

Citizens' Report on Security and Insecurity

Bastar Division
Chhattisgarh



12th August, 2024

Executive Summary

In the last few years, there have been large-scale protests by Adivasi communities across the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh against the proliferation of security camps on their lands. According to the Home Minister, Amit Shah, 250 security camps have been established after 2019.¹ There are camps roughly at a distance of every 2 - 5 km, turning Bastar into one vast cantonment. In February 2024, the IG Bastar announced 50 additional camps. This also means that Bastar is one of the most militarized regions of the country with one security person to every nine civilians.

In some cases, such as at Silger in Sukma District, these protests have been continuing for over three years. These are peaceful, youth-led movements under the banner of the Moolvasi Bachao Manch (South Bastar), and various movements in North Bastar such as the Bastar Jan Sangharsh Samanvay Samiti. They are demanding the right to be consulted on anything that affects them, as guaranteed under the fifth Schedule of the Constitution, as well as protesting against illegal appropriation of their lands. Compared to movements elsewhere in the country - whether the year-long farmers' protest, citizenship protests, or protests for reservations – the sustained demonstrations against security camps in Bastar have barely received any regional or national attention, either from the media or the public. Both the state as well as union government have consistently ignored the constitutional demands that the protestors are raising.

Do camps make people more secure or insecure? The government claims that setting up camps is necessary to ensure ‘area domination’ and control the spread of the Maoist movement. It also claims that the paramilitary camps are necessary for laying roads, constructing schools, health centres and voting booths, all of which are needed for state services. They also claim that the protests against the camps are ‘Maoist instigated’ as they are nervous about the incursion of security forces.

However, the villagers say that the camps make them feel more insecure and take away their livelihood. They believe, based on the layout, that the camps are meant for the safety of mining companies. Local communities say that camps and mining pose an existential threat to them.

A group of concerned citizens came together in February 2023 to investigate the claims and counter claims. This report is a result of that investigation, as well as subsequent material.

Mining: The Bastar region is known for its rich iron ore and other mineral deposits. Dantewada alone contributes about 50% of the state’s mineral revenue. As of 2022, 51 mining leases have been granted in the Bastar region, of which only 14 are with the Public Sector.

Roads, Camps and Mining: Camps and road laying are intrinsically connected. People state that they are not opposed to the building of roads per se, but it is their constitutional right to be consulted in how and where these roads are being built. The layout and width of the roads makes it quite clear in many cases that they are meant to facilitate mining operations. The roads are not accompanied by public transport services or other services for villagers.

Arrests: The proliferation of camps has been accompanied by mass arrests, including of many elected representatives, and members of the Moolvasi Bachao Manch. Framing people

¹<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/chhattisgarh-maoist-attack-amit-shah-completely-maoist-free-amit-shahs-big-vow-day-after-29-rebels-killed-5460797>

under Maoist charges is an easy way to silence their legitimate constitutional demands. Based on official figures, 6,804 arrests have been made in Bastar region from 2011 to 2022.

Fake Encounters and Drone Attacks: The presence of camps and forces like the District Reserve Guards (DRG) has increased the incidences of fake encounters: 2023–2024 has seen a spike in the incidents of extrajudicial killings of alleged Naxalites and civilians. Between 1 January and 15 July 2024, there have been 141 killings. The villagers have pointed out that many of those killed are ordinary civilians, shot in staged encounters. The villagers have also shown evidence of drone attacks and the firing of grenades.

Lack of Due Process in Setting Up Camps: Most of the camps are set up without due process. Quite often, they are set up in the middle of the night without informing the local communities, let alone after holding a proper consultation with them. Lands cultivated by villagers over generations are appropriated without any compensation. A camp also brings with it huge destruction of village commons, sacred burial sites and sacred groves. There has been severe repression on villagers protesting against the camps.

Securitization of Welfare: Instead of revamping the health infrastructure, like reactivating defunct primary centres and making sub-centres functional, the government is providing health facilities within the security camps and forcing people to interact with the paramilitary forces if they are to avail their basic entitlements as citizens. The weekly market, which is the lifeline for the communities has also been subject to police controls. The timings have been reduced, and the purchases are monitored, supposedly to ensure that no supplies reach Maoists.

Violation of PESA and FRA: Most importantly, the government is silent on the legitimate demands of people, viz. that camps, roads and mines should not come up on their private or community property without their consent as is mandated by provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA). Under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, scheduled tribes have community rights or rights over common property resources /forests. These are being ignored.

To summarize, there are several aspects of the securitization through camps which stand out:

1. The absence of land records and surveys being used by the administration to enable the appropriation of cultivated land;
2. Lack of consent before any projects are taken up as constitutionally mandated by PESA, 1996 and FRA, 2006;
3. Lack of accountability for massive deforestation
4. No recognition of forest rights;
5. Severe repression on villagers who gather to oppose this take-over of land;
6. Increased surveillance at camp checkpoints, making everyday life difficult for villagers;
7. Welfare measures are undertaken very slowly or rarely in comparison to the speed with which camps and roads are built;
8. The network and scale of roads being laid are a clear indication of government's priorities and intent. It is clear the roads are not for the local communities but for the state and corporates to access and exploit the lands on which the communities reside;

Contents

1	Introduction	7
2	The Fact Finding	10
3	Overview of Situation in Bastar	11
3.1	About Bastar: demographics and data	11
3.2	Mining	13
3.2.1	New mining sites identified	14
3.3	Building connectivity: For people or for mining?	15
3.3.1	Road network	16
3.3.2	Rail network	16
3.4	Forest Rights Act 2006 and Right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent	19
3.5	Militarization	19
3.5.1	Military: civilian ratios	20
3.6	Drone surveillance and attacks	22
4	Overview of Protests	25
4.1	Moolvasi Bachao Manch (MBM)	26
4.1.1	Protest sites	28
4.2	Issues of common concern	28
5	Narratives and Observations from the Protest Sites in South Bastar	29
5.1	Appropriation of land in violation of PESA 1996 and FRA 2006	29
5.1.1	Silger, Sukma district	31
5.1.2	Nambi, Bijapur district	31
5.2	Repression of protests	32
5.2.1	Gonderas, Sukma district	33
5.2.2	Silger, Sukma district	34
5.2.3	Burji, Bijapur district	34
5.2.4	Fundari, Dantewada district	35
5.2.5	Bedre, Sukma district	36
5.3	Aggressive push for road building – but for whom?	36
5.3.1	Burji, Bijapur district	37
5.3.2	Fundari, Dantewada district	39
5.4	Everyday policing and arrests	43
5.4.1	Gonderas, Sukma district	43
5.4.2	Fundari, Dantewada district	44
5.5	Loss of sacred sites — disrespect to the departed	45
5.5.1	Pusnar, Bijapur district	46
5.5.2	Nambi, Bijapur district	47
5.6	Cutting down of forests; No compensatory afforestation or compensation for villagers	48
5.7	Militarization of welfare services: missing welfare and health care services	48
5.7.1	Fundari, Dantewada district	52
5.8	Everyday life trapped in a never-ending conflict-ridden cycle	53

6 Narratives and Observations from the Protest Sites in North Bastar	55
6.1 Chilparas (Koelibeda block, Kanker): Protest against new BSF camp and road under construction on village forestland	55
6.2 Hetle (Gram Panchayat Kadme, Kalpat pargana, Kanker): BSF camp established overnight without consultation with the people	58
6.3 Madhonar (Chhote Donger, Narayanpur): Roads and camps are for mining purposes	60
6.4 Rowghat and Aamundai mines (Kanker and Narayanpur): Camps, mining and no Maoists	63
6.5 Badgam (Chhotedonger block, Narayanpur) : Under the fearful shadow of Aamundai mining	68
6.6 Gurapada (Chhotedonger, Narayanpur): Women alienated from both land and jobs	70
7 LEGAL STATUS OF SECURITY CAMPS	73
8 CONCLUSIONS	74
9 ANNEXURES	75

List of Figures

1	Banner at Madhonar protest site, Narayanpur District	7
2	Camps (CRPF and police) on the stretch between Bijapur and Dornapal	8
3	Bastar Division	11
4	Provisions of the PESA Act, 1996 banner at a protest site in North Bastar	18
5	Camps on the stretch between Jagargonda to Dornapal	21
6	Villagers showing the remains they gathered after drone attack by security forces. Photo credit: Raunak Shivhare	23
7	Ammunition that was allowed to remain after the day's operation was over. Got buried but proved to be lethal when some children accidentally touched it. Photo Credit: Bastar Talkies	24
8	Madhonar protest site, Narayanpur District	25
9	Silger camp 2 clearing area	31
10	Urban protest site in Sukma town to prevent appropriation of cultivated land	33
11	January 2023 Burji-Pusnar second protest	35
12	Nelasnar-Kodoli-Gangaloor road and approximate locations of camps on the route	38
13	Road at Burji village, this road is being laid from Gangaloor to Nelasnar	39
14	Fundari CRPF camp	40
15	Bangoli MBM meet	41
16	Shankar holding the patta for the land where now stands huge iron pylons for the Indravati bridge. He has filed a case against the road built over his land	42
17	Banner at Fundari protest site	45
18	New road through Pusnar cuts through the ritual stones erected by the villagers in memory of departed family members	46
19	Banner of the Nambi Dhara Jal Prapat Samiti	47
20	Health Camp organized by CRPF 229 Battalion in Silger	50
21	Fact finding team at Chilparas protest site	55
22	Road construction near Chilparas	57
23	Hetle protest site	59
24	Madhonar protest site	61
25	Gomter-Wakeli iron ore block	62
26	Layout details of Dalli-Rajhara-Rowghat new railway line project	65
27	An excerpt from the 'Monitoring Report' stating that four battalions of BSF comprising of 4,000 personnel were deployed for the Rowghat Iron Ore Mining Project	66
28	Trucks lined up outside Aamundai mine	67
29	Aamundai mine	69
30	Chhotedongar: dust and potholes	71

List of Tables

1	Demographics in Bastar Region	12
2	Tribal Literacy in Bastar Region (in percentage)	13
3	Description of Mining Blocks on Auction	15

1 Introduction

In the last few years, there have been several large-scale protests by Adivasi communities across the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh against security camps being set up on their lands. In some cases, these protests have been continuing for over three years. They are demanding the right to be consulted on anything that affects them, as guaranteed under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, as well as protesting against illegal appropriation of their lands.



Figure 1: Banner at Madhonar protest site, Narayanpur District

Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF)/ paramilitary camps have proliferated across Bastar Division, every 2–5 km. For instance, in 2023, between Fundari and Silger, on a stretch of 123.8 km, there were at least 26 paramilitary camp sites, while there were four camps on a stretch of 20.8 km between Awapalli and Nambi Road. As per current information, between the towns of Bijapur and Dornapal, on a stretch of 138 km, there are at least 28 camps. Based on information collected on the ground, it is roughly estimated that at the time of writing around 300 camps are spread across Bastar Division, the majority of them being in South Bastar. A 26 February 2024 article in the Hindi daily Dainik Bhaskar, cited P Sunderraj, Inspector General of Police (IG), Bastar Division, announcing 50 additional camps in the coming months, which means five to seven security camps every month.

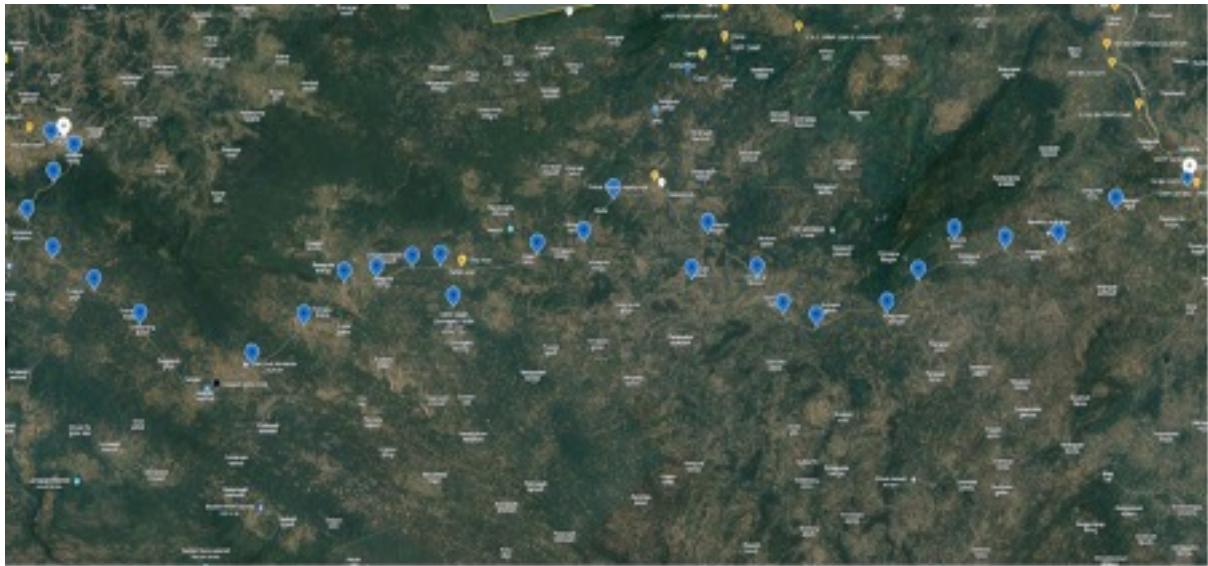


Figure 2: Camps (CRPF and police) on the stretch between Bijapur and Dornapal

The government (whether run by the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) or Congress) claims that the camps are necessary to ensure ‘area domination’ and control the spread of the Maoist movement. It also claims that the paramilitary camps are necessary for laying roads, constructing schools, health centres and voting booths, all of which are needed for state services:

“By establishing these camps, the villagers will be rendered free from Naxal terror by the five elements of Vishwas (trust), Vikas (development), Suraksha (security), Nyay (justice) and Sewa (services).”²

Ironically, the villagers are protesting against the camps, precisely because they want ‘vikas, suraksha, nyay and sewa’. The camps make them insecure, breed mistrust, and also take away their livelihoods.

Camps and road construction are intrinsically connected. The Sukma District Collector told a group of us on 22 February 2023, that the government has been setting up camps since 2012–13 to provide security for the laying of roads. People state that they are not opposed to the building of roads per se, but it is their constitutional right to be consulted in how and where these roads are being built. It is to be noted that road or more precisely highway construction is not accompanied by public transport services.

It is obvious to all residents of the area that the camps and the six-lane highways are primarily designed to facilitate mining operations.³ Camps have even been established in places where there is apparently little or no Maoist presence, but where there are mines. In North

²<https://www.deccanherald.com/india/chhattisgarh/will-transform-the-region-from-bloodybath-to-niyad-nellanar-2911245>; <https://www.bhaskar.com/chhattisgarh/raipur/news/chhattisgarh-cm-bhupesh-said-naxalism-will-end-with-policy-of-trust-security-development-01626689.html>

³‘After series of meetings, MHA approved 2 battalions of BSF & CRPF/SSB for protection of mining & railway line respectively. However, responsibility for developing Infrastructures i.e. barracks & campus was entrusted to BSP. BSP till date developed six nos of BSF camps at mining area & eleven nos. of camps between Dalli-Rajhara for CRPF/SSB, at a whopping cost of 90 Crores. As a result, mining area is fully secure.’ As per a Pre-feasibility report by SAIL dated December 2016. https://environmentclearance.nic.in/writereaddata/modification/Amendment/Attach_file/22122016AE1BYFXFSummary_PrefRetc.pdf

Bastar, for instance, camps encircle Rowghat mines⁴ and public representatives (sarpanches and others) have been arrested to prevent public resistance to mining.⁵ Framing people under Maoist charges is an easy way to silence them.

The government, however, claims that the protests against the camps are ‘Maoist instigated’ as they are nervous about the incursion of security forces. This denies villagers any agency. Local communities understand very well that camps and mining pose an existential threat to them. They do not need Maoists to point that out to them.

Most of the camps are set up without due process. Often, they are set up in the middle of the night without informing the local communities, without holding a consultation with them. It is evident from the field that these camps have resulted in increased violence on the communities and complete disruption of their sense of peace and security on their own land. The presence of camps and forces like the District Reserve Guards (DRG) has increased the incidences of fake encounters: the period 2023–2024 alone has seen a spike in the incidents of extrajudicial killings of alleged Naxalites and civilians. Between 1 January 2024 and 15 July 2024, there have been 141 killings.⁶ The villagers have pointed out that many of those killed are ordinary civilians, shot in staged encounters.

Further, once a camp has been set up, it brings huge destruction of village commons, sacred burial sites and sacred groves. Instead of revamping the health infrastructure, for example, reactivating defunct primary centres and making health sub-centres functional, the government is providing health facilities within the security camps and forcing people to interact with the paramilitary forces if they are to avail their basic entitlements as citizens. The weekly haat (local market), which is the lifeline for the communities has also been subject to police controls. The timings have been reduced, and the purchases are monitored, supposedly to ensure that no supplies reach Maoists.

Most importantly, the government is silent on the legitimate demands of people, viz. that camps and roads should not be constructed on their private or community lands, without their consent as is mandated by the Provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA). Under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 (FRA), scheduled tribes have individual/community rights or rights over common property resources /forests.

Compared to movements elsewhere in the country – whether the year-long farmers’ protest, citizenship protests, protests for reservations, or other protests – the sustained demonstrations against security camps in Bastar have barely received any regional or national attention, either from the media or the public. Both the state as well as union government have consistently ignored the constitutional demands that the protestors are raising.

⁴<https://scroll.in/article/777171/in-the-shadow-of-an-upcoming-iron-ore-mine-in-chhattisgarh-people-live-in-fear-of-the-gun>

⁵<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/raoghat-mines-in-bastar-iron-in-their-souls/storywh0f6njppQ5tR01sHAHflM.html>

⁶<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/stf-jawan-8-maoists-killed-in-bastar-encounter-2nd-operation-in-region-in-8-days/articleshow/111027107.cms>

2 The Fact Finding

In order to understand the widespread protests against mining activity and construction of roads and camps, a group of independent people came together to carry out a fact-finding endeavour. Our aim was to explore the linkages between roads, camps and mining activities, as alleged by villagers; whether the wide network of roads with corresponding security camps were laid to usher in basic services, including health, education, public distribution centres, etc. and whether camps indeed triggered atrocities. We wanted to understand whether and to what extent PESA Rules (notified in Chhattisgarh in 2022) and FRA 2006 had been implemented. Apart from meeting villagers at protest sites, we also met public officials including the Collector and police. We followed up with letters for further details but received no response. The team visited Bijapur, Dantewada and Sukma, Kanker and Narayanpur. Where possible, the situation has been updated, and the latest information incorporated. Since the team's visit, the situation in Bastar has deteriorated, both in terms of illegal setting up of camps and violence by the security forces. Therefore, while this report is primarily based on the facts and testimonies collected during the visit by the fact-finding team, we have also used the information available to us before and after the fact-finding exercise.

Members of the fact-finding team: Bela Bhatia, Krishna VS, Lingaraj Azad, Malini Subramaniam, Nandini Sundar, Nohrit Mandavi, Puja, Rahul Bedi, Ramkumar Darro, Sharanya Nayak, Shubhajit Banerjee, Virginius Xaxa

We would like to thank Keshav Shori and Narsing Mandavi for accompanying us in some parts of North Bastar and to Isha Khandelwal, Shalini Gera and Sharad Lele for their insights and support.

The South Bastar team visited the following sites from 19 to 22 February 2023:

1. Bijapur: Fundari and Nambi protest sites
2. Dantewada: Gonderas protest site
3. Sukma: Silger protest site, Collectorate

The North Bastar team visited the following sites from 28 February to 2 March 2023:

1. Kanker: Chilparas and Hetle camp protest sites, Hetle Camp, Phulpad village, Madhonar
2. Narayanpur: Aamundai mining site, Badgam village, Gudapada of Chhotedongar village, Jaiswal NECO office at Chhotedongar

People we spoke to:

1. Villagers in the visited protest sites
2. P Sunderraj, IG, Bastar, Jagdalpur
3. Harish S., Collector, Sukma
4. Collector and Superintendent of Police, Kanker
5. Hetle camp commandant
6. Commandant from Bedre camp
7. Members of the Moolvasi Bachao Manch and the Raoghat Sangharsh Samiti
8. Officials of Jaiswal NECO Pvt Ltd

3 Overview of Situation in Bastar

3.1 About Bastar: demographics and data

The new state of Chhattisgarh was carved out of erstwhile Madhya Pradesh in 2000. As a part of the reorganization, new districts were carved out in following years. The total number of districts at present is 33. A large tract of the territory transferred to Chhattisgarh comprised of Fifth Schedule Areas. As of 2011, Chhattisgarh's population is enumerated at 25,545,198 of which 7,822,902 are Scheduled Tribes. In the 2001 Census, the Scheduled Tribes were 31.8% of the total population, but by the 2011 Census, the figure had fallen by 1.2% to 30.6%. Accordingly, the Scheduled Areas have been respecified by the Schedule Areas (States of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh) Order, 2003 (Constitution Order, 192) dated 20 February 2003, after rescinding the order 31 December 1977. In all, 13 districts fall under the Scheduled Areas in Chhattisgarh today. Of these, seven districts are fully Scheduled Areas and in the remaining six districts, some development blocks are designated as Scheduled Areas. **All the current seven districts of the erstwhile Bastar region (divided as North Bastar and South Bastar in undivided Madhya Pradesh), are earmarked as fully Scheduled Areas. About 68% of the population of undivided Bastar are Scheduled Tribes.**

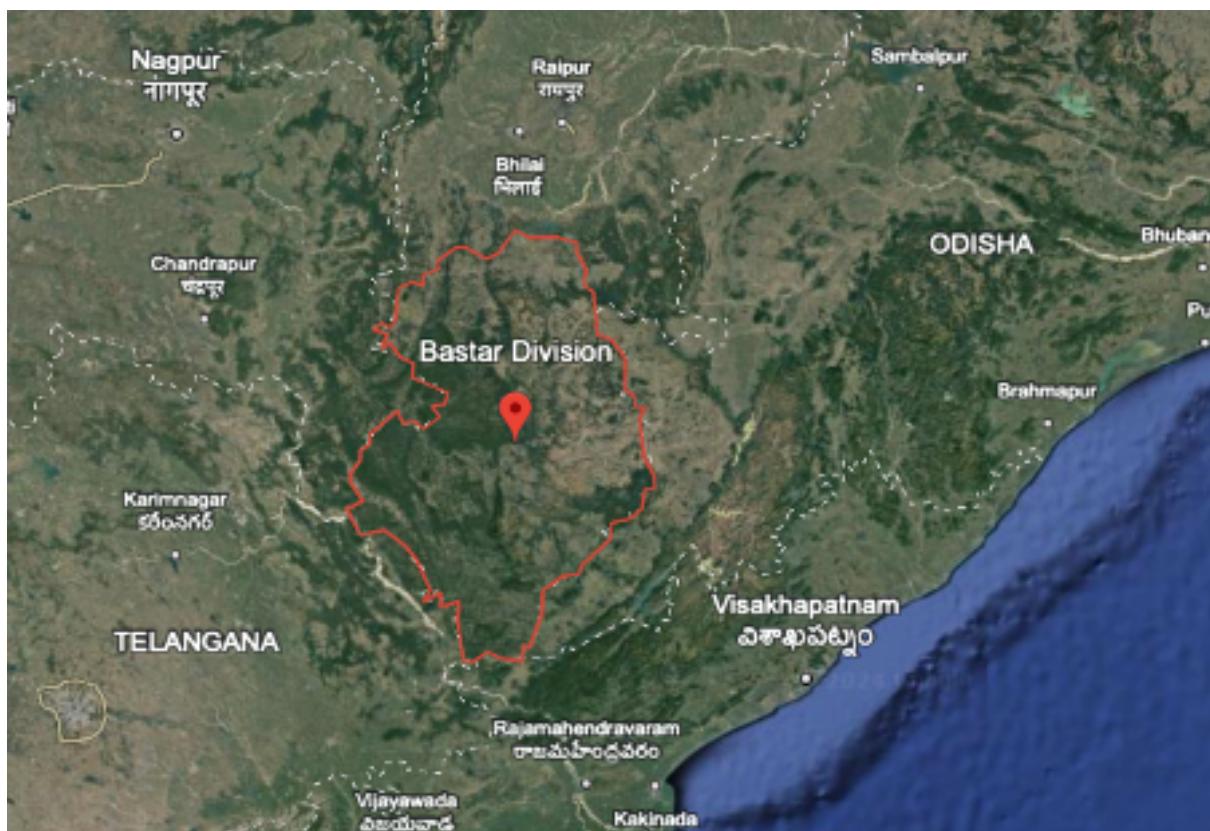


Figure 3: Bastar Division

Scheduled Areas have special administrative provisions as per Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. The key provisions of the Fifth Schedule revolve around the administration and control of Scheduled Areas by Scheduled Tribes. The most important feature of this provision is that

the Governor has the power not to extend any act of Parliament or State Legislature to the Scheduled Areas or extend an act with such exceptions and modifications as they may deem fit. The Governor has also the power to draft regulations for peace and good governance in the Scheduled Areas, especially regarding the transfer and allotment of land and money lending. Further, the Governor may repeal or amend any of the acts of the Parliament or the Legislature or any existing law that is applicable in the Scheduled Areas. Despite the region under study being the site of violence and absent governance for decades now, each successive Governor has abdicated their responsibility to protect and secure the interests of the Scheduled Tribes, who have time and again brought to the Governor's notice their demands and the challenges faced by them due to lack of implementation of the provisions of the Fifth Schedule.

Land is the most contested resource in Bastar. The Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code, (subsequently Chhattisgarh Land Revenue Code) 1959 [Section 165(6)], debars the transfer of agricultural land belonging to Adivasis in an area 'predominantly inhabited' by Adivasis [6(i)] and in other areas, the transfer requires the permission of Revenue Officer with reasons recorded in writing [6(ii)]. Further, Section 170-A stipulates restoration of land that has been transferred in contravention of the above sections, and Section 170-B provides for the reversion of land of members of Scheduled Tribes that was transferred by fraud. Section 170-B of Chhattisgarh Panchayat Raj Evar Gram Swaraj Adhiniyam 1993 (amended in 1997) empowers the Gram Sabha to act to restore alienated land, with the final responsibility in this matter resting with the Revenue Administration.⁷

It is again due to a special provision in the Constitution that the Panchayat Act 1993 was exempted from application in the Scheduled Areas and new provisions were made in the form of the PESA 1996. The act provides for self-governance as per Adivasi traditions and customary practices and gives power over a range of subjects including land alienation and even land acquisition.

Table 1 below provides a basic outline of the demographics in the Bastar region.⁸

Table 1: Demographics in Bastar Region

	Area (km ²)	Total Population	% of STs	Population Density	Households
India		121,08,54,977	8.6%		
Chhattisgarh	1,34,192	2,55,45,198	30.6%	189	
Kanker	7,161	7,48,941	55.4%	105	1,60,937
Bastar	10,470	14,13,199	62.4%	135	3,11,538
Kondagaon			55.4%		
Narayanpur	4,653	1,39,820	77.4%	30	27,982
Dantewada	8,298	2,83,479	71.1%	64	1,20,850
Sukma		2,50,159	83.5%		
Bijapur	8,350	2,55,230	80.0%	30	54,757

Although the state has seen steady overall economic growth since its inception, the Ranagarajan Committee of the Planning Commission estimated that in 2010–2011, nearly half of

⁷Centre for Equity Studies, 'The Extent and Nature of Individual Tribal Land Alienation in the Fifth Schedule States in India', New Delhi, India. March 2016.

⁸Statistical profile of Scheduled Tribes in India 2013, pp 134–135 and Census 2011. The district-wide data has been recalculated from the Block-level data available from the census figures.

Chhattisgarh's population was below the poverty line, making it the state with the largest fraction of its population in abject poverty.⁹ Unfortunately, district-wise data on poverty and health status is not available. However, the same is available for the State, from which one can draw certain inferences on the subject at the level of the districts under study. As per the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019–2021) conducted from 16 January 2020 to 21 March 2020, prior to the lockdown, and from 5 December 2020 to 30 March 2021 post lockdown, infant mortality for Chhattisgarh was 48.7% with under-five mortality at 50.4%.¹⁰ As per Special Bulletin on Maternal Mortality in India (2018—2020) released by the office of the Registrar General, Maternal Mortality Ratio¹¹ for Chhattisgarh is 137 – fourth highest among all states and union territories.¹²

Table 2 below provides an outline of the literacy numbers among the tribal population.¹³

Table 2: Tribal Literacy in Bastar Region (in percentage)

District	Literacy	Male	Female
South Bastar - Dantewada	32.9	42.0	24.2
Bijapur	34.5	43.2	26.0
Narayanpur	42.9	50.8	35.3
Bastar	46.9	57.3	37.0
North Bastar - Kanker	64.4	74.8	54.3
Chhattisgarh	59.1	69.7	48.8

3.2 Mining

Chhattisgarh state is richly endowed with high quality mineral resources, which includes 29 varieties of minerals, including precious stones such as diamonds, gold, iron ore, limestone, dolomite, tin ore, bauxite and coal.¹⁴ The state of Chhattisgarh has aggressively sought investments in its core industrial sectors of steel, cement and power production, all of which rely heavily on its abundant mineral resources. In November 2022, Chhattisgarh accounted for 14.8% of the total mineral production in India. Chhattisgarh is the sole producer of tin concentrates and moulding sand. It is one of the leading producers of coal, dolomite, bauxite and iron ore, and 28% of India's sponge iron, 18% of cement industries, 16% of coal reserves and 24.21% of India's total iron ore deposit reserves are available in the State.¹⁵ As per Indian Minerals Yearbook 2021, the State accounts for 36% tin ore, 20% bauxite, 20% iron ore(hematite), 18% coal, 11% dolomite, and 4% each of diamond and marble resources of the country.¹⁶

⁹Table 4.4, Poverty ratio and number of poor in 2011-12 based on proposed methodology shows 47.9% of Chhattisgarh's population living below poverty line. First (Highest) among all 35 states and UTs in India

¹⁰https://main.mohfw.gov.in/sites/default/files/NFHS-5_Phase-II_0.pdf

¹¹The number of maternal deaths during a given time period per 100,000 live births during the same time period.

¹²<https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/44379>

¹³Statistical profile of Scheduled Tribes in India 2023, pp. 165–167

¹⁴<https://msmediraipur.gov.in/chhattisgarh.htm>

¹⁵<https://www.ibef.org/states/chhattisgarh-presentation>

¹⁶Indian Minerals Yearbook 2021, Part I, 60th Edition, State Reviews (Chhattisgarh), by GOI, Ministry of Mines, Indian Bureau of Mines, <https://ibm.gov.in/writereaddata/files/168873051164a7fb8f13631Chhattisgarh.pdf>

Bastar region contains iron ore of the best quality in India, and abundant reserves of bauxite, dolomite, talc/soalstone/steatite, garnet, marble, granite, tin ore, limestone, and corundum among other minerals.¹⁷ This, coupled with abundant water resources and easy access to ports (Visakhapatnam), has attracted much interest in Bastar from the iron and steel industry. Bailadila iron ore mines have been operational in Dantewada since the 1960s.

Minerals are a rich source for state revenue. Mineral revenue accounted for 18.45% of total receipts of the state during 2020–2021.¹⁸ In 2022–2023, mineral revenue exponentially increased to INR 12,941 crores, an increase by INR 636 crores from the previous year.¹⁹ Of the total revenue, nearly half, that is nearly 50% (INR 6,419 crores) was contributed by Dantewada district of Bastar region.

As per the Bulletin of Mining Leases 2022, released by the Ministry of Mines, Government of India (GOI), 175 mining leases were granted by state of Chhattisgarh as of 31 March 2022.²⁰ These leases covered an area of 26,210 hectares (ha). Of these, 51 are in Bastar region, i.e., 7128.32 ha.; 34 of the 165 leases in the state were executed by the public sector (14 by union government and 20 by state government) and 141 by the private sector. Out of the 51 leases granted in Bastar region, only 14 were given to the public sector.

3.2.1 New mining sites identified

In September 2022, the then Bhupesh Baghel led Congress government organized a Stakeholders' Conference,²¹ without any representative from the Adivasi community. At the conference, the government of Chhattisgarh shared a list of 108 potential mining blocks that are at various stages of exploration [**Annexure A**]. Out of these, 39 sites are in Bastar region. On the official Critical Mineral Block Auction Website/MSTC of the Government of India, 16 blocks with total area 3,640.559 ha in Bastar region are listed for auction. Of these, four were auctioned in 2023.

In 2023, amendments were made to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, which introduced an ‘exploration license’ (EL). The bill has been designed to attract private sector to invest in the exploration of critical and deep-seated minerals, which previously was the remit of states. It also allows the Union Ministry of Mining to directly sanction ELs to private agencies. **On 13 March 2024, Chhattisgarh issued notices to invite tenders for three EL blocks for diamond and rare earth group minerals in the districts of Kondagaon,²² Narayanpur and Bastar for an area of 1,478 sq km.²³**

¹⁷Ibid, MK Tyagi, Secretary, Mineral Resources Department, Government of Chhattisgarh, a presentation on the minerals in Chhattisgarh, available at http://mines.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/Chhattisgarh_PDAC_2014.pdf

¹⁸<https://cag.gov.in/uploads/media/NRA-Report-2020-21-06566ea0ba60235-57963261.pdf>

¹⁹<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/indl-goods/svs/metals-mining/chhattisgarh-earns-record-mineral-revenue-of-rs-12941-crore-in-2022-23/articleshow/99711984.cms?from=mdr>

²⁰Excluding atomic minerals, hydrocarbon energy minerals and minor minerals. This bulletin is a precise compilation of All India Mining Lease Directory as on 31 March 2022(P), which is a provisional database. https://ibm.gov.in/IBMPortal/pages/_Bulletins_

²¹Raipur: Cg Invites Investors To Explore Mining Potential | Raipur News - Times of India (indiatimes.com)

²²For Kondagaon, final auction is to happen in September 2024. https://www.mstcecommerce.com/auctionhome/container.jsp?title_id=Corrigendum%20&%20Addendum&linkid=0&main_link=y&sublink=n&main_link_name=471&portal=mlcln

²³<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2014807>

Table 3 below describes the mining blocks on auction in 2024.²⁴

Table 3: Description of Mining Blocks on Auction

Block Name	Villages	Mineral	Area (Ha)	Last Date for Bids
North (Block A), Dantewada	Bailadila Kamalur, Keshpur (nearby villages)	Pandewar, Iron ore	78	30 Aug 2024
North (Block B), Dantewada	Bailadila Kamalur, Keshpur (nearby villages)	Pandewar, Iron ore	452	—
Lohattar (Sonadehi), Kanker	Sonadehi/Kanapal	Iron ore	150	—
Bargaon Narayanpur	Iron Ore, Bargaon	Iron ore	160	—
Gomter Bijapur	— Wakeli, Gomter, Wakeli, Edavera, Barsur, Mungari, Dundakal, Batbera, Tala-naar, etc	Iron ore	462.76	30 Aug 2024
Pandripani, Narayanpur	Pandripani	Iron ore	221.5	30 Aug 2024
Karchameta, Narayanpur	Karchameta	Iron ore	266	30 Aug 2024
Madamnar-Tarameta, Narayanpur	Madamnar- Tarameta	Iron ore	1000	30 Aug 2024
Sivni-Alnar (A,B,C and D), Bastar	Bade Alnar, Chhote Alnar, Sivni	Limestone	141.38	30 Aug 2024
Chhaparbhanpuri, Bastar	Chhaparbhanpuri, Takaraguda, Sirisguda	Limestone	99.592	30 Aug 2024
Junaguda, Bastar	Junaguda, Mongrapal	Limestone	112.257	30 Aug 2024
Baranji, Bastar	Baranji, Kumhli	Limestone	128	30 Aug 2024
Hahaladdi, Kanker	Hahaladdi	Iron Ore	42.63	Auctioned
Kalwar, Kanker	Kalwar	Iron Ore	23.72	Auctioned
Tumirsur Garda II, Kanker	Bhuski	Gold	240	Auctioned
Lohattar, Kanker	Lohhatar	Iron Ore	40	Auctioned

3.3 Building connectivity: For people or for mining?

Given the tenders that have already been placed for mining in these areas, the need for wide roads and rail connectivity to enable transport of the extracted minerals has also become urgent for both the state government and the private companies.

²⁴<https://www.mstcecommerce.com/auctionhome/mlcl/index.jsp> and <https://mines.gov.in/websportal/content/successful-auction-since-2015>

3.3.1 Road network

Chhattisgarh has about 29 state highways²⁵ running to a length of 4,136.85 km as per the state's public works department, and national highways to a length of 3,620.45 km²⁶ as of December 2022, according to the Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways. According to Pragati Ki Nayi Gati, since 2014, national highways in the state have been constructed at record speed.²⁷ In a period of four years (2014–2018), 1,198.31 km were constructed. Since a large number of mining sites are in the conflict-affected areas, several national highways are supported under the 'Left-Wing Extremist' scheme. According to the report,²⁸ a number of national highways are being converted from single lane to double lane in the state. Road construction has been a major input by the union government to 'counter Maoist menace'. Under this scheme, which was commenced in December 2016, ten states, including Chhattisgarh, identified as Left-Wing Extremist states, were allocated INR 11,275 crores for construction of 9,338 km of road;²⁹ of which 2,479 km falls in eight districts of Chhattisgarh: Bastar, Bijapur, Dantewada, Kanker, Narayanpur, Rajnandgaon, Sukma and Kondagaon.³⁰

3.3.2 Rail network

Chhattisgarh falls in the jurisdiction of South East Central and East Coast Railway (SECR), a predominantly freight oriented railway. The state has the highest freight loading in the country and one-sixth of the Indian Railway's revenue comes from Chhattisgarh.³¹ The length of rail network in the state is 1,108 km, while a third track has been commissioned between Raipur and Raigarh, another key mining district.

In 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a railway line and passenger train connecting Dallirajhara in Balod district to Bhanupratappur in North Bastar. The rail project links Dallirajhara-Rowghat-Jagdalpur, a distance of 235 km. It was showcased as 'boosting socio-economic interaction between the capital of Chhattisgarh and backward areas in and around Bastar region'. However, the commercial significance of this rail project could not be lost as clearly stated on the website of Rail Vikas Nigam Limited:

*'The line will help transport iron ore from the Rowghat mines to the Bhilai Steel Plant (SAIL), which currently depends on the almost-saturated Dalli-Rajhara mines.'*³²

The Rowghat mines will be the primary source of iron ore for Bhilai Steel Plant, given the depleting iron ore supplies from the Dallirajhara mine, which is an open cast iron ore mine that was started in 1960. On October 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated projects worth more than INR 23,000 crores, which include mining, multiple railway and road building

²⁵https://pwd.cg.nic.in/CurrentEvents/Roads_of_CGPWD.pdf

²⁶<https://morth.nic.in/sites/default/files/MoRTH%20Annual%20Report%20for%20the%20Year%202022-23%20in%20English.pdf>

²⁷<https://morth.nic.in/sites/default/files/PragatiKiNayiGati/chhattisgarh/files/assets/common/downloads/CHHATTISGARH%202024X7%20CONNECTED.pdf>

²⁸ibid

²⁹<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/infrastructure/road-constructio-n-to-gather-pace-in-chhattisgarh/articleshow/82020608.cms?from=mdr>

³⁰https://secr.indianrailways.gov.in/view_section.jsp?fontColor=black&backgroundColor=LIGHTSTEELBLUE&lang=0&id=0,4,2211,2229,2258

³¹<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1908355>

³²<https://rvnl.org/project-details/424/New%20Line>

projects. A new rail line between Antagarh in Kanker and Tadoki and a rail line doubling project between Jagdalpur and Dantewada were also announced.³³

The arrival of mining and road/railway projects, ostensibly to benefit the local populations of Bastar, have poisoned rivers, destroyed water sources, laid to waste prime agricultural land, and uprooted traditional villages.³⁴ These mining and industrial projects have seldom brought any benefit to the Adivasi populations. While the state argues that these projects bring employment opportunities for the local community, the same locals are mostly employed as daily wage labourers under private labour contractors, with no long-term benefits. Instead, these mines, roads and railway lines bring security camps closer to the villages by acquiring and clearing huge areas of forest land without following any due process or legal procedures such as the free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) mandated by PESA 1996, and land acquisition and forest conservation regulations.

³³<https://www.deccanherald.com/elections/chhattisgarh/pm-modi-to-inaugurate-nmdcs-s-teel-plant-new-rail-lines-in-bastar-region-of-chhattisgarh-2710008>

³⁴<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/environment/rivers-shankhini-and-dankini-in-chhattisgarh-run-dirty-8894>



Figure 4: Provisions of the PESA Act, 1996 banner at a protest site in North Bastar

3.4 Forest Rights Act 2006 and Right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent

While the right to FPIC is established in law, in practice it is violated in various ways. When land is acquired for either mining, building roads/railway line or security camps, the Gram Sabhas are almost never consulted, or their objections are ignored. In many instances, ‘No-Objection Certificates’ are either forged or obtained under duress. Additionally in recent years, there has been concerted effort by the union government to dilute laws that recognize Adivasi communities’ right to FPIC. New laws and policies have been introduced which reverse existing guarantees of self-governance and instead provide easy access to their lands for extractive and ‘developmental’ projects.³⁵ For example, in 2022, the union government amended the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 (FCA).³⁶ The FCA’s new regulations do not mention any requirement of mandatory consent of forest-dwelling communities when seeking government approval for forest land diversion. Instead, the union government can accord final approval for a project without waiting for the consent of the affected community. Once the government has given the final approval, the obligation to ensure adherence to FRA 2006 regulations then rests with the state governments. The new rules also remove protection from ‘deemed forests’, potentially exposing around 25% of India’s forests to urbanization, mining, and infrastructural development.³⁷ This infringes the rights of tribal and forest-dwelling communities under FRA 2006.³⁸

3.5 Militarization

Current paramilitary/Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) that are stationed in the Bastar region includes the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Shashastra Seema Bal (SSB), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), along with Railway Protection Force (RPF). In addition to the CAPF, which are deputed by the Union to States, there are recruitments into state forces, trained specifically to counter ‘Naxal terror’. These include the Special Task Force (STF), Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF), the DRG and Bastar Fighters.³⁹ These forces are directly under the recruitment of the state police and undergo training as state police forces. All the CAPF have camps set up across the Bastar region. As confirmed by the IG of Bastar Division, the CRPF is primarily stationed in South Bastar – Dantewada, Sukma, Bijapur, Bastar and Kondagaon, while BSF and ITBP are stationed in North Bastar – Kanker and Narayanpur and Kondagaon. To attract local youth into

³⁵<https://frontline.thehindu.com/environment/primed-for-plunder-modi-government-new-environmental-laws-biological-diversity-act-forest-conservation-act-a-threat-to-india-biodiversity-and-forests/article67158366.ece>, <https://www.newsclick.in/incremental-dilution-india-environment-regulatory-regime-benefit-corporates>

³⁶<https://news.mongabay.com/2024/01/indias-new-forest-rules-spark-dismay-and-hope-q-a-with-activist-soumitra-ghosh/>

³⁷<https://frontline.thehindu.com/environment/primed-for-plunder-modi-government-new-environmental-laws-biological-diversity-act-forest-conservation-act-a-threat-to-india-biodiversity-and-forests/article67158366.ece>

³⁸<https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/explained-what-will-the-amended-forest-conservation-act-change/article67146543.ece>

³⁹Bastar Fighters is an initiative by the previous Congress government as a special ‘employment drive to local youth as well as to drive away the fear of Maoists’; [https://www.patrika.com/jagdalpur-news-bastar-fighters-training-completed-chhattisgarh-news-jagdalpur-8174359](https://www.patrika.com/jagdalpur-news/bastar-fighters-training-completed-chhattisgarh-news-jagdalpur-8174359)

their fold, in 2023, the CRPF created a new battalion called Bastariya Battalion and recruited 400 tribal youth from the region.⁴⁰

The DRG are notorious amongst the specially recruited state police forces deployed against the Maoists. Although the formation of the DRG force began in 2008, it was in 2016 that then IG Bastar Range, SRP Kalluri, pressed them into action.⁴¹ Kalluri referred to them as ‘sons of the soil’ who could aggressively fight the Maoists. As 20% of the DRG are said to be surrendered Naxalites, Kalluri claimed they could ‘smell out Maoist hideouts’ and easily identify ‘sangham members even if not in their uniforms’. The DRG teams that usually accompany the CRPF (including COBRA – an elite anti-Naxal battalion within the CRPF) have been formed in districts considered to be ‘Naxal sensitive’. Since 2019 Chhattisgarh has declared 14 of its districts as Naxal sensitive.⁴²

The minimal education qualification required for entry into these state special forces is class V for Scheduled Tribes and class X for general candidates. DRG recruitment took place five to six years ago and presently there are four to eight teams of DRG in each district. In all, in the seven districts of Bastar Division, about 2,000 DRG personnel have been recruited, many of them former Maoists. Under the surrender rehabilitation policy of Chhattisgarh government, they are eligible for recruitment into the state police forces. However, this policy of recruiting surrendered Naxalites is in violation of a 2011 Supreme Court order which banned Salwa Judum and the use of Special Police Officers (SPOs): surrendered Naxals under any name cannot be recruited into the frontline combat forces under any circumstances. A contempt case has been pending against the government of Chhattisgarh since 2012.

3.5.1 Military: civilian ratios

According to IG P Sunderraj (interviewed on 23 February 2023), there is no standard government policy that guides the setting up of security camps.⁴³ He said it depends on multiple parameters, such as distance, the ground reality and above all, the need for the security forces to protect themselves. A police station covers a radius of 40 km and according to him there were approximately 40 battalions of the paramilitary forces stationed in 150 camps.

⁴⁰<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/400-tribal-youths-of-chhattisgarh-to-join-crpf-as-constables/article66590291.ece>

⁴¹<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/mission-2016-drg-force-pressed-into-anti-naxalite-ops-in-chhattisgarh/articleshow/50870871.cms>

⁴²<https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=188075>

⁴³<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/chhattisgarh-maoist-attack-blood-on-road-crpf-men-killed-on-key-sukma-stretch-4626975/>



Figure 5: Camps on the stretch between Jagargonda to Dornapal

A broad overview of a camp is shared here to provide a sense of how big and overwhelming it can be for villagers living around these camps. Each camp is in a massive area and houses a large number of personnel. Take for instance, Bedre camp, which was established around 12 February 2023. We interviewed the Commanding Officer (CO), Special Task Force (STF) of the Outer Cordon, asking him for some details on the numbers of paramilitary and DRG presence in camps. According to him, the Bedre camp has about 80 DRG forces and in a battalion about 600–700 personnel are present, which includes STF, DRG and CRPF. One camp is as big as 5–6 acres.

On an average if each of the security camps houses a troop of say 400 personnel, the ratio of civilian to armed personnel is highly skewed. A concrete example is that of the 56-km stretch between Dornapal and Jagargunda, which has five police stations and 15 CRPF camps, amounting to security camp at distances of less than 4 km from each other. Fifteen security camps with an average of 400 personnel indicates an overall total of 6,000 personnel. The stretch has 103 villages. Taking the average population of 500 persons per village, this comes to roughly a population of 51,500 persons in that stretch, bringing the civilian: armed security personnel ratio to 9:1. **In other words, for every nine civilians there is one armed security personnel.**

In 2024, the government announced that 3,000 more jawans (police personnel) would be

posted in Bastar.⁴⁴

This proliferation of security camps and recruitment of personnel is taking place even while the government acknowledges that the strength of Maoist cadres and their area of influence has shrunk. However, according to IG Sunderraj,

'They still have military capability to cause damage. In 2023, after media reports that they were waning, they bounced back with attacks on BJP leaders. There were 234 incidents in 2022. There has been a 65% decline since 2007–2008. But one can't go by numbers.'

It is not clear, then, in the government's strategic plan under which the military operations are being conducted and security camps being set up, what criteria have been defined for assessing under what conditions militarization can stop and be reversed. IG Sunderraj estimated that the Maoist armed cadre strength is around 1,200, the supporting cadre strength (Chetna Natya Mandali (CNM), Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan (DAKMS), etc.) is about 15,000. He added that the CNM is the only wing that has clarity about their role in the movement. In his opinion, DAKMS/AKMS, do not have role clarity since the Maoists have not been able to hold regular meetings with them. He was confident though that once the State is able to slice away this 15,000-support base, the Maoists will also collapse.

IG Sunderraj also claimed that the number of arrests has come down. Last year there were 250 persons arrested of whom most are from DAKMS. He also said that the police are not 'blindly' arresting people as before. However, a combination of state data (procured from the IG office) and data from the Ministry of Home Affairs, **from 2011 to 2022, shows that 6,804 arrests have been made in Bastar region.** If it is to be believed that all of them were members of the Maoist Party, then close to 50% of the support base is likely already behind bars. But that does not seem to be the case. Discussions held with the protestors revealed that **a large number of civilians have spent two to three years in prison for false charges of having been involved in Naxal activities.**

3.6 Drone surveillance and attacks

Besides the extra-judicial killings, faked surrenders and arrests on false charges, there have been worrying reports on the increased use of drones for surveillance and even for dropping explosives. So far been five such drone attacks have been reported: in April 2021⁴⁵, 14/15 April 2022⁴⁶, 11 January 2023, 7 April 2023⁴⁷⁴⁸, and 7 April 2024⁴⁹. About 20 villages are said to have been targeted with these strikes. According to a Maoist press note, one woman

⁴⁴<https://www.etvbharat.com/english/state/chhattisgarh/centre-asks-3000-capf-troops-to-move-from-odisha-to-chhattisgarh-to-crush-maoists/> na20240101072655075075054

⁴⁵<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/bastar-airstrike-maoists-claim-to-have-shot-down-2-attack-drones/articleshow/82208621.cms>

⁴⁶Amidst Claims of Drone Strikes in Chhattisgarh, Tribals Claim a Narrow Escape (thequint.com)

⁴⁷<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/chhattisgarh-maoists-allege-drone-attacks-police-reject-lies-meant-scare-people-7872546/>

⁴⁸Bastar villagers allege aerial bombing by security forces. What is the truth? (scroll.in)

⁴⁹<https://countercurrents.org/2024/04/condemn-recurring-aerial-bombings-and-fake-encounters-in-bastar/>

cadre has died in one attack.⁵⁰ The exact nature of her death is unclear; however, villagers have spoken in social media posts of injuries due to falls while scrambling to take safety cover.



Figure 6: Villagers showing the remains they gathered after drone attack by security forces.
Photo credit: Raunak Shivhare

On the one hand, the State police as well as the CRPF have completely denied the drone attacks but are also unable to explain the evidence. The CRPF has stated, ‘No such operation has taken place’ and IG Sunderraj has even called villagers’ claims of drone attacks as ‘lies’ and ‘Maoist propaganda’. A 2022 Indian Express report quotes the IG as follows:

‘In Bastar, like the rest of the country, security forces are involved in protecting life and property. The Maoists are trying to malign our image out of desperation at losing ground. Their leaders, all outsiders, are misusing tribal people. It is time people see their real, violent faces.’⁵¹

On the other side, the Maoists are devising strategies to counter such sophisticated methods adopted by the police.⁵²

This escalating militarization, the unfettered surveillance and attacks by security personnel,

⁵⁰<https://theprint.in/india/snipers-underground-bunkers-pipe-bombs-naxals-new-strategy-to-counter-aerial-strikes-in-bastar/1817709/>

⁵¹<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/chhattisgarh-maoists-allege-drone-attacks-police-reject-lies-meant-scare-people-7872546/>

⁵²<https://theprint.in/india/snipers-underground-bunkers-pipe-bombs-naxals-new-strategy-to-counter-aerial-strikes-in-bastar/1817709/>

including by the less-trained DRG personnel, has impacted civilians, especially children adversely. In an incident on 13 May this year, two minor boys of Bodga village, Bijapur district were killed when an unexploded grenade was dropped and left behind by the security personnel.⁵³ The two boys while returning from gathering tendu leaves saw a shining object. This object, an unexploded grenade burst, fatally injuring the two. The police immediately released a press note claiming this to be as a result of the improvised explosive device (IED) planted by the Maoists.



Figure 7: Ammunition that was allowed to remain after the day's operation was over. Got buried but proved to be lethal when some children accidentally touched it. Photo Credit: Bastar Talkies

⁵³<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kee-9QeZ2Dg>

4 Overview of Protests



Figure 8: Madhonar protest site, Narayanpur District

In 2019, people started protesting against Potali camp in Dantewada district.⁵⁴ This was followed by a huge protest at Pakhanjur, Kanker district, in December 2020 against the establishment of two BSF camps.⁵⁵ Fifty panches and sarpanches in Pakhanjur resigned over the administration's refusal to stop setting up the camp there. But the protest that eventually caught some national coverage was the sustained dharna (sit-in protest) at village Silger, on the border of Sukma and Bijapur districts, which started in May 2021 and is still ongoing.

On 11 May 2021, a paramilitary camp came up overnight on land in village Silger that villagers had been cultivating. The next morning, the villagers began to protest, and continued peacefully protesting for five days but the administration did not respond.⁵⁶ On 17 May 2021, when about 15,000 people had gathered in front of the camp, the CRPF started firing in the air, apparently to disperse the crowd. When people started protesting against this, the CRPF opened fire and killed three persons.⁵⁷ One pregnant woman too died in the stampede. The

⁵⁴<https://www.newsclick.in/Chattisgarh-Brutal-Crackdown-Adivasis-Protesting-Against-Police-Camps-Dantewada>

⁵⁵<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/50-panchayat-body-representatives-resign-over-2-bsf-camps-in-chhattisgarh/story-PReGZdRc31HXFu50sdSkEP.htmlt>.

⁵⁶<https://scroll.in/article/997617/silger-protest-taps-into-wider-anger-in-bastar-over-security-camps-coming-up-in-the-name-of-roads>

⁵⁷<https://scroll.in/latest/995932/silger-police-firing-independent-observers-point-out-irregularities-in-account-of-authorities>

government ordered an inquiry by an executive magistrate, but even now, three years since then, the report has still not been made public. In the meantime, no one has been either compensated for the deaths or prosecuted.⁵⁸ The Silger protest initially not only caught some national and international attention, highlighting the extent of State callousness against its citizens, but it also gained support from villagers of other districts in Bastar Division, who came to Silger in solidarity. Silger also triggered a number of similar protests elsewhere in Bastar as security camps and a network of wide roads were being laid out across this region at a remarkably speed. The administration completely ignored the pleas of local villagers expressing their concern and their requests for holding a Gram Sabha before setting up of any camps, as constitutionally mandated for Fifth Schedule Areas.

At these protest sites, people from surrounding villages take turns to stay at the sites, bringing their food rations with them. For instance, at one site we were told that groups of five people come from each hamlet to participate in the dharna on a rotational basis. A small group of youth activists provide the organizational backbone, managing the sites, providing first aid, composing songs and dances, and gathering and sharing information with both solidarity groups and within the Moolvasi Bachao Manch (MBM – see below). The sites are also equipped with batteries, mikes and amplifiers, speakers, stationery materials, laptop and printers so that the youth can write and print leaflets whenever there is an incident that requires protests and petitions. Since the increase in repression on the protestors and MBM leaders, while the intensity of these protests has decreased several such protests are still ongoing.

4.1 Moolvasi Bachao Manch (MBM)

The protests against security camps in South Bastar organically linked with one another to form an umbrella organization called the Moolvasi Bachao Manch or MBM as it is popularly known. The North Bastar protests are ongoing under banners such as the Adivasi Adhikar Bachao Manch or Sarva Adivasi Samaj.

The MBM is mostly led by youth – young, conscientized women and men in practically equal numbers. All the youth in the MBM come from villages which were burnt and in which people were killed during the Salwa Judum. Many of them had escaped with their families to Andhra. Upon return, they were forced to study in far-away hostels since schools had been shut down in their villages. They are now determined that they will not flee but will fight for their rights using legal and constitutional means. The current president of MBM, Raghu Midiyam, from Parlagatta⁵⁹ village , who is currently studying in Dantewada, described the process:

'we have organized our structure from village to panchayat to block to district committees, and while each committee is independent, we also coordinate with each other for common actions. Our focus is to raise our issues and voices against all forms of injustice happening to our people, such as fake encounters, drone attacks, laying of wide roads, felling innumerable valuable trees, setting up camps illegally and sexual violence on our women and girls. As of now, we have managed to make our presence felt strongly in Sukma, Dantewada and Bijapur districts. Whenever a camp is planned or set up, the people of that area inform us and then we take stock of our strength and presence there and plan for a protest.'

⁵⁸<https://thewire.in/rights/bastar-silger-killing-peaceful-protest-one-year>

⁵⁹Village was burned by Salwa Judum

The MBM has also taken up the issue of justice for the victims of massacres by security forces, such as: the burning of over 300 homes and killings of three persons at Tadmetla, Timapuram and Morpalli in 2011⁶⁰; the killing of 17 villages including six minors at Sarkeguda on 28 June 2012; and killing of eight villagers, including four minors at Edesmetta in 2013. In Tadmetla, the CBI held the SPOs and security forces responsible for the arson, while in Sarkeguda and Edesmetta, a judicial commission found that the CRPF opened fire unilaterally on a meeting of villagers. However, no proceedings against the officials responsible for the killings have been initiated by the Chhattisgarh government.⁶¹

The protest at Mukram, a village about 5 km from Tadmetla village, in September 2023 was in response to the fake encounter of two men from the village the same month.⁶² According to local accounts, they were picked up from a shop at Chintalnar, taken to a BSF camp and then executed in the jungle. They were then passed off as Maoists in a public statement by the paramilitary forces. One of the more recent protests, in January 2024, came up at Gorna village in Bijapur. It was in response to the killing of a 6-month-old infant in Bijapur district's Mutvendi village by the security forces.

Since the BJP took over the government of Chhattisgarh after the state elections at the end of 2023, the security forces have intensified their operations in the region. As of 15 July 2024, there have been around 141 deaths this year alone. According to villagers and news reports from the ground, many of those killed are either civilians or Maoists executed after being picked up by the security forces.⁶³ Unfortunately, despite the government recognizing that the MBM is entirely peaceful and constitutional, several members and leaders of MBM and other movements in the region, such as Sarv Adivasi Samaj, Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) and Madh Bachao Manch, Irakbatti Andolan, Madhonar Andolan, Aamrai Andolan and Raoghat Andolan have been arrested and harassed.

Many of those arrested have been leading voices from the community against the extra-judicial killings, sexual violence and forceful acquisition of their land for the purposes of militarization, road building and mining. For example, Surju Tekam, vice president, Sarv Adivasi Samaj and Convenor of Bastar Jan Sangharsh Samanvay Samiti was picked up on 2 April 2024. He was beaten up and arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA), and Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act, 2005 (PSA). Similarly, Suneeta Pottam, a long-standing human rights defender, co-founder of MBM serving as Bijapur district head of the movement, executive committee member of the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) and member of Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression (WSS), was arrested on 3 June 2024. Along with organizing her community through protests, Suneeta is also a petitioner in pending cases in the Supreme Court on encounters and sexual violence. Along with Suneeta another co-founder of MBM, Raghu Midiyami, who is Bastar district head of the movement has been threatened by the police. They have said they would shoot Midiyami for a reward of INR 12–13 lakhs.

⁶⁰<http://sanhati.com/articles/17850/>

⁶¹<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/sarkeguda-fake-encounter-villagers-gather-10th-anniversary-demand-justice-7997036/>, <https://www.thequint.com/videos/news-videos/chhattisgarh-sarkeguda-fake-encounter-anti-naxal-operation-17-people-killed>, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/chhattisgarh-govt-yet-to-take-action-on-submissions-by-sarkeguda-judicial-panel-101631276819379.html>

⁶²<https://scroll.in/article/1057739/in-bastar-both-maoists-and-security-forces-leave-a-family-bereft>

⁶³<https://www.counterview.net/2024/06/stop-counter-insurgency-in-bastar-150.html>

4.1.1 Protest sites

The number of MBM protest sites at one point of time varies, but as of October 2023, these were the following sites in South Bastar:

1. **Bijapur:** Rampuram, Nambi, Vechapal Gorna Ambeli and Fundari, Bangoli
2. **Sukma:** Silger (since 17 May 2021), Mukram, Dharmapuram, Gompad, Gonderas and Singavaram
3. **Dantewada:** Nahadi, which later merged with the Gonderas protest because the protest site was forcefully dismantled by security forces.

The protests in Kanker district began in December 2020. They were against the BSF camps in Karkaghat and Tumirghat that had been established on the pretext of securing the construction of a bridge over Mendaki river in Koylibeda block of Kanker.⁶⁴ Several of the protests in the Abujmadh (Narayanpur) area are organized under the banner of Madh Bachao Manch, while at other sites under Adivasi Adhikar Bachao Manch. As of October 2023, these were the following sites in North Bastar:

1. **Kanker:** Bechaghat (since 8 December 2021), Chilparas, Hetele, Kandighat and Nadichua
2. **Narayanpur:** Madhonar, Kadiameta, Irakbhatti, Brehbeda and Orchha

4.2 Issues of common concern

We adopted two approaches while writing this report. For South Bastar, we have divided our observations under different themes, while for North Bastar, we have described the situation in terms of each site. This enables us to both document a broad sense of the issues, as well as a holistic view of how villagers are impacted by camps near their habitations. Of course, even in South Bastar, each site has its own specificities. Several key aspects of the protests in North and South Bastar, however, are common across both regions, such as:

- The absence of both land records and surveys of the region makes it easier for the administration to appropriate cultivated land;
- Lack of FPIC before commencement of any project;
- Lack of state accountability with regard to the massive deforestation;
- Severe state repression being meted out to villagers protesting take-over of their ancestral lands;
- Increased surveillance at camps as villagers are searched on their way to and from their villages in the course of their everyday activities. Drivers have to submit their mobile numbers and details of where they are going, every time they pass a camp;
- Welfare measures are undertaken very slowly in the rare instances they are instituted in comparison to the speed with which camps and roads are built;
- The network and scale of roads being laid communities land to transport resources in heavy goods vehicles – are a clear indication of government's priorities and intent;

⁶⁴<https://www.bhaskar.com/local/chhattisgarh/raipur/pankhanjur/news/23-more-panchayat-representatives-also-resign-take-out-rally-and-take-one-month-off-to-picket-128061644.html>

5 Narratives and Observations from the Protest Sites in South Bastar

In South Bastar, the fact-finding team went to protest sites in Sukma, Dantewada and Bijapur districts in 2023. We were able to speak with the protestors at the site, as well as active members of MBM. The team also met with the District Collector, Sukma. With many leading organizers from MBM being arrested in false cases, the situation on the ground has deteriorated since our visit to these protest sites.

5.1 Appropriation of land in violation of PESA 1996 and FRA 2006

At all the sites, villagers informed us that no consent was obtained from the local villages for constructing security camps, in clear violation of PESA 1996 and FRA 2006. The IG justified this by saying there would be security issues if the camps were announced beforehand. In some cases, people had started protesting in anticipation of a camp or a bridge or road being built, but rather than hold a dialogue with them, the administration bulldozed the protest site using police and paramilitary personnel to guard the construction sites and threatening anyone opposing them.

In South Bastar, many of the villages have not been surveyed. In those villages which had been surveyed, and this was several decades ago, people do not have access to the revenue records, which are kept in the district and tehsil headquarters. The patwaris or revenue record-keepers have not visited the villages to update the records to reflect mutations or the transfer of ownership to those currently living and working the land. During the Salwa Judum, when vigilante groups and security forces attacked and burnt villages, people lost their documents, including caste certificates and land titles. In addition, in Maoist controlled villages, the Maoists had instructed the people that there was no use for government records. In all, people face severe problems in trying to establish their claims to land ownership. The government has used this lack of titling and its own administrative failure (dating back even prior to the Maoists) to claim that only government land is being used for the security camps.

One example of this is Pusnar village in Bijapur district, where a security camp has been established. When villagers raised concerns over loss of agricultural land to a camp and helipad, the tehsildar and patwari present in a meeting facilitated by one of the fact-finding team members in October 2023, stated that they had no records of the land titles for any villager. The villagers, however, maintained that they did have land titles, but had lost their documents during the Salwa Judum.

According to the Collector of Sukma, whom we met on 22 February 2023, most of the villages have not been surveyed. He said there are about 60 forest villages, 50 un-surveyed revenue villages and others that were converted to revenue villages in 2014. He said that even if they want to survey and recognize people's rights on forest land or compensate them for the trees being cut down, they cannot do it due to active Maoist threats. According to him, a team from the Indian Institution of Technology (IIT), Roorkee, which had gone to do survey and settlement work for revenue villages was attacked by the Maoists and had to abandon the

survey work. Presently, IIT Roorkee and the revenue department have set up a joint nodal agency for this purpose and work has already started. Eight villages had been surveyed by 2023 and satellite maps of another 81 villages had also been prepared to enable claims for FRA 2006. However, the villagers have said that it is a challenge to obtain FRA recognition for claims. For example, one person in the Fundari area submitted an application under FRA at Bhairamgarh but have not had FRA rights recognized until now.

The IG Bastar denied that private land was being taken over for camps, he said that it was all government land. Moreover, according to him, it was the Collector's responsibility to allocate the land to police and security forces. The IG also claimed that if they had asked for permission to set up camps beforehand, the Naxals would make it difficult for villagers to consent. He recalled an incident from 2006 when he was SP Narayanpur and a sarpanch was trying to build a school. The IG said the Naxals killed him on grounds of meeting the police. What also emerged from the conversation with the authorities is that the camps, established after forcible takeover of village land and felling large numbers of trees, were there to stay, in fact to become a part of the landscape of Bastar, even if the situation becomes 'normal'. The IG said

There is no sense in demolishing camp infrastructure, as each camp costs 60 lakhs to 1.5 crores to set up. They will be handed over to livelihood centres. Each camp covers an area of 2–2.5 acres or 1 ha.'

For example, the Katekalyan camp was dismantled in 2021, and handed over to the district administration for self-help groups (SHGs) to run a textile factory.⁶⁵ In Narayanpur, between Gondiguda and Chitrakoot, when an STF camp was closed, the administration opened a tourism centre and the barracks were converted to a motel.⁶⁶

The following two case studies from Silger and Nambi illustrate how land is being taken over in villages to build camps.

⁶⁵<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/raipur/cm-opens-new-dannex-textile-unit/articleshow/91753001.cms>

⁶⁶In fact, Somnath, a resident of Lamdaguda of Lohandiguda Tehsil, Bastar lost 0.62 x 0.251 ha of land including 40 mango trees and one mahua tree when the STF established their camp. As the camp closed its base, the place was internally handed over to the State Tourism Board to set up cottages for tourists visiting the famous Chitrakoot waterfall. One of the fact-finding team members had visited the place two years ago, when Somnath's wife was working there as a labourer. Somnath preferred to travel 25 km to Jagdalpur town to find work as he finds it impossible to work as a labourer on his own land, as stated to the member. Despite several appeal letters, Somnath has not received any compensatory land for the loss of his ancestral land



Figure 9: Silger camp 2 clearing area

5.1.1 Silger, Sukma district

There are now two camps in Silger, one on either side of the village, Sunil Post (between Pegdapalli and Tarrem) and Suraj Post (between Silger and Bedre). The first camp, which was set up in 2021, was set up on approximately 6 acres of land that had been cultivated for decades by three families from Kopampara, Korsa Bhime, Korsa Soma and Muchaki Joga. The patwari claimed that it was government land, and no-one has received compensation after the land was taken over. In the new camp that has come up, at Suraj Post in Silger, about 2 km from the protest site, three more families have lost lands that they cultivated and also possessed. Podia Korsa has lost 5 acres, Kosa Korsa has lost 3 acres land, and Mada Korsa has lost 1 acre. Mada Korsa is also the patel (head) of the village. As of now, these three families have been residing behind the camp site, but they are not sure how long they will be able to continue living there. According to them, the State is establishing another camp at Darbha village. They were not aware, however, as to how many people have lost land there for setting up of the camp.

5.1.2 Nambi, Bijapur district

In Nambi the villagers started their protest on 10 November 2022, well before a security camp was established. Nambi village has 72 households belonging to the Koya and Dorla communities and 1,700 acres of land falls within its traditional boundary. Nambi has a beautiful waterfall, and some sites which are sacred for the villagers. The government is planning to take over these sites for an eco-tourism project.

Instead of engaging with the villagers, the government forcefully established a security camp on 21 November 2022. The villagers talked to us with a sense of despair:

'We had protested before the camp came up, but we could not stop it. About 2,000 personnel had come and they set up the camp at 3 am in the night on 20 November 2022. It was after that that we built our protest site shed and began to sit here day and night. We also went to the site at night that day, but we were not allowed near the site. The next day in the afternoon we saw the huge number of trees had been cut down for the camp and a helipad that was then built in front of the camp.'

People from 11 villages around Nambi are participating in the protest and their three main demands are: only a small single road should be built in the area; no paramilitary camps in the area; and the eco-tourism initiatives should be controlled by the Gram Sabha. The Nambi villagers also informed the team that:

'The government did not hold any Gram Sabha before setting up the camp or acquiring forest land for the camp, helipad, and the road. We have already submitted our objections through a petition against the camp, helipad and road. The Sub-Divisional Magistrate and Collector had come to talk to us, but they dismissed our demands as we do not have any FRA titles to prove that the land for the camp, helipad and road is ours. The Collector told us that they would build a single lane road, but we do not believe him. Two acres of land belonging to Sodi Sukka was lost to the Nambi camp. Sukka is dead but the land was being cultivated by his two sons, his two brothers and their grandchildren.'

The villagers had organized a chakka jam (road blockade) to apply pressure on the government for removing the camp. Around 6,000 people had joined the chakka jam, but the government has not paid any notice to their demands or their request for talks.

While the state has seized the opportunity to convert the village into an eco-tourism hub and has set up a paramilitary camp, the primary school in the village is being run under a thatched roof built by villagers. The previous primary school building had been used by the paramilitary forces for their combing and counter-insurgency operations during the Salwa Judum, for which reason it was broken down by the Maoists.

5.2 Repression of protests

In almost all the cases where people have been or are protesting, they have faced repression, the most extreme case being the police firing at the Silger protest site. In other cases, people have been arrested or beaten brutally. The police consider MBM as a frontal organization of the Maoists and regularly accuse the villagers on dharna of being sent by the Maoists. Even if as per the police's claims, these are protests provoked by the Maoists, the facts on the ground do not first, absolve the government of its high-handedness and forced and illegal acquisition of land that legally belongs to the impacted communities. Second, the protests are peaceful and third, the people's demands are for their rights that are guaranteed to them under law. Fourth, it is the security forces which have been committing extreme atrocities on the communities with absolute impunity in the name of fighting the Maoists. Instead of repeatedly attacking the movements and their protest sites while exercising their constitutional right to protest peacefully, the government needs to respectfully engage with the communities to address their genuine concerns.



Figure 10: Urban protest site in Sukma town to prevent appropriation of cultivated land

5.2.1 Gonderas, Sukma district

Gonderas is a revenue village in Sukma district under Phulbagdi Police Station (thana), however, it is closer to two security camps established in Dantewada district. One camp at Potali (Dantewada district) is 2 km away from the protest site and was established in 2019, while another is at Nahadi (Dantewada), 8–10 km away and established in November–December 2022. The protestors shared their difficulty in complaining to the Phulgabdi police thana, Sukma, as the police dismiss their complaint, stating that the camp was not in their jurisdiction. Any complaint made in Dantewada is also dismissed as it is originating from Sukma district.

The protest in Gonderas began on 1 June 2022 against the road being laid from Gadiras.⁶⁷ In fact, the villagers had begun protests earlier in November 2021 in Nahadi village, about 8 kms from Gonderas, when they realized the security forces were establishing a camp in Nahadi. There was police repression against the protest and the protest site was burnt down in March 2022 after driving away the protesters. The villagers then moved their protest to nearby Gonderas village, where, As of 9 Aug, 2024, they continue to sit in protest.

⁶⁷Gadiras is 12 km away and has a CRPF camp and thana. The road from Gadiras goes through Mosalpara at 12 km, then Gonderas at 17 km, through Badesetti at 20 km (CRPF camp) and Kerlapal (CRPF camp), where it will connect to the main Sukma-Konta Road.

5.2.2 Silger, Sukma district

The villagers' protest against the overnight takeover of their land by the first Silger camp was met with police firing in 2021. Four people died. No-one has been given any compensation. The protesting villagers said the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) had visited their village twice to conduct an inquiry into the incident but with no apparent outcome. The people have not protested against the second camp at Silger, as they were warned beforehand of severe repercussions, like armed action. The protesters told us that this warning had 'instilled a deep-seated fear in us and so nowadays we go to protest but seeing the aggression of the forces many of us feel scared and we go back home in the middle of the protest'. People in the village further shared details about the brutality of the DRG personnel and described them as 'the most violent and brutal of all forces because if they catch any of the villagers they just kill and rape without provocation and reason'.

5.2.3 Burji, Bijapur district

The protests in Burji had begun as early as October 2020 opposing illegal construction of the security camp in Pusnar. In December 2022, villagers in Burji had heard a security camp was being planned and had therefore gathered in large numbers (about 7,000 persons, including women and children) to protest. In order not to miss on any surreptitious activity in their village, they stayed up dancing through way past midnight. Around 1 am on 16 December, truckloads of security personnel, followed by trucks of materials – wire, murrum, sheds, motorcycles etc. – descended on the village, taking over the area completely. As the villagers began to protest, they were beaten brutally, their dharna site was broken down, all their basic materials such as cooking vessels, stored ration, clothes, sleeping mats, blankets, etc. were thrown away. The entire area was converted into ditches full of rubble.⁶⁸ In January 2023, protestors came back to reclaim the protest site.

⁶⁸This information was relayed to one of the team members before the timeframe of the fact finding. Incidents such as these prompted the necessity of putting in place a comprehensive team to visit other protest sites to assess the situation



Figure 11: January 2023 Burji-Pusnar second protest

5.2.4 Fundari, Dantewada district

The protest site at Bangoli, near Fundari camp, started on 1 March 2022 and continued for 24 days. On 24 March 2022, Ashok Juri, then adhyaksh (head) of the protest, gave a notice to the contractor asking them to stop work. When the contractor did not comply, about 1,500 villagers participated in a rally to the bridge on 25 March. The next day, there was lathi charge by the security forces and 50 people were badly injured. The security forces also took away all the vessels, tarpaulin, fuelwood, etc., that the villagers at the dharna had collected. Eight people were jailed under sections 147, 148, 149, 307 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and released only after three months.⁶⁹ They were accused of bringing axes and lathis to attack the CRPF. The police beat up a driver associated with the contractor building the bridge and blamed it on the villagers. On 1 April 2022, the villagers planned a rally to ask why the eight people had been arrested but there was a heavy presence of the security forces, so they returned without protesting. After this, the force put up the iron pylons on the Madh side of the bridge. The force was stationed at Battekona during the day – which meant that people were unable to collect mahua. During the monsoons, with the river in spate, the forces also stopped coming

⁶⁹Those sent to jail: Adesh Juri, Bangoli, age 24, former adhyaksh of the MBM dharna; Sukhram Mandavi, Alwada, 22; Gopi Poyam, Belnar, 18; Sukhdev Korsa, Belnar, 18; Sukaru Karma, Takilod, 19; Chotu Tamo, Belnar, 17 (he was released after 1 month); Dukaru Modiyami, Markapal, 30-35; Balsai Hapka, Belnar 24 (died on 14/15 Jan of swelling while the hearings were going on). Two accused had to give INR 25,000 each to a lawyer while five others gave INR 15,000 each to lawyers to get them out on bail. Nine persons were declared absconding.

and after that people became busy with sowing and harvesting. The dharna started again in December–January 2022–2023.

5.2.5 Bedre, Sukma district

The villagers told the fact-finding team that where the camp has come up, they used to farm the lands and grow millets. They had not submitted any FRA claims. The administration needed 10 acres to set up the Bedre camp. However, the people told the sarpanch that they will not give their land and that they wanted to protest against setting up of this camp. We were told that it had been rumoured that the DRG personnel had told the villagers they would receive INR 1.5 lakhs per acre, but when the villagers went to protest against the camp the forces beat them up. One person from Kunded village was beaten very badly and many others were also injured.

5.3 Aggressive push for road building – but for whom?

Road construction activity is visible across the region, as a matter of priority, even though there is almost no vehicular movement. Villagers barely own cycles and walk long distances even now. There is no public transport. Much of the government activity is concentrated on road building; camps are justified on the grounds that they are necessary to build roads. The Collector of Sukma district gave us the example of the Dornapal-Jagargunda-Dantewada and the Bhejji-Karrigundam-Jagargunda roads, which had to be built by setting up camps in between as there was active Maoist threats to the construction workers and to the laying down of the roads. He cited the example of the Banda power sub-station, which had been blown up by the Maoists to emphasize the need to set up camps to build development infrastructure. According to the Commanding Officer (CO) of Bedre camp, ‘For us to build this camp, we had to fill in about 175 trenches on the state highway. This highway was built in 1987 and we are just laying the new road and tar topping it. Once the road is built, there will be new schools, hospitals and bus services, and government officials will come to visit the villages and monitor the work and development of the peoples.’

It appears that the administration, more specifically the police, has successfully embedded this narrative, that the opposition to roads and security camps by the villagers is prompted by the Maoists. While the narrative fits well in the given context of Maoist presence in the region and the fear of intense security movements in their ‘liberated areas’, the fact that the wide roads are disrupting the life of the local Adivasis by destroying their livelihoods due to the forced acquisition of their agricultural land and clearing of the forests by the State cannot be overlooked.

The opposition to the roads and camps is often thrown back at the villagers, that they are anti-development. The villagers at all protest sites categorically stated that they were not opposed to roads, in fact they welcomed roads. What they were opposed to were wide roads, which were also creating ecological problems – by blocking the natural flow of streams and rainwater. Most of the roads under construction are existing state highways on which buses used to regularly ply until the Salwa Judum. The direct confrontation between Maoists and the police led to complete collapse of the infrastructure. Buses were not allowed to ply by Maoists, leaving the state highways completely deserted and neglected. A classic example is the Bijapur-Jagargonda-Dornapal road, which is now being revived. The villagers remembered better days when traveling to the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh was convenient, and

they looked forward to its revival. However, the nature of the road – the two-way road overlaid with blacktop and coupled with the establishment of security camps every 5 km deeply unsettles them.

In fact, the speed with which the roads are being laid, with complete disregard to local concerns, has bred mistrust and reaffirmed their suspicions that these roads are being laid for mining purposes. That is, for large trucks to transport extracted raw material. Although the road from Silger to Jagargunda, a stretch of 13 kms, has been laid, no civilian buses ply so far. Buses for civilian transit is available from Dornapal to Jagargonda and from Bijapur to Silger. The villagers from Bedre, which lies along this road, told us that they had submitted many petitions to authorities regarding their objections and demands but no one has bothered to respond.

5.3.1 Burji, Bijapur district

The protest in Burji was the second village after Silger where villagers from Gangalur region of the district came in large numbers to protest against establishing a security camp in the adjacent village of Pusnar and widening to two-lane road of around 52 km stretch of the Nelasnar-Kodoli-Gangaloor road. The sanctioned cost for this two-lane project is INR 82 crores. The road was laid out from both ends – the Gangalur end falls in Bijapur district, while the Nelasnar end falls in Dantewada district – with security camps in between. The road passes through at least 17 villages directly⁷⁰ and several others indirectly. This road was identified as a ‘major district road’ (MDR) in 2005.⁷¹

⁷⁰Gangaloor, Nainpal, Burji, Pusnar, Eroli, Palnar, Hurrepal, Porewada, Timmenar, Irinagar, Handapal, Kondapal, Mirtur, Bechhapal, Tadkel, Kodoli, Nelasnar.

⁷¹https://pwd.cg.nic.in/CurrentEvents/Roads_of_CGPWD.pdf

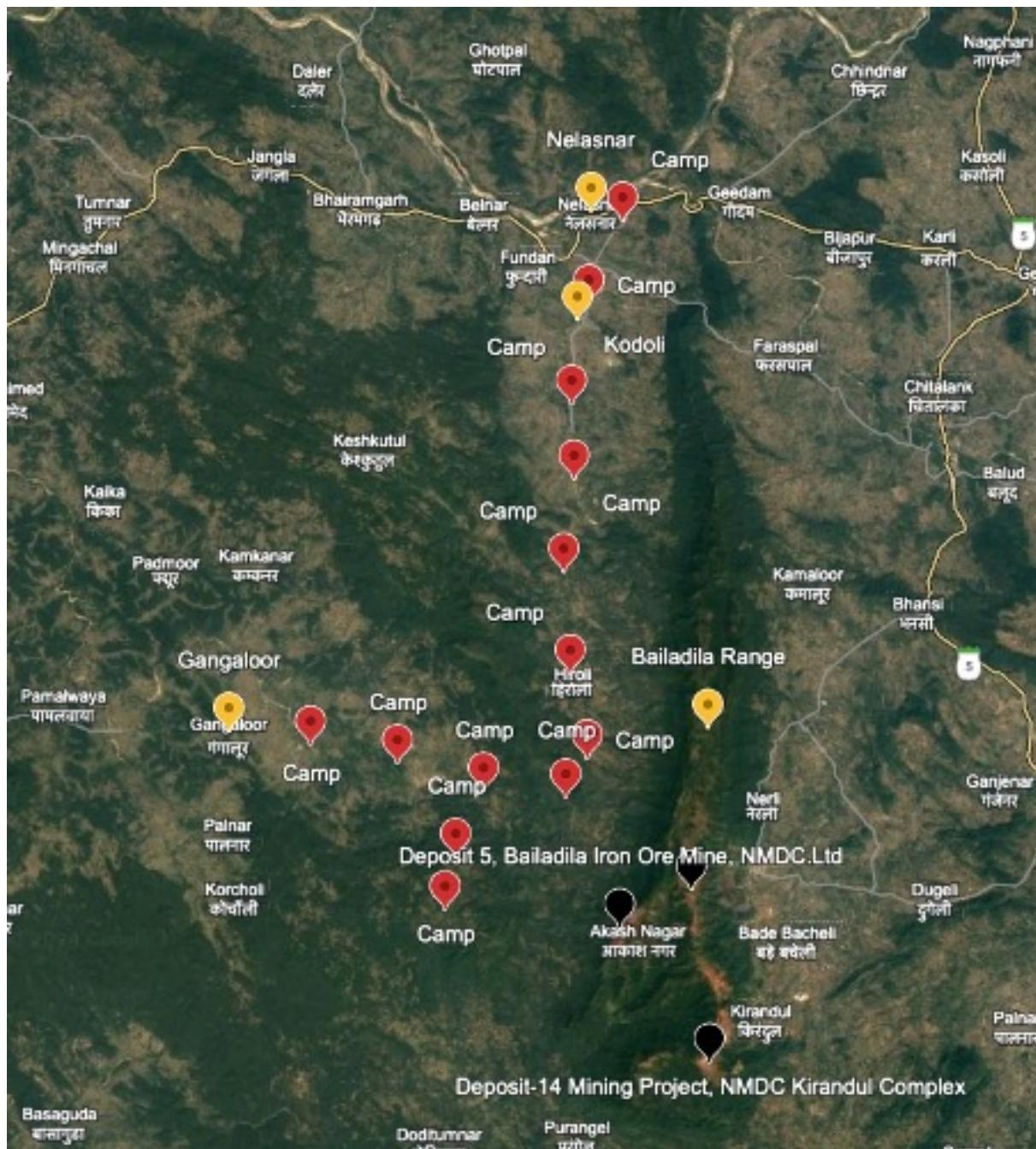


Figure 12: Nelasnar-Kodoli-Gangaloor road and approximate locations of camps on the route

This road, the villagers told us, existed as a narrow forest path used frequently by tractors, jeeps, two-wheelers, for commercial activities related to tendu patta, bamboo collection, etc. However, post Judum, the road lay deserted. Schools in many of the villages were also functioning prior to the Judum, but these too were abandoned, destroyed or stopped functioning. The Gangalur-Nelasnar road is today a 12 m wide blacktop road constructed at a cost of INR 73.8 crores, sanctioned in 2005 under the Left-Wing Extremist road construction project.⁷² The road work in the project is described as ‘widening to two lane and improvement from km 00 to 52.400 of Nelasnar-Kodoli-Gangalur road’. A two-way road, as per guidelines for rural (non-

⁷²<https://pqars.nic.in/annex/250/AU1566.pdf> (see page 5)

urban) highways, is 9 m (single or two-way).⁷³ However, physical verification of the same suggests the width of the road is not less than 12 m. An additional 3 m width across a 52.400 km stretch would entail illegal felling of thousands of trees and (forced) acquisition of land, including agricultural land. The villagers suspect the road is to ferry iron ores from the Bailadila mines through this stretch. It is not hard to notice the proximity of the Gangaloor-Nelasnar road to the Bailadila mines.

Further, villagers from about eight villages that directly fall enroute between Gangalur and Nelasnar made not fewer than five attempts to reach the District Collector's office and hand over memorandums. However, not even once were they able to reach the office, as they were stopped at Gangalur thana. When the villagers insisted on meeting the Collector to submit their memorandum, the concerned SDM was contacted, who reached the thana in a couple of hours. The SDM took their memorandum and promised to hand it over to 'higher officials' and revert to them once he had received a response. As of now, no response has reached the villagers. In fact, the villagers were unsure if their memorandums had even been delivered to the concerned 'higher officials'.



Figure 13: Road at Burji village, this road is being laid from Gangaloor to Nelasnar

5.3.2 Fundari, Dantewada district

In Fundari, a CRPF camp occupied by the 165th battalion of the CRPF was set up in 2019 at the point where a bridge is being built across the Indrawati river. There is another big bridge at Tumnar. The road leading on from the bridge goes to Rekavaya, 70 km away in Narayanpur district. Villagers stated that a survey had been done in 2005, and this road is being built for gold mining in Rekavaya; it will go on to Orchha, where the Aachilmetta (a hill in Kumam

⁷³https://archive.org/details/govlawircy1990sp73_0/page/8/mode/2up(see pages 8–9)

village, Orchha block) is rich in iron ore. However, when we met the IG, he claimed there was no plan to build a road to Orchha. Although the camp was set up earlier, people started protesting only in 2022, when road building started. The protest site was set up at Bangoli, the first village across the river from the Fundari camp. All the 200-odd villagers protesting at the dharna at any given time come from 12 panchayats.⁷⁴



Figure 14: Fundari CRPF camp

People have said they are not opposing the bridge or even the road as such, but the fact that this will enable the forces to go in and curtail their daily activities. They are also opposing the displacement of Rekavaya. They say they would agree to roadbuilding if FPIC is obtained from the gram panchayat. But the sarpanch was also not informed by the authorities, even though Fundari camp is in Bangoli panchayat area.

⁷⁴Bangoli, Belnar, Dharma, Utla, Bodga, Bail, Satwa, Takilod (Bhairamgarh tehsil of Bijapur district), Rekavaya, Dunga Pallevaya, Pdiyakot, and Itampad (of Orccha tehsil of Narayanpur district)



Figure 15: Bangoli MBM meet

This entire area was affected by Salwa Judum. Belnar was burnt in 2005. People fled to the forests, taking their cattle, pigs, and chickens with them. Men and youth would go back to the village in groups to cultivate, harvest and work on each other's fields. They said they lost all their pattas (land titles) and certificates in the fires and displacement, and the government has taken advantage of their vulnerable situation to forcibly acquire their lands. Many of them are also unable to proceed in school beyond class V or VIII because the schools demand certificates. Fundari camp comes in Dantewada district and has affected Battekona para. The Fundari camp was set up in the night on private land of approximately 5 acres. Shankar, who showed us the patta for it, has filed a case against the road built over his land. The patta is in the name of Sobi Barsa, Bangoli Battekona, and is for land on the banks of the Indrawati. The jungle near the land has been cut down and both the patta land and jungle have been replaced by huge iron pylons for the bridge.



Figure 16: Shankar holding the patta for the land where now stands huge iron pylons for the Indravati bridge. He has filed a case against the road built over his land

The MBM submitted complaints to the Collector on 1 March 2022 on this issue. All the Bijapur panchayats have filed Gram Sabha resolutions and given them to the Bhairamgarh Janpad office. But they have not kept a copy. The Collector of Bijapur came to meet them on 23 January 2023. He asked why people were protesting after so many crores had been spent on the bridge and said that it would be built at any cost. On that day 600–700 people were present at that meeting, but the sarpanch was missing. The CRPF states the Fundari camp is in Dantewada, and the villages affected are in Bijapur. The police informed them that villagers from Bijapur may not protest a camp and road coming up in Dantewada. It is clear that the artificial administrative division of the district has affected villages negatively in many ways.

Given the aggression with which roads are being laid in Bastar is clearly overlooking the provisions of PESA 1996, makes the villagers suspect that the purpose is not so much development of the Adivasi community or even ‘clearing’ the region of the ‘Naxal menace’, but a far bigger and lucrative purpose that lies behind these claims, such as mining of the various hills. IG Sunderraj, however, has alleged that, ‘Mining is not an objective. There is clearly ‘mis’-propaganda that road construction is being done for mining.’ When it was pointed out that the Vechapal-Kirandul Road has been clearly built for mining, the IG argued that there were many (other) roads which had no mining associated with them. Overall, he argued that there are several kinds of objectives for the roads:

1. Expansion of the national highway network

2. Expansion of the existing state highways network⁷⁵
3. Rebuilding of broken district roads, which had been destroyed, beyond normal specifications under the Road Requirement Plan (RRP) scheme. For instance, Jagargunda-Basaguda road (through Silger) has been sanctioned under RRP under which roads can be broader than the usual state highway
4. New roads – for a) mining and b) administrative convenience.⁷⁶

The IG said, ‘we would be happy if we could build roads without camps. For instance, the road from Pamed to Bijapur, and bridge over Chintavagu river between Pamed and Usoor. We wanted to construct these without security, but the machinery was targeted, and the contractor wanted to leave. Then we established a camp, and the road was built. Another example is the Chindnar bridge between Barsur and Bhairamgarh. The Naxals asked the sarpanch to oppose it. He refused and was killed in 2017. After a camp was established, the bridge was built and now 300–400 people cross it on haat market days. The Fundari bridge is 780 m. There are no plans to build roads after that.’ We asked the IG whether they would be willing not to establish camps, if villagers took responsibility for allowing road construction. He appeared a little amenable to the suggestion, however, such confidence building measures are never put into practice.

5.4 Everyday policing and arrests

Villagers who lived closer to the camps felt increasingly threatened, with their lives restricted and continuously policed. They described the regular visits of the security forces – who would enter the villages, conduct search operations and pick up people on the slightest pretext, beating them, accusing them of being Naxalites or supporting them, and then arresting them. This peaked during 2009–2010 or during the Salwa Judum, according to Mahesh Sori, an MBM leader who is leading the Gonderas protest.

5.4.1 Gonderas, Sukma district

Gonderas was fairly ‘protected’ from Salwa Judum atrocities as Maoist presence was stronger in the area and the police thus did not even try to enter these villages. In recent times, once Potali and Nahadi camp were established, ‘gasht’ (search operations by security forces) in surrounding villages has gone up. While this has deterred Maoist presence in the village, it has resulted in increased violence and abuse of the villagers by the security forces. We were told that almost every day, there would be such search operations and the security personnel would stop people going from one village to another to meet their relatives, detain them in the camp for questioning, obtain all their personal details and then release them in the evening. Since 2009–2010, about 15 men and women were arrested from the village and were only acquitted after spending three to five years in prison.

In fact, even the day the fact-finding team was visiting (on 29 February 2023) the village, one of the MBM members, Haldar Mahadi (from Gonderas), was stopped along with a few other villagers and made to wait in a camp and allowed to leave only in the evening. The security forces also interfere with the villagers’ everyday lives as well. According to several

⁷⁵e.g. State Highway 5, which runs from Bhilai to Maraiguda through Aranpur

⁷⁶The road constructed from Mirtur to Gangalur follows an administrative logic. The IG argued that there was no mining associated with the road from Usoor to Galgam, Bheji to Jagargunda, Basaguda, Silger

women and men we spoke to at Gonderas, the police enter people's homes without any warrant, asking invasive questions such as who visited them, did any Naxalite visit them, etc., and sometimes take people with them and either arrest them on false charges or let them go.

Sodi Dula, 35 years, and Kowasi Deve were taken from their homes on 25 December 2022 and arrested in 'Naxali cases'. However, they are now currently out on bail. Sodi Joga was arrested in 2021 but acquitted after two years in prison. Muchaki Malla was arrested in February 2023 and is still in jail.

A total of five people from Gonderas, including one woman, have joined the police as DRG. They all regularly come on gasht and identify and arrest villagers they know. Gangi Sodi had spent about five/six years with CPI (Maoist) and had fallen in love with a boy Bhima (from Jabeli village), who had also spent a similar number of years with the Maoists. Both then decided to quit the party and live in Gonderas village, which they did for two to three years after their marriage in 2018/19. But they were unable to lead the life of common villagers as Gangi was picked up by the police in 2019 and sent to jail. She was released after a year, and after being acquitted in all cases, she was taken to meet Bhima, her husband, who had surrendered to the police soon after Gangi was picked up.

Another person, Madvi Budram surrendered before the police in 2021. He had worked with the Maoists for about one-and-a-half years, before quitting. He had been working on his lands for nearly two to three years before he suddenly surrendered to the police. No one in the village understood why he made that decision – was it pressure from police to surrender or pressure from the Maoists to rejoin or perhaps Gangi's arrest could have instilled fear in him? Another person, Gondse Deva, killed his brother in a fight and ran away. And while he was never with the Naxalites, he also went to the police and supposedly 'surrendered' and joined the police force in 2022. He probably did so as he feared having a case of murder slapped against him. The fourth and last person from Gonderas to join the police force is Gondse Hadma. He is literate and joined the force in 2019 on his own accord.

5.4.2 Fundari, Dantewada district

The main concern expressed by the protestors against the camp was police harassment. They narrated specific cases of rape in the area when women were collecting firewood and also mentioned multiple cases of false arrests, looting, beating and even extrajudicial killings. They said that in Tadballa, 10 people had been killed in February 2019. They were all youths from Takilod and Bodga who had come for sports activities, and the CRPF had fired on them.⁷⁷

⁷⁷<https://thewire.in/rights/fake-encounter-abujhmarh-adivasi-security-forces-maoists>; <https://countercurrents.org/2019/06/blood-on-the-playground/>



Figure 17: Banner at Fundari protest site

A new camp has been set up in January 2023 at Sonpur Police Station in Dondribeda, Narayanpur, under the leadership of Sukku Nureti, who was once a Maoist. Currently, Nureti is a member of the DRG and holds the post of head constable under Narayanpur police. The villagers hold him responsible for the drones that took photographs of women bathing in the Indrawati. The protestors at Bangoli shared with the fact-finding team that the DRG admitted, in private, having watched and taken pictures/videos of bathing women and shared these photos amongst themselves. This sparked an outrage, and on 29–30 January 2023, a rally was taken out against such actions by the DRG personnel in Bhairamgarh, but the police brutally beat up one person and chased the others away. Although the rally was disrupted, the protest resulted in oral apologies extended by police personnel to some of the protest leaders for such misconduct by their force.

Additionally, the only job opportunities that are available for the youth in the village is through the police force. This not only puts their life in danger but also forces them to participate in violent actions of the police against their own community members. For instance, in 2023, about 25 youth from Belnar panchayat filled up forms for recruitment in the Bastar Battalion, a battalion raised by the CRPF to undertake anti-Naxal operations. However, the Gram Sabha convinced them to withdraw their applications as they would be compelled to kill their own family members. The young boys were instead encouraged to focus on their land to enhance their income and to live in peace rather than build animosity. Eventually only two boys proceeded to join the force, while their families continued to live in the villages. From the perspective of the villagers, their approach is a sensible one under the circumstances, but the police portray such decisions as Maoists inciting villagers not to join the security forces.

5.5 Loss of sacred sites — disrespect to the departed

Villagers are also worried about the displacement of their sacred sites by camps and roads. In Bedre, for example, villagers said ten sacred stones marking burial sites had been moved without their knowledge or consent, by the forces for the security camp and widening of the road. A camp commander in charge of road widening said that,

'We just leave the sacred stones on the roadside, and we take the people into confidence if we have to shift them and put them where they show us. But sometimes these sacred stones do get broken, and we often talk to the educated youth when we have to communicate to the elders.'

This did not appear to be so, people were clearly distressed at the way their sacred stones were being treated with disdain during the construction.



Figure 18: New road through Pusnar cuts through the ritual stones erected by the villagers in memory of departed family members

5.5.1 Pusnar, Bijapur district

In Pusnar, Bijapur district, where a camp has come up between Burji and Pusnar on a small hill on Pusnar land, there is a ‘Punem pen’ (clan deity) called Katora. The area also has many mahua, mango and kosom trees. The force decided to remove the devgudi (shrine) and move it to the side and build the road through it. The DRG had told them there was no shrine there. The Pusnar elders protested and scolded the DRG asking, ‘who is elder and who knows more about the village – you or us?’ The camp is now about 1.5 km from the devgudi.

The mechanized, aggressive road construction from Gangaloor to Pusnar has destroyed a few sacred stones. Budri Punnam, a resident of Pusnar lost the stone memorial of her husband Budu Punem, who had passed away the previous year due to illness. Budri was full of sadness as she told us that had spent about INR 10,000 to find an appropriate stone to erect on his memorial.

5.5.2 Nambi, Bijapur district



Figure 19: Banner of the Nambi Dhara Jal Prapat Samiti

As the road and camp in the Nambi village are being built to accommodate an eco-tourism project around Nambi Dhara waterfall, the villagers in and around the waterfall area resolved not to allow it. The waterfall is the site of their sacred deity Kundu dhara, Mitto dokri and another local deity to whom they pray for a good monsoon. The villagers have also formed a committee called Nambi Dhara Jal Prapat Samiti and in 2023, they had organized a huge fair during the worship of Kundu Dhara and Mitto dokri. It was attended by hundreds of villagers from nearby areas. These villages are planning to organize this fair every year to assert their control over the waterfall and its sacred sites. The Nambi Dhara Jal Prapat Samiti has passed several resolutions rejecting the eco-tourism plans of the government and has decided to regulate tourism related activities at the waterfall and sacred sites through their own committee. The committee told the fact-finding team that they will maintain the site and its surroundings and also raise funds for this through the ticket sales to visit the waterfall and sacred sites by outsiders. Local Adivasi communities visiting these sites will not be charged.

5.6 Cutting down of forests; No compensatory afforestation or compensation for villagers

The setting up of camps and road building exercises have caused massive deforestation. However, there does not seem to be any compensatory afforestation or compensation (under CAMPA). In Fundari, for example, villagers estimated that the camp had cut at least 100–150 trees. While speaking to the IG about road building and its impact on forests, he first claimed that the trees were marked before a camp or road came up. When it was pointed out to him that this contradicted his earlier statement that secrecy was required before establishing a camp, he was vague and said that there were satellite surveys. In any case, he disclaimed responsibility saying that it was the responsibility of the Public Works Department (PWD) or the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadhak Yojna (PMGSY) that built roads to deposit money under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA). Only on the Dornapal-Jagargunda stretch and Injeram-Bheji stretch did the police directly engage in road building through the Chhattisgarh Police Housing Corporation. It is not clear whether they deposited money under CAMPA.

On the destruction of forests for the camps, the IG was equally vague, and said the police has an afforestation drive – Podla Uraskhana or ‘police plantation drive’. At Bedre camp, the commander said that ‘When a camp or road is built we give away the cut down trees to the people. The forest department comes a month later after we cut the trees and numerates them and takes them away. But we also ask the people to take away the dead trees before the department comes.’ Contradicting the claims of the CO, the local villagers/ protestors said that the forces do not allow them near the camp so how can they even go and collect the wood of the dead trees and they have no idea who takes the wood and the logs of the dead and cut down trees. According to the villagers, some 60 mahua and tendu trees were cut down during the establishment of this camp, including on private land. They had not been able to count the innumerable mango, tamarind, sal, sagun, salphi, etc., trees that had been felled as well. The villagers said:

‘The head of the security camp told us that we will receive compensation for the land and mahua trees, but we have no idea when and how much we will get.’

They have lost hope on this front.

5.7 Militarization of welfare services: missing welfare and health care services

The government and paramilitary forces insist that the camps are there for the welfare of the people. The people, however, argue that they have a right to welfare services without the camps. According to our conversation with the IG on 23 February 2023, the camps are essential precursors to services. He argued that workers (such as teachers and health workers) would only come into the area after assessing the security in the area. He gave the example of how, in 2018– 2019, the health department built a sub-health centre at Bade Setti. A few days before it was to be inaugurated, the Naxals demolished it. Then in 2020, a camp was established, after which a road, then health department and finally the centre was rebuilt.

The Sukma Collector also insisted that camps were needed for welfare. He said that 123 out

of 128 primary schools had been revived after they had been closed during the Salwa Judum massacres. The blame for the lack of schooling in the interim period lies largely with government since they had ordered the teachers to come to Salwa Judum camps. During the Judum (2005 onwards), schools become a battleground. The security forces would occupy schools and the Maoists would destroy them in order to prevent the forces from staying in the villages. It is only in 2022–2023 that primary schools have started being reinstated in Sukma district. Until then children were sent to boarding schools far away from their homes, and even now the main schooling is through portacabins that seat large numbers of children. Now, according to the Collector, 54 primary school buildings have been sanctioned. ‘Shiksha doots’, who receive a monthly honorarium, have been posted in villages to motivate children to enrol in government schools. Another 14 tribal hostel schools have also been sanctioned. The Collector explained that before they start any development work in a village, they send Anganwadi workers and teachers to mobilize and build trust among the villagers and appease their anger against the government before they set up any camps in these areas. But he reiterated that they cannot function without setting up camps as the government is constantly being targeted by the Maoists.

This view of camps as ‘benevolent’ was also reflected by the CO, STF, at Bedre camp, who said:

‘The local villagers say they don’t want camps out of fear of the Maoists. We don’t enter villages because we want to win the trust of people and so we keep our distance. We have come so far from our villages to work for the people. Earlier the Maoists brainwashed the people, and they feared us but now we have very good relations with the people, and they do not fear us.’

In many places, the provision of health services is available only in the CRPF camp – forcing people to accept militarization and camps in exchange for their basic rights. For instance, in Fundari, there is a bus stop in front of the camp, and a sign in Gondi (in Devnagri script) asking people to come for medical camps. Similarly, Chintagufa camp offers medical services immediately outside its gates.



Figure 20: Health Camp organized by CRPF 229 Battalion in Silger

The villages haats as well as village shops are tightly surveilled. Not only are timings restricted, but the Adivasis are not allowed to buy groceries in bulk, on the grounds that these will then be supplied to Maoists. Even small shops in villages are not allowed to operate out of fear of goods being supplied to the Maoists. For instance, the weekly market in Uspari at the banks of Indravati river had been stopped for over a month when the fact-finding visited the area, forcing people to walk around 20 km to collect supplies for a week's needs.

Gonderas, Sukma district

Gonderas had a Balak Ashram (school and hostel) before 2003 in which some 50–60 children from 16 nearby villages were enrolled. However, the school was transferred to Gondpalli (12 km) in 2003 until 2005 for reasons not known to the villagers. After Salwa Judum began in 2005, the school was moved 55 km away in Sukma. Most of the children who studied in the Balak Ashram did not intend to discontinue their studies, but very often, circumstances at home meant they needed to take time out, after which returning to the school owing to distance and the need to stay away from home, made continuation of schooling in higher classes difficult.

When the Balak Ashram was shifted out from Gonderas, a primary school was established. But the attendance of the teachers coming from Gadiras was pathetic and the school eventually closed down until 2021, when the primary school was reopened. The children enrolled in the primary school were forced to drop their studies. Even now, said Mahesh Shori, an activist from MBM who is leading the Gonderas protest, the situation is the same. Teachers do not attend regularly although midday meals (MDM) are being served regularly. The village has so far only two students who have attained literacy beyond Class 12.^a As regards the Anganwadi, the situation is more or less the same. Before 2003, there were Anganwadis, but from 2003 to 2020, Anganwadis were withdrawn. Since 2020–2021 there are five Anganwadi centres in the villages' four paras. Although sahayikas are from the same para where the centre is opened, the Anganwadi workers come from Gadiras as the young women in the village are less educated.

However, the villagers hoped that once the young women finish their schooling they will ask for young women from the village to be posted as Anganwadi workers. The villagers were unable to throw light on whether centres fulfil the role of an Anganwadi centre in maintaining child health – taking height and weight of children, listing grade ii and grade iii malnourishment, etc. The children are being given something to eat. However, their main concern was that eggs were not being supplied.

The PDS shop has been available in Gonderas only since 2021. Previously Gonderas villagers had to travel 55 km to Gadiras or Kondre to collect their rations. The ration includes 35 kg rice (@ INR 1), Chana (@ INR 5) and salt (free). With regards to fortified rice, in a scheme that has been made universal across the country by the union government, Gonderas villagers said they were initially being given 'plastic' rice, but in the three months prior to our visit, they had not found any 'plastic' in the rice.

In 2022, a health sub-centre was opened. Nurses come once in a week and stay back for a day or so. According to the Indian Public Health Standard guidelines,^b a sub-centre should have at least one auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM) stationed at the sub-centre. The doctors, too, come on two to three days in a week, but there are hardly medicines with them. They mostly prescribe medicines which the people find difficult to buy, as the nearest chemist shop is 55 km away in Gadiras or Palnar (12–14 km) or Nakulnar (42 km).

The villagers have been able to access ambulances in case of emergencies. However, during the rainy season, because the nala (rivulet) near Potali fills up with water, they have to take the patient till the nala and then load him/her into the ambulance. When we asked the villagers if in that case, would not a road then be better for them, they replied:

'Of course, we want roads, but not like this. Ambulances do not need such'

big roads, and these are 10–12 m road.'

The Gonderas protest has halted the construction of roads beyond Mosalpara. When we asked whether the villagers knew who the contractor was, they said the local police told them to come to the police station for the information. Of course, they did not pursue this further, since given their prior experiences, they do not have any expectations that the police in the thana would come to their aid.

In 2023, the government made a policy decision of making bank payments and to provide Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (MNREGA) work only on the basis of Aadhar card identity. Consequently, the two pond-related works allotted to their panchayat were withdrawn after a week as no one from their village had an Aadhar card or bank account. In fact, the villagers do not even have voter IDs, as earlier there were clear instructions from the Maoists to boycott elections. But today, the villagers are ready to apply for Aadhar, voter ID and bank accounts. In fact, they, along with their sarpanch, Muchaki Sukki (Sarpanch Pati Lakma Muchaki), met the Collector in January 2023 to hold a camp and get all the cards made. This was promised, but nothing has materialized as of now.

^aVanjam Joga, after studying in Gonderas, went to Gadiras Ashram school. From there, he went to Sukma and studied law in Jagdalpur. In 2023, he began his practice in Sukma. The other youth, Karan Shori, after finishing his 12th, was running the Public Distribution System (PDS) shop but died unexpectedly two years ago. As of 2023, four girls were studying in 11th class and six boys in the 10th class. Seven boys and girls have completed their 10th class. About 25 children in the village have studied between Class 5 and 9. Most of them are in the village doing farming.

^b<https://nhm.gov.in/images/pdf/guidelines/iphis/iphis-revised-guidlines-2012/su>
b-centers.pdf

Niyad Nelanar

On February 16, 2024, the newly formed Chhattisgarh government announced a new scheme called Niyad Nelanar('Your good village' in Gondi language). Under the scheme, essential services like hospitals, housing, drinking water, electricity, schools along with 32 welfare and development schemes will be provided to the villages through security camps. These welfare facilities will be provided to the villages within a radius of 5 km of the designated security camp.⁷⁸ As per a government list, 21 newly established camps have been designated and 31 new camps have been proposed to be established under this scheme [Annexure B]. The chief minister was quoted in an article, 'These security camps will act as not only the police camps, but also as multi-faceted development camps wherein the government will ensure the availability of over 25 basic amenities besides extending the benefits of 32 individual-focused government schemes in the Maoist-affected villages'.⁷⁹

5.7.1 Fundari, Dantewada district

There have been no schools in this area since the Judum in 2005. Across the Indirawati River lie nine grampanchayts, geographically closer (8-10kms) to Bhairamgarh, but falls in Orchha block of Narayanpur, which lies 60 kms from these villages. For convenience of administration running schools have been shifted to Orchha block leaving hundreds of children without school.

⁷⁸<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/others/chhattisgarh-government-to-launch-niyad-nellanar-scheme-for-maoist-affected-villages-101708057829381.html>

⁷⁹Ibid

For instance the kanya shala in Dunga was shifted to Orchha block in 2013, while the Rekawayaya Balak Ashram school was shifted to Dunga. Most teachers come from Orchha, primarily to mark events such as 15th August, 26th January etc. Mid day meals are provided, however teaching as such is irregular, said the villagers. One PHC/Swasthya Kendra was built in almost every panchayat last year, but there are no doctors and nurses that attend these centres. There is no PHC in Bodga, Rekawayaya, Pallevaya and Pidiyakot, but Bangoli, Belnar, Dharma, Utla and Itampad have PHCs. There was no COVID vaccination in this area. There is an Anganwadi and Mitanin in every village though. There does not seem to have been fresh panchayat elections in this area with the Belnar sarpanch holding the post since 2015. Dharma, Itampad and Bail also have sarpanches who were elected back in 2015.

Deaths due to plastic rice?

In the Fundari area, people told us of sudden deaths due to swelling in the hands and feet, which they attributed to consuming fortified rice or ‘plastic rice’ as is known in this area. PDS distributors did not explain to us what the issue with the rice is and why it is being distributed. The locals call it plastic rice because when they cook it, plastic floats on top. In June 2022, 31 people died in Rekawayaya in one year; 12 died in Dharma in 3 months; and about one to two deaths happened in Belnar. One person, who was taken to Dantewada hospital in time, has recovered. Villagers described the symptoms as ‘hands and feet swell up and they die.’ The Bijapur administration sent a medical team once for one or two days.

In Sukma district too, there were 38 deaths in Regargatta in 2018, due to swelling. Most deaths were of people in the 17–35 year age group. The Collector Sukma said that the Sukma medical team had found no relationship with the fortified rice and the sudden spate of deaths. He only offered a counter-factual that other people were also eating the same rice and they had not been affected. According to him, the deaths which the people attributed to ‘plastic rice’ in Regargatta, were caused by acute chronic anaemia and endemic malaria attacks. The Collector said the government’s medical team had investigated the deaths and found that anaemia was probably caused by alcoholism and heavy wage work, which has taken a toll on their immunity. They had even done soil and water testing, but no lead content was found, although there was high iron content. The chief medical officer (CMO) said that similar symptoms were caused by protein deficiency. But this still does not explain why there should be similar symptoms of swelling and these mass deaths within a short period. Whether connected or not, a story done by the Reporters’ Collective^a showed that fortified rice had not been tested for negative health effects, especially in areas with high sickle cell anaemia such as in Fundari.

^a<https://www.reporters-collective.in/projects/modified-rice-papers>

5.8 Everyday life trapped in a never-ending conflict-ridden cycle

Primarily dependent on rain fed agriculture, Bastar region has a single crop system, where mostly paddy is grown with patches of maize and millets grown in some places. The months of June–September are spent preparing, tilling, growing and harvesting the land. From October to January, often people migrate to nearby towns or bigger cities of other states for labour work. February–March is spent at home in the forest for collection of forest produce like tendu patta, mahua, aonla, etc. April–May is again time to migrate to nearby Andhra Pradesh/Telangana for

labour work to harvest chillies. Increasingly, both migrating outside their villages or remaining in the villages – both are posing grave challenges for the villagers. There have been instances of villagers being picked up from Andhra Pradesh and having a ‘Naxali case’ slapped with charges they are unaware of. In the villages, during the dry season after monsoon, as the forest cover gets relatively thinner, extensive search operations by security forces makes it difficult for the villagers to work on their land or gather forest produce. Simultaneously, from March to June⁸⁰ (before the onset of monsoon), the Maoists undertake their Tactical Counter Offensive Campaign (TCOC).

The offence and counter offensive incidents result in insecurity among villagers, several arrests on suspicion on being Maoist supporters, civilian casualties, either caught in the cross-fire or being declared as Maoist after death. Ambushes by Maoists to trap security personnel followed by onslaught by security personnel on the villagers is now part of the seasonal cycle in Bastar region. It is amid this constant state of war that villagers are trying to live and make a livelihood.

⁸⁰<https://www.livehindustan.com/jharkhand/story-naxalite-use-tcoc-between-march-and-june-to-attack-security-forces-8092403.html>

6 Narratives and Observations from the Protest Sites in North Bastar

The fact-finding team visited various camp sites in Kanker and Narayanpur districts and were able to meet with members of the Rowghat Sangharsh Samiti. They also met with the officials of Jaiswal NECO, a private company carrying out mining operations in Narayanpur and Kanker, and the District Collector and Superintendent of Police of Kanker district. The observation from these interactions points to the fact that in North Bastar, the motivation of the State to set up camps and build roads and railway lines is closely tied to ongoing or future mining operations. The narratives presented below provide evidence.

6.1 Chilparas (Koelibeda block, Kanker): Protest against new BSF camp and road under construction on village forestland

On the intervening night of 16–17 December 2022, at around 1 am, a BSF security camp was established in Chilparas. Chilparas is a village of 50 Koya Adivasi households in Panidobir panchayat, Koelibeda block of Kanker district. It is part of the Bhomra pargana, which includes 22 villages. People of the village started a protest the very next day (17 December). The protest has been continuing since and the people have organized themselves under the banner of Bhomra Pargana Chilparas Sangharsh Samiti and have the support of the Sarv Adivasi Samaj of Koelibeda. On 28 February 2023, when the fact-finding team visited the site, we were told that by then people from 68 villages across 18 panchayats of Koelibeda had joined the protest.



Figure 21: Fact finding team at Chilparas protest site

On our way to the protest site, we crossed the camp, which we could see was still being built. From an official at the camp we learnt that the Chilparas camp housed 200 BSF jawans and around five district police personnel. There were no DRGs stationed there but they were sent from Kanker on demand.

Workers operating JCB brand vehicles were digging, carrying and levelling soil for the road that was being built from Koelibeda to Panidobir by PWD, a stretch of 15 km, and which went past the camp. The forest land taken up by both projects (camp and road) falls within the boundary of Chilparas village. We learnt later from the villagers that the camp had occupied around 10 acres of forest land apart from the forest land that had been taken up for the road.

The camp, established on the community forest land of Chilparas village, has affected the income of the families who used to collect forest produce from that patch of land. Each family in the village is allocated a specific area for collection of forest produce based on mutual agreement. Dayalu Kureti used to collect amla from the trees at what is now the camp site and make an annual income of around INR 40,000–50,000. He has lost this income since most of the trees were cut during the construction of the camp and he is no longer able to access the trees that remain. Apart from that, the camp is a kilometre away from the school and Anganwadi centre, which means that the children are learning and living in the shadows of paramilitary. Recalling examples of repression in the area, protestors said that they were afraid that such instances would increase if more camps came up in the area. Some instances they mentioned are:

- In 2011, Soma Kadyam (35 years old) from Alparas village, 5 km from Chilparas, was killed in a fake encounter by the security forces. He was asleep in his house when they came. He was forcibly taken outside and shot dead.
- In 2016, Shobi Ram Kawasi (35–40 years old) from Gattakal village, 10 km from Chilparas had gone hunting; he had his bharmar bandook (local made gun) with him. He was in the hill on his way back when he was shot dead on the pretext that he was a Naxalite. He was phad munshi of the area for collection of tendu patta. Phad munshis are an important link in the chain of tendu patta collection. An SDM enquiry was ordered but nothing came out of it.
- In 2021, Somji Mandavi and Chaitu Mandavi were arrested by the BSF from their village Jugda (Panidobir Panchayat) 3 km from Chilparas. They are still in jail in Jagdalpur.
- In December 2022, a week before the camp was established, a ‘tipper’ that is used for road work was torched, as was a bus and mobile tower in the area. A Maoist leaflet was found afterwards. Unknown persons were behind the act, but the police picked up father-of-three Suresh Sahu of Chilparas village when he had gone to buy petrol in Koelibeda, falsely accusing him of being a Naxal. Suresh was charged under UAPA and sent to Kanker prison.

According to the protesting villagers, camps were being established to secure the area for mining. Protestors showed us the Rowghat mountain range and said that they are establishing camps all around Rowghat to protect the interests of the mining companies. They informed us that the government conducted a survey of the entire area for minerals as far back as in 1989–1990. The government has tried to start mining since a very long time and it is only materializing now with the help of paramilitary camps. The villagers are aware of the dilution of various legal procedures required for establishment of camps in other sites. Giving the example of Chargaon Metabodli mines, which is 25 km away from Chilparas, they said that

a fake Gram Sabha was organized in Pakhanjor instead of Chargaon, as was the Jan Sunwai (environment public hearing) under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) rules. Bejnath Kadiyam (President of Bhomra Pargana Chilparas Sangharsh Samiti) explained:

'The construction of the camp is in violation of provisions of PESA Act. Villagers were not informed about the proposed camp. At the very least the authorities should have consulted the village patel (headman) before taking any steps towards the establishment of the camp. If they had consulted us, we would have told them why we did not want the camp. Ever since the camp has come up, we are not as free as we used to be before. There is constant movement of paramilitary forces on the roads and frequent searching and combing operations. People are afraid. Adivasis go to the forest to collect wood and minor forest produce like mahua, char, chironji, amla, etc. The usual practice is to go at dawn. Before the camp was established, women and children used to go as early as 4 am. But now they are afraid to go alone at that time. Police has also on many occasions detained Adivasis in the forests while they were collecting minor forest produce and accused them falsely of being Naxalites.'



Figure 22: Road construction near Chilparas

As far as the road is concerned, people felt that they wanted a road but it should have been discussed in the Gram Sabha. But the protestors also pointed out that they did not want the camp because they feared that the sacred places in the forests, where their deities resided, would be harmed and may even be displaced, similarly as they would if the mining operation started in Rowghat. Bummatand, wife of Uhse Mudya, deity of Bhomra pargana, is located near Chilparas, they said. Both the sacred sites of Bummatand and Uhse will get destroyed if mining starts. Kursel Hur, their sacred stream, too will get polluted by the mining.

Recalling earlier instances of protest against the establishment of BSF camps, Sahdev Usendi (president of the Sarv Adivasi Samaj, Koelibeda) said:

'Around 2018, two BSF camps were established in Tumirghat and Karkaghat. In protest, the representatives of 103 panchayats wrote to the administration that the camps had been set up without following the statutory provisions of free, prior and informed consent under PESA and were therefore illegal. The administration

had then given in writing that the camps would be removed after 14 months. But when neither that happened nor did any official come to meet them, 86 sarpanches and some members of the Janpad panchayat resigned. Shaken by mass resignations, people of the area started the movement against establishment of new camps in the district.'

Later, however, due to the problems that people were facing in the absence of sarpanches, they returned to their jobs. Leaders of the protest pointed out that they had also been in touch with higher authorities and presented written memorandums to the Chief Minister and Governor. However, they got no response. Their MLA, Anoop Nag, also had not deemed it fit to come and enquire what their dharna was about and stand with them.

6.2 Hetle (Gram Panchayat Kadme, Kaalpat pargana, Kanker): BSF camp established overnight without consultation with the people

Previously, in 2021, a road was built in Hetle. Following this, on the night of 13 February 2023, a BSF camp was established. Hetle village comprises 30 families/180 people. The 300–400 BSF personnel, along with their heavy equipment and armoured vehicles, arrived at Hetle and surrounded the village while people were sleeping. They then dug up and installed the sheds for their camp. Nobody came out of the houses because they were scared to have the paramilitary presence in the dead of night in their village.

The camp is 200 m away from the protest site, 400 m away from the school and Anganwadi center. According to the protestors, the camp is established on 10 acres of forest land falling within the boundary of Hetle village, and therefore people have a rightful claim over this land as community forest land under FRA. We also visited the camp site and met with the camp commandant Ratna Singh. According to her, Hetle BSF camp area is 100 x 100 m and their jurisdiction is 5 km radius under which about 11 villages fall. Earlier, when the camp was not established in Hetle, security personnel from Kodapakha camp used to patrol the village which is 10 km from Hetle. Chargaon camp is 15 km away from Hetle village.



Figure 23: Hetle protest site

On 14 February, the very day after the camp was set up, all members of Hetle Gram Sabha went to the campsite and asked the personnel regarding with whose permission this camp had been established. They were told that the camp has been established for their own good and for their safety. But people are concerned that the camp has been set up in order to facilitate mining. They said that beyond the camp was Hahaladdi hill, and Bajrang Ispat and Monnet Company were operating there.

When the fact-finding team visited the village, people from 19 villages were protesting at Hetle against the establishment of camps. Around 13 villages from three gram panchayats fall within the jurisdiction of Hetle camp. Ten villages are on one side of Hahaladdi mountain (Hetle, Enhur, Lohari, Kotodi, Kadme, Katrukhubodi, Majhikhubodi, Manhakal, Neraunda, Saalhebhaat) and three are on the other side (Laatmarka, Markachua and Urpanjur). The farthest village from the camp is 7–8 km away. Between Hetle and Chilparas, there are three camps, one of them is Koelibeda, which is also the biggest of the three.

The protestors from these 19 villages are concerned about the security of people, especially women and children. The consent of their Gram Sabhas was not taken before the camps were set up. As in Chilparas, the security forces arrived in the village in the dead of night and established the camp without informing anyone. People think that camps are being established for mining of minerals such as iron ore, which will affect their environment. In this village as well, we were told that the villagers were fearful of going to the forest for collection of minor forest produce and firewood.

Earlier, in the mahua season (from March onwards) women and children used to go to the forests at around 4 am and return in the evening. But now they are forced to leave only after daylight at 6 am and go in groups because they fear for their safety. This concern was specifically raised by many women who were sitting at the protest site. They are also afraid of extrajudicial killings and custodial torture, common methods of functioning of the paramilitary in these regions. The women had not seen DRGs in the camp, but according to their estimates, around 200 personnel are posted in Hetle camp. The protestors narrated the account of burning

of a protest site at Badhaibeda by the DRG a week prior to our visit. They also narrated a fake encounter of a person called Shambhu Darru (aged 50—60 years) from Lohari village, 4 km from Hetle. Police and security forces killed him on the pretext that he was a Naxalite.

The camp commandant, Ratna Singh, however, disagreed with what the villagers said. According to her, they had talked to the village patel before establishing the camp. When we told her that her claim was completely opposite of what the protestors were saying, she said that the protest started after 7 or 10 days of the camp being set up, hinting that the protests had been incited by Maoists. When asked about whether they have taken consent under PESA 1996 before the establishment of the camp, she told us that she cannot comment about it and we will have to ask the higher district authorities. Other camp personnel painted a different picture about the establishment and presence of the camp in Hetle. They told us that villagers want the camp and they come to the camp for medicines. When we asked them about the concerns raised by women about their access to minor forest produce being curtailed due to the establishment of the camp, the personnel outrightly denied it and claimed that the camp has been established for the security of people.

People from Hetle gave a memorandum to the tehsildar against the establishment of a camp in their village without their free, prior and informed consent. Villagers of Hetle also told us that Hetle is a forest village, it is not a revenue village and therefore they do not have access to many government funds for development like approach roads, etc. They went to meet the CM, Collector and local MLA for converting Hetle from a forest village into revenue village. But when we checked the records of the state government, we found that Hetle was listed as a revenue village. Some people have obtained individual forest rights under FRA 2006, but they had not yet applied for community forest resource rights under the Act. The protestors at Hetle are also demanding a health centre in their village instead of inside the camp.

6.3 Madhonar (Chhote Donger, Narayanpur): Roads and camps are for mining purposes

'Khanan ke liye hi road aur camp ban rahan hain [It is only for extracting resources that the roads and camps are being built]'

A protest is ongoing in Madhonar since 12 January 2023. The whole fact-finding team was not able to go to this site because the road leading to Madhonar was being tarred, which we were told, had begun that morning and our car would not be able to go further. Two team members continued on motorcycles while the other team members proceeded to Orchha. It was late afternoon when we reached Madhonar. We saw a lively space with banners, a manch (stage) and a large number of villagers sitting in groups under the shade of trees and rocks. We learnt that they were from around ten villages: Madhonar, Odnar, Itulvad, Kavanar, Toyameta, Chote Todabeda, Iknar, Kodoli, Chote Paralnar, Pulmeta and Orchha. There were around 40 women, we were told, from Kavanar village alone.



Figure 24: Madhonar protest site

The leaders of the protest were young women and men though older villagers were also present. Among them were Balsai and Badru, whom one of the team members was especially happy to meet since they had been her clients when they were in jail for a few years in two separate cases in which, with a few others, they had been charged under UAPA. They had been acquitted by NIA court in 2021. Balsai and Badru's presence at the dharna underlined why the Adivasis of the region do not want camps. Activists said that as of now there was only one police station and camp at Orchha which was around 45 km away when they went through the villages. They said that between Dongar to Hatulvad (15 km), Hatulvad to Chote Todabeda (15 km) and Chote Todabeda to Orchha (15 km) there was no camp. They had heard that a new camp at Toyameta was in the offing and feared that this would be the beginning of many more camps to be forced on them in future.

They said that they were against these camps because they housed not only the CRPF and the ITBP but also DRG. On the Dhodaipalli-Barsur road, a stretch of around 53 km, there were DRG camps at Kanargaon, Kadenar, Kadiyameta, Bodhli, Malevai, Saatdhar (also CRPF and ITBP), Sadar (ITBP) and at old police station near Barsur. The DRG, they said, had caused a lot of trouble for the people, and that is why they were protesting against the impending camp at Toyameta and the simultaneous widening of roads.

We asked why was the government increasing the number of camps? Activists said that it was because the government had sold the 'pahad' (hill) to 'Adani and Ambani'. In order to proceed with the mining easily they needed broad roads, and they needed the camps to control the Adivasis and prevent them from protesting. Summing up the above they stated, 'Khanan ke

liye hi road aur camp ban rahe hain.' As we were about to leave, we heard that the previous day (28 February 2023) Roopchand Mandavi of Toyameta village, who was on bail, had gone to Narayanpur to attend his court hearing (scheduled for 1 March 2023) with two other villagers (Sildar Netam of Kavanar and Jamlu Kashyap of Moosnar) on a motorcycle. But they did not reach Narayanpur, and no one knew about their whereabouts. Their phones were switched off. Worried family members wanted us to intervene. They said that they had gone to Chote Dongar thana but were turned away. Therefore, from Madhonar we first went to Chote Dongar police station and after being asked to wait for some time, were able to ascertain that the three were safe and had been sent to jail after being produced before the magistrate in Narayanpur court. Roopchand is a key leader of the protestors.

Between August 2021 to January 2023, the Mining Department auctioned 16 blocks in Bastar region, one of which was Gomter-Wakeli iron ore block. Although Gomter village is located in Bhairamgarh block of Bijapur district (across Indrawati River towards Orchha) road connectivity is being drawn from Chhote Dongar to Kawanar, which is further connected to the Palli-Barsur Road. The Chhote Dongar-Kawarnar-Kadiameta-Palli-Barsur Road passes through Madhonar, Hitulwad, Toyana, Bechha, Kadiameta to link with the Barsur road. The protests against wide roads and security camps are along this route. The government has kept the villagers completely in the blind with regard to the mining site when the survey was conducted in the Gomter-Wakeli project area, wherein falls the Tular Gufa, a cave much revered by the local population for cultural and religious reasons. In fact, every year in the month of February, an annual karsaad (mela; festival) is held here.



Figure 25: Gomter-Wakeli iron ore block

6.4 Rowghat and Aamundai mines (Kanker and Narayanpur): Camps, mining and no Maoists

'Camps were established not to counter Maoists'

The team spent some time in the two mining areas of Kanker and Narayanpur districts on 1 March 2023 where camps had sprung up: Rowghat and Aamundai. Rowghat has the second-largest iron deposits in Chhattisgarh, after Bailadila. They are being leased by the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), mainly for the Bhilai Steel Plant. The proposed railway line from Jagdalpur to Dalli-Rajhara via Rowghat is expected to facilitate transportation of iron ore from Rowghat. Aamundai also has iron ore deposits and is leased to Jayaswal NECO, the flagship company of the giant NECO Group of Industries, India's largest producer of iron and steel. Jayaswal NECO has a notorious record of corruption, default and environmental vandalism.⁸¹

In Rowghat, 40% mining is taking place in Narayanpur district and 60% in Kanker district. The mining is taking place on forest land and officially there is no displacement due to this giant mine. But in several villages in Kanker and Narayanpur districts around the mining area, the people are likely to be severely affected by the pollution from mining. The Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP) has 'adopted' 22 villages in the 'buffer zone' adjacent to the mines, including ten villages in Kanker under five gram panchayats: Kolar, Baihasalebhat, Phulpad, Talabeda and Bainsgaon, and 12 villages in Narayanpur. Earlier, the buffer zone was around 15 km radius of Rowghat covering around 40–45 villages. Now this radius has been reduced to 10 km. Still many villages within this range have not been included in the list of adopted villages. This has been done to reduce the number of villages towards whom BSP has the responsibility of providing basic facilities. These villages are called 'godgaon' (adopted villages).

Meeting with Rowghat Sangharsh Samiti leaders: living in the shadows of the paramilitary

In Phulpad village (Antagarh tehsil, Kanker district), we met with members of the Rowghat Sangharsh Samiti, spearheading the resistance against the mining of Rowghat. People from 22 'godgaons' of Narayanpur and Kanker districts were initially part of the Samiti, but now other villages from the area have also joined and the total number stands at 34 villages. Members of the Samiti informed us that there was hardly any State presence in the region before the late 2000s. The only State presence in the area was in the form of the Forest Department checkpoint at Bainsgaon and Baihasalebhat and which had been built in 1984. Even forest officers and patwaris (revenue officials) rarely visited Rowghat. The State's presence in the area through Forest Department was only felt in the form of coop-felling of bamboo and timber for sale. BSP officials sometimes visited Rowghat. The Maoists had pressured them to leave the area and also burned their machinery. So mining in the area was not a priority for the State at that time.

The government has been making efforts towards establishing mines in Rowghat since 1989. The Madhya Pradesh government of that time had submitted a proposal for mining in 1989 but the Ministry of Environment and Forests had rejected the proposal in 1998, since it involved the felling of a large number of trees, and because of its adverse impacts on the rich flora and fauna of this area. Then in the 1990s, this area was heavily under the influence

⁸¹<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/indl-goods/svs/metals-mining/cbi-registers-20th-fir-in-coal-scam-jayaswal-neco-industries-named/articleshow/35525057.cms?from=mdr>

of Maoists. Even now Maoists have a committee called the Rowghat Area Committee for this zone. Until 2007, Maoist influence in the area was very strong but now it has apparently waned.

In 2005, the Chhattisgarh government submitted a revised proposal for mining in the area, but the Maoists were against it. At that time there were no security camps. There were only two police stations in Narayanpur and Antagarh. In 2005 itself, officials from BSP held two public hearings (under EIA notification) in Antagarh and Narayanpur without informing the gram panchayats and villages that were about to be affected by the mining. The government had the full intention to set up camps after the public hearings. Also, the procedure for taking the consent of the Gram Sabhas before mining or any developmental work under PESA 1996 were not followed. Finally, forest clearance and environmental clearance approvals for the Rowghat mining were granted in 2009.

The environment clearance granted to Rowghat Iron Ore Mine mandated that all the iron ore would be transported by means of conveyor belts and railways to Bhilai. This meant the extension of Bhilai-Dallirajhara rail track to Rowghat, through the construction of a 95 km long railway track connecting Dallirajhara to Rowghat. The Rowghat railway project obtained forest clearances in 2010 and 2014, but this process has not yet been completed, and currently small amounts of iron ore are being transported via road. The graphic shown in Figure 26, submitted by the BSP on the progress of the rail line in October 2021, shows that the new rail track being constructed parallel to the existing State Highway 5 is lined with paramilitary camps (BSF and SSB camps), and the mining site is Rowghat is surrounded by BSF camps.⁸²

⁸²Presentation submitted by BSP for ‘Extension of Amendment in EC dated 08th June, 2017 and Change in Operation of Rowghat Iron Ore Mine Deposit-‘F’ along with its application before the Expert Appraisal Committee of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, dated 29 October 2021 http://environmentclearance.nic.in/DownloadKmlFile.aspx?files=writereaddata/presentation_Mod/11111125312991184018SAILRowghatECExtn.pptx

Name of Project: Dallirajhara – Rowghat (95 Km) New Rail Line Project

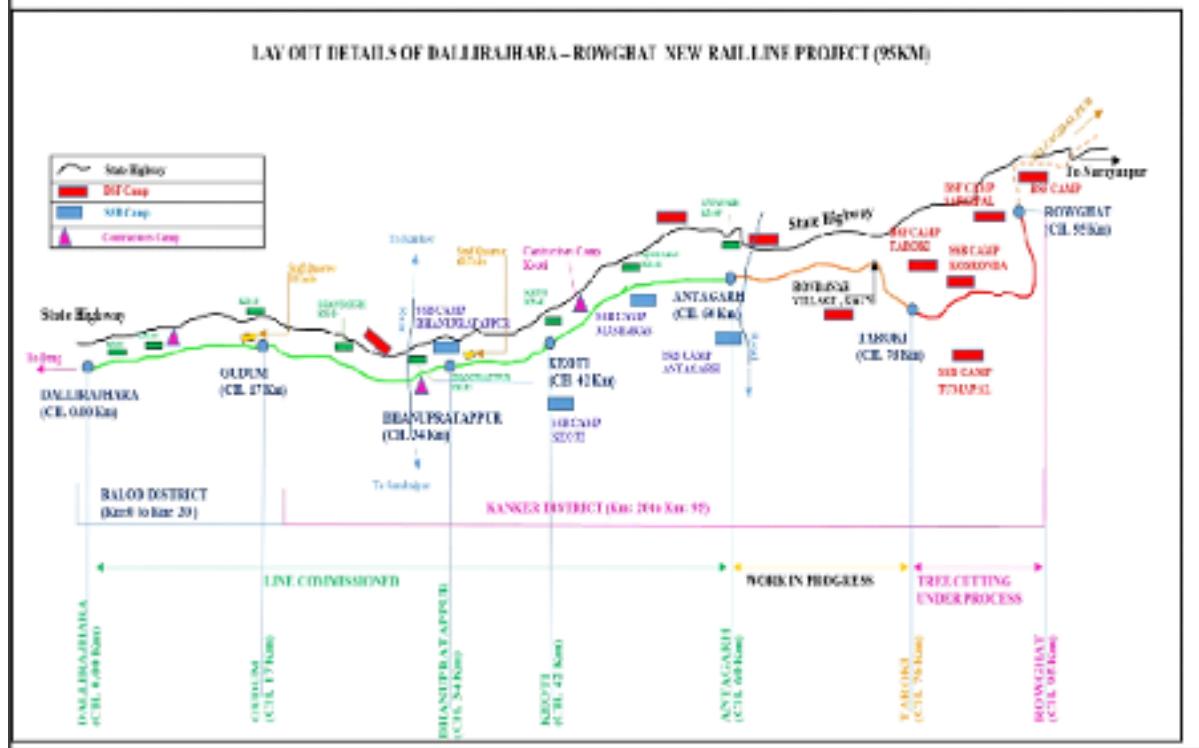


Figure 26: Layout details of Dalli-Rajhara-Rowghat new railway line project

According to the Samiti, in 2013, the first camp came up in Dandakvan and this was to secure mining operations. Wherever the State intends to set up mining operations, it also sets up camps. For example, three camps have been set up on the mountains (including Jal-top and Maal-top) as mining is set to start very soon at these locations. The camps are not being established to fight the Maoists. If that were the case, they would have built camps in interior areas and not around the mining site. These camps are being established for one purpose only – to secure mining operations in Rowghat. Figure 27 shows an excerpt from the ‘Monitoring Report’ of the Rowghat Iron Ore Project by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) from a site visit dated 18 September 2023, annexed to a letter dated 10 October 2023 of the BSP, which makes this clear:

<u>a. Salient features:</u>	
a. Present status of the project	: As informed by the Project Authority, the developmental activities and production of Rowghat Iron Ore Mining project could not be implemented as envisaged due to Maoists Movement in the project area. However, M/s SAIL with the help of Ministry of Home Affairs and Government of Chhattisgarh deployed 4 battalions of Border Security Force (BSF) comprising of around 4000 personnel. After deploying the Security Force, the Mining area and its surroundings are sanitized from the Maoists movement. Due to the prevailing security issues, laying of Railway track up to the Rowghat Mine has not completed. As informed, PA has invited global tender for Mine Development Operator's (MDO) with the projected initial investment of Rs.1500 crore for the development of the Rowghat Iron Ore Mine and other infrastructure facilities. Reportedly

Figure 27: An excerpt from the ‘Monitoring Report’ stating that four battalions of BSF comprising of 4,000 personnel were deployed for the Rowghat Iron Ore Mining Project

The Rowghat mountain range is being circled by camps as explained above, except for one stretch of 40 km which has not been ‘secured’. In Rowghat alone, according to the Samiti members, there are 23 camps: Kaleshwar, Dandakvan, Abuj, Jal-top, Maal-top + 1, Sargipal, Baihasalebhat, Phulpad, Padargaon, Kosraunda, Rowghat police station with camp, Bharanda, Binjli, Bodgaon, Anjrel, Talabera, Taruki, Tumapal, Patkalbeda, Havechur, one camp near Bre-hbeda and one more. In Koelibeda block, people are protesting against the establishment of camps. In Narayanpur, the police station and camp were first established in 2022 in Bharanda. The Samiti members informed us about the issue and their struggle thus: Rowghat is a sacred mountain range, and many local deities reside there. More than dozen streams originate from Rowghat, and these are essential for meeting people’s water needs as well as to maintain biodiversity of the region. Between 2020 and 2022, the Rowghat Sangharsh Samiti wrote several letters to the Governor and Collector stating that their deities would be destroyed by mining operations. This was done by taking inspiration from Niyamgiri judgment. But they did not hear from either of these offices. Members of the Rowghat Sangharsh Samiti also met with Sameer Swaroop, general manager of BSP, which did not yield any results as well.

The Samiti has also suffered set-backs due to the administration’s diversion tactics and presence of paramilitary forces, because of which they have lost some ground in their struggle against mining. In Anjrel, which is part of Narayanpur district, mining started when Bisel Nag, sarpanch of Khodgaon broke away from the Samiti and gave consent to BSP for mining. Anjrel has a very strong social and cultural connection with Phulpad, which is in Kanker district. Even now the gayta (priest) and patel (headman) of Anjrel are from Phulpad, which is against mining.

Apart from that, mining in the Rowghat region is happening completely illegally because BSP has illegally leased out its mining operations to two private companies: Dev Mining Company, Chhattisgarh, and ACB Company, Haryana. ACB Company has not yet started mining operations. According to the landmark Samata judgment, no private companies can conduct mining operations in Fifth Schedule Areas on forest land, government land and tribal land.⁸³

⁸³Although the Supreme Court, in the case of ‘BALCO Employees Union v. Union of India’, AIR 2002 SC

Moreover, when the affected families and villagers asked BSP for jobs, the company responded that it cannot provide jobs because mining operations have been leased out to two private companies and hence, they are not responsible to provide jobs. According to the Samiti, a compensation of INR 400,000 per acre was provided for revenue land. For community forest rights land, compensation was not provided. Instead, the project proponent pays damages of INR 400—500 per decimal to holders of individual forest rights (IFR) pattas if the forest land under their occupation has been acquired, but there is no clear process and many individual forest rights holders have been left out.

Living in the shadows of the paramilitary has become a part of the lives of people in Rowghat and so are the extrajudicial killings which happen from time to time. In 2022, Manu Nureti, a civilian, whose brother is employed as DRG was killed by the security forces while returning from hunting. He was shown as a Maoist killed in an encounter. However, when his DRG brother confronted the administration, the IG admitted that a civilian had been killed but couched in the language of a civilian dying in cross-fire and not a fake encounter. This case reveals that anybody and everybody is a suspect and criminal in the eyes of the State and it can take extraordinary measures without any justification or imminent danger. The Samiti said that even families of the feared DRGs are not spared in this mad drive to secure mines.



Figure 28: Trucks lined up outside Aamundai mine

350, held that this did not apply in the case of Chhattisgarh (then, Madhya Pradesh), where such a transfer was permissible under the State's Land Revenue Code

6.5 Badgam (Chhotedonger block, Narayanpur) : Under the fearful shadow of Aamundai mining

We met with the people of Badgam village, who fear displacement due to an upcoming mine about which they have no information. According to the people, Kodometa mountain comes under Badgam Gram Panchayat, and this includes Badgam, Kumaribeda and Kanera villages. While there is no clarity about mining in Kodometa, people are assuming that the mountain has gold deposits. They have already submitted a memorandum to the Collector expressing their rejection of any mining operation on Kodometa, on which they are dependent for their livelihood because they collect minor forest produce from the hill. The village is on Orchha road and is subjected to continuous heavy traffic – the trucks going to and fro from the Aamundai mines. Because of this, the road is in bad shape. According to the villagers, at least 100 trucks pass through this route every day and the whole area is filled with red dust, which the fact-finding team also witnessed. Houses, trees, ponds, rivers and fields were covered with red dust. This extremely polluted area and damaged road stretched for more than 30 km from the mining site. The people of Badgam said they had met the tehsildar regarding the mining in Badgam pahad (hill) which also covers Kodometa hill. They were told that there was no such plan.

The 12 mining blocks (mentioned above) in the Bastar region which are to be auctioned soon at the time of writing, includes the Bargaon Iron Ore Block at exactly the same place where the Badgam protests were being staged for fear of mining on the Kodometa hills, where their deity is believed to reside.

At the Aamundai mining site, we asked if we could meet the supervisor and enter the site. We were denied permission to enter and were told that ‘Jha ji’, the manager, would be found at Jayaswal NECO office in Chhote Donger and we should meet him there for any enquiries about Aamundai mines.



Figure 29: Aamundai mine

6.6 Gurapada (Chhotedonger, Narayanpur): Women alienated from both land and jobs

We did not know anyone in the surrounding villages, so we entered Gurapada, the nearest habitation to the mining site (Aamundai mines). The para (hamlet) was adjacent to the Aamundai police camp. This para consists of 22–25 houses. We met a man who works at Aamundai mine and he told us they were being paid INR 477 per day and 400 people from seven gram panchayats were working in the mine, including 50 people from Gurapada village. The mine workers are responsible for clearing bushes, controlling traffic on the road and some computer work. They are not given any benefits other than shoes – his own shoes were getting worn out. The man worked at the bore point. He said that technical persons employed at the site are outsiders. According to him, 250–300 trucks carrying raw material are dispatched every day from the mine. He said that the road and camp were built together, around two years' ago and then the mining started.

We also met an elderly woman at the para. She informed us that 10–12 women from their village had been sitting on dharna for a week on the village road because NECO is also using the village road apart from the main road for its water tankers, cars and sometimes even trucks. It is a risk for their livestock (hens, goats, cows, etc.) and also children because their houses are very close to the village road. One calf was injured by a vehicle recently. These women are also concerned about the environmental effects of mining in the area and ill-effects on their crops. These reasons led them to protest. She said that the Collector, Station House Office (SHO), Thana Incharge (TI) and SP had come to the protest site and asked these women to call off their protest, but they have not complied.

These women were also asking for employment of local people from their para at the mining site. Currently only four people are employed from this para. These women and others from the para and other paras in Chhotedongar are asking for jobs at the mining site because their livelihood options have shrunk after the mines started. The mine is located between Permapal and Chhotedongar. People from Gudapada enjoyed nistar (user) rights in the area where the mining is taking place. They also collect minor forest produce such as tendu patta, firewood, dori, phutu, bamboo, etc., and take their cattle for grazing there too. They were able to access the area until a year-and-a-half ago. Now they could no longer access the area because it has been fenced off. Therefore, they are demanding jobs. It is an interesting fact that not a single woman has been employed at the mine. This is all the more unfair as women lose the most when access to community forest land is denied for any reason including mining. Women are the primary collectors of minor forest produce, firewood and other products from the forest, and this forms almost 40% of their livelihood income. Here as well, they lost access to food and the right to collect forest produce and gained nothing – not even minimum wage jobs.

Apart from that, one woman pointed out that blasting is done in the mine from time to time for digging the minerals. Blasting is done at night and its effect can be felt in their village even though it is 3–4 km away from the mining site. Villagers are not informed in advance about the blasting. The main road that leads from the village to Nayaranpur and other towns is in poor condition due to constant traffic of trucks carrying raw materials. The road is filled with potholes and covered with red dust. The trucks have tarpaulin covering the raw material, but it is clearly not enough to stop air pollution. According to the woman, due to the pathetic condition of roads, it takes two to three hours to reach Narayanpur from their para, a journey that used to take an hour. This is a big problem when there is a health emergency. When we

asked her about the camp and whether they face any problems, she told us in a very pragmatic manner that it is their job and they do not disturb the villagers. They go on a patrol from time to time and it is a difficult job. There is no point in feeling angry about the fact that it is there or that it was established without the consent of Gram Sabha. But she did concede that if the camp had not been established then that land could have been used by the landless people. Following on from what she had said earlier, she also demanded that jobs should be given to the landless at the mining site.



Figure 30: Chhotedongar: dust and potholes

Jayaswal NECO Office, Chhotedongar: 'Employing beyond our capacity'

Jayaswal NECO is a private company, and its head office is in Nagpur. Mining operations in Aamundai started in 2021. We asked to meet their general manager and their mines manager, but we were told that both were absent. So, we met the human resource managers, Satish Kumar Pandey (from UP) and Arjun Goswami (from Mahasamund).

They told us that their human resource capacity is only 80 miners, but they have engaged 426 people, all of them locals from various gram panchayats. Apart from that, 40 technicians are employed, and all are from outside. They have employed 426 people, which they say is way beyond their capacity because of 'pressure from all sides'. When asked whether this might be unsustainable and put them at risk of facing losses, they answered in the affirmative. But when we asked why they are operating the mine despite the 'losses', they had no answer. We can only guess that this is a temporary tactic of the company to contain the discontent among the villagers whose lands were taken away and in no time, they will get rid of the affected villagers whom they have employed in excess of their human resource needs.

The two employees informed us that they were paying INR 477 per day to unskilled workers and INR 595 per day to skilled workers. They also claimed that all their mine workers are on permanent contracts and receive benefits such as Public Provident Fund (PPF), bonus and other welfare benefits, which surprised us, and was against the version presented by the employee who had informed us that they did not receive any benefits. According to the human resources personnel, 100–150 trucks are dispatched every day to the steel plants. When we asked about the condition of the main road and the red dust, they said that there were plans to have the road repaired for a stretch of 30 km. They also said that they use 15 water tanks to spray water on the road, but it was only visible near the mining site (for around 5–6 km). They also mentioned that INR 35 lakhs had been deposited twice in the accounts of seven gram panchayats including Rajpur, Manora, Badgaon, Rainaar, Chameli and Gowardhan. NECO has also installed water purifiers and taps at 18 places. They have started a training centre for women and plan to start a school as a part of their ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CSR).

7 LEGAL STATUS OF SECURITY CAMPS

The government has claimed that the security camps have been set up on government land. But many villages in Bastar, especially in Abujhmadh, Narayanpur, have never been surveyed, so it is impossible to determine what is and is not government land. Many other areas have not had a patwari or a tehsildar visit in recent decades, therefore, the land records have not been updated in this region, and people have been cultivating these lands for years without their rights being recorded, whether as private patta land or as land to which the village has collective forest rights. The whole of Bastar is governed by the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, and PESA, 1996 empowers the Gram Sabha to check the alienation of land held by tribals to non-tribals. PESA Rules in Chhattisgarh which were notified in 2021, mandate that the Gram Sabha is empowered to take decisions regarding utilization of community resources, including land. The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Act 2013 (LARR) allows land acquisition in Scheduled Areas only upon consent given by the Gram Sabha. In relation to forest land, FRA 2006 requires that all forest rights are settled in an area before it is diverted for any other use, and that the Gram Sabhas give prior, free, informed consent to such diversions. The Supreme Court, in the Niyamgiri judgment,⁸⁴ also held that it was open to the Gram Sabhas to consider whether mining affected their religious rights, i.e., impacted their sacred places, and that right had to be preserved and protected.

'66. We are, therefore, of the view that the question whether STs and other TFDs [Scheduled Tribes and Traditional Forest Dwellers], like Dongaria Kondh, Kutia Kandha and others, have any religious rights i.e. rights of worship over the Niyamgiri hills, known as Nimagiri, near Hundaljali, which is the hilltop known as Niyam-Raja, have to be considered by the Gram Sabha. Gram Sabha can also examine whether the proposed mining area Niyama Danger, 10 km away from the peak, would in any way affect the abode of Niyam-Raja. Needless to say, if the BMP (Bauxite Mining Project), in any way, affects their religious rights, especially their right to worship their deity, known as Niyam Raja, in the hills top of the Niyamgiri range of hills, that right has to be preserved and protected . . . '

However, all these safeguards are being openly violated in a manner in which the community land, and in most cases forest land, is being used for camps and mines, leaving villagers completely in the dark. The IG revealed (see above) that even if the situation normalized, the security camps would not be dismantled but would be used for other purposes, since they had been built at considerable expense. This could potentially pave the way to privatize and commercialize village or community land. Communities are opposing recent changes to FCA 1980 and its Rules, under which the union government is no longer required to ensure compliance with FRA 2006 prior to granting permission to divert forest land for a project (although, the state government is still required to ensure compliance prior to the actual commencement of the project). Further, the recent amendment also exempts security related infrastructure, such as paramilitary camps up to 5 hectares in Left-Wing Extremism areas from requiring forest clearance from the union government. The whole of undivided Bastar is identified as Left-Wing Extremism affected region. However, even so, the requirements of the Gram Sabha consent cannot be overlooked either under PESA 1996, FRA 2006 or LARR 2013.

⁸⁴Orissa Mining Corp v. MoEF, 2013 (6) SCC 476

8 CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions of this report are as follows:

- The proliferation of par-military camps in Bastar is an imposition on local Adivasis – they do not want the camps and have been protesting against them for years.
- There are rampant human rights violations in the proximity of camps – this is the main reason why Adivasis oppose them.
- The camps are being set up by stealth, without any pretence of consultation, in violation of PESA 1996 and FRA 2006 provisions for Free, Prior and Informed Consent.
- Peaceful as they are, protests against the camps have been ignored, or worse, suppressed using brutal methods, from lathi charge to burning the sites to firing on the protestors.
- The harsh treatment meted out to peaceful protests is an attack on people's democratic rights and exacerbates the antagonistic relationship between Adivasis and the State in this region
- It is very apparent from the evidence presented in this report and relevant cited material that the real purpose of the camps is to protect corporate interests, particularly mining interests, and help the State to make deeper inroads into Bastar.
- Mining companies are operating in Bastar without serious scrutiny and often in violation of the laws, in particular, environmental and forest laws.
- Further militarization of Bastar will achieve naught, except for opening the area to corporate plunder of minerals and other natural resources, with irreconcilable environmental destruction and creating an existential crisis for the Adivasi tribes who have been living in the Bastar region for centuries.
- The need of the hour is respect for law, an end to human rights violations, implementation of PESA 1996 and FRA 2006 provisions in letter and spirit and a serious attention to people's grievances.

9 ANNEXURES