

British company faces protest in Orissa's Kalahandi

Hundreds of people, mostly tribals, Friday staged a protest and blocked roads in Orissa's Kalahandi district against British company Vedanta Resources for allegedly not taking care of local interest after setting up a refinery in the area, the police said.

The people of about five villages marched carrying traditional arms and weapons and blocked the roads at Lanjigarh, some 600 km from here, where the company has already built a \$800-million alumina refinery.

Hundreds of vehicles were stranded when the protestors raised slogans and blocked roads, a district police official told IANS.

The protesters alleged that the company had cheated them by not spending adequate money on development even after they had given up their land.

"The company had promised to provide jobs to all people who had studied up to class five, but it did not keep its promise," an anti Vedanta leader Sidhartha Nayak told IANS.

"The company should go back from the area. It has no right to stay if it cannot take care of local interest," Nayak said.

A company official, however, said that their projects would significantly enhance employment and economic growth in the state. He described the protest as unjustified.

The company is also facing protests in the region for its mining project which got the Supreme Court nod in August this year.

The court allowed the company to mine bauxite in the Niyamgiri Hills to feed its alumina refinery in Lanjigarh and an aluminium smelter project the company is building, costing Rs.70 billion in Jharsuguda district.

The tribals of Kalahandi, as well as from Gajapati and Rayagada districts, have been protesting after Vedanta signed the mining agreement with the state government four years ago.

The tribals claim that mining would pollute their rivers, destroy the jungles and displace them.

"We never went to the Supreme Court. We don't care about what the court says," a tribal leader said. "We will not allow any body to mine in our sacred hills."

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