

## ArcelorMittal, Vedanta targeted by global campaigners

After rising to world domination, Indian-owned steel giant ArcelorMittal and mining company Vedanta Resources are being accused of paying scant attention to the environment and the rights of tribals in their areas of operation.

ArcelorMittal, the world's largest steel company that is owned by Indian billionaire Lakshmi Niwas Mittal, is bracing itself for protests by environmental campaigners at its annual meeting to be held in Luxembourg Tuesday.

And Vedanta Resources, the mining giant owned by another London-based Indian billionaire Anil Aggarwal, is being targeted by Survival International, a global group fighting for the rights of tribals that claims the company's activities are threatening the survival of a tribe in a remote corner of Orissa.

Both companies vehemently deny the allegations.

Campaigners from Bankwatch, which monitors the activities of international financial institutions (IFI), are gathering in Luxembourg saying ArcelorMittal has used money from publicly funded institutions such as the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development to boost its profits rather than address the environmental and social impact of its plants.

They are carrying a 40-page dossier claiming ArcelorMittal, which has received more than \$500 million in loans from IFIs in the past 10 years, has not invested sufficiently in clean technologies at the state-owned plants it has bought across the world.

One member of the group alleges that pollution from the ArcelorMittal plant in Ostrava, the third largest city in the Czech Republic, is so high that people in the district of Radvanice a Bartovice have to use magnets to clear steel dust from inside their homes.

A spokeswoman for Mittal, however, said the steel giant takes environmental issues very seriously.

"During 2007, we spent approximately \$500 million on health and safety and environment-related projects and since 1990 we have successfully reduced the carbon footprint of our steelmaking by over 20 percent," she said.

She also said the company is drawing up plans to reduce emissions from the Ostrava plant.

Meanwhile, Survival International has launched a global campaign saying plans by Vedanta subsidiary Sterlite to mine bauxite from the Niyamgiri mountains of Orissa would destroy the Dongria Kondh tribe if carried out.

Survival is urging shareholders, including major British companies Coutts Bank, Standard Life, Barclays Bank, Abbey National and HSBC, as well as local authority councils in Middlesbrough and Wolverhampton to sell their stakes in Vedanta unless it abandons its plans.

Survival says Sterlite plans include building a huge open-cast mine which it says would destroy the local forests, part of the mountain and the Dongria Kondh tribals, whose 8,000 members live on the

slopes of the Niyamgiri.

A spokesman for Vedanta said: 'As one of the largest metals and mining groups in India and with mines in Australia and Zambia, Vedanta is committed to managing its business in a socially responsible manner.'

'The management of environmental, employee, health and safety and community issues in respect of our operations is central to the success of our business. Therefore, we vigorously refute these allegations from Survival.'

*Dipankar De Sarkar (© IANS / India eNews)*