

ULFA to oppose digging Brahmaputra for crude oil

The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) Thursday said it would not allow a state-owned oil exploration firm to dig the Brahmaputra river to hunt for new crude oil reserves.

'The Indian government has for long been exploiting Assam's natural resources and now it plans to extract oil from the Brahmaputra. This is nothing but another clever attempt to take away local resources at the cost of our people,' the ULFA said in a statement.

'We shall not allow such a thing to take place,' warned the group, which is fighting for an independent homeland in Assam since 1979.

The warning follows a whopping \$22 million agreement made by Oil India Limited (OIL) with Kazakhstan Caspi Shelf, a Kazakhstan-based oil exploration firm, to conduct a 2-D seismic survey along a 175-km stretch of the Brahmaputra in Assam.

The survey is to begin later November and expected to take two years.

OIL officials refused to comment on the rebel threat but said the idea to scout for crude in Brahmaputra's riverbed was not based on assumptions.

'This is a proven oil rich zone and we are confident of striking crude along the Brahmaputra once exploration work begins after the survey,' said a senior OIL official, requesting anonymity.

The 2,906-km-long river - one of the longest in Asia -traverses Tibet, India and Bangladesh before emptying into the Bay of Bengal.

India produces about 30 million tonnes of crude oil annually, with Assam accounting for about five million tonnes of the total.

OIL, with its headquarters located in Assam, produces about 3.2 million tonnes of crude in the state annually.

The ULFA in the past had blown up oil pipelines and installations, kidnapped officials and even killed a Russian petrochemical engineer engaged by OIL in Assam 10 years back.

Assam has over 1.3 billion tonnes of proven crude oil and 156 billion cubic meters of natural gas reserves of which about an estimated 58 percent of these hydrocarbon reserves are yet to be explored.

Assam is also home to the world's oldest operating oil refinery - the Digboi Refinery - established in 1901.

'Assam accounts for nearly 50 percent of India's on-shore crude oil production and has the highest success ratio in the world with 70 percent of the exploration sites yielding oil,' the OIL official said.

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