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Tribal affairs minister Kishore Deo to apprise governors of right to cancel mines

New Delhi: Union tribal affairs and panchayati raj minister V [Kishore Chandra Deo](#) says his ministry will take a closer look at mineral resource projects, bauxite, [iron ore](#) or any other mineral, in areas where the rights of tribals are protected by the Constitution.

The minister said he would write to governors of nine states that have Schedule V areas, apprising them of their right to revoke allocation of mines if they violate the constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Tribes.

Last week, Deo had directed Andhra Pradesh to cancel [bauxite](#) mining leases in Visakhapatnam, a district with most of the state's bauxite deposits, where Andhra Pradesh Mineral Development Corporation was to mine under joint ventures with JSW and UAE-based [Ras Al Khaimah](#) for their planned downstream alumina refineries.

Deo said the arrangement flouted safeguards to the rights of [Scheduled Tribes](#) and was an attempt to bypass a historic Supreme Court judgment. It was also against the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Areas Land Transfer Regulation of 1959, he said.

The ministry's order covers the 10 prior approvals granted in the region; seven of these to APMDC and three to [National Aluminium Company](#) [BSE 1.27 %](#) ([Nalco](#)). It will also have implications for 13 other applications for APMDC.

Two third of the country's bauxite reserves lie in the Andhra Pradesh-Odisha border region. This includes Deo's own constituency [Araku](#) and the Niyamgiri deposit across the border, which the Odisha government had hoped to mine for Vedanta Aluminium.

Vedanta has said that its refinery in Lanjigarh faces closure because of bauxite shortage.

"That's a fait accompli. Tomorrow someone sets up a big plant outside of Delhi, and then you discover you have diamond or gold deposits under the India Gate or the lawns of Rashtrapati Bhavan, will you start mining them," asked Deo.

Six months ago, Deo had asked AP governor ESL Narasimhan to cancel the leases. That did not happen.

"In fact, in the last 60 years, I don't think any governor has invoked these powers. I feel this was the most fit case. Apart from the fact that Forest Rights Act, public hearings and provisions of Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 have not been implemented, the threat of mining is one of the main reasons for the growth of Left-wing extremism in these areas," Deo said.

"Reports say all our raw iron ore is lying in the south coast of China. We are at a nascent stage of economic development. We can't afford to fritter away resources without a mineral road map, projections of domestic needs over the next 25 or 50 years," he added.