

Ignored Warnings, Unanswered Questions: Dikhow Flood Renews Scrutiny of Illegal Mining



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Aahwahan Foundation volunteers distribute relief materials to flood-affected families at multiple locations in Sivasagar district.



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NAZIRA, August 7, 2026 — The devastating Dikhow River floods that ravaged Nazira and surrounding areas last month have renewed scrutiny over years of warnings about alleged illegal riverbed mining and the implementation of environmental safeguards.

The recent disaster has also revived questions over whether repeated concerns raised by local residents, journalists and public representatives since 2018 received adequate attention before the floods struck.

According to records cited by former Nazira MLA Debabrata Saikia, concerns over alleged illegal stone extraction from the Dikhow River were repeatedly raised through the Assembly, official correspondence and later before the Gauhati High Court.

Local journalists had also reported extensively on alleged unregulated mining activities along the river, with some claiming they faced intimidation while covering the issue.

On December 23, 2018, Saikia raised the matter in the Assam Legislative Assembly, alleging widespread illegal stone mining and the operation of organised syndicates along the Dikhow River. He subsequently submitted written representations to various government departments, seeking intervention to stop the alleged activities.

After what he described as a lack of effective action, Saikia filed Public Interest Litigation (PIL No. 62/2019) before the Gauhati High Court.

In its order dated October 21, 2019, the High Court directed the state government to take steps to curb illegal riverbed mining. The order also called for measures including the creation of a specialised Mines and Mineral Task Force Battalion under the Department of Mines and Geology and the constitution of a high-level committee aimed at protecting the river's ecological balance.

According to Saikia, those directions were not fully implemented. A contempt petition was later filed in 2021 alleging non-compliance. In 2022, the state government reportedly sought a review of parts of the order, contending that existing enforcement agencies, including forest personnel, were sufficient and that a separate task force was unnecessary.

Environmental concerns surrounding the Dikhow River have continued to be debated. Saikia and several local groups argue that extensive stone extraction altered the river's natural characteristics. According to them, the riverbed stones helped regulate water flow, and their removal may have increased erosion and changed the river's behaviour during periods of heavy rainfall.

Many residents in the flood-hit areas also believe that illegal stone mining in the Dikhow and coal mining activities in neighbouring Nagaland contributed to the severity of the July 19 floods. However, no official investigation has yet established the extent to which these activities contributed to the disaster.

The July floods caused extensive destruction across Nazira and parts of the undivided Sivasagar district, washing away homes, farmland and livestock while displacing thousands of residents.

As recovery continues, affected communities are demanding greater accountability, stricter enforcement against illegal mining, and stronger protection of river ecosystems to reduce the risk of future disasters.

For many survivors, the Dikhow floods have become more than a natural calamity—they have raised difficult questions about environmental governance, enforcement, and whether earlier warnings could have prevented at least some of the devastation.

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BY SK HASAN

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