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New panel to study Vedanta mine impact on tribals

Special Correspondent

Dongria Kondhs of Lanjigarh in Orissa may have received some respite, with the government setting up yet another committee to reconsider how a proposed Vedanta mine in the area could affect the tribe.

On Wednesday, the Environment and Forests Ministry constituted the four-member committee to make recommendations on a proposal to divert over 660 hectares of forest land for the Lanjigarh Bauxite mines, submitted by the Orissa Mining Corporation for a project to be implemented jointly with Vedanta Aluminium.

The committee will examine, apart from the diversion of the land which comes under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, issues of settlement of rights under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, says a Ministry release.

Of particular importance will be the "specific impact on the livelihood, culture and material welfare of the Dongria Kondhs, a notified Primitive Tribal Group."

Holy mountain

A number of international NGOs have taken up the cause of the tribe, which claims that the mine would desecrate its holy mountain and cause disruptions to its way of life on the Niyamgiri Hills.

The committee will also consider the project's impact on wildlife and biodiversity in surrounding areas.

It will be headed by National Advisory Council member N.C. Saxena.

The other members are Tata Institute of Social Sciences director S. Parasuraman, retired IFS officer Promode Kant and the Institute of Economic Growth's associate professor Amita Baviskar.

They will submit their findings within one month after conducting field visits and analysis, and reviewing previous reports.

Follow-up action

In fact, this panel was set up as a follow-up to concerns raised by a three-member committee which submitted its report after site inspections in January and February 2010.

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