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## **India: Toxic sludge leak from Vedanta's red mud pond threatens rural communities**

Amnesty International has warned that thousands of families in the Indian state of Orissa are facing serious health risks during the imminent monsoon season following reports of leaks at the Vedanta Aluminium refinery's main 'red mud pond', a vast reservoir of toxic residue.

The organisation has obtained video footage taken by people living in the Lanjigarh area showing two recent serious breaches of the pond following heavy rains, with gushing liquid flowing onto nearby roads.

An estimated four to five thousand people in 12 villages are threatened by the leaks, which could worsen during heavy monsoon rains.

"Vedanta and the authorities must take action – with rainy season approaching the situation is a ticking time bomb. The red mud pond poses a serious threat to the health, livelihoods and safety of the local people" said Ramesh Gopalakrishnan, Amnesty International's South Asia Researcher.

The red mud pond is an estimated 92 billion litre cocktail of toxic residue that includes radioactive elements from the process of refining bauxite. Last year, spills from a red mud pond in Hungary which leaked into the Danube led to deaths, serious injuries and widespread environmental damage.

The Vedanta refinery and the red mud pond are situated only a kilometre from the river Vamsadhara, the region's main water source; four villages are very close to the refinery and eight others are downstream of the river.

Local people have protested that they have not being given any information by Vedanta Aluminium or the government about efforts to prevent further leaks.

Vedanta Aluminium denies that there were any spills from the red mud pond but has reportedly repaired the damaged areas. Amnesty International is however not aware of any attempts by the company to assess pollution of land and water caused by the reported leaks, or to clean up any damage that has occurred.

"Vedanta must stop pumping into the red mud pond – and make clear what steps it will take to avert a potential disaster for the thousands of families who live nearby." added Ramesh Gopalakrishnan.

The Orissa State Pollution Control Board has in the past pointed to concerns around the red mud pond's design and maintenance.

On 11 May 2011, the Orissa State Pollution Control Board visited Lanjigarh to study the situation at the red mud pond, but has not made its findings public.