
[India: Mining ancestral lands for corporate profits](#)

Norsk Hydro, a Norwegian corporation with investments in light metals, oil, petrochemicals and agriculture, along with Canadian transnational Alcan and India's Hindalco plans to mine bauxite on sacred tribal lands in Eastern Indian state of Orissa. The project would also process one million tonnes a year of bauxite through a joint venture with the company Utkal Alumina Industries Ltd (UAIL).

The Baphlimali Hills, where Hydro plans to mine bauxite, is the source of 350 perennial streams, including the tributaries that feed the Indravati River. To the Adivasis of the region, Baphlimali is a sacred life-giver. Though the region's forest cover has been depleted over the years, there is still enough left to sustain the region's 70-odd villages. Kutrumali, a huge mountain the companies plan to mine, has forests covering around 10-15 per cent of the plateau top. Whatever little is left of the forest resource, after having been plundered by the state government's commercial activities, is crucial for the tribals' food security during the dry months. Utkal's plans to mine 200 million tonnes of bauxite from the Baphlimali plateau would destroy this watershed. Estimates of the people negatively affected by the Utkal project range from 750 (Hydro's estimate), to 3,500 (Utkal's estimate) to 60,000 (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation estimate).

The \$1 billion project has led to confrontation between the tribal villagers who stand to lose their lands and forests, and the company and its supporters, including the State Government of Orissa and the police. Last year, on December 16, protests from some 4,000 people from 15 villages in the area took a toll of three men shot dead and nine others seriously injured by armed police. Norsk Hydro's initial reaction was to temporarily curtail project activities pending a lower level of tension in the project area. But that decision comes several years and three lives too late. The company had fuelled tensions which have been high ever since 1993, when the predominantly tribal population of this region first heard of Utkal's plans to mine bauxite.

Utkal has downplayed the importance of the ecosystem it plans to dig up, and has misrepresented sludge deposition rates in its application for environmental clearance. Critics accuse Utkal of presenting misleading data about the region's economy and ecological status. According to the NGO Norwatch, the deforestation caused by the mines and smelter will be aggravated because of the hilly terrain, resulting in more frequent flash floods, landslides, and nutrient enrichment of water bodies. Simultaneously, forest loss would also mean the loss of habitat for the region's wildlife including bears, jackals, wolves, sambars (a deer-like animal), spotted deer, leopard cats and the occasional tiger.

Corporate interests have the government's support to carry out their plans-for-profit. They encroach upon peoples' livelihoods and the environment without even knowing what they are destroying: "I showed four leaves from the jungle to the forest ranger and asked him to identify the trees. He could not. If you do not know, then how is the forest yours?" (Faguaram Gond, Dhamtari district, Chhatisgarh)

