

MEETING OF THE NORTH INDIAN CHAPTER OF THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF INDIA AT LUCKNOW

An interaction meeting of the Lucknow based Fellows of the North Indian Chapter of the Geological Society of India was organized at Birbal Sahnı Institute of Palaeobotany (BSIP), Lucknow on 29 August, 2005. A large number of Fellows and other scientists attended the meeting.

Dr Naresh C Mehrotra, Director, BSIP welcomed the guests and assured the participation of BSIP in different activities of the Society. Dr K R Gupta highlighted the activities of the recently started North Indian Chapter. He informed about the decisions taken at the last meeting of the North Indian Chapter at Delhi and requested the Fellows of the Society to suggest future plans for the Society at Lucknow. Shri Ravi Shanker, Vice President of the Geological Society, stressed the need to bring out popular books. Prof S M Mathur suggested that we could try to write books on the geology around major townships and inculcate interest in the masses on geology and related subjects. There was active discussion among the fellows and following suggestions emerged:

- a) Dr Naresh C Mehrotra, Director, Birbal Sahnı Institute of Palaeobotany will coordinate the activities of the Society at Lucknow
- b) Bimonthly meetings will be organized at Lucknow in which lectures will be delivered on current topics of interest. It was also suggested that young researchers might be encouraged to talk about their work. This will help in closer interaction with the other experts/professionals.
- c) Scientists of the Birbal Sahnı Institute of Palaeobotany will attempt some popular booklets on topics of general interest as a part of collaborative venture between BSIP and Geological Society of India.
- d) It was also agreed that a meeting of science teachers of the local schools be organized by BSIP to apprise them about the science popularization activities of the Society.
- e) BSIP and Geology Department of Lucknow University should in collaboration with the society organize Field workshops/training programmes and science exhibitions from time to time.

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CARRYING COAL TO NEWCASTLE

Newcastle being the centre of coal mining in Great Britain, this English saying implies importing any commodity to its place of origin - an apparent contradiction. Similarly, reports that India is importing coal in spite of its possessing large internal resources have given rise to misgivings on the subject in the minds of the general public. Though the total *in situ* geological resource of Indian coal currently stands at a mind boggling 247 billion tonnes (Source Geological Survey of India, January, 2005), it may appear paradoxical that in spite of a total annual internal production of over 350 million tonnes, the import of coal anticipated during 2004-2005 is to the tune of 27 million tonnes. Of this, 16 million tonnes is coking coal for metallurgical use and the balance 11 million tonnes is non-coking coal meant for thermal generation. This apparent contradiction between geological resource scenario *vis-a-vis* the necessity for import demands investigation and explanation.

Coming to the basics, let us be clear that there is an inherent imbalance in the geographical distribution of coal in India. Some states like Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh are endowed with all the coal while lignite - a coal substitute with much lower heat value - occurs in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. On the other hand, some states like Bihar, U P, Uttaranchal, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala are for all practical purposes devoid of solid fossil fuel resources.

The resource estimate encompasses coal seams of all types and grades above 0.8 m thick up to a depth of 1200 m from the surface - factors which make 247 billion tonnes rather unrealistic in relation to demand *via-a-vis* economics of mining. It must be borne in mind that in India the depth of underground mining - itself a losing proposition - does not extend beyond 300 to 350 m at most with the bulk of production (84%) coming from open cast mines at present.