Award of 16 oil and gas blocks in Nelp-IX gets nod

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, 23 March

The government today approved the award of less than half the 33 oil and gas blocks bid for in the ninth round of New Exploration Licensing Policy (Nelp).

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the award of 16 blocks, oil minister S Jaipal Reddy said here. "Bids for 16 blocks were recommended for acceptance by the Empowered Committee of Secretaries. The CCEA has approved," he added.

The government had offered 34 areas for exploration and production of oil and gas in the 9th round of bidding under Nelp, and bids for 33 had been received at the close of bidding on March 78 last year. The previous eight rounds of Nelp saw 235 blocks being awarded.

Rise in DA
Giving relief to its employees and pensioners from inflation, the government today announced a seven percentage point increase in dearness allowance, which will cost the exchequer an additional Rs 500 crore. The new DA rate of 65 per cent of basic pay against 58 per cent earlier will be applicable retrospectively from January 1, 2012.

Teacher education scheme
With an aim to improve teaching standards in the country, the government has approved modifications of the existing scheme on restructuring and reorganisation of teacher education. The CCEA gave its approval to meet the increasing challenges of the teacher education system and fulfill the mandate of the government with regard to teacher preparation and training under the Right To Education Act.

Ex gratia for Bhopal victims
The government has sanctioned Rs 34 crore for payment of ex-gratia to additional 9,000 cases of cancer and total renal failure among victims of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy.

MMTC iron exports
The government has approved iron ore exports by MMTC to Japanese and South Korean steel mills, including that of Posco's, for next three years.

Govt accommodation
The government has approved a proposal of the urban development ministry for re-development of East Kidwai Nagar in Delhi for the construction of residential accommodation for government employees. The project will be implemented in five years through a public-private partnership mode, without any budgetary support by NBCC.

Transfer of GSI land
The Cabinet approved a proposal for transfer of a piece of land belonging to the Geological Survey of India to Chennai Metro Rail Limited to facilitate completion of Phase-I of the project.

JNNURM projects
The Cabinet Committee on Infrastructure has approved the proposal of two-year extension to projects under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, till March 2014.

N 231 cr cold chain projects
The government approved an investment of Rs 231 crore for an additional 30 cold chain projects in the country. This follows a proposal from the ministry of food processing industries to further upscale the scheme of cold chain, value addition and preservation of infrastructure in the sector.

LIG housing needs
The government approved the establishment of a Credit Risk Guarantee Fund Trust, with a corpus fund of Rs 1,200 crore, to meet the housing needs of the low income groups under the Rajiv Awas Yojana.
Govt Okays Proposal to Wind Up SUUTI

To set up National Asset Management Company to buy shares in divestment drive

OUR BUREAU
NEW DELHI

The government on Friday approved winding up of the Special Undertaking of UTI (SUUTI), putting in place another structure that will allow it to leverage its holding in some of India’s blue chip companies to raise funds that can be used to buy shares in government’s disinvestment programme.

The SUUTI holds 11.54% stake in ITC, 23.6% in Axis Bank and 6.3% in L&T, the combined worth of which is about ₹32,000 crore, will be parked in a new asset management company National Asset Management Company.

“The proposal has been cleared by the cabinet,” a government official told ET.

The new company will leverage its assets to raise funds from banks and other financial institutions that it will use to buy shares of the state-run companies in government’s disinvestment programme.

Assuming a 50% borrowing limit on loans available against shares, the company will be able to raise nearly ₹16,000 crore from the market. The corpus will help provide stability to the government’s disinvestment programme that has made little progress in the last fiscal because of the poor market conditions.

The auction of ONGC shares earlier this month also got embroiled in controversy after LIC stepped in at the last moment to bail out the issues. The government has budgeted ₹30,000 crore from disinvestment in the next financial year, which will be crucial to the government meeting its fiscal deficit target of 5.1% of GDP.

The disinvestment department is keen to start the disinvestment early in the year to avoid a rush towards the end of the year and will focus on companies where the government stake is more than 50%.

It has already begun inter-ministerial deliberations on stake sale in Hindustan Copper, Oil India and Neyveli Lignite.

Apart from auctions of shares, the government also has the option of crossholding among state-run companies to help aid disinvestment this year.
BCCL CLAIMS RELIEF FROM JHARKHAND HC ON COAL MINES

Jharkhand State Pollution Control Board, on the advice of Secretary, Department of Forest and Environment, Govt of Jharkhand, Ranchi have issued closure orders for 24 coal mines of BCCL on 16.8.2011 stating the reasons that BCCL does not have the environmental clearances for operating the mines. Against this order, BCCL had approached the High Court of Jharkhand, Ranchi and filed a Writ Petition WP(C) 4944/2011 for legal relief stating that the orders of the Jharkhand Govt and the JSPCB are illegal, invalid, improper and bad in law and liable to set aside. A detailed hearing was conducted before the Hon'ble Justice, Poonam Srivastava on 25.8.2011 wherein BCCL had put up the argument that BCCL mines are more than 100 years old and are taken over mines and so there are no environmental clearances earlier and BCCL mines are severely infected by the problems of underground fire, subsidence and inundation and also BCCL had prayed before the Justice that the environmental clearance procedure for obtaining clearance has already been started by BCCL and has already completed more than 50 per cent work in this respect. Based on our argument Hon'ble Justice has ordered to list the petition at a later date and till then Status quo shall be maintained by the party. This means the High Court has given the relief to BCCL to continue with its mining operations.
हिन्दुस्तान कॉपर को 121 करोड़ रुपए के बिजली बकाया के लिए कृप्या नोटिस

वालापुर (मण), 23 मार्च (भारत)। देश में तेलंगणा में आयसी सार्वजनिक कंपनी हिन्दुस्तान कॉपर लिमिटेड (एसएसएल) की इकाई में उद्यान आमची 25 मार्च से पूरी तक से बंद हो सकता है। सचिवालय विज्ञापन मंडल ने कंपनी की इस इकाई को 121 करोड़ रुपए की बकाया राशि की दर्शनी का नोटिस जारी किया है, जिसमें विवाद से एसएसएल को 25 मार्च तक भुगतान नहीं करने पर कलेक्शन करने का नोटिस दिया है। 

इसके साथ ही सचिवालय सख्त रूप से राजस्थान विभाग ने भी तहसीलदार (प्रभारी, बैंड) के माध्यम से एसएसएल को बकाया दर्शनी की दर्शनी का नोटिस दिया है, जिसकी विवादी इकाई की स्थापना ।

विज्ञापन मंडल के सूत्रों के अनुसार किसी भी हिन्दुस्तान कॉपर लिमिटेड पर विवाद का पता नहीं है।
खनन पट्टे व क्वारी लाइसेंस पर रोक
नवीनीकरण पर भी लगाई रोक, पांच हेडेटर से कम पर भी लेनी होगी पर्यावरण स्वीकृति

ली जा रही है सलाह

सुलभ प्रकाश के दिशा पर समाप्ति के दिन पर रोक लगाई गई है। लेकिन समस्त अवधारण के दिन तक रोक लगाई जाएगी ताकि भुगतान पर समय तय न हो।
Vaulting ambition, which o’erleaps itself - or does he just have a compulsive urge to acquire? Anil Agarwal, the Indian scrap dealer turned Mayfair maharaja, is meant to be restructuring his London-listed Vedanta Resources group and easing its debt burden. But the ambitious billionaire is back to his old ways. Vedanta’s Sterlite Industries copper unit has offered Rs170bn ($3.4bn) to buy out the Indian government’s residual stakes in its zinc and bauxite assets, Bloomberg reports.

Only last month, Vedanta said it would merge its Sesa Goa iron ore subsidiary with Sterlite, to make 60 per cent-owned Sesa Sterlite its main Indian operating company, and adding its existing aluminium and Cairn India oil assets. The real aim of that, of course, was to shift $5.9bn of debt on to Sesa Sterlite, so easing Vedanta’s own debt burden.

So Mr Agarwal’s plan to add New Delhi’s near 30 per cent stake in Hindustan Zinc to Sterlite’s existing 65 per cent interest, and add its 49 per cent stake in Bharat Aluminium to its 51 per cent holding, was bound to unsettle investors. Vedanta’s shares fell by almost 5 per cent on Thursday. If these bolt-on deals happen, however, they may not be as rash as they seem. Greater control over the companies will eliminate government inertia from decision-making. But more important is the Rs163bn of gross cash (and minimal debt) Hindustan Zinc’s balance sheet at end-December, making the acquisition cash neutral for Sterlite.

So Mr Agarwal could look clever this time. But that should not stop him working harder to dispel the sense that he is surrounded by eunuchs too reverent to point out how opaque his company seems to investors. Vedanta’s share price, down 40 per cent over the past year, illustrates this mistrust. Again and again, they are asked to believe in the latest deal, in spite of a looming commodity-cycle downturn.
Copper rises on signs of economic rebound

Bloomberg
March 23

Copper rose in London on indications of a rebounding economy in the world's second-biggest consumer of the metal.

Copper for three-month delivery advanced 1.2 per cent to $8,392 a tonne by 10:18 a.m. on the London Metal Exchange. Prices are down 1.4 per cent this week. The May-delivery contract rose 1.2 per cent to $3,809 a pound on the COMEX in New York.

Copper inventories monitored by the LME, down 31 per cent this year to the lowest level since November 2008, were little changed at 255,175 tonnes, daily exchange figures showed. That capped a 25th weekly drop. Stockpiles monitored by the Shanghai Futures Exchange dropped to 223,632 tonnes after reaching the highest level since at least 2003, weekly data showed.

Orders to draw copper from LME warehouses climbed 5.1 per cent to 85,500 tonnes on gains in South Korea and Singapore. Zinc for three-month delivery on the LME rose 1.2 per cent to $2,008 a tonne and lead advanced 1.2 per cent to $2,007 a tonne. Aluminium rose 0.7 per cent to $2,183 a tonne, nickel slipped 0.1 per cent to $18,424 a tonne and tin advanced 0.9 per cent to $22,300 a tonne.
New Norms to Make Forest Land Diversion More Predictable

VIKAS DHOOT & MRAJ SHEKHAR
NEW DELHI

The government plans to make the diversion of forest land for industrial, development or mining projects more predictable by adopting a 'Go, No Go' style classification for forests on the basis of their ecological value. A group of ministers (GoM) on measures to tackle corruption has approved a clean-up act in forest clearances that would make acquiring such land a tad costlier, but easier.

The group chaired by finance minister Pranab Mukherjee has, however, rejected an expert committee's suggestion to approach the Supreme Court for de-reserving vast tracts of land officially classified as forests.

As per international benchmarks, India should have 33% of its total land area covered by forests. Officially, 25% of the country's area is under forest cover. But environment and forest ministry officials reckon that actual forests in the country "are much less than the 25% shown on paper."

The Ashok Chawla Committee on Allocation of Natural Resources had suggested that such land be freed up for development projects with the Supreme Court's permission. This is the only suggestion of the panel that has been rejected outright by the government.

Officials close to the development said though the idea was plausible, current strained ties between the judiciary and the executive do not make it the best time to pursue this suggestion. The GoM has accepted other recommendations aimed at bringing transparency and efficiency in forest clearances.

The present system of obtaining forest clearances is quite slow — projects that need over 40 hectares take over three years to secure a clearance. Part of this delay could be attributed to the current system of case-by-case decisions on diverting forests for non-forest uses. The process varies depending on the area of land to be diverted rather than on the basis of nature or quality of the forest.

Now, the government will classify forests based on their ecological value, which would also include marking some tracts of forests as 'inviolate' or 'no go'. The idea is to make forest diversion more predictable so that time is not wasted pursuing projects in areas that are inviolate.

"The government is considering something very similar to the 'Go, No Go' proposal that was first advanced by former environment minister Jairam Ramesh," said a Delhi-based environment lawyer.

"It is important to first identify the no-go areas — both from a biodiversity value perspective and from a wildlife corridor/ connectivity perspective — and take them off the table," said Ravi Chellam, director (research and conservation) at Madras Crocodile Bank Trust, a non-government environment group.

"Otherwise, whenever the economics are attractive, we might lose even critical forests. Unlike countries like Brazil and Indonesia where forests are filled for timber, India needs to balance the value of the forest themselves with the value of timber in the same tracts mapped from these forests," said a senior government official.