

RIL row: Govt probes DGH, ONGC ex-brass Will Disclose Identities Of Guilty, Says Oil Minister

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The government has launched a probe into the role played by ONGC executives and officials in the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH), the oil ministry's technical arm for exploration, for their alleged "inaction" on information about gas from the state-run explorer's block in the Krishna-Godavari basin flowing into an adjacent field of Reliance Industries (RIL).

"All stakeholders are being looked into as to what role they had played in those days. This is an internal mechanism (of investigation). Whosoever is found responsible (for lapses)... (their identity) will be disclosed publicly," oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan told the Economic Editors' Conference on Thursday.

Pradhan said his ministry was probing the role played by "those in office" in the ministry, ONGC as well as DGH in the entire issue. Petroleum secretary K D Tripathi is overseeing the probe to find if there were any errors of omission or commission in not taking timely action on the information provided by the seismic data that ONGC's natural gas was flowing into RIL's KG-D6 block. The probe is in line with the recommendations in the Shah panel report, which said RIL and its partners in the KG-D6 block had gained from ONGC's gas and suggested the government should fix responsibility. The government recently sent a notice to RIL, BP and Niko Resources de-

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OIL MINISTER



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manding \$1.55 billion as cost of gas pumped out of ONGC's block.

ONGC had in late 2013 claimed it suspected gas reservoirs of its blocks in the Bay of Bengal extended into RIL's adjacent field. This was based on seismic data available to it at least since 2007. Both ONGC and DGH have had two heads since seismic data is reported to have indicated reservoir connectivity with RIL fields. While R S Sharma and Sudhir Vasudeva headed ONGC during this time, DGH first had SK Srivastava and then R N Choubey at its helm. There are allegations that ONGC had initially refused to act on the information, seeking more detailed study of the data. DGH did not take cognisance of the issue when the state-owned firm finally brought the issue to its notice in 2013.

Pradhan said Supreme Court has clearly established that all natural resources belong to the state.