



Years of illegal sand mining take its toll on Tuticorin coast, shore line eroding

South | Reported by [Sneha Mary Koshy](#), Edited by [Abhinav Bhatt](#) | Updated: August 12, 2013 01:04 IST



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Shore line eroding in Viapar, Tuticorin

VIAPAR, TUTICORIN: People from Viapar, a coastal village in Tamil Nadu's Tuticorin district, say they have never seen sea waves reach so close to their homes. Several neighbouring villages echo the same story as years of illegal mining have led to heavy beach erosion across the region.

On August 6, VV Minerals, the company accused of illegal mining here, was raided by District Collector Ashish Kumar. The raid report says the company had encroached upon 30 hectares of government land and other mining lease violations, affecting the common man directly. VV Minerals' lease allowed mining only on four hectares.

Mr Kumar was controversially transferred just a day after the crackdown.

VV Minerals, speaking to NDTV, denied these allegations and claimed that the "charges made by the former District Collector are baseless, motivated and vague."

Meanwhile, NDTV has accessed a letter written by the first District Collector of undivided Tirunelveli, V Sundaram, to the Chief Secretary of the state in January 2013. It accuses VV Minerals of illegal mining worth over Rs. 96,000 crores. The letter also accuses state government departments of favouring VV Minerals, saying the mining lease was given to them within 72 days, while the other companies are still waiting for permission.

A Right to Information (RTI) response shows that VV Minerals enjoyed 100 per cent monopoly in Ilmenite mining and also had a giant share for exploiting Garnet - both being export favourites. Sources say the owner of VV Minerals, Vaikundarajan, is a businessman with political connections in high places.

"VV Minerals owner Vaikundarajan knows every inch of the area and he has recorded large scale illegal mining going on with the connivance of all departmental officials. All functionaries of nodal departments of GOI and nodal mines department in Tamil Nadu have all been singing, dancing and collecting bribes together. Now, with Christmas just a few months away, the bribing would begin," said Mr Sundram.

But VV Minerals dismisses all allegations as a conspiracy by its business rivals.

"Sundaram is passing this as a cruel joke. He is on the payroll of our business rival... Our hands are clear. We will come out clear from these allegations. Our records are straight," Ravindram Duraiswami, advocate for VV Minerals told NDTV.

Even as continuing illegal mining across various states brings to light several systemic failures, the Tamil Nadu government has ordered a probe into reports of illegal mineral mining in the Tuticorin district.

Story First Published: August 12, 2013 00:56 IST

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