

Hope there's no politics behind decision: Naveen

Special Correspondent

BHUBANESWAR: As Vedanta plans to mine the Niyamgiri Hills came crashing down following the Centre's decision on Tuesday, Orissa Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik expressed the hope that there was no politics behind the rejection of clearances given to the company in the past.

Mr. Patnaik, whose government has been backing Vedanta's alumina refinery and mining plans in the Lanjigarh area of Kalahandi district despite strong protests from the Dongria Kondh tribals, was responding to journalists' questions here.

Mr. Patnaik had laid the foundation of Vedanta's alumina refinery near the Niyamgiri Hills several years ago.

Stating that the project was meant for Orissa's development, the Chief Minister said his government would examine the order and take action.

Mr. Patnaik's Biju Janata Dal said the decision was taken just two days before Congress general-secretary Rahul Gandhi's scheduled visit to Lanjigarh, to help the Congress leader draw mileage out of the order of Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh. During his 2008 visit there, Mr. Gandhi had promised to help the tribals.

Social activist Prafulla Samantara termed Mr. Ramesh's order a "victory for the tribals of Lanjigarh. He demanded that the alumina refinery, which had come up near Niyamgiri and begun production, be shut down due to the heavy pollution.