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# K'taka HC bans mining near KRS dam

Court noted that it had permitted mining within 20-km radius earlier as safety measures

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE High Court of Karnataka on Monday banned all mining activities within a radius of 20 km from the KRS dam in Mandya district, expressing serious concern over the possible threat to it because of the use of explosives.

The ban applies even to existing mining licenses or those operating in the area in view of the permission granted by the high court in earlier cases. The court noted that it had permitted mining within the 20-km radius earlier as the safety measures to be taken under the Dam Safety Act, 2021, were not brought to its notice.

Though the government advocate submitted that a study on the threats to the dam due to mining will be completed within six months, the court said it has not fixed any deadline for it. Experts should take a decision on conducting experimental blasts to assess the threats to the dam, it added.

A division bench of Chief Justice Prasanna B Varale and Justice Krishna S Dixit passed the interim order by taking suo motu cognisance of the possible danger to the dam due to



mining while hearing a petition by CG Kumar, a landowner from Chinakurali village in Pandavapura taluk of Mandya district. The petitioner questioned the restrictions imposed by the deputy commissioner of Mandya on mining in May 2023.

Underlining the importance of the dam after going through the statement of senior advocate Aditya Sondhi, who has been appointed as amicus curiae on the matter, the court orally observed that it is a question of three states fight-

ing for water; but nobody is protecting the dam.

Highlighting the importance of KRS, the court said the dam has heritage and historical values attached to it. The dam was built by master architect and Bharata Ratna Sir M Visvesvaraya with financial assistance from visionary Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar, the erstwhile Maharaja of Mysuru. "We deem it appropriate to protect this dam from mining activities... Until further orders, no mining activity within the 20-km radius," the court said.

## Dam has heritage and historical value: Court

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Stating that the Mandya DC had rightly banned mining using explosives, the court said the petitioner cannot seek permission for such activities in the dam region till a decision is taken by experts as per the Dam Safety Act.

The court noted that the experts made attempts to conduct experimental blasts, but could not due to the non-conducive atmosphere. Therefore, they are waiting for suitable conditions to conduct the experimental blasts to assess the impact of mining on the dam.

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# El Niño Effect: Dry, snowless winter grips NW Himalayas

**NEW DELHI:** The majestic Himalayas, usually adorned with a pristine blanket of snow, are facing an unprecedented challenge this winter. The El Niño effect, coupled with a long dry spell, has resulted in scant snowfall across the northwest region, raising concerns about the future of water resources and the delicate north-west Himalayan ecosystem.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) declared 2023 the hottest year on record, and the warming El Niño event promises to crank up the heat further in 2024. This phenomenon arises from warmer-than-average sea surface temperatures in the eastern tropical Pacific, coupled with weakened trade winds.

The lack of snowfall isn't a mere blip; it disrupts the delicate annual snow cycle. "If it



Tourists at a frozen stream, at Chandanwari in Anantnag district

continues," warns glaciologist and Himalayan researcher A N Dimri, "it can have a huge cascading effect on socio-economic benefits. Less snow means less water replenishment, impact-

ing agriculture, health, and ultimately, the economy."

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO), usually battling blizzards to keep the strategically important 11,800-foot Zojila Pass

**This unusually long dry spell has left places that should be blanketed in four-to-six feet of snow with barely a trace. After initial snowfall in November and December, precipitation has vanished altogether**

open, finds itself with an unexpectedly easy task this year. "Zojila connects Kashmir with Ladakh, crucial for supplying troops," explains Lt Gen Rajeev Chaudhry, former BRO direc-

tor general. "It usually has 30-40 feet of snow by now, but barely six-seven feet this year. Less snow might keep the pass open for another week," says Chaudhry.

The picture is bleak in Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand as well. Popular tourist destinations like Gulmarg and Pahalgam have received almost no snow, disappointing both tourists and locals. Amateur meteorologist 'Weatherman Shubham' posted a photo of the snowless Kedarnath temple on social media, lamenting the "bizarre dry winters" due to the prolonged dry spell.

This unusually long dry spell has left places that should be blanketed in four-to-six feet of snow with barely a trace. After initial snowfall in November and December, precipitation has van-

ished altogether. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) blames the absence of Western Disturbances (WDs), predicting no major snowfall till mid-January.

WDs, cyclonic storms originating in the Mediterranean, are crucial for Himalayan snowfall. An April 2015 study in the Review of Geophysics highlights their role in establishing and sustaining the regional snowpack, replenishing water resources. Spring melt from this snowpack feeds northern Indian rivers and plays a vital role in various hydrological processes.

Climate scientist Raghu Murtugudde from the Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay connects the dots between WDs and El Niño. "WDs have been declining for a while, so the

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## El Niño

low precipitation aligns with that trend," he explains. "During El Niño, cold winds from the northwest keep temperatures high over northern and north-central India, leading to dry winds and less precipitation," says Murtugudde.

He elaborates on the "trend," stating, "WDs have been bringing less precipitation for a couple of decades, meaning more years with below-normal snowfall. El Niño just amplifies this effect."

Glaciologist Dimri, noting a distinct pattern shift in WDs, concurs, "There's been a decrease in their number, precipitation, and most impor-

tantly, a shift from solid to liquid precipitation, with rain replacing snowfall in winters."

The consequences of this disrupted cycle are dire. "The water system will collapse. We're moving towards a drier future," warns Dimri.

On average, India receives four to six intense WDs between December and March. With December witnessing none and no sign of them till mid-January, the situation is alarming.

Adding to the concern is the unusual nature of this El Niño event. "It's different this year due to a strong superimposition of El Niño and global warming, his happened back in 2009, another dry year," says Murtugudde.

Murtugudde co-authored a 2012 study demonstrating the link between unprecedented basin-wide warming in the Tropical Pacific and global warming trends.

The Himalayas, usually adorned with a glistening winter crown, now stand bare and parched.

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