

NGO urge government against pursuing unsustainable extractive industries



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The Centre for Research and Advocacy, Manipur would like to express our concern with the ongoing oil spill and fire at the oil drilling site of the Oil India Limited (OIL) at Baghjan Village in Assam since 27 May 2020. OIL officials failed to control the oil spill as of 10 June 2020. The oil Blowout, or uncontrolled spillage of oil and gas at the oil drilling site has led to displacement of more than 3000 community members in Baghjan Village and surrounding areas and contaminated much of the Maguri-Motapung wetland, part of the eco-sensitive zone of the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park. The oil spill has had an adverse effect on biodiversity of the two eco-sensitive zone.

The Dibru Saikhowa National park is home to at least 36 species of mammals including feral horses and at least 382 species of birds. Locals found a carcass of a Gangetic dolphin, declared as "endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, with its skin peeled in the Maguri wetland. The OIL company has contracted experts from Singapore based Alert Disaster Control to control the oil spill. OIL's seeking help from foreign countries indicates the failure or the lack of capacity of the OIL company to handle major oil spills, which is a concern for indigenous peoples across North East where Jubilant Oil and Gas Private Limited and Oil India Limited are involved in oil exploration and survey works like in Manipur since 2010.

In Manipur, the Oil India Limited (OIL) commenced surveys in Khaidem, Moidangpok, Sangaithel villages in Imphal West district in Manipur since March 2017 without providing any detailed information to the villagers and in absence of their consent. Manipur indeed falls in two of the World's Biodiversity Hotspot, the Eastern Himalayas Biodiversity Hotspot, and Indo-Burma Hotspot and oil exploration and related spills like in Baghjan will entail massive social and environmental impacts. Oil companies downplayed the impacts of oil exploration in Manipur.

The Oil India Limited unleashed human rights violations by contaminating the land and water bodies and by denying the livelihood of communities depending on Rivers and wetlands, such as in Baghjan Area of Assam. The oil exploration moves in Manipur failed to recognise indigenous peoples' rights over their land and resources. The effort to explore and drill oil in Manipur involves a process of disrespect and non-application of human rights-based approach to development, one that recognise Indigenous peoples' rights, more with self-determined development over their land and resources.

The continued oil spill and uncontrolled fire at Baghjan should lead to serious review and rethinking of oil exploration and fossil fuel-based industries pursued aggressively across India's North East. The communities affected by the oil spill should be fully compensated and rehabilitated to restore their livelihood and health. OIL should be held accountability for social impacts and irreparable loss of biodiversity. An investigation should be pursued to prosecute responsible officials of Oil companies involved. The Government should refrain from pursuing unsustainable extractive industries, like oil exploration without recognizing community rights and without taking their consent.

Bg Gogoi

Journalist, Coder, Traveler. Facebook: <https://facebook.com/gogoi>

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