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GOVT RECEIVES 44 BIDS IN 10TH ROUND OF COMMERCIAL COAL MINE AUCTION

The coal ministry in June put on sale 67 coal mines for auction under the 10th round of commercial mines auction.

The government on Friday said that 44 bids have been received for 67 coal blocks put for sale under the 10th round of commercial mines auction.

A total of 44 bids were submitted in physical form.

The coal ministry in June put on sale 67 coal mines for auction under the 10th round of commercial mines auction.
"The substantial number of bids underscores the continued interest and participation from stakeholders in India's evolving coal sector," the coal ministry said in a statement.

The auction process has drawn considerable participation from small and medium-sized players, indicating the inclusive nature of the auction process. This inclusivity highlights that the reforms in the coal sector have been well received across the industry, regardless of the size of the players.
The online bids received during the auction process, along with the offline bids will be opened on Monday.

The strong response to this round of auctions is a significant step towards making the country self-reliant in energy and aligns with the Government's vision of self reliance.

By engaging a diverse range of participants, the Centre aims to further increase coal production, ensuring a reliable supply of dry-fuel for various sectors, thereby supporting energy security and reducing dependence on imports.

The coal ministry remains committed to fostering a dynamic and competitive environment for the coal sector, ensuring the availability of coal resources to meet the growing demands of the economy.

Source: Economic Times

WHY THE VEDANTA CHIEF SAID INDIA'S IRON ORE INDUSTRY IS 'DYING' AND WHY THE GOVT DISAGREES

Anil Agarwal flagged high auction premiums, slow mine operationalisation on X; Auction premiums not paid out of company's total revenue says Govt

Global mining giant Vedanta Resources Ltd's chairman Anil Agarwal alleged India's iron ore industry is "dying" due to high auction premiums, limited blocks on offer, and slow mine operationalisation in a post on X last Friday. Hours later, the Union Ministry of Mines issued a sharp rebuttal, also on X, calling Agarwal's remarks "completely misleading" and "incorrect".

"Could you run a business successfully if you have to share more than 100% of your revenue with another party? I doubt if anyone would say yes. But this is the reality of India's iron ore industry today. And it is dying," Agarwal's post began.

He argued that although the government introduced the auction regime to increase transparency in mining, the limited number of blocks on offer, coupled with competition from steel manufacturers, is creating a 'huge demand-supply mismatch,' driving bids sky-high. "The bid is based on how much revenue you will share with the government. Since auctions were introduced, the average for iron ore is 118%," Agarwal claimed.

Roughly twelve hours later, the mines ministry dismissed Agarwal's remarks as "completely misleading". "No mining company in India shares 100% of company revenue with the Government," its official X account said.

The post clarified that auction bids determine the monthly premium a company pays to the state government as a percentage of the average ex-mine price of iron ore, excluding expenditure on logistics and on value addition for steel production. "Auction premium is not paid out of total revenue of the company," the ministry said.

Auction premiums surge

While the ministry correctly pointed out that auction premiums are applied to the average ex-mine price of iron ore, not a mining company's total revenue, premiums for blocks auctioned since 2016 have risen sharply. High auction premiums strain profit margins, especially for mining companies not integrated with downstream value chains.

Since the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2015 introduced the auction regime, 121 iron ore blocks have been auctioned across India. Of these, 35 blocks requiring further exploration were awarded under composite licences (CL).

or the remaining 86 blocks awarded under mining leases (ML), the average auction premium stands at 119 per cent, according to an analysis of official auction data by The Indian Express. This figure has surged over the years—from 86 per cent for the first eight blocks auctioned in 2016 to a whopping 171 per cent for the most recent 16 blocks auctioned in 2023.

Blocks on offer have grown

In response to Agarwal's claim of a demand-supply mismatch due to limited auctioned blocks driving up premiums, the mines ministry countered that 17 blocks are currently under auction, with 60 more handed over to state governments. "It is therefore wrong to say that only limited blocks are on offer," the post said.

Between 2020 to 2023, the ministry auctioned 97 iron ore blocks compared to 24 blocks in the preceding four years. In the four years prior to 2016, before the auction regime was introduced, only four blocks were allotted to mining companies. In 2024, however, no blocks have been auctioned yet.

Still, the number of available blocks has significantly increased under the auction regime. However, experts argue that offering even more blocks could help cool premiums, providing relief to smaller mining companies and those not integrated with downstream operations.

The ministry also noted that India's iron ore production has risen from 129 million tonnes (MT) in FY15 to 274 MT in FY24. "India produced 144 million tonnes of steel in FY 2023-24 for which iron ore requirement was easily met and additionally 46 million tonnes of iron ore was exported by India. Thus, there is no shortage of iron ore in the country to support the iron and steel production," it added.

Hurts non-captive mines

A 2023 market study by the Competition Commission of India (CCI) found that the share of captive mines in the total number of iron ore mines has risen over the years. Steel manufacturers with captive mines can absorb higher auction premiums through value addition, unlike companies operating non-captive mines.

"The contribution of iron ore in the cost of steel produced is about 15%. So, in case of a steel company which uses iron ore produced from its own mine, it pays only a small percentage of total value of steel produced as auction premium to secure assured supply of iron ore for running its steel plant," the ministry said in its post.

In contrast, the rising auction premiums squeeze the margins of mining companies not integrated with steel plants or those focused on exports. In FY24, roughly 46 MT of iron ore was exported out of India, which is also the world's fourth largest producer of the key commodity

The ministry also rejected Agarwal's recommendation for a 50 per cent cap on auction premiums, stating that "investment in iron ore blocks is low risk project and hence, there is no need to place any cap on iron ore revenue share".

Competition concerns

The CCI study also highlighted that large-scale producers gaining control over the iron ore supply chain through captive mines can manage "fluctuations in raw material prices better".

"This has created competition concerns due to differential cost structure amongst steel producers with and without captive mines. It is further observed that the iron ore blocks auctioned after 2015 are dominated by some companies like JSW, which accounts for nearly 47 percent of the total quantity of the reserves auctioned," the study noted.

Of the 4,300 MT of iron ore reserves auctioned under ML since 2016, 35 per cent went to JSW Steel Ltd, 11 per cent to Jindal Steel and Power Ltd—both vertically integrated steel players. Rungta Mines Ltd and Tata Steel Ltd secured 9 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively, while Vedanta Ltd acquired only 94 MT, or about 2 per cent. The remaining 36 per cent of reserves were awarded to various other players, small and large.

Slow mine operationalisation

"Not surprisingly, most of the blocks have not been operationalised. Operating companies are even considering returning some of the blocks because of unviability," Agarwal also said in his post.

In response, the mines ministry said 34 of the 119 auctioned iron ore blocks have been operationalised, less than 30 per cent. The ministry also expects another 21 blocks to become operational in the near future.

"It is incorrect to say that non-operationalisation of blocks is due to high auction premium committed by the bidders during auction. Operationalisation of the blocks requires obtaining various statutory clearances such as environment clearance, forest clearance, etc. and land acquisition which normally takes 3-7 years time after auction, depending on level of exploration of the block. Since, most of the blocks have been auctioned during the last 3 years, it will take another 2-5 years to operationalise these blocks," the ministry said.

Source: The Indian Express

GOVT ASKS MAJOR STEEL COMPANIES TO USE IRON ORE FINES ALSO FOR STEEL MAKING

Major players use only high grade ore (lumps), with 65 per cent and above iron content, to make steel through BF (blast furnace)

To increase the usage of available raw materials, the Ministry of Steel has directed integrated steel players to make use of iron ore fines in steel making after its beneficiation.

As per sources, the ministry has also suggested that players look at options like acquiring coking coal mines abroad.

This is aimed at increasing the availability of raw materials at competitive prices, they said.

"It has been conveyed to them that iron reserves are limited in the country and to preserve that, players must also use low grade ore through beneficiation process. They can also look for coking coal mines outside India," the sources said.

Iron ore and coking coal are the two key raw materials used for manufacturing steel through blast furnace route. While iron ore is available in abundance, for coking coal, India remains heavily dependent on imports.

Major players use only high grade ore (lumps), with 65 per cent and above iron content, to make steel through BF (blast furnace). Fines are low grade ore having iron content or 64 per cent or less. Beneficiation of low grade ore adds to the overall cost of production

Source: Busniess Standard

SC STAYS HC ORDER DIRECTING CBI PROBE INTO 'ILLEGAL' COAL MINING

"Issue notice, returnable in four weeks. Until further orders, there shall be stay of impugned order passed by the high court," the bench ordered.

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed the Jharkhand High Court order directing a CBI probe into alleged illegal coal mining involving senior police and government officials of the state.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai and K V Viswanathan sought response of one Arup Chatterjee, who moved the high court seeking a CBI probe into the allegations of coal mining in the state, especially Dhanbad district.

"Issue notice, returnable in four weeks. Until further orders, there shall be stay of impugned order passed by the high court," the bench ordered.

The top court order came on an appeal filed by the Jharkhand government against the October 3 order of the high court. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the state government, assailed the high court order saying it was passed on a petition filed by a person, who himself is accused in multiple cases.

Source: The Indian Express

RAJASTHAN TO LAUNCH NEW MINERAL POLICY TO BOOST REVENUE, STREAMLINE MINING

The policy will be unveiled before the "Rising Rajasthan" summit in December based on stakeholder input

The state government is set to introduce a new mineral policy, aimed at boosting mining revenue and optimising operations.

The policy will be unveiled before the "Rising Rajasthan" summit in December based on stakeholder input, a senior government official said.

Principal Secretary of Mines T Ravikant emphasised zero-loss mining and the adoption of advanced technologies to enhance investment, employment, and sustainability.

The policy targets increasing the sector's contribution to Rajasthan's gross domestic product from 3.4 per cent in FY24 to 5 per cent by FY30 and up to 8 per cent by FY47, while curbing illegal mining and ensuring environmental protection, the official said

The new mineral policy draft, prepared in consultation with stakeholders, aims to foster domestic and foreign investment, promote joint ventures, and support sustainable mining practices.

A significant part of the policy will focus on improving market practices, curbing illegal mining, and boosting revenue, an official of the mining department said.

The state, rich in minerals, produces 22 major and 36 minor minerals, including unique outputs like lead, zinc, wollastonite, and gypsum. In FY24, the state's mining revenue exceeded ~7,460 crore.

By leveraging new technology, the government aims to expand the sector's potential, Ravikant said. Sustainable practices, such as waste management, site reclamation, and ecosystem protection, are key features.

Source: The Hindu

MOIL SIGNED A DRAFT JV AGREEMENT WITH MP STATE MINING CORPORATION

MOIL has entered into a draft joint venture agreement with Madhya Pradesh State Mining Corporation Limited (MPSMCL), at MP Mining Conclave'24 in Bhopal. This collaboration aims to advance manganese ore mining and undertake value-addition projects in the state of Madhya Pradesh.

The formal signing ceremony took place in the esteemed presence of the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Dr. Mohan Yadav, Mr. Sanjay Shukla, Principal Secretary, Government of Madhya Pradesh, Shri Ajit Kumar Saxena, CMD MOIL, and Shri M. M. Abdulla, Director (Production and Planning) MOIL, alongside other distinguished dignitaries.

As per the agreement, a JV Company will be formed between MOIL and MPSMCL with a shareholding of 51% of MOIL and 49% of MPSMCL. This strategic partnership between MOIL and MPSMCL is expected to harness the rich manganese ore reserves in Madhya Pradesh, driving economic growth and creating numerous employment opportunities in the region, aligning with the vision of Atma Nirbhar Bharat.

Source: pib.gov.in

INVESTMENT PROPOSALS WORTH RS 20K CR RECEIVED AT MADHYA PRADESH MINING CONCLAVE

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said that Madhya Pradesh is rich in mineral resources and that the state will actively encourage new investments in the mineral sector by intensifying efforts to harness this wealth. The state government is committed to providing all necessary support and facilities to entrepreneurs in the mining industry. He stressed the importance of utilizing the state's mineral resources for local production. Dr. Yadav was addressing the closing session of the two-day Mining Conclave held on Friday. The conclave, which took place at Kushabhau Thackeray Auditorium, attracted investment proposals worth Rs 19,650 crore from 11 industrial institutions. A significant 'Joint Venture Agreement' was signed between MOIL, a Government of India enterprise, and the Madhya Pradesh State Mineral Corporation Limited in Yadav's presence, focused on mineral block development. Describing the event as a success, the Chief Minister expressed confidence that the state's mineral revenue will increase fivefold in the near future. The conclave saw the participation of entrepreneurs, geologists, scientists, senior officials from the Mineral Department, the Ministry of Mines, Government of India, and the Geological Survey of India.

Yadav said that the culture of our country is different from the rest of the world. Where other countries consider the nation as the father, in our country we proclaim Bharat Mata Ki Jai. The matriarchal system has been supported since ancient times. We also consider the country as our mother institution. The composition of the body is also like the universe. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said that the rivers of the earth are like blood flowing in a human body. There is life on earth and there is life in plants too, this belief of ours is much older than that of other countries. There is a need to understand the difference between exploitation and utilization of nature. God has blessed Madhya Pradesh in terms of mineral wealth.

Yadav remarked that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is advancing at a rapid pace, making notable contributions globally in the field of minerals. He highlighted that Madhya Pradesh is also making strides in all areas of development. Alongside new projects in agriculture, animal husbandry, and other sectors, the state is poised to achieve significant milestones in the mineral sector. Recognized by the Government of India for its achievements in mineral auctions, Madhya Pradesh is committed to effectively harnessing its diverse mineral resources. Dr. Yadav assured that the state government will fully support investments in the mineral sector, ensuring that entrepreneurs in mining receive comprehensive assistance. He emphasized that the mineral sector will play a key role in helping Madhya Pradesh reach new heights of development.

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said that Regional Industry Conclaves are being organized monthly in various regions of the state. So far, four conclaves have been held this year, resulting in investment proposals totaling approximately Rs 2 Lakh 50 Thousand crore. The upcoming "Regional Industry Conclave" in Rewa on 23rd October is expected to attract new investments across diverse industrial sectors, further boosting the state's economic growth.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said that the Regional Industry Conclave is being organized to ensure continued industrial growth in Madhya Pradesh and to create employment opportunities for the youth. In line with this, a tourism conclave was also held to tap into the state's full potential. Today, I had the privilege of participating in two important conclaves—first in the Petrochemical and Pharma India Chem in Mumbai and later in the Mining Conclave.

Source: Free Press Journal

GOA MINING: NEW REGIME, BIGGER CHALLENGES

- *The central and state government have fastracked iron ore mining resumption in Goa.*
- *Transportation of e-auctioned extracted ore from as-is-where-is sites in the state, is expected to resume in October, and will test the efficacy of the state's pollution and vehicle monitoring systems.*
- *A spate of challenges, complaints and court appeals from village communities and NGOs indicate that the new mining regime is no panacea.*

Vishnu Kushta Gimonkar (79) owns what used to be a 10,000 square metre field, in Pilgao, Bicholim sub-district, in the heart of Goa's iron ore mining belt, 28 kilometres from capital Panjim. "Decades ago, it yielded two crop cycles of rice, beans, chillies, vegetables", he says.

A tenant-owner, who came by this land from its previous owner under Goa's 1964 Land-to-the-Tiller legislation, Gimonkar, like hundreds of other farmers in the mining belt, yielded to the economic pressures and trade-offs from the mining industry.

For decades, he abandoned agriculture and accepted the compensation paid out by the adjoining open-cast iron ore mine, for silting his fields with dust and mineral run-offs, as ore-laden trucks barrelled through and past his fields, from the mine to the Sarmanas jetty on the Asanora river.

Loaded onto river barges at the jetty, the ore made its way, via mangrove lined estuaries of the Mandovi river, to the Mormugao Port, for export shipment to China, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and East Europe – an industry that began in 1951 with 4.36 lakh tonnes; peaked in the 2007-2011 China boom at 54 million tonnes per annum; and was shut down in 2012, following the Justice Shah Commission report.

A tussle for control of the Goa mines has always undergirded centre-state politics on mining, including the shutdown in 2012. Colonial-era concessions granted to regional private investors were abolished in 1987 by the Central Government, while the second renewals of 88 working mines granted by the state government in 2014, were challenged and cancelled by a Supreme Court order in 2018.

Keen to keep mining restricted to established regional miners and avoid auctions, the Goa government initially set up a Goa Mineral Development Corporation in 2021. However, a post- Manohar Parrikar BJP state regime, was unable to stave off pressure.

Instead, within months after returning to power in the February 2022 state assembly election, the Pramod Sawant-government acceded to central demands for a fast-tracked auction of the mines, opening up the sector to out-of-state traders, steel companies and miners. It marked a significant shift from the hitherto regional mining landscape

rucks lined up on the road in mining areas of Goa. The government fast-tracked auction of the mines, opening up the sector, which was so far restricted to established regional miners, to out-of-state traders, steel companies and miners. Image by Pamela D'Mello.

In April 2022, 159 regional leaseholders and mining firms were served notices to vacate their leases, along with machinery, as a precursor to nationwide e-auctions. Nine blocks were auctioned in two phases, in December 2022 and 2023.

The Bicholim Block I mine went to Vedanta Limited in December 2022 in Phase I auctions under the new mining regime of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 and its amended Mineral (Auction) Rules 2015. In March 2024, the Goa Government signed a mine development and production agreement and the company started operations in April.

New mining regime's impact on villages

But as mine regimes change, how are village communities reacting directly on the ground? The Bicholim I lease is indicative.

As the 4.78 square kilometre Bicholim I mine lease (started in 1951) amalgamated and changed hands from the Dempo Mining Corporation, to Sesa Mining Corporation Ltd in 2007 and finally to Vedanta Limited, residents of Pilgao find their fortunes fluctuating. "I worked with Dempo Mining for eighteen years," Gimonkar tells Mongabay.

In June 2023, four hundred local workers, many former tenant-owner farmers from Pilgao and surrounding villages, who had, like Gimonkar, been employed by the mine, found themselves being retrenched, after months of being kept on half wages, through the stoppage period.

Though dressed up in notions of public ownership of mines and mineral wealth, as opposed to the private mine lease ownership regime that existed in Goa, local village residents are discovering a harsher reality, far removed from the concepts of intergenerational equity.

"We got a shock when we realised all lease periods are now fifty years (it used to be twenty years previously) Earlier, the mines employed local villagers as dumper/fitter/excavator operators, wheel loaders and helpers. Now labour is being brought in from Orissa and outside. Even the contractors are from outside. What are we left with?" asks former village sarpanch, Mahesh Volvoikar (53).

"And to think that we spent four months camped at Jantar Mantar, Delhi, to demand the restart of mining. We were simply used and then thrown away," he adds.

When realisation dawned, the village united.

In April this year, the former farmers-turned-mine-workers were picketing the mine periphery, demanding restoration and return of their farmlands that have been over decades, converted into peripheral mine usage – access roads, weighbridge locations and reject ore (below 54% iron content) dump sites.

"The Dempo Mining Corporation used to listen to people, take the villagers and workers into confidence, talk things over and resolve issues with the village amicably. There was a limit to what they did, they showed the village respect," retrenched fitter and mining truck owner, Nilesh Phadte (53) told Mongabay. "Now they don't waste a second to do as they wish," he adds.

Petitions flood courts

As illustrated by Phadte, Goa's erstwhile private mining regime that operated in the state prior to 2018, had been smart enough to give the local people a buy-in and stake in the industry. Not just in direct employment, understanding over land and public road use, but also sub-contracting support services like trucking, transportation, river barges, machine and raising contractors. As the old structure teeters, under the new open-auction mining regime, village after village are flooding courts and the administration with objections.

Several Pilgao farmers petitioned the Zonal Agricultural and the Collector's office for the return of their agricultural khazan fields, that were previously used as mine exit routes, dump sites, machine and office buildings and weighbridge areas, terming these as encroachments.

The village was no longer willing to tolerate mines using public roads for ore transportation, effectively blocking exit and jetty access routes, for a while.

Farmers and the Comunidade of Pilgao, approached the High Court, but were directed to file civil suits in respect of their lands. The company, meanwhile, told the courts it was willing to follow Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) laid down by the Goa government to mitigate public inconvenience, dust pollution, accidents and traffic movement. Residents however alleged that the SOPs looked perfect on paper but were not being followed on the ground.

Following the High Court's disposal of their petition in July, a tussle broke out between the company, government and village residents. The residents were forced to back down, but will continue their fight, environmental activist Ramesh Gauns told Mongabay India.

"Farmers of Pilgao have filed another writ petition before the High Court for illegal encroachment on their farmland. Police complaints were also filed in July, but no action was taken. Instead, using the police force, transportation of ore started in July, despite our complaints and has continued even in the monsoon," Pilgao Comunidade member and lawyer, Ajay Prabhugaonkar told Mongabay India.

Vedanta Ltd however has disputed this narrative. In a press release in July, the company said "Vedanta Sesa Goa is a responsible mining company committed to transparency and environmentally and socially responsible mining practices. …its activities have caused no damage to property, and all necessary checks have been put in place so that there is no inconvenience to the local community. The company utilises a traditional road, which has been in use since many decades… and is the only available route for transporting iron ore."

Challenge in National Green Tribunal

The Pilgao farmers case in the High Court for encroachment, is not the only legal battle the Bicholim Block I faces. Three petitions have been filed before the Pune Bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) against the Environment Clearance (EC) granted in January 2024 by the Central Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF).

Aside from twenty-nine standard conditions required for all non-coal mining projects, Block I's EC is contingent on compliance of twenty-five project specific conditions. It permits extraction of 3.0 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) from Block I, while the Court mandated cap for all of Goa, is set at 20 MTPA.

Stabilisation of dumps; regular maintenance of siltation ponds and catch drains to arrest silt and sediment flows from dumps;

monitoring of discharge water in upstream and downstream rivers; fugitive dust monitoring systems during transport; staggered replacement of 10.5 tonne tipper trucks with 25 tonne trucks to reduce traffic and emission load per tonne/km; water sprinklers along haul roads; peripheral and safety barrier plantations; in-house laboratories for routine monitoring of air and water quality, noise and ground vibrations during drilling/blasting; camera traps for wildlife stress reduction are some of the project specific EC conditions.

Non-government organisation Rainbow Warrior's petition before the NGT, challenges the EC on grounds that "the Environment Impact Assessment Report had completely ignored the history of mining in the region and the environmental destruction caused, while wrongly noting that the project was a greenfield project."

It said, concerns identified by the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) to curtail air pollution through an Overland Belt Conveyor for material handling, increasing efficiency of trucks had not been complied with, before granting the EC.

No Wildlife Conservation Plan had been approved by the Chief Wildlife Warden, though 29 Schedule I species were recorded as present within ten kilometres of the project site, the petition stated, adding that the Dr Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary was within this radius.

Environment clearances granted

Similar conditionalities, as laid out by the MoEF EC to Block I, have also been set out by the Goa State Expert Appraisal Committee Ltd (SEAC), while approving environmental clearance (ECs) in June 2024 to two more leases, Block III Monte de Sirigao Mineral Block granted to Rajaram Bandekar Mines Pvt (0.9567 square kilometres) and Block V Advalpale-Thivim Mineral Block granted to Fomento Resources Pvt Ltd (0.3622 square kilometres).

After the May 2024 general elections and lifting of the Election Code of Conduct, the state government has admittedly been putting the resumption of mining and the clearance of permissions, on the front burner. This followed the impetus given by the central government, and the foregrounding of the industry's stoppage during the recent hustings.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said the government was holding multi-department monthly meetings to speed up the several lengthy processes involved —- from applications for Terms of Reference (ToR), obtaining ECs, holding public hearings and several other permissions required.

In May, the SEAC granted Terms of Reference to Vedanta Ltd for production capacity of 0.5 MTPA at the Cudnem Mineral Block VII (0.7530 square kilometres). While the Goa State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA), in mid-May 2024, finalised two ToRs for conducting Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for production capacity of 0.5 MTPA by JSW Steel Ltd at its Cudnem-Cormolem Mineral Block VI (0.3851 square kilometres) and 0.33 MTPA of the Thivim-Pirna Mineral Block VIII (0.7205 square kilometres) by Odisha headquartered KAI International Pvt Ltd.

Public hearings by the Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB), for Block VI and VII will be conducted in the coming weeks in end-September and mid-October.

Mixed response to public hearings

Hearings conducted, thus far for some blocks, drew mixed reactions from village residents. Many supported a resumption, for employment and contract generation; others advocated caution and strict compliance of rules; while some argued the negative fallouts, far outweigh any gain.

"Mining has destroyed the social and cultural significance of the village. There are three mine leases in Sirigao village. Over the years, not a square metre of the village was left without significant negative impact, from water bodies to food lands, plantations and orchards to grazing lands. Creeks and ponds have been destroyed and the village faces water shortages," a local resident, Ganesh C Gaonkar, told officials at a hearing for Monte de Sirigao Mineral Block III.

Digamber K Gaonkar echoed a wide-spread feeling in the village, "There are 15 temples and 90 % of the village's houses within the lease area. They should be removed and then start mining."

This may well be impossible now.

"The lease boundaries have been retained as earlier, without removing temples and habitations, mainly because the administration thought it would benefit from central provisions that permit the transfer of ECs from one leaseholder to another," Claude Alvares of the Goa Foundation told Mongabay India.

Transportation standard operating procedures

Hundreds of truckloads per day in ore transportation and haulage from pit to jetty, via public roads and inhabited villages have been a flash point in the past and continue to plague the present. Acting on a series of public interest writ petitions and applications, mainly by 141 farmers of the Mulakh Khajan Farmers Association, in July, the High Court set out strict conditions and establishment of monitoring systems, along mining transport routes. Extending the scope of its oversight to the entire sector, it directed the DMG and GSPCB to map all the mining transportation routes and safeguards, for the state and industry.

Despite this torturous process of cranking up for an uncertain resumption, including a spate of challenges in courts at various levels, the central and state government is powering ahead with its processes.

An e-auction process for three more mining blocks in South Goa district, are currently underway on the Metal Scrap Trade Corporation Ltd (MSTC) portal. These are for the Onda Mineral Block X in Sattari sub-district (0.6173 sq km), Curpem and Sulcorna Block XI in Sangem and Quepem sub-district (0.8764 sq km), and the Codli Mineral Block XII, in Dharbandora sub-district (3.7708 sq km).

Bids for these Phase III auctions are likely to take place in December 2024, while a September pre-bid conference drew interest from across the country.

On September 30, as per a cabinet decision to modify dump handling policies, the Directorate of Mines and Geology is set to hold its thirtieth e-auction of 0.76 million tonnes of extracted ore lying at jetties, dumps, within leases and private lands outside leases.

Ore transportation through villages will resume shortly, likely in October, and test the efficacy of the new vehicle monitoring systems set up by DMG and pollution control SOPs that have been put in place.

- Pamela D'Mello

Source: Mongabay

INDIA STRIVES TO LESSEN DEPENDENCE ON CHINA FOR CRITICAL MINERALS

India is heavily dependent on China to meet the requirements of critical minerals. For example, around three-fourths of the country's requirements of lithium and lithium-ion, which are critical elements for electric vehicle batteries, are imported from China. The situation is similar in the case of other critical minerals.

Critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, graphite, and nickel, which are crucially important for various strategic sectors of the economy as well as for the transition to cleaner energy, have recently received much-needed attention in India.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Union Budget 2024-25 presented in July unveiled a plan to launch a critical mineral mission. It will have a multi-pronged approach from promoting domestic production to recycling and overseas acquisition of critical mineral assets. "Its mandate will include technology development, skilled workforce, extended producer responsibility framework, and a suitable financing mechanism," the minister announced. The mission is likely to be launched by the end of this year.

Sweeping changes in import tariffs have been introduced to boost the processing and refining of critical minerals in the country. Custom duties on 25 critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, and copper have been slashed to zero. Earlier, the import duties on these minerals ranged from 2.5 per cent to 10 per cent. Duties on graphite, silicon quartz, and silicon dioxide have been reduced from 5-7.5 per cent to 2.5 per cent.

"The government has taken the first step in the right direction realising that the dependency on China and others comes with its own attendant risks," said Arun Vishwanathan, Professor & Head, Department of Security Studies, School of National Security Studies, Central University of Gujarat.

India is heavily dependent on China to meet the requirements of critical minerals. For example, around threefourths of the country's requirements of lithium and lithium-ion, which are critical elements for electric vehicle batteries, are imported from China. The situation is similar in the case of other critical minerals. The source of critical minerals is geographically concentrated. China accounts for 79 per cent of Graphite and 60 per cent of rare earth mineral reserves. Around 55 per cent of the total lithium reserve is found in Australia while Congo has around 70 per cent of the world's cobalt reserve. The concentration level is even higher for processing, with China dominating across the board.

"We need to recognise that this is a global issue and not unique to India," said Rajnish Gupta, Partner, Tax and Economic Policy Group, EY India. "Countries that are at an advantage are firstly those who have discovered deposits with critical minerals and secondly those who have established large critical mineral processing capacity," Gupta said.

Addressing a Business 20 meeting during India's G20 presidency last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned that control of critical minerals by a few countries would lead to a new form of colonialism.

Only a few countries dominating the mineral resource exploration, refining, and processing capabilities have led to a geopolitical monopoly of critical mineral resources, said Sehul Bhatt, Director-Research, CRISIL Market Intelligence and Analytics.

Mineral exploration and battery manufacturing involve complex technology, research and development, and stringent process requirements. "Despite policy incentives, India has a relatively weak technical expertise and experience in this field," said Bhatt.

To reduce reliance on imported cells and promote domestic battery manufacturing, the government launched a Rs 18,000 crore Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme in 2021 to develop Advanced Chemistry Cells (ACC) over 5 years with a capacity of up to 50 GWh. So far 40 GWh have been allocated through bidding. "Critical minerals play a crucial role in India's strategic and economic future, particularly in ensuring national security and driving the transition to greener energy sources," said Rakesh Surana, partner, Deloitte India. "As India's economy grows, the demand for batteries, energy storage systems, and other advanced technologies will continue to rise. Critical minerals are essential in meeting this demand," Surana added.

A significant amount of lithium reserves has been discovered in different parts of the country including Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Jharkhand. Reserves of several other critical minerals have also been found.

The central government has made amendments to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, and fixed royalty rates for 12 critical minerals paving the way for private sector participation in exploration and mining in the segment. Critical minerals for which royalties were fixed earlier this year include Beryllium, Cadmium, Cobalt, Gallium, Indium, Rhenium, Selenium, Tantalum, Tellurium, Titanium, Tungsten, and Vanadium.

A joint venture company namely Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL) has been incorporated with the equity contribution from 3 Central Public Sector Enterprises namely, National Aluminium Company Ltd, Hindustan Copper Ltd, and Mineral Exploration Company Ltd to identify and acquire overseas mineral assets of critical and strategic nature.

KABIL has signed pacts with several companies and government entities in Australia, Argentina, and Chile for the exploration and mining of lithium and cobalt. India on October 4 signed an MoU with the United States to expand and diversify critical mineral supply chains. It earlier joined the US-led Mineral Security Partnership.

India on October 4 signed an MoU with the United States to expand and diversify critical mineral supply chains. It earlier joined the US-led Mineral Security Partnership

Source: Deccan Herald

INDIA NEEDS OVER A TRILLION DOLLARS IN 30 YEARS TO MOVE AWAY FROM COAL MINING AND POWER: STUDY

The primary studies were carried out in coal dependent districts of the country to understand and calculate the costs of transition, cost components and factors.

In the next 30 years, India will require more than a trillion dollars, or `84 lakh crore at current rates, to transition away from coal mining and thermal power plants, estimates a first-of-its-kind study by environmental think-tank iForest.

These costs will largely be required to close mines which produce 1,315 million tonnes per annum of coal cumulatively and to phase out coal-based thermal power plants which have a capacity of 237.2 gigawatts, said the new study.

The energy transition estimate did not include the investment cost of setting up new green energy plants and infrastructure, which alone is estimated to be in trillions of dollars. It also excluded costs of transitioning for industries such as steel and cement that use coal directly.

The other associated costs required to move away from the coal-dependent economy will include rehabilitation and repurposing of closed coal lines, using the closed mines for clean energy and crucially, supporting nearly 60 lakh workers who are dependent on the coal economy.

"The associated costs include rehabilitation and repurposing of 343,504 hectares (ha) of coal mining land, green repowering of 124,789 ha of land available at TPP (thermal power plant) sites," the iForest (International Forum for environment, sustainability and technology) report said.

The study divided the costs of transition into green energy costs and non-energy costs. Green energy costs, accounted for neatly 52 per cent of the total costs, and comprised the cost of building green energy plants, repowering existing thermal power plants through other sources of power and upgradation of the electricity grid.

About 48 per cent of the transition costs are non-energy costs such as “just transition costs”, which refers to supporting workers and communities dependent on coal to get livelihood alternatives and costs of economic diversification which can create green jobs.

Chandra Bhushan, Chief Executive Officer of iForest and one of the authors of the study told The Indian Express that primary studies were carried out in coal dependent districts — Korba, Angul, Bokaro and Ramgarh — to understand and calculate the costs of transition, cost components and factors. “The methodology is based on a case study of these districts. They were selected as in some districts, such as Angul, coal use is increasing whereas in Bokaro it is going down. The detailed cost components for transition were developed on the year-long case studies and they were then extrapolated for the entire country,” Bhushan said.

Currently, coal accounts for about 55% of India’s commercial energy requirements and coal-based thermal power plants produce more than 70 per cent of electricity. Besides, these two sectors employ a large number of workers directly and indirectly in various districts of India and also play a significant role in the growth and development of these districts.

Source: The Indian Express

A FESTIVAL OF INNER ILLUMINATION: PREPARING FOR DIWALI BY ENHANCING OUR PERSONAL VALUE...

Diwali, the festival of lights, is one of the most cherished celebrations in Indian culture and around the world. It symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil. Beyond the rituals, fireworks, and sweets, Diwali also presents an opportunity for personal reflection, growth, and renewal. As we clean our homes and prepare for festivities, it's equally important to cleanse our minds and make ourselves more valuable—not just to others but to ourselves.

Here's how you can prepare for Diwali by enhancing your personal value in various aspects of life:

1. Cultivate Knowledge and Wisdom

Diwali is associated with the victory of knowledge over ignorance, so what better way to prepare than to focus on self-education? Use this time to reflect on your goals and invest in learning something new. Whether it's reading books, taking up a new course, or exploring a skill that adds value to your profession, personal growth always starts with acquiring knowledge. As you grow intellectually, your self-worth will increase, making you feel more confident and capable.

2. Focus on Physical and Mental Health

Our health is our true wealth. As you prepare for Diwali, take steps to improve both your physical and mental well-being. Clean your body just as you clean your home—pay attention to your diet, exercise routine, and sleep patterns. Engage in activities like yoga or meditation to build mindfulness and inner peace. Physical vitality combined with mental balance enhances your value and equips you to handle life's challenges with grace.

3. Improve Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is an often overlooked but highly valuable personal attribute. It includes understanding and managing your own emotions, as well as being empathetic towards others. This Diwali, reflect on how you respond to situations and how you interact with those around you. When others feel understood and supported by you, your influence naturally grows.

4. Practice Gratitude and Generosity

Diwali is a time for giving—both materially and emotionally. Gratitude and generosity are powerful forces that can elevate your spirit and strengthen your relationships. Expressing gratitude for the things you have fosters a positive mindset and helps you focus on abundance rather than scarcity. Generosity shifts the focus from "getting" to "giving," creating a sense of fulfillment that money alone can't provide.

5. Declutter Your Life

During Diwali, people often engage in the tradition of deep cleaning their homes to prepare for the arrival of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. In a similar way, we can declutter our lives by removing distractions, bad habits, and toxic relationships.

Identify what no longer serves you—whether it's a physical object, a draining relationship, or a negative mindset—and let it go. Simplifying your life opens up space for new opportunities, positive energy, and personal growth, making you more focused and productive.

6. Enhance Financial Responsibility

Diwali is also closely associated with wealth and prosperity. It's the perfect time to reassess your financial habits and adopt smarter strategies for managing your money. Financial responsibility isn't just about earning more; it's about making the most of what you have and planning for the future. Being financially secure not only increases your self-confidence but also makes you more valuable in your household, workplace, and community.

7. Strengthen Relationships

Diwali is a time for coming together with family and friends. However, the true essence of relationships lies in the effort and care we put into them. Strengthening relationships, whether personal or professional, requires nurturing. Take the time to reconnect, apologize where necessary, and express love and appreciation to those around you. People value those who invest in meaningful connections, making it one of the most important personal assets.

8. Develop a Positive Mindset

The festival of lights is symbolic of illuminating one's inner world. A positive mindset is a powerful tool in creating a brighter, more valuable self. Developing a positive mindset requires consistent practice, but it dramatically increases your ability to overcome challenges and seize opportunities. Others are naturally drawn to people who radiate positivity and optimism, enhancing your influence and value.

9. Commit to Consistency and Discipline

Consistency and discipline are the backbone of long-term success. Just as Diwali preparations require planning and attention to detail, so does personal growth. Whether you're building a new habit, learning a skill, or improving your health, the key to real progress lies in your daily actions. The more reliable and consistent you are in pursuing your goals, the more valuable you become to yourself and to those around you.

10. Align with Your Purpose

Diwali represents a time of introspection, making it the perfect opportunity to realign with your life's purpose. Reflect on what truly matters to you—your passions, values, and long-term dreams. When you live in alignment with your purpose, every action you take holds greater meaning. It's not about chasing success for the sake of it, but about living a life that feels authentic and fulfilling.

Conclusion

Diwali is not only a celebration of external lights and festivities but also an opportunity to illuminate your inner self. By focusing on personal growth, developing positive habits, and nurturing relationships, you can make yourself more valuable in all aspects of life. As you prepare your home for Diwali, take time to prepare your mind, body, and soul for the year ahead—so you can truly shine in all areas of your life.

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