Minister opposes uranium mining

BANGALORE, DHNS: Yadgir district in-charge minister Raju Gouda on Wednesday said he would appeal to Chief Minister D V Sadananda Gowda to cancel the permission granted to the Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL) to take up uranium mining in Gogi village of Yadgir district.

Addressing the media, Gouda said he would take a delegation to meet the chief minister on Thursday, and submit a memo-randum urging the government to drop the project as it would pose serious health hazards to the people of the region.

The minister said the project was not only hazardous to human beings but would also adversely impact the environment and the wildlife, and fertile land in the radius of over 100 km in and around the project would turn barren.

The government has agreed to allot about 102 hectares of land to UCIL for taking up mining activities in Gogi, where rich deposits of Uranium have been found. UCIL had already dug up a 273-metre deep tunnel.

The effluents generated are being discharged into a nearby water body, which was a water source for the people. Both humans and cattle have been taking ill after consuming this water, he said.

Exploratory mining activities were taken up in the year 2007 by UCIL in about 32 hectares of land near Gogi.
Iron ore exports may fall 75% by 2016

New Delhi, Nov 17: In an indication that many of the iron ore exporters could be out of their businesses in the next few years, the Steel Economic Research Unit (SERU) has estimated that the iron ore exports would fall to 30-40 million tonne (mt) by 2016 from the present level of around 120mt.

"Iron ore exports would decline to 30-40 mt by 2016," said AS Firuz, chief economist, SERU steel ministry.

Though there is apprehension about exports going down due to the government’s ban, Firuz said it would be only due to the market forces.

"Global economies are not doing well. The Chinese economy will also come under pressure, resulting in reduced demand for iron ore," he said at the International Iron Ore and Steel-Making Raw Materials conference.

Iron ore exports have come under tremendous pressure due to a blanket ban on mining in Karnataka. Besides, Goa is facing an inquiry into illegal mining in the state.

Firuz said even if there was demand the exports would not be viable due to infrastructure and logistics costs. "If the price is $100 (per tonne of iron ore), most of the mining companies would achieve only a break-even and if current road and railway freight charges are considered, nobody would be making money," he said.

Another threat to the iron ore exporters of the country would come from tough competition from countries like Australia and Brazil. "Chinese companies have already tied up with Australian mines for supply of iron ore. In Australia and Brazil, some of the mining projects have been delayed due to environmental issues. But within four to five years, a lot of mining capacity will be created there," he added.
Experts look at safety issues in work places

Special Correspondent

JAIPUR: The challenges before occupational and environmental health and safety in the Asian countries were highlighted at a two-day conference which began here on Thursday with the experts raising the issues relating to silicosis, electronic workers, asbestos, mining and construction industry.

The event, focused on workers in organised, unorganised and informal sectors, was held under the auspices of Hong Kong-based Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) and was supported by the Union Ministry of Mines, Occupational and Environmental Health Network India (OEHNI) and Jodhpur-based Mine Labour Protection Campaign.

The previous conference was organised last year in Bandung, Indonesia, and the member organisations signed a Bandung Declaration. AMRC director Sanjiv Pandita explained the importance of pursuing a declaration with the similar title signed by the heads of Commonwealth nations five decades ago.

Mr. Pandita said while the Bandung Declaration spoke of upholding the dignity of citizens, much of the work of governments in the recent years was “in the opposite direction”. In that sense, AMRC and its associate groups would restore the declaration’s spirit by demanding safety measures at the workplace.

The participants from 18 countries in the conference included victims, activists, occupational safe health advocates, trade unionists, researchers and representatives of non-government organisations working on occupational health issues.

The conference was organised here in the backdrop of growing concerns about the increasing number of people killed every year due to the work-related reasons. According to the figures released by the International Labour Organisation, about 10 lakh people die every year in Asia alone and China and India lead the death toll.

Mr. Pandita said the ILO’s report for 2008 had revealed that almost 4 lakh people die every year due to work-related reasons in India. “This is an underestimation, as our government fails to report any figures in this regard,” he added and underlined the significance of firm evidence concerning occupational safety and health for which credible data was necessary.

The conference focused on the occupational and environmental health concerns in the Asian nations with testimonies of victims from different countries, including India. During the two days, the event would throw light on the critical health issues in electronics, silicosis, asbestos and mining.

An-Seok Jang from Korea highlighted the struggle against an electronic major in her country, where she said the workers were dying of occupation-related cancers. She said her first child was aborted due to exposure during her factory work, but the employers were not willing to accept the liability for ailments.

Xiao Ying, an activist from China who was injured in a major factory fire, pointed out that though there were sufficient laws for protection, occupational safety and insurance of labourers in her country, their enforcement was not up to the mark.

Earl Brown of the American Centre for International Solidarity said political will of the governments was required to provide adequate compensation to the victims, even as the chemical exposure was the biggest problem for workers in the Asian countries. He said silicosis was the strongest occupational health challenge in Asia.

Jagdish Patel of Gujarat-based People’s Training Research Centre said his organisation had taken up the matter of several workers suffering from diseases with the National Human Rights Commission and obtained orders in favour of 238 labourers.

Labourers Raja Devi from Jodhpur and Tabira and Madhu Ben from Gujarat also narrated their tales of suffering.
Uranium mining stir: Minister joins protest

KESTUR VASUKI □ BANGALORE

The BJP's newly formed Yadgir district Minister in-charge in Karnataka Raju Gowda has now joined protesters to oppose uranium mining at Gogi village in this district. Gowda, State Minister for Small Scale Industries in a Press conference in Bangalore appealed to Chief Minister DV Sadananda Gowda to cancel permission granted to the Uranium Corporation of India (UCIL) for mining uranium at Gogi village.

After holding consultations with the people of the Gogi village, elected representatives from the area, scientists and experts here, the Minister said he would soon meet the Chief Minister seeking cancellation of permission given to UCIL for undertaking uranium mining. There is stiff resistance growing in the district against uranium mining in view of the health hazards it poses to the local population. The mines and mills are reportedly spread over 40 hectares.

A high-powered committee under former Chief Minister BS Yeddyurappa had accorded in-principle approval to UCIL to undertake uranium mining and consented to allot 102 hectares in Gogi village for the purpose in July last. When his attention was drawn to the consent given by some farmers to part with their land for uranium mining, Gowda said they were unaware of the health hazards due to the activity posed and its impact on environment. He said the UCIL had already commenced its operations and dug up a 275 metre-long tunnel and was discharging effluents into a nearby tank. He claimed that the exploration work had caused health problems to several people. UCIL has been engaged in uranium exploratory work in the village since 2007.

The approval to mine uranium came after nearly five years of exploration in the area. According to experts, the uranium mine will have a life of 15 years during which it will supply fuel to nuclear power plants in India.

An official source in the department of Atomic Energy told The Pioneer that the uranium deposits at Gogi in Karnataka have high grade deposits. He said, "The total deposit of uranium oxide is 4,250 tonnes. It's a high grade deposit with 0.1 per cent uranium. This is as good as the deposit in Meghalaya. In comparison, the ore in Jadugoda (Jharkhand) is inferior with only 0.05-0.06 per cent uranium."

When the issue was raised in the State Assembly, Yeddyurappa had assured that the Government would take the decision on approving the project only after confirming that the uranium mining would not create any health problems to the local population. The UCIL had obtained the Centre's permission to conduct exploratory mine in 2007. Initial processing of the ore will be done at a plant to be set up at a village six km from the mining area of Gogi, official sources said.

If it becomes operational within the next few months — which the Department of Atomic Energy is hoping for — it would be a boon for the nuclear sector as mining at Domla in Meghalaya has stalled for years due to stiff opposition from local political parties and activists. Uranium mining at Cuddapah district of Andhra Pradesh is also in a limbo at the moment due to opposition from local people and voluntary organisations. Shortage of uranium fuel has been a serious issue for Indian nuclear sector, which is hoping to achieve 20,000 MW capacity by 2020.
Cabinet Secretary to head panel on overseas asset buys by State-owned firms

Anil Sasi
New Delhi, Nov. 17

The Government is working on a new strategy to garner a bigger share of vital natural resources across the globe.

A high level inter-ministerial coordination panel under the Cabinet Secretary is being formed to facilitate a consortium approach by State-owned firms and faster decision making in strategically important acquisitions such as coal blocks or uranium assets abroad. The move is specifically aimed at reversing the dismal track record of India’s state-owned enterprises in this sphere and seeks to emulate the success of their counterparts in China in cornering overseas assets.

A cell is being created in the Department of Public Enterprises, which would be made operational with two senior consultants, six consultants and other support staff to service the proposed Coordinating Committee of Secretaries (CCOS).

The steps, which form part of the Government’s new Policy for acquisition of Raw Material Assets abroad by central public sector enterprises (CPSEs), focuses on a co-ordinated approach in the hunt for resources such as coal and iron ore abroad, higher discretionary power for the boards of companies such as NTPC Ltd, Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) and Coal India, and a cohesive view of funding entailed in such acquisitions. It comes at a time when a debilitating resource crunch threatens to stymie growth across core sectors.

PATCHY SUCCESS

While at the utility level a joint venture firm already exists, the success rate of this venture has been patchy, concede officials involved in the exercise. International Coal Ventures Pvt Ltd (ICVCL) was set up by five state-owned firms to secure overseas coal assets two years ago.

The new proposal for the CCOS is being mandated to specifically address funding requirement for acquiring raw material assets abroad, including for the development of infrastructure along with the acquisition on a case-by-case basis. The focus is to avoid competition among Indian companies, reconciling interests of the nation vis-a-vis those of the CPSEs in the event of a conflict and facilitating “quick, coordinated decision making”.

Coordinating grant of concessional credit to foreign enterprises or governments in return for long-term commitment for the supply of natural resources has also been entrusted to the CCOS, something that China is actively doing in Africa. Constituting a Sovereign Wealth Fund that can serve as a corpus for financing investments in acquisitions of raw material assets has also been mooted.

The Policy also proposes a hike in the powers delegated to the boards of profit making PSUs for equity investment though mergers and acquisitions and in joint venture and subsidiaries floated for taking over assets abroad. The new policy would be applicable only to CPSEs in mining, manufacturing, electricity and the agriculture sectors having a three-year profit record.

The policy has been formulated at a time when despite a massive resource crunch back home, state-owned Indian utilities have not been able to register successes in their hunt for resources abroad on the scale of their Chinese counterparts, or even the limited success that Indian private players have seen.
China wants long-term pacts with Indian iron ore firms

Press Trust of India
Panaji, Nov 17

In the backdrop of a slump in demand for the iron ore in his country, a senior Chinese embassy official today underlined the need to establish long term trade agreements and a new pricing system with India for maintaining demand and supply equilibrium.

Mr Peng Gang, Economic and Commercial Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in India, said Indian iron ore exports to China have declined to 15 per cent in the first half of this year, as against 25 per cent in 2005.

Mr Gang was speaking at the international conference on iron ore and steel making raw materials’ here.

2-DAY MEET
Observing that it is imperative to maintain a transparent and stable policy system of mining, trading and export, he said, “both sides might try to establish a long-term iron ore trade agreement with a new pricing system, with the purpose of establishing a long and stable supply and demand relationship”.

The two-day conference has attracted several iron ore traders and buyers from across the globe, including from countries such as China and Indonesia.

GREEN AND CLEAN STEEL PRODUCTS
Stressing the need for a better cooperation between the conventional trading partners, Mr Gang said, “China and India might carry out a comprehensive cooperation on environmental protection and low-carbon economy, try to apply green innovative technologies to produce green and clean steel and other products”.

“India and China should continue to deepen mutual trust, strengthen communication,” promote mutually beneficial cooperation, properly handle differences, so as to enhance the development of China-India strategic cooperative partnership and create a favourable macro environment for the iron ore trade between the two countries,” Mr Gang said.

ENHANCE COOPERATION
Pointing out that the two neighbours can enhance cooperation in the areas of mining exploration and processing, he said, “new policies should be adopted to encourage FDI in this sector”.

“From our side, we would like to encourage more Chinese enterprises to establish additional joint ventures in iron ore and steel-making sector with their Indian peers to increase the capability of iron processing and steel production of India,” Mr Gang said.

During the past three years, mutual investments have boosted 10 times, and Chinese enterprises have completed infrastructural projects with total value of more than $10 billion in India, he added.

BILATERAL TRADE
“The bilateral trade volume reached $61.7 billion in 2010 (which is) 20 times increase in ten years.

“From January to September of this year, bilateral trade maintains a strong momentum of growth, while the two-way trade volume rose by 20 per cent to $54.5 billion against the year-ago period,” Mr Gang said.
British Columbia, Haryana in tie-up

Chandigarh, Nov. 17

The Province of British Columbia in Canada and Haryana have agreed to form a working group for mutual cooperation and assistance. They also agreed to cooperate in the field of food processing and mining. This decision was taken in a meeting between the Haryana Chief Minister, Mr Bhupinder Singh Hooda and the Premier of British Columbia, Ms Christy Clark, here on Thursday. Ms Clark is on a visit to India at the head of a high-level delegation, a Haryana Government release said. She said that Haryana and British Columbia could share technical expertise in the field of IT, food processing and mining. –PTI