

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
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Export compulsions to balance foreign exchange payments are likely to speed up clearance of several sensitive projects held up so far on environment grounds.

About 370 million tonnes of bauxite deposits are estimated to be spread over 300 sq. km in forests right from Chintapalli of Visakha agency up to Sukamamidi of Khammam district.

The National Aluminium Company (NALCO) with Russian collaboration has proposed to excavate 6 lakh tonnes a year, of which 4 lakh tonne is to be exported and 2 lakh tonne transported through a conveyor belt to Krishnadevipet, the proposed factory site. A 30 megawatt power station and a railway line between Chintapalli to Damanjodi were also planned to facilitate transport. The plant, a mechanised one, employs 250 technical executives and 2,000 clerical staff.

About 2,000 hectares of revenue

land and 2,000 hectares of forest land is proposed for initial mining. The mining will totally displace 11 villages - Chintapalli, Sarabhannapalem, Batumetta, Kamparevula, Ravanapalli, Kottapalli, Pentapadu, Peddakotturu, Vanchula, Kottapalem and Jarilla in Chintapalli and Koyyuru mandals of Visakhapatnam district.

Opposition: First mining of bauxite was started at Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh. But it was given up as the mineral quality is found inferior. The companies switched over to Gandhamandan hills and Damanjodi in Orissa. So far the NALCO has ^{not} moved an inch in Gandhamandan hills due to public agitation against the project on the grounds of environmental hazards, displacement, pollution and effluents to be discharged into reservoirs and lands.

But the authorities were successful in grounding the unit at Damanjodi. But here, apart from mineral waste, the ash from the Thermal power station is let off through Nadira drain into Brahmani river. The boiled water released by the power station threatens the survival of the several water species.

Forest removal: The proposed mining at Jallila in Visakha agency at 1,400 metres above sea level of Yeleru, Tanava Pampa and Varaha reservoirs would accelerate flow of mineral waste into reservoirs. The removal of forest cover would dry up the hill streams which feed these reservoirs.

Since the USSR is not in a position to invest outside their country, the proposal of the Birlas to expedite the project is under consideration. The issue of alumina deposits and exports has several times figured in the current session of Parliament.

The capital investment of this project as per the estimates in 1980s was Rs.216.30 crore in which up to Rs.76.50 crore is likely to be open for public shares.

Scientists' warning: Scientists way back in 1982 predicted at a seminar in Andhra University on environment of the Eastern Ghats, that bauxite will be exploited by strip mining. A power shovel bites into forests, soils, laterite and bauxite, piling up rows of soil and laterite on one hand and bauxite ore on the other hand. In this process the Eastern Ghats forest land will be laid bare. It may produce stream-fouling sediment.

When the mining is carried out up to 125 km length and width of 15 km, the destruction of forest and soil will be enormous. This results in

destroying entire ecosystem and habitat. The environmental devastation to be produced by the strip mining of bauxite in Eastern Ghats is expected to exceed any other form of man-made land destruction.

The scientists cautioned that it is important to see that the eco-system and the environment are not disturbed by the mining activity to maintain equilibrium in environment. For this, as preventive measures, the following may be carefully assessed.

Precatuions: An estimate of the area of land that is to be disturbed by mining of bauxite should be made. A study of the spoil bank to be piled up during the shovelling operations of bauxite should also be made. An estimate of the proportion of soil, sub-soil, laterite in the spoil banks is to be made by competent geologists. Maximum use of materials from the spoil bank is a must in reclamation. No time lapse should be allowed in case of erosion or land slides. The stabilization and reclamation should be undertaken by engineering geologists.

As soon as the reclamation is made, the agronomists, hydrogeologists and foresters should restore status quo-anti. Unless the above measures are taken the environment will be affected.

It is understood that National Institute of Rural Development of Hyderabad (NIRD) has conducted studies on the impact of the project on environment and population.

Since the project is likely to be cleared in near future, the tribals who may be displaced, the farmers who depend on the reservoirs below are anxious to know more details of the project, and the effectiveness of safeguards to protect environment.