# Issues in Addressing Rat-hole Mining Disaster

## Why in news?

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The efforts to reach the 15 miners trapped in an illegal coal mine in the East Jaintia hills of Meghalaya since December 13 continue.

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## What is happening in Meghalaya?

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- Meghalaya’s annual coal production of nearly 6 million tonnes is mostly said to have come through rat-hole mining.
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- The scale of the problem is clear in this one fact: there are 3,923 coal mines in one district with a geographical area of 2126 sq. km.
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- Despite the National Green Tribunal ban of April 2014, mining continues in the Meghalaya.
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- Recently 15 miners were trapped inside a rat-hole coal mine in the East Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya.
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- There has been no word on the miners by the state administration although search and rescue operations are still continuing. Click here to know more
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## What are the issues with rescue operations?

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- **Poor Assessment -** The district administration assumed the miners to be dead on the very day of the tragedy.
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- This assumption was evident in the letter written to the National Disaster Response Force.
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- **Lack of Disaster Preparedness -** The distance of the mine was a major hindrance to carry out the rescue operations.
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- When a mine is flooded, the immediate response apart from pumping out the water is to stop further flow of water into it, which has not been carried out.
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- The recuse operation requires stakeholders like hydrologists, divers from the Indian Navy, water pumps, underwater vehicles and geologists, but there was no one person or agency to coordinate the rescue mission.
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- **Socio-Economic factors -** The trapped miners were being racially profiled in the minds of the people and the state.
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- Of the 15 miners, only three were locals from the nearby village of Lumthari, rest were Muslims from Garo Hills, Meghalaya, and Bodoland, Assam.
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- They were the poorest of the poor who took a huge risk to enter mine and dig for coal without any safety gear, thus their socio-economic profile also worked against them.
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## What is the response of Tribes on rat-hole mining in Meghalaya?

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- The tribes of Meghalaya are divided on the issue of rat-hole mining. The fault-lines are clear.
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- Those who care for the environment and for a future for their children and grandchildren have been clamouring for an end to the practice of rat-hole mining and reckless limestone mining.
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- On the other hand, the mining elite has mobilized forces to demonize environmental activists.
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- Coal mine owners are insisting that since Meghalaya is a State under the

Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, national mining laws should be exempted here.
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- The Sixth Schedule was enacted to protect the community rights of tribal from any form of exploitation of their land and resources.
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- They have left thousands of abandoned mines as human graves, the State does not insist that they reclaim and afforest those mines.
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- There is a complete disregard for corporate social responsibility because the mines are privately owned by the tribal.
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**Source: The Hindu**

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