

## Orissa Govt Questions Authority of Environment Minister

BHUBANESWAR | MAR 09, 2011

Challenging Centre's refusal to allow bauxite mining at Niyamgiri hills, Orissa government has questioned Ministry in denying stage-II clearance to Vedanta's mining project on the plea of non-implementation of

"The state owned Orissa Mining Corporation (OMC) has moved the Supreme Court yesterday challenging Orissa Steel and Mines minister Raghunath Mohanty told reporters here today.

MoEF is not the authority to reject permission for mining in Niyamgiri hills for non-implementation of Forest Act. MoEF could not review or re-examine a matter after Supreme Court's go ahead.

The state government had complied with all the terms and conditions set by the Supreme Court for bauxite clearance.

"Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MTA) is the nodal agency for implementation of FRA and not MoEF. When MTA gave permission making a plea that the act has not been implemented properly," Mohanty said.

"Precisely our ground in the petition is that the matters which have already been adjudicated upon by the court have been opened and re-examined by Ministry of Environment & Forest. Therefore the rejection of forest clearance by OMC managing director Saswat Mishra said.

The state government's prayer before the Supreme Court is to set aside the rejection order and to direct the mining project, Mishra said quoting the petition.

The state government moved the SC six months after denial of permission by MoEF in August, 2010. MoEF had given to Vedanta's Rs 5,000 crore mining project basing on the recommendation made by NC Saxena Committee.

Saxena in his report had stated that the project would severely affect the ecology as well the primitive tribes in Niyamgiri hill.

Earlier, Vedanta had also moved Orissa High Court challenging MoEF's rejection of expansion of its alumina refinery.

The state government had allowed Vedanta to expand the refinery capacity to six million tonnes from 1.5 million tonnes.

The denial was based on NC Saxena committee report which found violation of Forest Conservation Act and Forest Rights Act, 2006.

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