

Shell LNG plant blockade gets no easy fix from Canadian province



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British Columbia Premier John Horgan gave little sign his government was ready to intervene in a contentious blockade obstructing Royal Dutch Shell Plc's \$31bn gas export project, shying away from condemning the indigenous group that's defied a court order to remove barricades. "There is no quick fix to resolving issues that go back to 1876 and beyond," Horgan said, referring to the year of Canada's Indian Act and the thorny legacy created in British Columbia, where most First Nations have never formally ceded jurisdiction of their ancestral lands. "We recognise the right of individuals to protest." But he also acknowledged that the project, LNG Canada, had met every requirement to proceed and had the support of all 20 First Nation groups along its corridor, including the Wet'suwet'en on whose lands the blockade is taking place. "We believe that LNG Canada has met the

obligations that we asked them to achieve.” The blockade underscores how hard it’s become for Canada to clear the way for sanctioned energy projects – even those blessed by all levels of government and elected indigenous leaders. When Shell and its four Asian partners agreed to invest last October after a decade of negotiations, the project was feted as the blueprint for how industry should work with First Nations. Yet in the months since, a group of holdouts have erected barricades on a public road, preventing TransCanada Corp from working on the 420-mile (676km) Coastal GasLink pipeline that will supply the export facility. The protesters ignored a November court order to allow access. “It’s important to understand that construction time lines require us to gain access to the area and begin activities as soon as we safely can to keep the current construction schedule and time lines in place,” Jacquelynn Benson, a spokeswoman for Coast GasLink, said in an email. “Any delays to that would affect our ability to meet those dates.” LNG Canada didn’t immediately respond to a question about delays to the project. The project – also backed by Petroliam Nasional Bhd, Mitsubishi Corp, PetroChina Co and Korea Gas Corp – is Canada’s largest infrastructure project ever and the world’s biggest planned liquefied natural gas facility in years. Indigenous leaders, including a former Wet’suwet’en elected chief, have lamented the blockade for threatening a project that offers rural communities their best shot at economic development. Yet since Monday, when police arrested 14 to enforce the court order and restore access, protests have flared up across the nation in support of the blockade. In an October interview, Horgan credited LNG Canada’s success to its aboriginal support, contrasting it against Trans Mountain, the oil pipeline bought by the federal government from Kinder Morgan Inc. Shell was able to reach agreements with all aboriginal groups, whereas “Trans Mountain was not,” he’d said. “I think that speaks for itself.” Three months later, it’s not clear that made such a difference. “British Columbia is unique in Canada – we have unceded territory and in every

corner of the province we have court ruling after court ruling,” Horgan told reporters on Wednesday, saying he’d spoken to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau about the impasse late Tuesday. The project, he said, “highlights the challenges of reconciliation.”