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## **Maoists threaten iron ore mining in Bastar Region of India**

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IANS reported that the growing activities of Maoists in Bastar in Chhattisgarh are threatening iron ore mining in a sprawling forested region that accounts for a fifth of all iron ore deposits in India.

Businessmen and politicians fear that the authorities might end up ceding control of Bastar's ore reserves in five to seven years if the dominance of the area by the insurgents is not checked urgently.

Mr Manish Kunjam former legislator of the Konta assembly constituency told IANS that "Maoists have been expanding their influence in Bastar since they first stepped into the region in the early 1980s. They have a monopoly in the interiors of Bastar. The day when they decide to stop mining in Bastar, they will do it easily as they enjoy the support of the tribal population."

Mr Kunjam president of the All India Adivasi Mahasabha, an umbrella grouping of tribal organizations, pointed out that Bastar's locals were left out of the development story for decades. He said that "Now they are being driven out from their soil, jungles, to make way for industries such as TATA Steel's 5 million tonne per annum steel project in Bastar district and Essar Steel's 3.2 million tonne per annum plant in Dantewada. Their democratic protests are not heard. Now their anger is resulting into sympathy with Maoists."

Mr Anil Nachrani president of the Chhattisgarh Sponge Iron Association said that "The future of Indian industry is based on the growth of the steel industry. The situation in Bastar is alarming. The government can't take it lightly; otherwise the country will suffer heavily. The situation will be more critical in the coming years in Bastar. Maoists can't be eliminated. I suggest that the government should try its best to solve the problem through dialogues rather than at gunpoint."

Admitting that the Maoists were terrorizing mining companies, Mr Vishwaranjan director general of Police told IANS that "Maoists are trying to scare off miners in Bastar's interiors, mainly in areas where private companies are excavating iron ore. But the Maoists will not succeed. Police are well aware of the threat to iron ore mining in Bastar. Police presence around the mining facilities will be strengthened heavily. We are expecting more paramilitary battalions."

TATA Steel and Essar Steel are set to mine iron ore in the region to feed their upcoming integrated steel plants in the tribal dominated Bastar. The Bhilai Steel Plant of the Steel Authority of India Ltd is also set to extract iron ore in Bastar. But the worst sufferer will be the National Mineral Development Corp, which produces roughly 80% of its 27 million tonne annual iron ore output from Bailadila reserves in Dantewada.

(Sourced from IANS)

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