
Lanjigarh tribals allege Vedanta violation of FRA

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The local tribals and activists have vented their strong opposition to the diversion of 660.749 hectares (1632.66 acres) of forest land for the proposed bauxite mining on the Niyamagiri hills at Lanjigarh in south Orissa's Kalahandi district by the Vedanta Alumina Limited (VAL) before the visiting committee of the Union minister of environment and forests (MoEF).

The four-member committee headed by N C Saxena, member of National Advisory Council, was on a visit to the Niyamgiri hills to check the allegations of violation of forest rights of the tribals.

The locals alleged before the committee that the company has violated the Forest Rights Act by forcible acquisition of forest land.

The four-member committee visited different villages to be affected by the bauxite mining by the Vedanta in the Niyamagiri hills in Kalahandi district in the last three days.

The committee also visited Raygada district on Friday to hear the grievances of the people to be affected due to mining of bauxite by the company.

"We have talked to the committee about the grievances of the affected people pertaining to the violation of Forest Rights Act and Human Rights Act. Now, the committee will decide about the future of the plant", said Sidharth Nayak, an activist.

Since around 8000 Dongria Kondhs, a primitive tribal group, are living in the vicinity of the Niyamgiri hills, social and environment activists have strongly opposed bauxite mining in the hills and have urged the MoEF not to grant the environment clearance for it. Responding to the concerns of the activists, the ministry has formed a fresh panel headed by Saxena to look into the allegations.

The Saxena Committee will ascertain whether the Forest Rights Act has been properly implemented and also determine the impact of the bauxite mining project on the livelihood and culture of the Dongria-Kandha tribals. The committee is expected to submit its report next month to the ministry.

Meanwhile, the company has already started operations of its 1.4 million tonne per annum refinery plant at Lanjigarh. Bauxite for the refinery is being brought from Vedanta's mine at Bodai-Daldali in neighboring Chhattisgarh.