Coal-mine protester nun murdered

RAJESH KUMAR PANDEY

Dumka, Nov. 16: A nun who led a decade-long agitation against coal mining that was allowed after investors agreed to compensate villagers, was dragged out of her home in Jharkhand and murdered last night.

Sister Valsa, a 50-year-old nun from Kerala, was attacked with sharp weapons in Pachaura village in Pakur district, close to the Bengal border and around 300km from Ranchi, inspector-general Arun Arya said.

The killers left behind Maoist posters but police said they had not established yet if the rebels were involved.

"Prima facie, the murder appears to be linked to the villagers' agitation. But the matter is being probed to ascertain whether the rebels were involved in the killing or not," Arya said.

Under the banner of the Rajmahal Pahar Bachao Andolan, Sister Valsa had led the tribal agitation since early 1996 against land acquisition for Panem Coal Mines Ltd, a joint venture between the Punjab State Electricity Board and Eastern Mineral Trading Agency.

An agreement was reached in December 2006, following which Panem said it was ready to offer the compensation package Valsa had helped the villagers frame. The package proposed the market price for land, alternative plots, employment, a school, free education for the children of displaced families and a health centre.

"It appears that villagers were unhappy with her activities. Prima facie, it does not appear to be the work of the Maoists," DGP G.S Rath said.

Of late, Sister Valsa had been involved in supervising the school and the primary health centre in Pachaura. The police are investigating whether a section of villagers had fallen out with the nun as they felt she had "sold out" to the company while framing the 2006 agreement.

But former deputy chief minister Stephen Marandi, who witnessed the signing of the agreement between her organisation and the company, dismissed the theory.

Marandi said the murder was the handiwork of anti-socials who could not call the shots during the negotiations because of Valsa's popularity.

"Sister Valsa sacrificed her life for the well-being of the tribal people and played a big role in ensuring a suitable rehabilitation package from Panem. It will be wrong to say she dumped the people," he said.

Cardinal Telesphore P. Toppo has demanded a time-bound investigation. "Her murder is a shame for all of us in Jharkhand," he said.
Adani seeks nod for Australian coal export project

ADANI Mining Pvt Ltd has applied for regulatory approval for a new coal terminal at Abbot Point in the state of Queensland, which would potentially raise total coal export from the port by 70 per cent.

Adani said the project would create jobs and stimulate the local economy, while the mined coal would be exported to India for the power sector.

"Adani Mining is planning a large coal mining project with allied infrastructure, the Carmichael coal mine and rail project, with a planned 60-mtpa (million tonne per annum) peak production in 2022. For evacuation of our coal volume, we are exploring various port options, including a greenfield (new) terminal at Dudgeon Point and also the possibility of expansion of the Abbot Point Coal Terminal," said Harsh V Mishra, president, corporate planning, for the Ahmedabad-headquartered Adani Group.

Adding: "Ultimately, depending on what is feasible from the environment, community, technical and commercial standpoint, we might choose a combination of options, including earmarking some of the capacity available for commercial third-party cargo."

In a filing to the federal government under the Environment Protection and Bio-diversity Conservation Act, 1999, Adani said the proposed development, known as Abbot Point Coal Terminal 0, may potentially enable the export of up to 35 mtpa of coal per annum.

The terminal would be located next to the existing X50 Abbot Point Coal Terminal which the Queensland government leased to Adani's Mundra Port & Special Economic Zone Ltd for 99 years in an A$2 billion deal earlier this year. Abbot Point is close to Adani's mines in Queensland's remote Galilee Basin, which contain an estimated 7.8 billion tonnes of coal.

"The Project will be constructed in two stages, the timings of which are based on existing and forecast demand. Stage one construction works are planned to commence in 2013, with 25 mtpa of coal being exported from two stockpiles and one berth in 2014. Stage two is planned to be operational in 2020 and provide a total throughput of 35 mtpa through this terminal," Adani said in a filing on the website of Australia's department of sustainability, environment, water, population and communities.
**PRICE CARD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metals ($/tonne)</th>
<th>International Price</th>
<th>%Chg#</th>
<th>Domestic Price</th>
<th>%Chg#</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aluminium</td>
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<td>Silver ($/ounce)</td>
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**AGRI COMMODITIES ($/tonne)**

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<th>Commodity</th>
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<th>Domestic Price</th>
<th>%Chg#</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Cotton</td>
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**BALTIC EXCHANGE INDICES**

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<th>Nov 16, 11 cgb%*</th>
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<tr>
<td>Baltic Dry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baltic Supramax</td>
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<td>Baltic Capesize</td>
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<td>Baltic Handsizes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baltic Clean Tanker</td>
<td>682</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baltic Dirty Tanker</td>
<td>787</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**ELECTRICITY TRADING AT IEX**

Market prices at 3PM IST

Nov 17, 2011

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* Compiled rates
  1) 1 rupee = 21.00 US cents
  2) Change over 3 Months
  3) (a) = All contracts
  4) (b) = Export
  5) International spot price of crude oil is Brent
  6) International spot prices of all base metals are London Metal Exchange (LME)
  7) International spot prices of all agricultural commodities are CBOT
  8) International spot prices of all industrial commodities are LME
  9) International spot prices of all energy commodities are NYMEX
  10) International spot prices of all precious metals are Comex
  11) International spot prices of all currencies are Reuters

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* 1 rupee = 21.00 US cents
* Compiled by S. Research Bureau
SC panel clears two Karnataka mines out of 42 under review

By Shamsheer Younus

A Supreme Court-appointed committee to survey 42 iron ore mines in two districts of Karnataka has cleared only two mines for resumption of operations and will decide on a third in a few weeks.

Among the 39 defaulting mines is Sesa Goa Ltd's Narayan mine in Chitradurga, the company's second-largest mine in the country with production capacity of 6 million tonnes (mt) a year.

Iron ore production in India has slumped after the Supreme Court banned mining of the commodity in Karnataka, the country's second-largest producer, this year owing to environmental concerns.

"The joint survey team deliberated on the findings of the field survey and decided to clear only two mines for resumption of operation," said a forest official who participated in the survey operations. The official declined to be identified for this report.

The panel, which completed the assessment last week, has cleared a private mine each in Chitradurga and Tumkur districts, and another person who participated in survey operations.

The survey was ordered by the apex court following a petition by Samajik Parivar Vrthan Samadhi, a non-governmental organisation, against illegal mining in Karnataka.

Chitradurga saw a peak production of 6.5 mt in 2008-09, and Tumkur 2.5 mt.

Along with Bellary's production of nearly 40 mt that year, the three districts accounted for nearly 28% of the country's iron ore production.

After Karnataka banned exports of iron ore in July 2010, production of the steel-making commodity in Bellary dropped to 25 mt. In Chitradurga and Tumkur, combined production dropped to about 7 mt.

In Bellary, the joint survey panel cleared 31 out of 99 mines for resumption of operations in September. Production can resume only after a final order from the Supreme Court.

Sesa Goa's Narayan mine was named in a central empowered committee (CEC) report in August for having dumped mining waste in private land outside the lease area without permission.

Sesa Goa declined to comment on the joint survey team's findings.

According to a Press Trust of India report in October, Sesa Goa hoped to resume production from this mine in early 2012. Sesa Goa shares have dropped about 40% this year, compared with the Sensex's 20% fall. On Thursday, Sesa Goa's shares ended at ₹192.95 each, down 4%, while the benchmark index lost 1.8%.

The forest official mentioned earlier said the survey team will now begin classifying the defaulting mines as those with serious and non-serious violations.

The CEC will recommend to the apex court that mines with non-serious violations be allowed to resume mining after paying fines and going through a complex process of so-called reclamation and rehabilitation (R&R) operations.

Mines with serious violations will have their licences cancelled.

These two will have to pay fines and be part of the R&R operations.
WINTER SESSION

UPA plans to push through new laws to counter charges of policy paralysis

By Liz Mathew

The Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) intends to push through a raft of legislations in the upcoming winter session of Parliament to ward off accusations of policy paralysis in the government ahead of last year’s assembly elections.

But ministers said the UPA is not expecting a business-like session, with the opposition parties set to target the government on contentious issues such as corruption and price rise.

The UPA has listed 33 proposed laws for consideration by Parliament in the month-long session, which begins on Tuesday. It will focus on “essential government legislative and other business, including financial business”, parliamentary affairs minister P.K. Bansal said.

Rahul Gandhi, chief whip of all political parties on Wednesday seeking cooperation. However, the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Left parties insisted that both houses of Parliament take up issues such as inflation and black money in the first few days of the session.

The opposition is also expected to target the government over the provisions of the Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence Bill of 2011 and recent moves to improve relations with Pakistan. Lawmakers from the Telangana region in Andhra Pradesh are also likely to disrupt proceedings as the UPA is yet to decide on their demand for special status.

“IT IS OUR INTENTION (to push the legislations). However, the government is aware that it is very difficult to even achieve 50% of the targets in the current scenario,” said a cabinet minister who did not want to be identified.

Lok Sabha speaker Meeta Kumar conducted an all-party meet on Thursday to discuss the agenda for the session. The opposition indicated it will target the government on issues such as price rise, corruption, a proposed law on creating the anti-graft watchdog Lokpal, and the ongoing census of castes.

Kumar described the meeting as “very fruitful” and said all leaders were “very keen” that the House transacted all business, including the passage of Bills, during the session. She said the opposition parties came up with 45 issues it wanted to be discussed.

“Keeping the elections in view, the government wants to refrain itself with some headline reforms. It would not work because the reimbursed opposition has listed several issues ranging from chlorine content in drinking water to corruption charges to take on the government,” said Raj Mhrg, a Mumbai-based political analyst. “A smooth,ioin Abdullah,” he added.

Elections are due in five states next year, including Bihar, which is India’s largest state.

Parliamentary proceedings were disrupted during the budget and monsoon sessions as the opposition attacked the government over corruption charges against ministers and rising inflation. This prevented the presentation of any major legislative business.

Keen on projecting a reform-friendly image, the UPA is expected to push the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) Bill, which aims to promote old-age income security by establishing developing and regulating pension funds.

It has also listed the Women’s Reservation Bill, which will reserve 33% seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, and the National Food Security Bill, which will provide a legal entitlement to subsidized foodgrains to 75% of the country’s rural population and 50% of urban India.

The long pending Companies Bill, which aims at reforming the functioning of the country’s corporate sector, was also expected to be a main plank of the agenda. Most of the draft laws are in the initial stages of drafting and the legislative process is time consuming, said Mhrg. “Additionally, the credibility of the government is at its lowest, so it will not have the desired impact,” he said.

PFI contributed to this story.
SC panel clears two Karnataka mines out of 42 under review

BY SHANKAR YUSAF
shankaryusaf@mint.com

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Spooked by North Korea stake, NMDC drops its bid for coal mine in Russia

PRIVADARSHI SIDDHANTA
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 17

STATE-RUN mining giant NMDC Ltd has dropped a proposal to acquire the Erchim Tkhan — popularly known as Vinci Coal — project in Russia. Reason: one of the owners of Vinci Coal is based in North Korea, a country under heavy US sanctions.

The Rs 11,369-crore Maharashtra company last year opened talks with the owners of Vinci to acquire 100 per cent stake in the project. On October 10 this year, NMDC signed a non-disclosure agreement with one of its three owners, the Russian EN+ Coal Ltd. The other two owners are CJSC Baltiyskaya Companiya, also of Russia, which has a 29.9 per cent stake, and the North Korean firm Vneshugol, which holds a 20 per cent stake.

The project is in Russia’s eastern Sakha region, and has estimated reserves of 100 million tonnes, of which 2.5 million tonnes are mineable annually. However, it currently produces barely 0.1 million tonnes to comply with licence obligations, and is in need of capital infusion. NMDC had intended to spend $165 million spread over three years.

The company’s October 10 board meeting, however, took note of the ownership of the North Korean firm, and decided to abort the proposal.

“Apprehensive of an adverse regulatory fallout in case we acquire Vinci as North Korea is facing US sanctions, we have decided to drop the acquisition proposal,” NMDC CMD Rana Som told The Indian Express.

The board also reasoned that Vinci was, after all, not so ideally located in terms of evacuation infrastructure, with the nearest port, Vanino, on the Strait of Tartary in the Sea of Japan, being as much as 230 km away.