

Tribals in Niyamgiri demonstrate against Bauxite mining

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More than 3000 tribals assembled in Muniguda village of Rayagada district on Wednesday (May 22), to protest against mining in the Niyamgiri hills.

The Supreme Court had recently suggested that there was need to seek the opinion of local tribals before mining as it did not want any damage to be caused to the environment. The mining project has also been opposed by the rights groups.

The Gram Sabha, a village body, with help from the provincial high court, was to decide within three months and communicate whether it wanted mining should go ahead. The final decision was to be taken by the Environment and Forest Ministry.

Bhal Chandra Sarangi, President of a social organization fighting for the rights of the tribals in eastern state of Odisha said that the government should take into account the opinion of the locals before they go ahead with bauxite mining.

Sarangi wants the Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti (Association for the Safeguard of Niyamgiri Hills) to conduct the proposal of Gram Sabhas in a free and fair manner so that people of Niyamgiri particularly Dongria and... (sic) Kondh people, will exercise their opinion free and fairly. "We demand that the government should leave it to the people," said Sarangi.

Lingaraj, a tribal activist said the decision of the village bodies would further chart the course of ownership issues of the natural resources. "The advice given by Supreme Court which allows the Gram Sabha of 12 villages to take a final decision pertaining to the Bauxite mining in Niyamgiri pursued by Vedanta in the region, will further decide the fate of tribals in matters of ownership of land, water and other natural resources. It is a historic moment for them," said Lingaraj.

India has the world's fifth-largest bauxite reserve of about 593 million tonnes, the majority of which is located in Odisha.

The Vedanta bauxite project is one of several big investment plants.