

NEWS WRAP

AGD

Initial studies indicate that shale gas may be able to feed India's needs for up to fifty years. The country's first shale gas well, RNSG-I at Ichapur (Burdwan district, West Bengal) is part of the Damodar Basin, having thickness of about 800 metres, and one of the largest in the world in terms of volume. Of the four wells, the other two are at North Karanpura (Jharkhand). The research and development at Raniganj basin in the Damodar Valley, undertaken by state owned ONGC, in collaboration with oil field services company, Schlumberger, is expected to be over in five to six months, the basin level of resource of shale gas in India is estimated about 2000 trillion cubic feet (t.c.f).

In a first ever termination case of a Production Sharing Contract (PSC), the government of India has maintained that Canadian Company Canoro Resources has caused "irreparable damage" to the reservoir at Amguri Oil Field (Assam). The continued production from the Barail Main Reservoir below dew point pressure, has led to condensate drop of 551,000 barrels, in the reservoir during the last two years.

SPACE BAND SCAM

No competitive bidding was held by Indian Space Research Organization for the use of ten transponders in yet to be launched satellites GSAT 6 and GSAT 6A in 2005. The commercial arm of ISRO, Antrix Corporation has entered into a contract with Devas Multimedia Pvt Ltd, promoted by M G Chandrasekhar, former ISRO scientific secretary, to utilize 90% capacity of the yet to be launched satellites, using 70 mhz spectrum, valued at more than Rs 200 lac crores, for a paltry Rs 1000 crores, after obtaining Union Cabinet approval. The contract with ISRO and Devas does not place any restriction on Devas for sub-leasing spectrum. Obtaining the attractive allotment of spectrum, designed to work at specific frequency bands, Devas sold 17% of its stakes, to Deutsche Telekom for \$75 million, and the Foreign Investment Promotion Board cleared Devas for conveying 74% direct foreign investment. Stiff penalties clauses exist in the Antrix-Devas deal for delays as well as cancellation. The S-band spectrum deal has since been annulled by the Union Government of India.

VIOLENCE IN HILLS

What appears as a premeditated attempt only to instigate violence, the incident in which three Gurkha Jana Mukti Morch (GJMM) activists were killed in police firing in Sibchu area (Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal) led to further violence in Darjeeling, in Feb 2011. GJMM supporters were agitating in Shibchu forest area since 19 Jan 2011. Trying to make inroads into the Doors, a stronghold of the Adivasi Vikash Parishad (AVP), an anti-GJMM organization, the GJMM activists clashed with AVP supporters. Under section 26 of the Indian Forest Act, the police arrested certain GJMM leaders, and dismantled 33 tents of the GJMM. Armed with sharp weapons like khukri and firearms, the GJMM supporters pelted the police with stones, on 08 Feb 2011, at Khunia-Sibchu Road (Kalchini). A woman protester hit Ms Karuna Tigga [a woman homeguard] with a sharp blade. The agitators intensified their attack and police fired seven rounds, in which there were three fatal casualties. Violent agitations in Darjeeling, left government property worth Rs 50 crores destroyed, and 62 government establishments ransacked and set on fire. The GJMM called for indefinite bandhs in Darjeeling and Kalimpong. CBI investigations into the killing of All India Garkha League leader, Madan Tamang, and the escape of Nicol Tamang, prime accused in the murder case, have been disrupted.

POVERTY IN USA

The unemployment rate in USA is about 9.4%. If one adds those who want full-time work, but can find only part-time jobs, the unemployment figures rise to almost 18%. The US budget deficit is running at almost 10% of GDP. Recession, unemployment and homelessness are related. From Detroit, Newark to Sarasota, Florida on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, to formerly fast-growing southern and western cities in California, Idaho, South Carolina and Arizona, the proportion of people living below the poverty line has increased from about 9.2% to 13.7%, between 2007 and 2009. Almost half the children in the local schools are from families poor enough to be eligible for free or cut-piece lunches. A tenth of households qualify for food stamps. One in eight residents get free meals from soup kitchens or food banks. One in twelve of the population has suffered a recent spell of homelessness. The severe housing crash that ended the breakneck growth of the sunbelt cities has brought with it massive deprivation.

CAMBODIA AND THAILAND CLASH

Feb 2011 saw shell fire exchanged on disputed Cambodia-Thailand border, over what appears to be a sustained engagement between the two nations. Around ten civilians and soldiers have been killed between the two sides. The armed dispute involves a century-old French colonial map, on which both sides offer different interpretations. A 11th century Hindu Temple, is most easily accessible on the Thai side, whereas it could be reached up a steep cliff on the Cambodian side. The International Court of Justice in 1962, ruled that the temple belonged to Cambodia. In 2008, the UNESCO listed the temple, Preah Vihear, as a Cambodian World Heritage site, with political tensions simmering in election year Thailand, thousands of “yellow shirt” protesters are demanding tougher Thai measures at the border. The Cambodian government claims that Thai shelling has damaged part of the temple. The Cambodian army has removed military vehicles and construction equipment, and evacuated villagers from near the temple.□