OBITUARY

**Samarendra Nath Talukdar
(1928-2013)**

The doyen of Indian Petroleum Geologists, Shri S. N. Talukdar, Former Member (Exploration), Oil and Natural Gas Commission passed away on 23rd October 2013 at Dehradun after a brief illness. He is survived by his wife, son and two daughters.

Born on 3rd December 1928 at Tangail, in Rajshahi district of erstwhile united Bengal, he had his early education at the Doon School, Dehradun. He did his graduation in geology from the Presidency College, Calcutta and went to do his M.A. Tripos in geology, Earth Sciences at the Cambridge University in the UK in 1953. On his return to India, Shri Talukdar joined the Associated Cement Company (ACC) in 1954 and then, a year later, Indian Statistical Institute. He left the Institute in 1956 and after a brief stint with Standard Vacuum Co. in its West Bengal Oil Exploration Project, joined ONGC at its initial stage of formation in 1956. As a first task, he trained the newly recruited geologists in field mapping and other aspects of oil exploration. In later years his guidance to geologists and chemists as Director Geology and Member (Exploration) paid rich dividends as most of them rose to occupy the seats that steered the fortunes of the organization.

Shri S.N. Talukdar by all means was one of the pioneers who steered the search for oil and gas that brought India to the oil map of the world. It was his foresight and technical know-how that led to the discovery of many onshore oil and gas fields in India. The exploration activities in the west coast offshore areas brought tremendous potential for discovery of oil and gas and the super giant field, Bombay High, was discovered in 1974. While oil and gas in the onshore areas had been discovered in clastic reservoirs, the offshore (Bombay High) reservoir was in carbonates. This presented an entirely new challenge for exploration and development. Shri Talukdar quickly set about creating a large band of geologists who soon became experts in carbonate reservoirs. After the initial euphoria of having discovered oil, later appraisal drilling did not indicate much promise since the oil bearing sequence was found to be absent. Shri Talukdar had studied the data in some detail and was convinced that another set of payzones (as hydrocarbon bearing rock sequences are called in petroleum industry parlance) lurked below the initially discovered payzone.

He “sat” at the well and got the well drilled deeper that discovered another pay zone which later became the main oil producing zone that has been producing oil till today since 1977. To an extent the establishment of Bombay High as a super giant field is credited largely to Shri Talukdar.

During the period when he was Member Exploration, hydrocarbons in four more basins (Krishna-Godavari, Cauvery, Rajasthan and Assam-Arakan Fold Belt (Tripura) basins) were discovered and put on production. All these put together resulted in increasing not only the in-place and recoverable reserves of petroleum but production as well that saved the country considerable amount of foreign exchange out flow in importing oil.

While he was a hard task-master, he was a friend and firm supporter of geologists. Such was his love for geology that on one of his birthdays, his father asked him as to what birthday gift he would like to have and Shri Talukdar asked for a very costly book on structural geology! It wouldn't be wrong to say that he lived, dreamt, ate and drank geology. He was extremely good at English and at times his technical notes were literary masterpieces. Unfortunately, he never published an article though he always encouraged others to write. He was a ferocious reader and besides technical subjects he was fond of Jeeves and Bertie Wooster stories in P.G. Wodehouse novels. He had a penchant for travelling and given the chance preferred rail travel over air as it gave him enough time to catch up on his reading. His love for rail was like that of a child and had a huge collection of automated toy engines, coaches and rail lines with complete signaling system etc.

To those who worked with him, he was a boss par excellence in office, a friend outside and a family member who shared their grief and pleasure.

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