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For Dongria Kondhs, clearing their names from Naxal cases a priority before they vote

Satyasundar Barik
LAKHPADAR (ODISHA)

Decked in traditional attire, with hairpins adorning her head, rings on all 10 fingers, and colourful beads around her neck, Minjali Sikaka from the Dongria Kondh tribe in the secluded village of Lakhpadar, nestled within Odisha's Niyamgiri hill range, appeared as though she was ready to grace a social gathering.

However, beneath the facade of her attire lies a truth untold - she was purportedly persuaded into surrendering as an active cadre of the banned CPI (Maoist), with the promise of being paid ₹2 lakh under the government's surren-

Harisha B.C. and fellow Dongria Kondh members. But she was not ready for this as it would have labelled her as Maoist and tainted her family name.

In Lakhpadar, where 32 families reside, she was not the sole inhabitant facing such allegations. Seven other villagers have faced such charges of alleged ties with the outlawed CPI (Maoist) over the past 15 to 20 years. Two of them have since passed away.

This pattern extends beyond Lakhpadar as numerous Dongria Kondh tribals have been detained and sent to jail by the authorities on suspicion of Maoist affiliations.

Just last year, nine Dongria Kondh tribals and an



Dongria Kondh community members gather for a meeting in Rayagada district; (right) Minjali Sikaka. BISHARANJAN ROUT

dropped by the police.

Frustrated by the continued branding of their community members as Naxalites along with their sympathisers, they announced a boycott of the upcoming elections.

had ties to left-wing extremism. I have been living with my family in Lakhpadar, and have visited cities like Mumbai, Bhubaneswar, Bhopal, Rayagada, and the block headquarters town of Kalyansingh-

Minjali said.

"Even though my family struggles financially, I would never accept ₹2 lakh to surrender (to the police)," she added.

When asked to comment, Nilakantha Behera,

that it was an "old matter".

Major political parties rarely visit the scattered settlements within Niyamgiri hill range, deeming it a "waste" of time due to the dispersed population.

"We understand that we

cannot the elections, we can at least assert our existence," stated Ladda Sikaka, a community leader who faces numerous legal cases, many of them related to alleged Maoist connections.

"The Dongria tribes had never encountered cases related to the CPI (Maoist) until they opposed the bauxite mining plan in Niyamgiri hills. Our steadfast resistance led to the government abandoning the mining proposal, but we are paying a heavy price for safeguarding biodiversity."

In the early 2000s, the Odisha Mining Corporation proposed bauxite mining in Niyamgiri, a rich biodiversity forested region,

mining clearance required consent from gram sabhas, including Dongria representatives, paving the way for what could be India's first environmental referendum. The Dongria Kondhs overwhelmingly rejected the proposal.

Stating that Dongria Kondhs are unfairly burdened with criminal cases due to supposed connections with CPI (Maoist), Krushna Sikaka, recently released on bail after six months of incarceration, said, "While the boycott might seem insignificant, the underlying discontent runs far deeper."

Dongria Kondhs' villages fall under Bissamkatak Assembly constituency. They are represented by Ja-

- The Dongria Kondh community is a section of the Kondh community of Odisha . They are identified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs) of Odisha
- The Dongria Kondhs live in villages located in Niyamgiri hill ranges of Eastern Ghats particularly in Rayagada district.
- Shifting cultivation with horticulture is their main sta

The Hindu-Environment(GSIII)-Page 9

Can green credits benefit India's forests?

PARLEY

The Green Credit Programme, announced by the Environment Ministry in October 2023, is a market-based mechanism where individuals and companies can claim incentives called 'green credits' for contributions to environmental and ecological restoration. However, there is criticism that these initiatives may be used to circumvent existing laws, particularly those that deal with forest conservation. Can green credits benefit India's forests? Vaibhav Chaturvedi and Debodityo Sinha discuss this in a conversation moderated by Jacob Koshy. Edited excerpts:



A eucalyptus plantation at near Chinnakkandil in Kerala, the north.



This programme ends up bypassing the whole forest clearance process just to help the industries get green credits

DEBODITYO SINHA

Trees in a particular patch earn you one green credit per tree. Now, the interesting thing is, this could be connected to voluntary carbon markets. In your experience in market-based mechanisms, we are familiar with carbon offsets as they are measurable quantities. Can you actually devise a logical trading system around such a philosophy of green credit and carbon?

monoculture plantations.

As Debodityo said, this is an incentive scheme in a market-based formulation. For example, the government could also incentivise planters by paying, say, 2000 per tree. You get capital subsidies for solar plants. Being a market-based incentive approach, there has to be a demand and supply side. In carbon markets, the commodity is carbon credits. Here, it is green credits.

But plantations and monocultures were also driven by incentives. Can you regenerate a forest ecosystem in a market mechanism without compromising on biodiversity?

DS: There are two aspects to it: the land where you're going to have plantations and how you're going to do the plantations. The guidelines require States to identify degraded forests within their jurisdiction. Now, a forest is not just trees; there can be open patches within it. We have more than 200 types of forests. The forests of the Central Indian landscape, the whole Deccan Peninsula, and Leh-Ladakh are not dominated by trees. There are bushes and many other things. What happens when plantations come up in these areas? There's a huge incentive now; it's not small like the Compensatory Afforestation schemes. Wherever these schemes have promoted plantations, we have seen disaster. We have seen forest departments promoting plantations by clearing existing vegetation, uprooting local trees, planting big ones using JCBs and tractors. Such approaches can impact local biodiversity, soil health... For regeneration, you don't have to do any major intervention, you have to just protect the area from disturbances. And in 10-15 years, we can have a good natural forest supporting biodiversity and benefiting local communities.

Let's say a 1,000 trees are planted. After two years, an independent body will do a verification. And let's say another 1,000

and it can be measured. In green credits, one is a biodiversity credit, one is a water conservation credit. How do you, on the same platform, equate a credit of one unit of water conservation with one unit of ecosystem restoration? So yes, fungibility is not there and that is a challenge.

The whole idea behind markets is that there are many suppliers and then many people demand the same commodity. That's how you have something that is close to a perfect market. Here, what you will end up having is five projects, which are about water conservation. And then on the demand side also five people who are interested in water conservation. So, they will be backing this trade. So the market will still function. But they are definitely not fungible commodities.

DS: One important aspect is how green credits will influence mandatory compliances. For example, in the case of forest clearances, the guidelines say the green credits earned from these conditions can be used while applying for forest clearances. And again, the problem is, can you separate forest, water, biodiversity, and livelihood? Can you make them uniform? Every place is different, unique. So, there is a problem. And I think this is going with the assumption that we are not going to compromise on our industrial growth, economic growth, that is something which is primary. All these things are taken care of, and industry should not be threatened that such a law is there. So basically, it is more of ease of doing business.

Just to build on that, the way this is structured, do you think it clashes with any of our other environmental laws?

DS: Definitely. At least in this guideline, I can see clearly the clashes with the Forest Conservation Act. First there's no definition of forest, and no definition of degraded forest. So, we end up wrongly categorising open natural ecosystems also as forest. Second, this programme ends up bypassing the whole forest clearance process just to help the industries get green credits. While applying (for forest clearance) they will say, "I have already green credit, you give me the clearance quickly." Normally, you have stage one, stage two - a step by step process - and this is a longer process but ideal. This is because when things are so complicated, we have to take a very nuanced approach and you have to follow all the principles of environmental law, which anyway is compromised in our country. So we should take the steps to strengthen it.

VC: That's the biggest challenge with this market - fungibility. Let's say in the carbon market, there are many different kinds of projects. There is a solar project, there is a cookstove project, there is a forestation project. Ultimately, whatever they do, they use one unit of carbon



To listen to the full interview Scan the code or go to the link www.thehindu.com

- Green Credit Program (GCP) notified on 13th October, 2023 is an innovative market-based mechanism designed to incentivize voluntary environmental actions across diverse sectors, by various stakeholders like individuals, communities, private sector industries, and companies.
- The GCP aims to generate tradable green credits for activities such as increasing forest cover, water management, and sustainable agriculture through a series of programmes for which the government has issued guidelines.

VC: That's a valid concern. But it is not specific to the green credits programme. India has always promoted plantations and it has unfortunately promoted monocultures in several places. It is possible that the green credit programme could have similar fallouts and you have to be careful not to incentivise these

VC: The larger point is we have to incentivise green action and sustainable action and create a system where green actions are undertaken by many actors. You could do it in different ways such as having a 'command and control' policy that directs everybody to undertake action at the risk of penalties. But in policymaking, the role of incentives is important. Green credits fit in as an incentive architecture to deliver on, for instance, water conservation and afforestation by involving individuals and corporations.

VC: How do you understand the green credit programme as it stands today?

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Rising incidence of IBD cases across the globe is a cause for concern, say experts

Serena Josephine M.

The rising incidence of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) across the globe has become a concern for doctors. While early diagnosis is lacking, diagnosis in itself is challenging considering that other conditions could mimic IBD.

"IBD is a significant problem. It comprises Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn's Disease and is characterised by inflammation. It is different from Irritable Bowel Syndrome which is predominantly non-inflammatory," Jonathan Leighton, president, American College of Gastroenterology, USA, said.

"Both Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn's Disease are complex immune-mediated diseases; there is a dysregulated immune response. We do believe there are genetic markers that contribute to the disease but not in isolation. There is a synergy between the external environment and gut bacteria," he added. There is an increasing incidence of IBD across the globe, including in North America and western Europe. "The prevalence is also rising... From 0.5% right now, the prevalence will increase to 0.6% in America," he said.

Early onset

There is also a rise in early onset cases among those under 18. For the Indian perspective, Vineet Ahuja, Professor of Gastroenterology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, has pinpointed a challenge in diagnosing Crohn's disease. "We have peculiar issues such as intestinal tuberculosis, which is common in India and resembles Crohn's disease. The phenotype is very similar, and so is the clinical presentation. As a result, the challenge is greater,"

he said.

On incidence in India, Dr. Ahuja observed that lifestyle changes have contributed. "What was an uncommon condition three decades ago has become more common. Changes in lifestyle, a Westernised diet with high fat and high sugar, processed and packaged food cause an insult to the gut epithelium, precipitating inflammation."

T. S. Chandrasekar, founder and chief gastroenterologist, MedIndia Hospitals and Academy, and the Governor of American College of Gastroenterology, India region, said the incidence of IBD has almost doubled in India from 1990 to 2019, with a rise in the death rate as well.

A study in Tamil Nadu showed that there were more cases of Crohn's Disease than Ulcerative Colitis. Nearly 50% of IBD were Crohn's Disease and 40% were Ulcerative Colitis. It is important to catch patients early so treatment is better, he said.

Dr. Leighton noted that there is still a delay in diagnosis, particularly among the young. "The symptoms of IBD overlap with Irritable Bowel Syndrome. This does delay diagnosis. Individuals with alarming symptoms such as bleeding and severe abdominal pain need a complete evaluation," he said.

Delay in diagnosis


There are other diseases that mimic IBD, and there is a need to rule out infections. "There is no single diagnostic test for Ulcerative Colitis or Crohn's Disease. It is a combination of a physical, laboratory, and endoscopy. We have come a long way in the treatment of IBD. Over the last 25 years, biological therapy has emerged that

uses monoclonal antibodies directed at inflammatory pathways. Biologics have been developed to target different parts of the inflammatory pathways to control the disease thereby decreasing hospital stays and surgeries. In addition, we have developed small molecules that can be given orally that have had a significant impact."

Both stressed that the cost was a challenge. "There is no cure. It is a lifelong disease. So, in India, we are looking at low cost therapy such as faecal microbiota transplantation along with regular medication," Dr. Ahuja added.

Environmental factors play a big role in IBD, Dr. Leighton said, adding: "This includes smoking and antibiotics. There are no human studies that have proved the role of diet, but we do think some foods such as super processed foods have the potential to be pro-inflammatory. A healthy diet avoiding highly processed food, and consuming wholesome food – for instance a Mediterranean diet – is recommended."

Dr. Ahuja said patients are advised to avoid being restrictive about their diet as they could become malnourished. "Avoid processed foods. We have an anti-inflammatory diet of curd and buttermilk, and less milk, more rice and millets, fruits, and vegetables. Avoid red meat and consume fish. This seems to be helpful," he said. (Serena.m@thehindu.co.in)


For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'

- Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is a term for two conditions (Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis) that are characterized by chronic inflammation of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. Prolonged inflammation results in damage to the GI tract.

The Hindu-Intellectual Property Rights(GSIII)

Intellectual property: India features yet again on U.S.' 'priority watch list'

Amiti Sen
NEW DELHI

The U.S. has once again included India in the 'priority watch list' of countries, along with China, Russia, Venezuela, and three others, for alleged problems related to IP protection and enforcement, and has said there will be particularly intense bilateral engagement on the matter during the coming year.

There has been progress under the U.S.-India Trade Policy Forum in addressing issues of trademark infringement investigations and pre-grant opposition proceedings, but numerous long-standing concerns remain, per the U.S. Trade Representative's 2024 Special 301 report released on Thursday.

'High online piracy'

These include inadequate IP enforcement, including high rates of online piracy, an extensive trademark opposition backlog, and insufficient legal means to



Under the radar: India has been on the 'priority watch' list of countries for many years. REUTERS

protect trade secrets," it said.

Among other things, India still needs to fully implement the WIPO Internet Treaties and ensure that copyright statutory licences do not extend to interactive transmissions," the report added.

The USTR releases the Special 301 Report annually, highlighting the state of IP protection and enforcement regimes in various countries it trades with.

India has been on the 'priority watch' list of

countries for many years, which, according to the USTR office, indicates that serious problems exist in the country concerning IP protection, enforcement, or market access for Americans relying on IP.

India's stance

New Delhi, however, has always maintained that its intellectual property laws were in strict adherence to the WTO's Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement and that it was not bound

by any global rules to make changes in its laws.

No action is threatened by the U.S. against countries on the 'priority watch list', but if a country slips further and is categorised a 'priority country', Washington may impose 'retaliatory' measures. Indonesia, Chile, and Argentina are the other countries on the 'priority watch list'.

Other trading partners

Twenty trading partners are on the 'watch list', including countries that the U.S. believes merit bilateral attention to address underlying IP problems but are better than the 'priority watch list' countries.

Algeria, Barbados, Belarus, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Egypt, Guatemala, Mexico, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam are on the 'watch list'.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

- The Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) today released its 2024 Special 301 Report on the adequacy and effectiveness of U.S. trading partners' protection and enforcement of intellectual property (IP) rights.
- It has once again included India in the 'priority watch list' of countries, along with China, Russia, Venezuela, and three others, for alleged problems related to IP protection and enforcement

HEADLINES OF THE DAY

PIB- Miscellaneous

Ministry of Culture

Indian Historical Records Commission (IHRC) Adopts a New Logo and Motto

Announcement of Winner of Logo & Motto designs Competition for IHRC

Posted On: 25 APR 2024 2:41PM by PIB Delhi

The Indian Historical Records Commission (IHRC), an apex advisory body on archival matters, acts as an all-India forum of creators, custodians and users of records to advise the Government of India on the management of records and their use for historical research. Established in 1919, the IHRC is headed by the Union Minister of Culture.

In order to visually communicate the unique identity of IHRC and the ethos that it represents, an online competition was launched in 2023 on MyGov portal to invite the designs for logo and motto, and in response a total 436 entries were received.

The following entry for logo and motto submitted by Shri Shaurya Pratap Singh (Delhi) was selected for the logo as well as the motto of the IHRC:



- The Indian Historical Records Commission (IHRC), an apex advisory body on archival matters, acts as an all-India forum of creators, custodians and users of records to advise the Government of India on the management of records and their use for historical research. Established in 1919, the IHRC is headed by the Union Minister of Culture.