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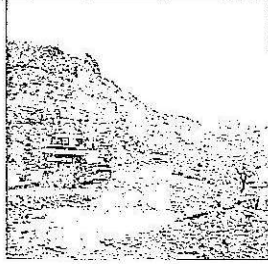
Political slugfest over illegal stone mining at Baby Betta

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mandya: Illegal stone mining in Baby Betta, a hillock about 11km from Krishna Raja Sagara (KRS) reservoir in Mandya district, has triggered a political slugfest with parties blaming each other for the menace.

HD Kumaraswamy of JD(S) on Sunday accused the BJP government of allowing illegal mining and claimed that he completely stopped the activity in Mandya district during his tenure as the chief minister. BJP workers countered him on social media, reminding him of allegations against JD(S) member and former minister CS Puttaraju, who owns mining units in Baby Betta. In 2017, Puttaraju was slapped with a fine of Rs 90 lakh for carrying out illegal mining on the hill.

BJP workers also recounted how HD Deve Gowda protested at a min-



ALONG-STANDING PROBLEM

ing unit in Nagamangala taluk last year after claiming that district in-charge minister KC Narayanagowda had harassed JD(S) members who were in the mining business. At the time, farmer leaders had criticised Deve Gowda's stance to support mining, pointing to a report by the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre that highlighted the dangers of mining close to the dam and recommended a complete ban. The report drew attention to the fact that seismic

activity recorded within the radius of the reservoir on September 25 was linked to blasts at nearby stone quarry units. The reservoir is the main water source of Bengaluru, Mysuru, Mandya and other districts.

Congress and JD(S) activists on Sunday questioned the BJP government's alleged failure to tackle the problem, circulating videos of an election speech in which Yediyurappa had vowed to end illegal mining in Baby Betta. The speech was made before the KR Pete bypoll in 2019.

That year, mining was completely banned at Baby Betta after a study highlighted the risks. Mandya MP Sumalatha Ambareesh raised the issue in the Lok Sabha. "I've got reports that illegal mining work is affecting the KRS dam. I have instructed officials to take immediate steps to stop it," Yediyurappa said on Sunday.