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MINES

State 'violates' Central rules

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

HYDERABAD - Has the Andhra Pradesh Government violated the stipulations laid down by the Centre in granting mining lease in a notified reserve forest area to a company owned by a former Congress-I legislator in East Godavari district ?

This question put the State Government in a piquant situation, with Telugu Desam Party members grilling the Mines Minister Mr Ch. Venkata Harirama Jogaiah, during question hour in the Assembly on Tuesday.

In reply to a query by S. Venkateswar Rao and others of the TDP, Mr. Jogaiah said that the mining lease was granted to M/s Adivasi Minerals owned by former Congress-I legislator Ratna Bai in Tadepalli village in East Godavari district.

Joint inspection ordered: A joint inspection by the revenue and forest officials had been ordered to verify whether the mining area was situated in the notified forest. The minister, however, maintained that the lease was given during Feb. 1992 based on the district collector's report that the

land was classified as unassessed wasteland.

Dissatisfied with the minister's answers, the TDP members shot question after question grilling Mr. Jogaiah for more than 40 minutes. The TDP members asserted that Tadepalli village was notified as a reserve forest by the Centre and any mining operation in the forest area was banned.

Supported by the CPI and BJP members, Telugu Desam deputy leader K. Vi dyadhar Rao demanded that the government institute a probe by a House committee. But, the mines minister firmly rejected the demand stating that he would initiate action based on the report of the joint inspection team.

CM to minister's rescue: As the Opposition continued to grill Mr. Jogaiah, Chief Minister K. Vijayabhaskar Reddy intervened to point out that the minister had already assured the House that the mining operations would be stopped immediately pending the report of the joint inspection team. Stern action would be initiated against the officials who recommended granting of the lease,