

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF Mr. CHAVEZ

THE VISIT TO India last week of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez marked an important milestone in not just New Delhi's relations with Caracas but also in the ongoing Indian effort to develop a broader relationship with Latin America. The countries of South America have borne the brunt of neoliberal globalisation, with the 1990s now widely acknowledged, even by the authors of the Washington Consensus, as a lost decade in terms of growth and development. Like other Left-oriented regional leaders who have been voted into power — in Brazil, Chile, Argentina and now Uruguay — Mr. Chavez is the product of a continent's desire to make up for lost time. The pro-social agenda and 'Bolivarian' vision of pan-American unity he espouses resonate not just with the history and psyche of South America but also with the requirements of a modern economy. Projects like Petrosur and Telesur, which seek to link up the sectoral potential of individual countries into a common network, will help South America use its resources in an optimal fashion and prevent a large neighbour like the United States calling all the shots. That is why Washington has been so implacably hostile towards Mr. Chavez, backing a failed coup to overthrow him in 2000 and issuing veiled threats against his Government from time to time. Under these circumstances, India did well to host the Venezuelan leader and accord him a warm reception. The fact that thousands of people turned up to hear him speak — at Jawaharlal Nehru University and then in Kolkata — is testimony to the enormous respect Mr. Chavez commands in India and the wider world. It is proof of the fact that as far as public diplomacy is concerned, the size of a country matters much less than the dignity and largeness of heart

of its leadership.

For India, the process of purposefully engaging Latin America started a few years ago with the IBSA — or India-Brazil-South Africa — initiative. Although the Manmohan Singh Government has been a little slow in recognising the potential of this initiative, this year has already seen the visit to Delhi of Chilean President Ricardo Lagos and now Mr. Chavez. Later in the year, the Mexican President, Vicente Fox, is likely to make an official visit. Indian companies have a small but growing presence in Latin American markets but this is dwarfed by China, which has been quicker off the block. In the oil sector too, Chinese companies have already established significant positions in Venezuela.

During his visit, Mr. Chavez made it clear that he would like to have an energy relationship with India, and that Indian companies would be welcome to help exploit the oil resources of Venezuela. Indeed, the scope for cooperation is enormous, despite the distances. Apart from New Delhi benefiting by extracting Venezuelan oil for use in India or sale through swap agreements, Caracas gets to further diversify its markets and reduce the monopolistic power of the U.S. Indian companies like IRCON are also well placed to assist Venezuela in the construction of railway lines and roads, not to speak of low-cost housing, which is a priority area for Mr. Chavez. His visit last week has done a lot to exorcise the ghosts of previous agreements that fell through at the last moment. The crucial factor in all this is the determination to follow through. ONGC Videsh Ltd. signed a memorandum of understanding with the Venezuelan state oil company, PDVSA, during the visit of Mr. Chavez, and this must now be taken forward and implemented.

THE HINDU

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Venezuela to give ONGC oilfield stake

NEW DELHI, March 5. — Venezuela will give state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC) a stake in a Venezuelan oilfield and wants to supply crude to India, Asia's third biggest consumer, under a long-term agreement, President Hugo Chavez said today.

ONGC will partner Venezuelan national oil firm Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) in exploring for oil in an on-shore field San Cristobal, which has a potential to produce 100,000 barrels per day. ONGC's foreign arm ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL), which is bidding for foreign oil assets to secure energy supplies, will hold 49 per cent stake.

"The oil (from San Cristobal) will come to India," Mr Chavez said after holding wideranging discussions with Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh here. He said Venezuela wants to have a long-term agreement to supply crude oil to India. "Venezuela wants to become secure, continuous and long-term supplies of oil to India in the same manner as we have been doing to US for a century."

Venezuela, which sells 60 per cent or 1.5 to 1.6 million barrels per day of its crude to the USA, is South America's only member of the Opec which wants to diversify in the market.

— PTI

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ও এন জি সিকে ভেনেজুয়েলায় চান রাষ্ট্রপতি উগো শাভেজ

নয়াদিল্লি, ৫ মার্চ: রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত সংস্থা অয়েল অ্যান্ড ন্যাচারাল গ্যাস কর্পোরেশনকে (ও এন জি সি) তাদের তেল সংস্থায় অংশীদার করতে চায় ভেনেজুয়েলা। এ দিন প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহের সঙ্গে বৈঠকের শেষে ভেনেজুয়েলার রাষ্ট্রপতি উগো শাভেজ এই কথা জানিয়ে বলেছেন, দীর্ঘমেয়াদি চুক্তিতে ভারতে তিনি অশোধিত তেলও রফতানি করতে চান।

ভেনেজুয়েলার রাষ্ট্রপতি বলেন, এ দেশের যেমন অশোধিত তেলের প্রয়োজন রয়েছে, তেমনই ভেনেজুয়েলাও চায় ভারতের মতো নির্ভরযোগ্য বাজারে, দীর্ঘমেয়াদি চুক্তিতে তেল রফতানি করতে।

ভেনেজুয়েলার সান ক্রিস্টোবাল প্রকল্পে সে দেশের সরকারি তেল সংস্থার ও এন জি সি বিদেশকে ৪৯ শতাংশ অংশীদার দেওয়া হবে। প্রতি দিন এই খনি থেকে এক লক্ষ ব্যারেল অশোধিত তেল উৎপাদন হওয়ার সম্ভাবনা রয়েছে। তিনি আরও বলেন, ও এন জি সি বিদেশ এবং গ্যাস অথরিটি অব ইন্ডিয়া লিমিটেড (গেইল) ভেনেজুয়েলার সমুদ্রে গ্যাস খনন প্রকল্পেও অংশগ্রহণ করতে পারে।

শাভেজ আজ বলেন, কম দামে জ্বালানি তেল পাওয়ার দিন শেষ হয়ে গিয়েছে এবং এখন থেকে তেলের দাম ব্যারেল প্রতি ৪০ থেকে ৫০ ডলার থাকবে। (বিশ্বের সবচেয়ে বড় তেল রফতানিকারি দেশগুলির মধ্যে পঞ্চম স্থানাধিকারী দেশ ভেনেজুয়েলা। দেশটি ওপেকের এক

সদস্যও।) শাভেজ বলেন, “কম দামে তেল কেনার কথা ভুলে যাওয়া উচিত। আমরা কেউই চাই না তেলের দাম ব্যারেল প্রতি ১০০ ডলার হোক কিন্তু এই দশকে (২০০০-২০১০) তেলের দাম প্রতি ব্যারলে ৪০ থেকে ৫০ ডলার থাকবে এবং তা বাড়তেও পারে।” তিনি এও বলেন যে গত ত্রিশ বছরে তেলের দাম সে ভাবে বাড়েনি যে ভাবে গাড়ি বা বাড়ির দাম বেড়েছে।

প্রতি দিন ভেনেজুয়েলা মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রকে ১৫ লক্ষ থেকে ১৬ লক্ষ ব্যারেল অশোধিত তেল বিক্রি করে। দক্ষিণ আমেরিকা থেকে একমাত্র ভেনেজুয়েলাই অর্গানাইজেশন অব পেট্রোলিয়াম এক্সপোর্টিং কার্টিজ বা ওপেকের সদস্য।

১৯৭৪ সালের ব্যারেল প্রতি ১২ ডলার থেকে গত অক্টোবরে তেলের দাম বেড়ে হয়েছিল ৫৬ ডলার। তুলনায় গাড়ির দামের বৃদ্ধি বা বাড়ি বানানোর খরচের বৃদ্ধি অনেক বেশি হয়েছে বলে মন্তব্য করেন শাভেজ।

ওপেক এখনও দামের পরিধি ঘোষণা করেনি কিন্তু শাভেজের মতে ২২ থেকে ২৮ ডলারে তেল কেনার কথা আর আশা করা উচিত নয়।

প্রসঙ্গত, ভারতের চাহিদার মোট ৭০ শতাংশ অশোধিত তেলই আমদানি করতে হয়। রিলায়েন্স ইন্ডাস্ট্রিজ বর্তমানে ভেনেজুয়েলা থেকে সব থেকে বেশি অশোধিত তেল আমদানি করে। বছরে ৭০ লক্ষ ব্যারেল ভেনেজুয়েলা থেকে রিলায়েন্স তেল আমদানি করে থাকে। — পি টি আই

Chavez in Delhi with rap for USA

Associated Press

NEW DELHI, March 4. — Venezuelan President Mr Hugo Chavez warned today that his nation, the world's fifth-largest oil exporter, would cut off oil supplies to the United States of America if the USA tries to "hurt" his country, reports said.

"We want to supply oil to the USA. We are not going to avoid supplying oil unless the US government gets a little bit crazy and tries to hurt us," he told reporters during a visit to India, according to Dow Jones Newswires.

"If there is any aggression, there will be no oil."

Mr Chavez said. Last month, Mr Chavez and Cuban President Mr Fidel Castro accused USA of trying to assassinate the Venezuelan leader. The US state department called the allegations ridiculous. Relations between the USA and Venezuela have deteriorated steadily since Mr Chavez took office in February 1999.

Mr Chavez has accused the USA repeatedly of efforts to destabilise his government. For its part, the Bush administration is uneasy about Mr Chavez's intimate ties with Mr Castro and his efforts to silence the Venezuelan media and his political opponents.



Mr Hugo Chavez with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President APJ Abdul Kalam in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

Venezuela keen on oil supply to Indian shores

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

VENEZUELA on Friday said it was keen to supply oil to India and provide technical assistance for exploration and refining of crude even as it invited Indian companies to invest in agriculture activities and infrastructure development.

Speaking at a CII-Ficci business meeting,

Venezuela threat to stop oil to US

NEW DELHI:

Venezuela, the world's fifth largest oil exporter, threatened to stop supplies to the US if it "hurts" Latin American countries. "If there is any aggression, there will be no oil," Venezuela President Hugo Chavez told reporters. Venezuela supplies more than half of its exports to the US. —ENS

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said, "We want to extend short-term and long-term support to India in oil exploration and production and also supply to India. We are ready to sign investment agreements with India."

Inviting Indian companies to tap the vast reserves of gas and oil in Venezuela, he said his country was keen to extend all possible help in the sector to India.

"We are aware of India's needs now and about what it will be in the future. We know that India imports most of its petroleum. We now want to supply to India," he said.

Chavez said he would be signing agreements on energy cooperation when he meets Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Saturday. He also said Venezuela will extend technical assistance in exploration and refining of crude. Chavez said Venezuela will be investing around \$40 billion, of which \$10 billion will be used for "brother countries like India".



Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez at the CII-Ficci business meeting in New Delhi on Friday. PTI

African invite for Indian oil firms

NEW DELHI: India oil firms may soon be cruising on an African safari. African nations Chad, Niger, Ghana and Congo are keen on Indian firms exploring oil and gas there and want technical support for upgrading their refineries.

This was stated by Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar on Friday.

Aiyar said the African nations want Indian public sector firms to invest in prospecting for oil and gas. "We have agreed to look into possible areas of cooperation," he told reporters.

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