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Government panel says no to Vedanta's Orissa project

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NEW DELHI: A government panel on Monday said Vedanta Resources' bauxite mining in Orissa's Niyamgiri hills could not be allowed unless the local tribal communities give their consent and village councils agree to the use of forest land for the project.

The panel, investigating violations of the Forest Rights Act and environmental norms by the mining company in the Niyamgiri hills in Kalahandi district, said that allowing mining in the area would shake the faith of tribal people.

"The committee is of the firm view that allowing mining in the proposed mining lease area by depriving two primitive tribal groups -- Kutia and Dongaria Kondh -- of their rights over the proposed mining site in order to benefit a private company (Vedanta) would shake the faith of tribal people in the laws of the land," said the four-member panel, headed by National Advisory Council member N C Saxena.

The committee said that since Vedanta has repeatedly violated the law, allowing it further access to the proposed mining area at the cost of the rights of the tribes will have serious consequences for the security and well-being of the entire country.

The tribals, who hold the hills sacred, have been opposing the project and due to the controversy, some of the investors of Vedanta have even withdrawn their shares.

The environment ministry will now have to take a call on the fate of the project.

Environment and forest minister [Jairam Ramesh](#) on Saturday said the government would not tolerate any violation of the Forest Act by any corporate and would decide the future of the Vedanta project after the panel submitted its report.

Britain-based Vedanta Alumina, part of the Anil Agarwal-promoted Vedanta Resources Plc, has built an alumina refinery at an investment of \$800 million at the foot of the hills, where production has already started.

The firm, which is currently sourcing bauxite from other states at market rates, said mining permission in the hills was essential for it to reduce the cost of production.

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