



**FAMILIES READY TO GIVE UP LAND IN LIEU OF HOMES & LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES**

# Anti-Vedanta Agitation Evokes Poor Response

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The agitation against Vedanta Aluminium Ltd (VAL) suffered a setback on Sunday when a rally organised by Niyamgiri Surakhya Samity and others at Jagannathpur village near Lanjigarh in Kalahandi district received a poor response.

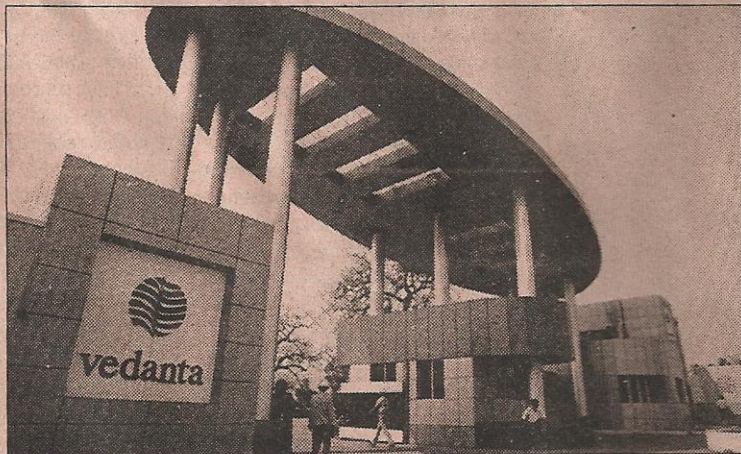
The rally was held just one day before the Supreme Court is scheduled to take up the case for final disposal of bauxite deposits at Niyamgiri hills allotted to a joint venture of the state-owned Odisha Mining Corporation and VAL and one month before the fresh public hearing for people's consent to the expansion project.

VAL, a subsidiary of the newly set up Sesa Sterlite, had planned expansion of its refinery in Lanjigarh from 1 million tonnes to 6 million tonnes, but was asked to stop work in October 2010 by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) because of Green concerns.

The presence of an Amnesty International representative in the rally sparked off a row with the district authorities taking extra caution to ensure peace in the area. The district authorities had imposed 144 CrPC, banning assembly in and around the VAL area in Niyamgiri, an official spokesman said on Sunday.

SP Nanda, the local police inspector in-charge told ET, "Though there had been a ban on foreign nationals entering tribal dominated areas, Amnesty International had deputed Ramesh Gopal Krishnan, Researcher-Asia Pacific, to attend the rally. Since he is Indian, we could not do much. The rally had thin attendance and passed off peacefully."

The state government has issued guidelines to all district collectors to regulate the visit of foreign tourists and researchers to areas inhabited and frequented by the particularly vulnerable tribal groups such as Bondas, Dongria Kandha and others. Last month, some 100 families of Ren-



gopalli, Bandhuguda and Kothduar villages located near the VAL alumina refinery, gave consent to give away their land to the Anil Agarwal-owned company for the plant's expansion work contrary to the reports of NGOs like Amnesty International and Survival International.

Linga Majhi of Rangopalli village made it clear that they would like to be rehabilitated properly. "We have told the district authorities and the company that we would happily hand over our land if we are properly resettled," he told ET.

VAL Lanjigarh President Mukesh Kumar said the company would rehabilitate these displaced families with new homes, livelihood opportunities and other benefits.

"The success of these three Pali Sabhas and people's willingness to offer their homestead and land for the alumina project is a true reflection that these deprived tribal communities want development to improve their life and living

standard but they are being projected differently by some external people in their vested interest," Kumar remarked.

VAL has been demanding proper regulation of foreign NGOs and visitors in tribal areas, saying that it has started yielding positive results as the former could hold Pali Sabhas successfully.

Earlier the Vedanta Group had asked the state government to restrict entry of foreign non-government organisations (NGOs) in Lanjigarh area, saying they were instigating locals.

The company, in a letter to the state Home Ministry, had sought restrictions on movement of such foreign nationals, besides investigation into their source of funding.

"They (foreign NGOs) are enemy of industrial development in the state. Such NGOs and foreign nationals posing as the saviours of environment and human rights, come on tourist visas but camp in jungles of Kalahandi and Rayagada, inciting the innocent tribals against industrial projects bringing prosperity to the region and the state. If they do not abide by rules, they should be sent back," Kumar added.