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52 Andhra villages give Polavaram a red signal

In a new twist to controversy over forest clearance to Polavaram dam in Andhra Pradesh, 52 village bodies of the state have sought cancellation of environment clearance to the biggest dam in south India as their consent was not sought under the Forest Rights Act.

The environment ministry had cancelled forest clearance for bauxite mining for Vedanta Resources aluminum refinery in Orissa on the ground that consent of villagers under FRA was not taken. Similarly, the ministry's forest advisory committee has found that FRA provisions in case of Posco's steel plant in Orissa were not met.

"Same is the case with Indira Sagar Polavaram Multipurpose dam," the villagers said in a letter to Forest Advisory Committee. A resolution to this effect was passed by 52 gram sabhas in Khamman, East Godavari and West Godavari, which will be submerged when the dam is constructed.

The villagers have strongly contested the claim of Andhra Pradesh government that the Forest Rights Act was not applicable and no forest rights needed to be settled in the areas of submergence.

The villages have sought environment minister Jairam Ramesh's intervention and said that same law cannot be applied in differently in two states. "We want cancellation of the final forest clearance accorded to the Polavaram Dam, in view of the non-compliance of Andhra Pradesh government with respect to the implementation of FRA 2006 in the Polavaram submergence affected villages," the letter read. "Our rights have not been protected".

The environment ministry had earlier issued a notice to Andhra Pradesh government on why action should not be initiated against it for failing to hold public consultations in Orissa and Chhattisgarh, the two states to be affected by dam construction.

The state government had refused to conduct public consultation stating it was duty of the respective state governments and not theirs.

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