

GOAL: 15,000 LITRES OF CRUDE A DAY

Oil flow from ONGC wells resumes at Ashoknagar

SUBHASISH CHAUDHURI

Calcutta: The ONGC resumed commercial crude oil production at its Baigachhi field in Ashoknagar, North 24 Parganas, with the first consignment dispatched to the Haldia refinery on Friday.

ONGC director (exploration) O.P. Sinha and Ashoknagar BJP MLA Dr Sumay Hira formally flagged off the tanker carrying the oil.

The oil production resumed after years of delay caused by technical and land-related hurdles.

The state-owned oil and gas major has targeted production of 15,000-20,000 litres of crude a day at the Baigachhi field and plans to raise output by drilling at least four or five more wells. Exploration is also underway at Bhurkunda, Daulatpur and other parts of Ashoknagar.

Commercially viable crude oil has been found at a depth of around 2396 metres in a newly drilled well, located about 95 metres northeast of the well where oil was first discovered in 2018. Production from the earlier well had declined, prompting the ONGC to drill the new well. A pump-jack has been commissioned and the extraction will be carried out in shifts.



The tanker carrying crude oil from ONGC's Ashoknagar field being flagged off on Friday. Picture by Sudip Deb

Sinha said the crude oil from the new well was of better quality than the earlier output.

"The oil that is being produced today is of very good quality. Much better oil is being found than before. That is why several more borings are being done at different locations," Sinha said, adding that the company was working to increase domestic oil and gas production and reduce India's dependence on imports.

According to ONGC officials, the crude oil has an estimated American Petroleum Institute (API) gravity (a quality yardstick) of 40-41, comparable to crude from Bombay High. Water will first be separated from the extracted crude at the production facility before it is transported to the

refinery to be processed into petrol and diesel.

Six wells have so far been drilled in the Ashoknagar field — four for oil and two for natural gas. Around ₹1,000 crore has already been invested in the project. Land acquisition, however, remains a challenge for expansion, though Hira said most hurdles at other locations had been resolved.

Oil and gas were first discovered in Ashoknagar in 2018. A test well produced around 375 barrels in 2020, and then Union petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan inaugurated crude dispatch to a refinery on December 20 that year.

The project was subsequently hit by technical problems, the Covid-19 pandemic and land-related complications.