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Indian Mining & Exploration Updates

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## INDIA'S GOLD MINES REINCARNATED

India has long been one of, if not the, largest consumers of gold. However, with practically all of it being imported, the hit to the Indian trade balance is second only to oil. In an effort to reduce the trade deficit and encourage local industry, the Indian government is leasing out parcels containing old Victorian era gold mines, or known deposits that were never developed.

The first big step in the return of private industry to gold mining in India occurred last week with the historic first auction of a gold mine by the Indian government. The government in New Delhi plans on auctioning at least two more gold mines this year, as well as a number of base metal and mineral mines.

India is home to some of the **world's most ancient gold mines**,

proving that the yellow metal has been favored by the people in the Indian subcontinent for millennia. Some of these ancient gold mines, abandoned for centuries, can still be found. Many gold mining companies thrived during the British occupation of India, shipping the gold straight to London. By the early 1900s, declining yields and low prices forced them all to shut down. Today, the landscape in the old gold-bearing regions are dotted with abandoned Victorian-era mines, as well as simple, pre-colonization mines. Only one, state-run, gold mining company is still in operation.



In an effort to boost the domestic economy, the Indian government embarked on a plan to offer the mineral rights to 100 different parcels of land at auction to private firms. This is the first time since their independence from Britain that the Indian government has opened mineral exploration to private companies.

The first gold mining auction took place last week, when Indian **billionaire Anil Agarwal's Vedanta Resources** emerged the winner in a grueling, 13-hour open auction that saw 160 separate bids from four competitors. The area, known as the Baghmara gold deposit in the state of Chhattisgarh, has been known to contain gold since the ancient times, but has never been properly worked. The winning bid was made on the basis of government surveys from 1981 to 1990.

One of the next gold leases will be in The Kolar Gold Fields, the site of gold mining from ancient times to the modern era. The last gold mining operation, also owned by the state, was shut down in 2001 due to rising costs. Kolar was a big gold mining area in the 1800s, after the British discovered the old, ancient mines.

This new wave of public-private mining ventures by the Modi government are aimed at revitalizing the domestic minerals and metals industries, using the technology and experience of modern mining companies. When the mines in Baghmara and Kolar start pouring gold, Indians will once again have the ability to gift native gold to loved ones and temples.

## LARGEST ZINC CO. MAY SELL ALL MINES

Debt-laden Nyrstar NV the world's largest producer of refined zinc, is exploring the possibility of selling all its mines and getting out of zinc mining completely. Stung by zinc prices that have fallen 24% this year due to falling demand, the company is looking at \$447 million in bonds coming due in next year. Initial plans to offer up to \$296 million in stock to pay for the debt sent its share price tumbling 27%. Nyrstar announced an amended plan Monday, in which **Trafigura, the world's second-largest metals trader**, will buy as much as \$135 million of the stock offering.



The deal calls for Trifigura, which already owns more than **20% of Nyrstar's stock**, to supply Nyrstar with zinc concentrate and buy the resulting refined zinc. The agreement prohibits Trifigura from obtaining more than a 49% stake in Nyrstar or appointing a majority to its board of directors. It also exempts Trifigura from making a tender offer for all outstanding shares once its stake exceeds 30%.

If Nyrstar doesn't go through with plans to sell its mining division, it still plans of offloading assets. It has already shut down two zinc mines (one each in Mexico and Canada,) and announced that it could cut ore production by as much as 400,000 metric tons as it mothballs unprofitable operations.

Mining behemoth Glencore announced last month that it was reducing zinc production by 500,000 metric tons, nearly 4% of global output. This means we may see around a 7% reduction in zinc supplies next year. Zinc prices couldn't hold on to gains made after **Glencore's announcement**, so analysts are unsure whether Nyrstar's announcement will boost prices.

In addition to the agreement with Trifigura, Nyrstar's CEO said the company would sell up to €250 million in high-yield bonds, if necessary. Precious metals investors should keep an eye on the **lead and zinc mining industries**, since the majority of the world's silver (and a good bit of gold) comes from these mines. If they collapse, then the oft-rumored silver shortage may become a reality.

## VEDANTA LTD WINS FIRST EVER AUCTION OF AN INDIAN GOLD MINE

Chhattisgarh on Friday night earned the distinction of auctioning its first gold mine in India with Vedanta Private Limited quoting the highest bid of 12.55 per cent of IBM (Indian Bureau of Mining) price of Rupees 74,712/ troy ounce (1 troy ounce = 31.10 gram) to win the gold mine against three other bidders.

The successful auction of gold mine of Baghmara at Sonakhan in Balodabazaar-Bhatapara district took place on February 26 for 13 hours from 11am to 11.47 pm when the final bid was stamped upon. It is the first gold mine auctioned in the country, for grant of composite license (prospecting license-cum-mining lease) since enforcement of new amendment in Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act 2015.

The mine, with a reserve of 2700 kg, is expected to earn more than Rupees 81.40 crores to Chhattisgarh in addition to existing royalty of Rs 24.70 crores.

Earlier, on February 18 successful auction of mining lease was granted for Karhi Chandi limestone block in Baloda Bazaar and on February 19 Kesla limestone block in Raipur district. Karhi Chandi limestone block also earned the distinction of becoming the first non-coal mining lease to be auctioned in India. Like previous two limestone auctions, Baghmara also saw aggressive bidding.



Expressing pleasure over the move, Chhattisgarh chief minister and minister for mining Dr Raman Singh told TOI, "Chhattisgarh is blessed with mineral resources and mines, while it has been known for iron-ore, coal, bauxite and limestone, commencement of gold mine would be a huge attraction for industries and for revenue generation which would earn the state with new kind of development and name. The ease of business here is the uniqueness we offer that attracts industries to Chhattisgarh."

Talking to TOI, Subodh Singh, state Secretary mines (IAS) said, "Baghmara gold mine will contribute towards India's target to reduce gold import. State government notified auction of four limestone blocks and Baghmara gold mine on 8th December 2015. Among the four bidders for gold mine were Krishna Global Mineral Limited, Rungta Mines Limited, Sainik Mining and Allied Services Limited and Vedanta Limited, and after submission of over 160 bids, the latter one fixed it highest on 12.55 per cent of IBM price."

With transparent method of allocation of mineral resources with less time of just four months it is the best age of doing business in state. Auction of this mine will enhance the gold, gems business and employment potential would also be generated from exploration and mining. Interestingly, the place's name itself is Sonakhan which indicate that ancient people were aware about existing gold mine there, Singh said.

## POLAND, INDIA TO INK PACT ON COOPERATION IN COAL MINING

The Polish government is hopeful of signing a pact with India for cooperation in coal mining and related fields to achieve a common goal in the next two months.

Polish deputy minister of economic development Radoslaw Domagalski-Labedzki today said the subject was discussed in a meeting with India's coal secretary Anil Swarup.

Speaking on the sidelines of an ICC-organised programme here, the minister said that his government possesses a lot of expertise in terms of technology in underground coal mining.

"Both of us are now looking forward to signing an agreement in two months," he said.

The MoU would be for providing machinery, knowledge sharing and technology in underground mining from Poland.

Last year, India imported over 10 million tonnes of coal from Poland.

Poland has been active in coal mining for over 100 years, but in

the last few years it was affected due to subsidised pricing of the commodity in the global market.

"Polish economy is highly dependent on coal energy and we will not deviate from this. However, we are increasing our investments in various renewable energy resources like solar, bio-mass and more. Besides, we are also innovating new technologies for cleaner coal energy," said Domagalski-Labedzki.

Besides, Poland is also exploring options to enter the food processing sector in India and a team of at least 20 Polish companies are scheduled to visit the country in March.

"We were enlightened about the mega food parks that are coming up across the country during the Make in India week and the centre has invited us to discover investment opportunities here," added the Polish minister.

Another area of interest for Poland is home furnishing and it is currently studying the market opportunities here.



# INDIAN STATES OPPOSE SHARING ROYALTY FOR EXPLORATION PROJECTS

Several Indian states have expressed their reluctance to loosen the purse strings to promote mineral exploration within their respective geographies. These provinces have communicated that they were not willing to let go any part of their revenue streams from mining activities, thereby throwing a spanner in the federal government's plans to incentivise mineral exploration through the New Mineral Policy (MNP), currently in the works. According to an official in the Mines Ministry involved

in formulating MNP, provinces like Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal have pointed out that revenue streams from minerals extracted from their respective territories formed a crucial element in meeting capital and revenue expenditures of local provincial budgets and in meeting the developmental commitments of the respective governments. Some of the provinces, such as West Bengal,

claimed that since the provinces had no control over the end-use of minerals extracted within their territories and most often the extracted minerals were transported for value addition to other locations beyond provincial boundaries, local governments could not be asked to forsake this part of their revenue stream. The NMP, slated to be unveiled by the Mines Ministry in the next couple of months, was expected to lay down the framework for a slew of fiscal incentives for private exploration and mining companies to undertake exploratory projects in at least 100 prospective mineral reserves across various provinces. Indications were that the NMP would entitle exploration projects to reimbursements of expenses incurred in projects based on specific parameters set out in the policy.

But according to the officials, what had raised the hackles of the provincial governments was the proposal that part of the incentives to exploration companies would need to be met from the royalty receivables of the local government once projects for extraction were commercialised. Under an NMP provision, an exploration company would be assured of a definite revenue stream from the royalty receivables of the provincial government for a period of 50 years, even if the exploratory agency did not itself

undertake an extraction project but it was taken up by another miner. According to the Mines Ministry, the sharing of royalties between local government and the exploration investor formed a crucial part of the twin incentive on offer under NMP. As the first benefit to explora-



tion company, a reverse auction would be held under which mineral exploration companies would put in their bids to secure exploration rights of the blocks which would be based on bids for royalty in the case of successful discovery, or compensation claims in the case of no discovery. The successful bidder in the reverse auction would be the exploration company bidding for the lowest share of royalty from that payable by a miner to the provinces or the lowest claims of reimbursement in the case of no discovery. Post successful exploration, when a mineral block would subsequently be put up for auction for extraction of resources, the exploration company could be offered the first right of refusal to match the highest bid and secure mining rights to the block it had explored.



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## 15 YEARS AFTER BGML CLOSURE, NOTHING HAS HAPPENED

Gold is sizzling as an asset now. But there are no visible signs of a revival of the mines that once produced it – Bharat Gold Mines (BGML).

Once the pride of the district, BGML had 4,500 employees when it was closed down 15 years ago on March 1, 2001.

Service benefits of its former employees have not been settled yet and quite a few of them have passed away too.

Although the Union government decided to reopen the mines in 2006 and the Supreme Court gave a ruling in favour of a revival of the century old mines, nothing concrete is taking place on ground now.

When the then second deepest gold mines were closed, the prices of the yellow metal was ₹500 per gram. Ironically the price has now shot up nearly six times.

People of the district want the mines revived by either the state government or the Centre as they can generate employment to thousands of people. Cyanide dumps at KGF only evoke the nostalgia for former BGML workers.



The dumps are an accumulation of slurry waste and residue piped out after gold was extracted from ore. After the closure of the mines, multinational companies evinced interest in taking over the cyanide dumps for extraction of gold with advanced technology. But nothing has happened till now.

People of the district are also pitching for underground mining as open cast mining is not environment-friendly.

Nodal Officer Appointed

KGF: The State government has appointed Ramanarayana Gowda as the nodal officer to facilitate filing of investment proposals for taking up gold mining in KGF.

JMJ Minerals director and chief executive officer G Jaya Kumar said his company had submitted a proposal during the recent Invest Karnataka global investors meet to take up gold mining (shallow mining) in tail dumps at KGF with an investment of ₹500 crore.

The State government came forward to provide support to take up the project and an MoU was also signed with it, he said on Tuesday

## SHREE CEMENT BAGS FIRST NON-COAL MINING LEASE IN CHHATTISGARH

Shree Cement Limited (SCL) bagged the Karhi Chandi limestone block in Balodabazar district of Chhattisgarh in the first-ever non-coal mining lease auctioned by the state government.

The IBM price of Limestone in Chhattisgarh was Rs 483.17 per tonne. SCL offered to pay Rs 284 per tonne – the highest bid that was 58.95 per cent of IBM price. The auction process continued for over five hours on Thursday. In all, 192 bids were submitted.

**“The auction of Karhi Chandi block itself would yield Rs 4,386 crore to the state exchequer at the said IBM price by way of bid-revenue, in addition to royalty of Rs 1,232 crore,” Chhattisgarh’s Mining Secretary Subodh Kumar Singh said. The state government had notified auction of four limestone blocks and**



one gold block on December 8, 2015, under the MMDR (Amendment) Act, 2015 that stipulated ‘auction’ as the mode for allocation of mineral resources and empowered the states to conduct the auction.

According to SCL officials, the block has an estimated reserve of 166 million tonnes with 80 million tonnes cement grade limestone. **The block would feed the company’s cement plant located in the same district.**

The company had a major expansion plan to augment the capacity in Balodabazar plant to 5.2 million tonnes. A memorandum of understanding had been signed earlier between the Chhattisgarh government and the SCL, which has a cement production capacity of 23.6 million tonnes per annum from multiple locations.

## TATA STEEL LOSES IRON ORE MINE IN CHHATTISGARH

mine allotted to Tata Steel by Chhattisgarh government in Dantewada district stands cancelled as the company failed to complete prospecting work within the stipulated period.

The state had allotted 2,500 hectares of iron ore bearing land in Bailadila deposit No. 4 to Tata Steel in 2008 to feed raw material for its proposed steel plant to be set up in Bastar district with an annual capacity of 5 million tonnes.

The company had signed an agreement with the state

government for the project. A prospecting licence was issued to the company for the mine with an estimated reserve of 108 million tonnes of high grade iron ore.

The prospecting work was to be completed within stipulated period of five years. An extension of another term was given to the company following multiple challenges as the mine site was located in the pocket where Naxalites had considerable sway. After prospecting, Tata Steel would have qualified and applied for getting the mining lease (ML). (Continued on page 5)...

**“The company failed to complete the prospecting work within the set time following which the agreement reached with the state government for the allocation of iron ore mine stand cancelled,” Chhattisgarh’s Industry Secretary Subodh Kumar Singh told Business Standard.**

Under the new policy, the mine cannot be allocated to any company and would be put for auction.

Singh said if Tata Steel wanted to get the mine back, it had to participate in the auction. As of now, the company had lost the iron ore mine.



The development was likely to cast shadow over the Bastar plan of country’s largest steel producer. The company had planned to set up a 5 mtpa Greenfield integrated steel plant in Bastar with an investment of over Rs 20,000 crore.

The Dantewada mine would have been used to feed the plant located at a distance of about 100 km. The land has been acquired by the state and been transferred in favour of the Department of Industries, which will subsequently lease it out to Tata Steel Limited. The process is still underway.

Local head of Tata Steel, Abhay Narayan Singh, did not take calls and did not responded either to text message.

## GOA MINING SEES NEW DAWN AS SUN SETS ON EXPORT DUTIES ON IRON ORE

In a major respite to the sagging iron ore mining industry in Goa, the Union Ministry has slashed the export duty on the low grade ore from 10 per cent to zero per cent. The decision will boost the export of nearly 4 million tons of e-auctioned ore, which is lying at the jetties, mining sites and ports since 2014, when the e-auction process was initiated in the State.

The zero export duty is expected to encourage the buyers for the final phase of e-auction, wherein total 7.76 million tonnes of stacked iron ore would be e-auctioned. While the Directorate of Mines and Geology (DMG) had identified ore for final phase of e-auction on February 8, the date for e-auction was **not announced hoping for “good news” on the export duty in Union Budget, presented on Monday.** The Government is expected to fetch good revenue from this e-auction.

**“The slashing of export duty has given a major relief not only to mine owners but also to government as the State was losing out crores of rupee royalty on export,”** a

senior official from the Mines department said adding that **‘State can now highlight royalty from iron ore export in its upcoming budget’.**

The Union Budget has proposed zero per cent export duty on iron fines below 58% Fe grade, from 10 per cent. On lumps below 58% Fe content the duty has been reduced to zero per cent from 30 per cent.

**“In a highly competitive international iron ore market where the prices are depressed, this reduction will certainly help our members in marketing their ores. It may also help in encouraging buyers to bid during the next round of e-auction,”** Goa Mineral Ore Exporters Association (GMOEA) secretary Glenn Kalavampara said.



In the first three e-auctions, held on February 17, March 4 and May 12, 2014 over 15 companies participated in the process. Thereafter, with fall in iron ore prices in the international market, the demand for ore also reduced during the successive 11 e-auctions held on August 19, November 6 and 7, 2014. In 2015, the e auctions were held on May 19, August 4, September 8, September 10, September 22, November 29 and December 24 last year.

While the falling international prices got poor response, the export duty- which was earlier at 30 per cent and later brought down to 10 per cent last year, saw limited export of the e-auctioned ore.

In last two years, DMG managed to e-auction only 7.24 million tonnes of ore, of which more than 60 per cent continue to remain

at the sites. Hardly three million tonnes of ore has been either exported to China or transported for local consumption in states like Karnataka and Chhattisgarh. This included nearly 88,000 tons of Vedanta’s (Sesa Goa) ore.

**“The heavy export duty had restricted certain buyers to transport the ore within the country. However, now it will help in export,”** a official said. The Government meanwhile has already earned revenue of around Rs 910 crores through e-auction.

Reacting to the same, Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) director general Ramakant Kamat said **“Currently international prices for ore are at a all time low and with export duty and a lot of other fees and other charges imposed by the State Government, the industry was finding it difficult to carry on the mining activity”.**

The GCCCI wants State too to reduce the taxes and fees imposed by them, thereby helping in full-fledged resumption of the activity.

## JSW'S EXPANSION PLAN TO DEPEND ON AVAILABILITY OF ORE

Vinod Nowal, deputy managing director, JSW Steel, has said that the plans to expand the capacity of Vijayanagar Steel plant in Toranagal from 12 million tonnes to 16 million tonnes per annum depended on the availability of iron ore.

**"JSW Steel, which has set up an integrated steel plant at Toranagal, will have a production of 10 million tonnes by March 31. The work on expanding the capacity to 12 million tonnes a year is under way and will be achieved during the next financial year. Expanding it further to 16 million tonnes will depend on the availability of ore," he told The Hindu .** According to him, JSW was finding it difficult to produce 10 million tonnes of steel owing to the short supply of iron ore in the State. Against the requirement of 33 million tonnes of ore by the steel industries in the State, the production was only 23 million tons.

To a question, he said that JSW imported around 6 million tonnes of iron ore during the previous year to overcome the shortage of ore in the State. **"We imported because ore production in the State had come down following a ban on mining imposed by the Supreme Court. Moreover, the steel market was also good. But now there is recession and importing ore will only lead to losing precious foreign exchange," he said.**

Dr. Nowal, while claiming that Indian steel industries were equally competent, said that the government should lay more stress on creating business environment in the country by removing the hassles and uncertainties besides giving thrust to improve the infrastructure that would help create a demand for steel in the domestic market.

## UNION MINISTER OF STEEL & MINES LAUNCHES OPERATION KHANIJ KHOJ

Targeting Deep Seated and Concealed Mineral Deposits the Union Minister of Steel & Mines Shri Narendra Singh Tomar launched Operation Khanij Khoj of Geological Survey of India (GSI) and received GSI report of 100 mineral blocks for regional exploration during 55th Central Geological Programming Board meeting in New Delhi today.

While addressing the representatives from different states and institutions of the country in the meeting, Shri NS Tomar said, Mineral exploration in India needs to be done in a proactive and time-bound manner. Government of India has taken several decisions to enable this, and to build exploration capacity in the country. Mineral exploration and mining are independent of each other. Former aims to build a comprehensive database of countrys mineral resources, while mining of these resources can be done based on the requirement. Exploration by its very nature needs to be done well in advance and not when there is scarcity of minerals. The central government under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Modi has created a spirit of national pride and belongingness through programmes like Make in India, Skill India etc. All of us need to carve out a role for ourselves as individuals and organizations to be a part of this drive to make a better India. Shri Tomar congratulated GSI and CGPB for their initiative and contribution and exhorted them to take up more challenges and assured that Government will provide all possible support.

The Secretary, Mines, Shri Balvender Kumar in his address informed that in next few months, over 6600 geological exploration reports will be put in public domain by GSI in digitized format, the work on which is already on. Selection of consultant for aero-geophysical survey of the entire 8 lakh Sq. Kms. Area is

also in advanced stage and is likely to be completed in this month, he added. Shri Balvender Kumar stated that the changes being brought in the Mining sector over the last one and a half years are going to revolutionize the mining sector in the coming 2-3 years.

Additional Secretary Shri R. Sridharan spoke on the status of exploration in India vis-?-vis international developments in exploration.

As mentioned, Geological Survey of India [GSI] has identified 100 such blocks which may be taken up by the private explorers for regional exploration. The Steel and Mines Minister today released the document in six volumes detailing these blocks. Ministry of Mines will take further action in this regard. The identified blocks includes total area of about 12,000 sq. km with prospects for minerals such as, basemetal, gold, iron, tin/tungsten, strategic minerals, etc.

The Operation Khanij Khoj state-of-the-art project of GSI launched today in the 55th meeting of CGBP is to be implemented in two selected areas in the country. It is focused on probing for deep seated/concealed mineral deposits. Characterizing Indias geological cover, investigating lithospheric architecture, resolving 4D geodynamic and metallogenic evolution, and detecting and characterizing the distal footprints of ore deposits, would be the main components of this initiative.

These programmes are also important action points of the draft National Mineral Exploration Policy (NMEP).

The 55th Central Geological Programming Board Meeting being held in New Delhi under the chairman Shri Balvender Kumar

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Secretary Mines has emphasized on judicial and sustainable utilization of natural resources. GSI under the Ministry of Mines will act as a torch bearer in coordinating with other stake holders through CGPB in the field of mineral exploration. Exploration of minerals and mining is crucial for the development of the country for increase in the GDP growth and employment generation.

The coordinated efforts of GSI, MECL and state governments were emphasized for accelerating the exploration activities in the country. The private investment in exploration will be stepped up after approval of the attractive options proposed in National Mineral Exploration Policy. The Policy is under finalisation and will be notified soon.

GSI has undertaken an important step for digitization of its over 6600 exploration reports for putting it in the public domain so that data is available to all the stake holders.

The Operation Khanij Khoj project of GSI launched during the meeting is targeting concealed and deep seated mineral deposits. GSI has planned two projects in (i) Northern parts of Arravallies and Bundelkhand craton; (ii) Western and Eastern Dharwad cratons.

GSI has initially identified 100 blocks for reconnaissance survey. Once the NMEP is approved, these blocks will be put on e-auction for undertaking regional exploration by private companies.

## SWARNA BHARAT PARTY PITCHES FOR REFORMS IN MINING INDUSTRY IN INDIA

At last party pitching for Miners Swarna Bharat Party's President, Vishal Singh, said that India's mining policy needs a total reset. Each mines give jobs (including unskilled jobs) to hundreds, even thousands of people. Mines boost local service sector jobs, leading to improved nutritional outcomes for the poor within a radius of 50-100 kms from a mine. Exploration and mining on a large scale can also create lakhs of downstream jobs in mineral processing and use.

India's land mass has much in common with Western Australia, which is rich in a range of minerals. Unfortunately, successive governments have restricted exploration and India's mineral wealth remains largely unexplored after 65 years of independence. The Modi government also remains oblivious to the vast potential of the mining sector.

India remains close to the bottom of the world on indicators of per capita mineral and energy consumption, key indicators of prosperity. India also has no strategic mineral policy, forcing us to import even basic minerals like coal and iron ore, of which India has some of the largest known reserves.

Mr Vishal Singh said that mineral exploration is an extremely high risk venture and needs incentives, not the kind of disincentives we have imposed on the industry. Royalties should be set at a level that allows profitability and viability.

Mineral exploration licences should be given on a first-come-first-served basis, except in the case of mineral deposits which are fully mapped: in such cases auctions can be considered. Of course, all licences should comply with requirements for environmental protection and consultation with the community. The most urgent policy changes needed are to make exploration and mining licences fully transferable in the open market and to require all mineral exploration companies to be listed on the BSE. The stock market will get rid of any unethical companies. In addition, the government should commission and publish large-scale mapping of mineral resources to reduce uncertainty for potential investors and motivate investment.

Unfortunately, we have such restrictive policies that many Indians and international junior exploration companies are investing in mineral exploration in Africa and South America, and in mining in Australia, but not in India. This is an absurd situation. The government must urgently liberate the industry from government created shackles.

Mr. Singh said that in summary, India needs a modern and investor-friendly Mineral Act, a sensible tax structure for mining and a good regulatory regime that ensures environmental protection even as jobs and growth are given a huge boost. He committed that SBP will liberate the mining sector to enable India to become a Sone Ki Chidiya, once again.

## GSI IDENTIFIES 46 NEW COAL BLOCKS

The Geological Survey of India has identified 46 new coal blocks in the country, out of which 12 are located in West Bengal.

Out of the 34 new coal blocks outside Bengal, Chattisgarh has 12, Madhya Pradesh 11, Maharashtra 4, Jharkhand 1, Telangana 2, North-Eastern regions 3 and Andhra Pradesh 1, Director-General of GSI Harbans Singh said here today.

"We will soon hand over these blocks to the Coal Ministry, probably by this month. The ministry will then perform a detailed exploration of these blocks before they are auctioned," Singh said during a media interaction at the GSI headquarters here.

"The exploration depends on the size of the blocks. But, generally it takes one or one-and-a-half year's time for the exploration after which they will be ready for auctioning," the DG elaborated.

According to GSI scientists, the Central Mine Planning and Design Institute is generally given the task to upgrade blocks before they are ready for auctioning.

The 12 blocks in West Bengal are located in Birbhum, Bankura and Burdwan districts (Raniganj and Birbhum Coal field areas), the officer said.

Scientists say that the GSI organises 600 to 700 "exploration programmes" annually taking four to five years to complete mineral exploration of a particular area.



## INDIA TO OFFER 100 MINERAL BLOCKS FOR EXPLORATION TO PVT FIRMS

Mines Ministry has identified 100 mineral blocks for exploration, which will be offered to the private sector once the government notifies the National Mineral Exploration Policy (NMEP). "In exploration, Centre, States and Geological Survey of India (GSI) are doing a commendable job. GSI identified 100 blocks and has given it to Mines Ministry. Going ahead when NMEP comes, we will offer it to the private sector too," Steel and Mines Minister Narendra Singh Tomar told reporters here. He said exploration should not be viewed based on the market conditions. "We should complete our exploration work so that in future when the need arises, we are prepared. I want that in coming time we should not wait for exploration and all the agencies whether under Centre or State should strive to fulfill the goal of exploration," he added. Tomar also launched 'Operation Khanij Khoj' of GSI and received the GSI report of 100 mineral blocks for regional exploration during 55th Central Geological Programming Board (CGPB) meeting here today. The Operation is to be implemented in two selected areas in the country. It is focused on probing deep seated/concealed mineral deposits. Characterising India's geological cover, investigating the lithospheric architecture, resolving 4D geodynamic and metallogenic evolution as well as detecting and characterising digital footprints of ore deposits, would be main

components of this initiative. Mines Secretary Balvinder Kumar said the draft NMEP has been finalised and it outlines a slew of measures for accelerating mineral exploration in the country.

One of the important features in NMEP is attractive provisions for private investment in the exploration sector, he added. NMEP proposes that private entities engaged to carry out regional and detailed exploration will get a certain share in revenue (by way of royalty/ premium to be accruing to state government) from mining operation from the successful bidder after e-auction of mineral block discovered by that private explorer. The revenue-sharing could be either in the form of a lump sum or an annuity, to be paid throughout the period of mining lease, with transferable rights. Selection of private explorer is proposed to be done through a transparent process of competitive bidding through e-auction. For this, reasonable areas/ blocks for regional exploration will be earmarked/ identified by the Government for auctioning. Kumar informed that 6,000 geological reports are being digitised by GSI and would be put in the public domain in the next two months. Besides, work on the aero geophysical survey of 8 lakh sq km area is being done. A consultant will be appointed by next week and in next 3 months a tender floated for the survey, he added.

## CENTRE ASKS MAHARASHTRA TO IDENTIFY MORE MINES FOR AUCTION

Steel and Mines Minister Narendra Singh Tomar has asked Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to identify more mines for auction.

Tomar met Fadnavis on the sidelines of the 'Make in India Week' in Mumbai yesterday and discussed issues related to steel and mines sector in the state, the Mines Ministry said today.

"Tomar asked the state government to identify more blocks for mine auctions and also start the process of assessing the remaining mineral resource in mines after 2020, in cases where the lease extension has been given for 5 years," the Ministry added.

These mines will be put up for auction after expiry of extended lease period in 2020, it said.

As on January 14, 2016, Maharashtra has offered four blocks – Limestone, Iron ore, Bauxite and Tungsten – in the ongoing mines auction.

Tomar also sought update on setting up of District Mineral Foundations in Maharashtra and urged the state to take up and execute projects under Prime Minister Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojna for benefit of people and areas affected by mining, the Ministry said.



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Your suggestions and feedback is awaited at :-

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