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Mineral exploration needs to increase: Union Minister Pralhad Joshi

He added that if States and Centre work together India will become a 'developed nation' by 2047.

Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Coal and Mines Pralhad Joshi has said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set an ambitious target of increasing the revenues to 2.5 per cent of GDP from the existing 0.9 per cent, excluding coal and petroleum products, in the mining sector. He was speaking at the National Mines Ministers' Conference (NMMC) here on Friday.

Addressing the delegates who included at least 11 Mines Ministers of various States and highly placed officials of Mining and allied departments from Central and State governments, Pralhad Joshi said that the goal can be achieved with the true spirit of co-operative federalism. He said that the mining contribution to the GDP is very low when compared to the developed countries. He added that if States and Centre work together India will become a 'developed nation' by 2047.

Expressing concern over the low percentage of exploration of geological and mining areas, Joshi said that India's geological exploration is 30 per cent and mines is 10 per cent.



"Australia, which is bigger in terms of geographical area, has almost completed 100 per cent exploration. When can we reach this level? It will be possible only with the cooperation and proactive involvement of officials at the ground level.

For Aatma Nirbhar Bharat, Aatma Nirbhar minerals are needed," the Union Minister said. Answering a question during the interaction with the media on the sidelines, he said, "You cannot function without mining. You need steel, cement, and things like that. "We need to focus on sustained mining without impacting the environment. Mining will con-

tinue until the existence of dharti (earth)."

Responding to another question about auctioning of mines, he said that the Union Finance Minister earlier announced to auction 500 mines and "it is our target. Already, 52 mines had been auctioned in five months." This, he said would create huge employment.

Speaking on the stocks of domestic coal and imports, the Minister said that the country has the highest ever coal stocks at the end of last month. He added that by another year, the import of thermal coal will be stopped.

Source: The New Indian Express

Mineral exploration: New India & green dreams

India is an under explored country. The journey from the National Minerals Policy 2019 up until the recently proposed amendments to the Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Act 1957 is telling in so far as the government's focus on changing this situation is concerned. The focus is essentially premised on the well-established role of the potential of the minerals sector in realizing India's dream of self-reliance. India envisions to increase mineral mining sector's share in GDP from 1.7 to 2.5%. The potential may be even more than that, provided the right policy environment.

The MMDR amendment 2021 showed promise as a harbinger of game-changing reforms

by allowing private agencies to undertake mineral prospecting operations. This may just be a start though. The current geo-political scenario rings multiple alarms around trade protectionism and mineral asset swaps around the world owing to projected astronomical rise in demand for critical minerals. The same, coupled with India's domestic demands and climate commitments leaves us poised on a razor's edge and demand a sharpening of focus. When stacked against the global exploration budget of \$11.3 Bn annually, India spends a measly and conservative \$170 Mn that is dwarfed by USA, Australia, Canada clocking spends in excess of \$ 1 Bn.

Sharpening the focus on exploration

One of the ways to sharpen this focus can be to narrow it to a special set of minerals that are critical not only from a supply chain perspective but also from the point of view of their indispensability to tools of energy transition like EVs. This set is a wide range of minerals including metallic and non-metallic minerals (as in Part C of Schedule I of MMDR Act) like zinc, copper, lead etc., rare earth minerals, along with other critical and strategic minerals like lithium, cobalt, nickel, cadmium, PGMs etc.. From an approach and manifestation



perspective, these minerals, like any other mineral, may be found as surficial deposits or as concealed deposits.

Both categories require detailed exploration but deep-seated minerals require state-of-the-art technologies and are therefore capital intensive. These mineral deposits manifest at a deeper level of more than 1 km (extending to even 4 kms as at Mponeng mine in South Africa) under the ground and run as underground veins and webs in no particular direction. It is on account of this peculiar manifestation that the exploration of such minerals becomes riskier thereby diminishing the chances of discovery. There is a sequential method to explore deep seated minerals but the method can be deployed by technologies and expertise that cost investment of the magnitude that governments across the globe avoid using the tax payers' money on.

Between 2016 – 2019, Geological Survey of India along with support from the Ministry of Mines conducted a pilot project on aero geophysics with state of art magnetic and radiometric sensors was successfully completed in 4 identified blocks. This was supposed to be followed up by detailed electromagnetic and gravity gradiometric (targets can be identified up to 3-4 km depth) but the project did not see the light of day.

After the successful completion of the pilot project, up to 8 other blocks OGP (Obvious

Geological Potential) were to be taken but progress on the same has been non-existent. These aero geophysical surveys can be a game changer for deep seated mineral deposits as has and is often witnessed in the countries of Australia, Canada, etc.

Incremental change with compounding effect

There is ample evidence to prove that no mineral rich country has developed its mining industry on the basis of government exploration in the last more than 30 years. The MMDR Act's newly inserted provision on NMET fund to propel mineral exploration commensurate with India's endowments is in clear recognition of this fact and is a step in the right direction to attract junior explorers,

who have the expertise and the technology to explore deep seated minerals. The fund, however, does not take care of the policy obstacles in exploring the mineral in so far as the exploration of the mineral still needs to go through the same check points as surficial minerals.

Even if a junior explorer or any other private player or a consortium manages the financial and technological aspect of exploring such minerals, the definition (lack of), demarcation and allocation applicable to these minerals do not factor their peculiar geology thereby maximizing the risk and minimizing the incentive for an explorer who may otherwise have the wherewithal to follow the sequential method of

discovering the deposits. An incremental change by defining, demarcating and allocating such minerals through a separate mechanism may have a compounding effect. With the recent proposal to bring out some of the atomic minerals into a special schedule in MMDR Act 1957, the government already seems to be aligned with such thought process.

While India's mining policy has for long paid greater attention to bulk minerals, it is essential that production of minerals such as those mentioned above be incentivized and ramped up to cater to the projected exponential rise in demand in the coming years. As per a financial services firm, current dependence on import of these critical minerals amounts to 14% of India's imports comprising \$8.5 Bn in deep seated minerals and another \$78 Bn in precious metals, which, by any standards would peg it as a major forex guzzler. This leaves us vulnerable to global supply chain shocks, negatively impacts our goals of an *Atmanirbhar Bharat* and effects our competitiveness in the international market. A specialized policy framework deep seated minerals will help explore a whole range of minerals critical to India's domestic growth and green dreams.

Source: Times of India

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New area limits for mining to make resource auctions attractive

The move will also prevent vast tracts of land irregularly ending up with a few miners, which would undermine the very purpose of auctioning mineral concessions through a fair and transparent mechanism

The Union government is preparing to set out area caps for mining as it aims to carve out smaller mining areas to attract more investors. The move will also prevent vast tracts of land irregularly ending up with a few miners, which would undermine the very purpose of auction

ing mineral concessions through a fair and transparent mechanism. The changes would be made through a legislative exercise where the Centre would empower itself to decide the size of mines of different minerals to be awarded by states. *Mint* examines the need for such changes and how it will help improve the investment climate and make auction process transparent.

What is the proposal on defining area limits for mineral mining?

The Ministry of Mines has proposed to fix

mineral-wise area limits for states in the statute. Under it, depending on the kind of mineral mined, states can set aside 25-400 sq. km for a prospecting licence (PL) which is to establish the presence of mineral in a given block, and 10-25 sq. km for a mining lease (ML), which allows companies to actually start mining and production for a defined period of time. The area limits will be applicable for all minerals



including iron ore, diamond, bauxite, gold, copper, limestone, atomic minerals and states will auction mines following these limits. Any changes would be permitted with only expressed directions of the Centre.

What is current regulation with regard to area limits for mining?

Section 6 of the Mines and Minerals (Development and regulation) Act, 1957 provides maximum area limits for acquiring mineral concessions by a person in respect of any mineral or prescriber group of associated minerals in a state. The limit is 10,000 sq km for reconnaissance permit (RP), 25 sq km for PL and 10 sq km for ML. The limit is for all minerals and there is no mineral wise area limit. The section also empowers Central government to increase these area limits for a particular mineral for a particular region which has been increased several times on request from the state governments. The frequent changes in area limits under this regulation distorted the entire system. The new changes would attempt to change this.

How new area limits are proposed to be fixed?

Centre proposes to amend the MMDR Act, 1957 and prescribe mineral-wise area limits in a new schedule (Seventh Schedule). This is expected to give stability to the proposed area limits and desist frequent amendments in it as certain changes would require legislative process and parliamentary approval. The new area limits have been defined based on the recommendations of a mines ministry constituted committee chaired by the Director General of Geological Survey of India (GSI) with experts from IBM (Indian Bureau of Mines).

How will the changes help improve investment climate in the mining sector?

Irregular distribution of large mining areas to companies defeating the very purpose of auction of mineral concessions through a fair and transparent mechanism. This will change will new area limits for mining. Smaller mineral areas are expected to bring in more investors into mineral blocks and help to ramp up mineral production in the country to meet the ris-

ing demand. Also, such limits are expected to give impetus to growth of the mining industry where large-scale sustainable production is imperative along with equitable distribution of natural resources.

Will the new area limits affect existing mining operations?

The new area limits are expected to be made applicable prospectively. It has been decided that area limits specified in the new schedule to MMDR Act will not be applicable for earlier PLs and MLs and where the letter of intent upon auction has been issued or reservation of mineral areas has been made in accordance with the present area relaxation but would be in violation of the proposed area limits. Such contracts will continue till the expiry of concession period or termination with area limit initially allowed. But any new concessions entered thereafter would have follow area limits specified in the Act.

Source: Mint

View: 10 steps to bolster bidder interest in India's mining sector

Synopsis

For a pointer, of the 108 mineral blocks put up for auction so far this fiscal, more than 50% have had to be annulled owing to either lack of bidding participation or getting less than the mandated minimum of three bids for a block or put on hold because of litigation.

The raft of legislative measures taken by the government over the past seven years has helped streamline the auction process for mines in the country. However, more needs to be done to bolster the mechanism and make bidding more responsive.

For a pointer, of the 108 mineral blocks put up for auction so far this fiscal, more than 50% have had to be annulled owing to either lack of bidding participation or getting less than the mandated minimum of three bids for a block or put on hold because of litigations

The amendment of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act) in March 2015 marked the adoption of auctions as a mechanism for allocation of mineral resources for prospecting as well as mining. Rules were notified under the Act, spelling out the method and process of auctioning a mineral concession by a state government

A total of 203 mineral blocks have been auctioned since then, with Odisha leading the table, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. Among minerals, iron ore and limestone constitute more than half of the blocks auctioned, followed by manganese and bauxite. A smaller number of other minerals such as gold, graphite, chromite, copper, and diamond have also been auctioned. More than 80% of these blocks are for mining lease and the rest for composite licence, which involve

exploration of the area at the first stage, followed by mining operations.

There have been several amendments to the Act and the rules in the past seven years to enhance participation in auctions and allow for a faster transition of the mining rights to the new allottee in case of an expired mining lease.

The process has gained traction in the past 3-4 years with many states joining the fray. Auction premiums have ranged from as low as 5% to as high as 452% of the sale price notified by the Indian Bureau of Mines for a mineral. Iron ore has witnessed the most aggressive bidding with average premium over 100% of its sale price.

Yet, more than 75% of the auctioned blocks remain undeveloped so far due to the larger issue of procuring statutory clearances. ↓

Other reasons for tepid bidder interest include lack of clear demarcation of the block boundary without any overlapping area with the adjacent block(s) or non-availability of area for approach roads. Also, higher auction premiums and resultant unviability have led to blocks being surrendered or terminated.

Further, despite removing the end-use restriction in participating for mineral blocks auctions, more than 80% of the resources have been obtained by end users, as they have outbid the merchant players due to the larger value chain of their business activity and by optimising their logistics costs. However, this has led to shrinking the market of merchant mining of minerals and overall higher market concentration.

In the context, the imperatives

Clearly, there is a need to undertake more extensive preparatory work prior to the auctions, whether it is for composite licence (prospecting licence cum mining lease) or direct mining lease.

First, without adequate geological data, valuation of the block and related bidding strategy tend to become speculative. Hence, to give bidders a clear idea on the quantity, quality and mine-ability of the resources, there is a need to undertake due exploration and develop the geological report as per the reporting standards notified by the central government.

Second, the block area needs to be carefully demarcated to avoid any overlap with the adjacent block area and a plan thought through to tackle issues such as presence of wind turbines or transmission lines present within the concession area.

Third, new models need to be evolved for expanding exploration — especially of strategic minerals and minerals that the country spends a lot of foreign exchange on importing — by utilising the existing National Mineral Exploration Trust more vigorously.

In view of the high risk and high cost associated with exploration, the government may introduce a cost-sharing model wherein a part of the costs incurred would be reimbursed to explorers who have completed the minimum work programme and shared the relevant data, documents and samples. This will help boost private participation in minerals such as lithium of which there are limited reserves in the country.

Currently, reconnaissance level exploration is being carried out by the Geological Survey of India. The non-exclusive reconnaissance permit for an area can be acquired through an online application with payment of applicable fees, but the rights/permit of the explorer in the area is non-exclusive and there is no system for transitioning to prospecting or mining licence in case of a successful find.

The government may pre-fix a certain percentage of auction premium that is payable upon successful exploration. The methodology for this may be notified in advance and could be based on the past premiums discovered in the auctions process.

Fourth, for the states to maximise bid participation and realise the auction premiums to augment their revenues, clearances for auctioned blocks need to be expedited. A committee at the highest level in state, with representatives from environment and forestry departments, can help the process.

Fifth, auction premiums have been unreasonably high for many deposits, especially of iron ore. While resource security can drive auction premiums higher, their unsustainability can derail the entire process and effort.

Hence, the average sale price (ASP) published by the Indian Bureau of Mines — which the auction premium is linked to — needs to be made more robust to capture the market prices correctly.

Sixth, the central government is contem

plating a national mineral index (NMI) on the lines of the National Coal Index. Clarity is needed on the role of NMI in the presence of ASP.

In general, adequate technical data, proposed scheme for tackling any surface constraints and disclosure of the status of various statutory clearances, and any litigation at the auction stage can help more prudent bidding and obviate surrender.

Seventh, from an economics perspective, the resource will go to the party that is able to place the highest value on it. In view of large quantities of the auctioned resources of minerals such as iron ore being bagged by the end users, the policymakers need to ensure that alternative supply channels such as linkages from state-owned mining corporations are available to small and medium enterprises such as sponge iron manufacturers.

Eighth, the mineral administration and reporting requirements need to be made robust to ensure arm's length transactions between the miner and the buyer, and correct capturing of the sale price that goes towards calculation of the ASP.

Ninth, in view of limited merchant sale transactions, the IBM needs to formulate alternative pricing methodologies for ASP. Further, IBM needs to publish the ASP for minerals such as the rare earth group to enable their auctioning by state governments.

Tenth, given the change in the regime of allocation of mineral concessions and the resultant preparatory work and expansive monitoring required, state governments should develop the capacity of their departments of mines and geology to administer the mining activity within the state appropriately.

Source: Economic Times

Goa opens 4 iron ore mining blocks for auction

Mining is not expected to immediately resume as the tender document specifies a successful bidder will have to first obtain forest, wildlife, and environmental clearances afresh.

The Goa government on Friday invited bidders to submit financial and technical bids for four iron ore blocks by November 21, beginning the process to resume mining halted in the state in September 2012.

Monte de Sirigao, Sirigao-Mayem Bicholim, and Kalay blocks will be the first to go under the hammer of the 90-odd for which mining leases were active when the ban came into effect. Several of these leases have now been amalgamated into blocks for auction.

November 15 is the last date for the purchase of the tender documents after payment of the fee on an e-auction platform. November 21 is the last date for submission of the bids.

In May, the government asked leaseholders,

who held possession of the 88 mining leases, to hand over their possession by June. The Supreme Court cancelled the renewals of the leases.

The Bombay High Court at Goa has reserved an order on a petition challenging the Goa government's decision to take back the leases.

Mining is not expected to immediately resume. The tender document specifies a successful bidder will have to first obtain forest, wildlife, and environmental clearances afresh.

The erstwhile Portuguese colonialists granted mining rights in 1906 to shore up state finances via a decree. The first mining concession was issued in 1929. Between the 1930s and the 1950s, 791 mining concessions were granted giving the holders rights to mine in perpetuity without any fixed tenure.

The concessions were converted into leases under the Mines and Minerals Development

Act, 1987. The tenure of the leases ended in 2007, the Supreme Court ruled while asking the government to issue fresh leases. The legacy leaseholders continue to fight their claims for valid leases in the Supreme Court.

According to the Goa Mineral Ore Exporters Association of legacy leaseholders, mining in Goa grew to 54 million tonnes annually in 2012. From 2004-05 to 2010, it nearly doubled from around 24 million tonnes to 45 million tonnes as demand for ore grew from China. In 1970, Goa's iron ore production was around 10 million tonnes annually.

The mining sector contributed roughly ₹6500 crore or 16.94% to the state's GDP and employed 19,000 employees directly out of a labour force of around 600,000 in 2010-11, a National Council for Applied Economic Research study found.

Source: Hindustan Times

Govt plans to auction 22 mineral blocks in next two months

The notice inviting tenders for the blocks were floated in September.

The government plans to auction 22 mineral blocks in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Goa in November and December. The mines to be auctioned include six iron ore blocks, three blocks each of limestone and gold, two blocks of bauxite, one block each of copper, phosphorite and glauconite, according to the mines ministry.

The notice inviting tenders for the blocks were floated in September.

While the mines in Maharashtra will be auctioned next month, those in Uttar Pradesh and Goa will be put on sale in December.

So far, more than 180 mineral blocks have been put on sale since the system of auctioning of mineral blocks began. The government started the process of allocating mineral blocks through auctions in 2015-16.

The ministry has expressed hopes of auctioning 500 mines by the end of 2024.

The Centre is aiming to increase the mining sector's contribution to the country's Gross

Domestic Product (GDP) to 5 per cent from 2.5 per cent at present.



The ministry has also notified the Minerals (Evidence of Mineral Contents) Second Amendment Rules, 2021, and the Mineral (Auction) Fourth Amendment Rules, 2021.

Source: The Economic Times

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Reckless' coal firms plan climate-busting expansion, study finds



Coal is the most polluting of all fossil fuels and investors must stop funding it, say campaigners

Hundreds of coal companies around the world are developing new mines and power stations, according to a study. The researchers said the plans were “reckless and irresponsible” in the midst of the climate emergency.

Coal is the most polluting of all fossil fuels and its use must be quickly phased out to end the climate crisis. However, almost half the 1,000 companies assessed are still developing new coal assets, and just 27 companies have announced coal exit dates consistent with international climate targets.

The new mining projects could increase the production of thermal coal, used in power stations, by more than a third, the report found. The bulk of these projects are in China, India, Australia, Russia and South Africa.

The analysis was produced by the German environmental group Urgewald, which said it was the world’s most comprehensive public database on the coal industry.

“Pursuing new coal projects in the midst of a climate emergency is reckless, irresponsible behaviour,” said Heffa Schücking, the director of Urgewald. “Investors, banks and insurers should ban these coal developers from their portfolios immediately.”

The world’s nations agreed at the UN’s Cop26 climate summit in Glasgow last November to “accelerate efforts towards the phasedown of

unabated coal”. However, the International Energy Agency said in July that coal burning was set to rise in 2022, taking it back to the record level set in 2013. The rise is due in part to

high gas prices as a result of Russia’s war in Ukraine, making coal relatively cheaper.

The IEA said in May 2021 that no new coal-fired power stations could be built if the world was to stay within safe limits of global heating and meet the goal of net zero emissions by 2050. Some progress is being made, with only 4% of new power capacity in 2021 coming from coal, down from about 30% in 2016. In contrast, 75% of new power came from renewables, which are often cheaper and increasingly challenge the economic viability of new coal plants.

Nonetheless, Coal India aims to double the amount of coal it mines to 1bn tonnes a year by 2025, according to Urgewald’s analysis, making it the biggest mining company on the list. “The coal mining rush is testament to the industry’s complete denial of climate reality. The writing is on the wall, but coal miners refuse to read it,” said Schücking.

The report found 476GW of new coal-fired power capacity is still in the pipeline worldwide, equivalent to hundreds of new power stations. If built, the projects would increase the world’s coal power capacity by 23%. China is responsible for 60% of all the planned new capacity.

Lidy Nacpil from the Asian Peoples’ Movement on Debt and Development said: “The world welcomed President Xi Jinping’s 2021 announcement that China would stop building new coal power plants abroad, but China

needs to adopt similar measures for its domestic energy system if it wants to become an actor for a 1.5C world.”

To reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050, the IEA says, all coal power plants in rich countries must be retired by 2030 at the latest and by 2040 in the rest of the world. Urgewald found just 27 companies out of 1,064 had announced such coal exit dates. Of these, most were planning to convert to gas-powered plants or sell to another owner.

“At the end of the day, we only identified five companies with coal transition plans that could be considered Paris-aligned,” said Schücking. “The vast majority of companies still have no intention of retiring their coal assets, which are propelling us towards a climate breakdown. Delaying has become a new form of climate denial.”

The US, which has the world’s third-largest number of coal plants, has not set a national end date for its coal power, unlike the UK, France and Italy. The US would need to retire 30GW of coal-fired capacity a year up to 2030 to meet the Paris climate goals, the Urgewald report said, but only 8.4GW was closed down in 2021.

Lucie Pinson, the director of Reclaim Finance, which rates the coal policies of more than 500 financial institutions, said: “Companies won’t transition unless banks, investors and insurers rapidly stop all support for the industry’s expansion and require the adoption of closure plans.” She said 190 financial institutions still have no coal policy, 272 have weak coal policies and only 28 have effective coal exit policies.

There can be no more hiding, and no more denying. Global heating is supercharging extreme weather at an astonishing speed, and it’s visible in India and beyond. Guardian analysis recently revealed how human-caused climate breakdown is accelerating the toll of extreme weather across the planet. People across the world are losing their lives and livelihoods due to more deadly and more frequent heatwaves, floods, wildfires and droughts triggered by the climate crisis.

Source: The Guardian

‘Travesty of justice’: Supreme Court fumes at delay in mining baron Reddy’s trial

Gali Janardhan Reddy is an accused in the illegal mining case being probed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) since 2009.

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said that the 12-year delay in proceeding with the trial against former Karnataka minister Gali Janardhan Reddy in a serious offence involving illegal mining amounts to a “travesty of justice” and demanded a report from the trial judge on why the matter has not proceeded despite a clear direction from the top court a year ago to expedite the trial.

“Not to proceed further with the trial with respect to very serious offences alleged cannot be permitted and it is nothing but a travesty of justice,” said a bench of justices MR Shah and Krishna Murari.

“It is very unfortunate that the trial in CC No. 1 of 2012 pending before the Principal Special Judge for CBI cases, Hyderabad ... has not proceeded further even after a period of 12 years,” the bench said, posting the case for the next hearing on September 20.

Reddy is an accused in the illegal mining case being probed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) since 2009.

The bench also ordered the top court’s registry to call for a report in a “sealed cover” from the

judge concerned to know the stage of trial and the reason why the trial hasn’t proceeded.

The court was considering a CBI request to restore the bar on Reddy’s entry into Bellary. When the top court granted bail to Reddy in January 2015, it had barred him to stay from Bellary in Karnataka and neighbouring districts of Ananthpuram and Cudappah in Andhra Pradesh. This bar was lifted at his request by the court on August 19, 2021. By the same order, the court specifically directed the trial to be expedited.

On Wednesday, however, CBI told the Supreme Court that there had been no further progress in the trial. Additional solicitor general (ASG) Madhavi Divan, appearing for CBI, told the court that one of the witnesses filed a complaint on September 2 that he is being threatened by Reddy.

In an affidavit filed last week, CBI told the top court, “The hearing of the matter before the trial court is abnormally delayed due to the petitions being filed by the accused persons from time to time.” Besides Reddy, there are eight other accused facing trial in the case which include former ministers and bureaucrats.

Citing the September 2 complaint of intimidation faced by a witness in the case, CBI said,

“If this court directs the accused to stay in Bellary relaxing the bail conditions, there is every reason to apprehend that accused would intimidate and create a sense of insecurity among the witnesses in this case.”

Senior advocate Ranjit Kumar appearing for the petitioner told the court that during the period of bail, he visited Bellary several times but not once did the police report any threat or intimidation faced by witnesses.

The bench remarked, “That is because Bellary is your hometown. Police will not report against you. CBI is the complainant in this case.”

Following the SC order of August 2021 granting Reddy permission to enter and stay in Bellary, CBI is seeking cancellation or withdrawal of the order citing threat to witnesses and delayed trial. In addition, CBI has also urged the court to direct the trial court to decide the matter at the earliest by setting a time frame for completion of trial.

Reddy was arrested in this case in September 2011 and CBI filed its supplementary charge sheets, the latest one being filed in April 2014. Reddy claimed that the investigation in the case had been completed and opposed CBI plea to keep him outside Bellary.

Source: The Hindustan Times

Govt auctions 10 commercial coal mines; Jaiprakash Power Ventures, Vedanta among successful bidders

The Ministry had launched the auction for commercial mining under the second attempt of the fourth tranche of CMSP Act & the MMDR Act as well as the fifth tranche of CMSP Act & MMDR Act on March 30, 2022, Coal Ministry said in a release.

Mines explored

Seven coal mines are fully explored, while 3 mines are partially explored. The total geological reserves for these 10 coal mines are 3,445.76 million tonnes with a cumulative Peak Rate Capacity (PRC) of around 39.31

mtpa, it added. The mines are spread over Maharashtra, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh.

Auctions

On Day 1 (Tuesday), eight coal mines were auctioned of which five mines are fully explored and three are partially explored. Their total geological reserves are 2157.48 MT and the cumulative PRC for these coal mines is 19.31 million ton per annum (MTPA).

The successful bidders of these mines include Jaiprakash Power Ventures, Avassa Ferro

Alloys, Madhya Bharat Minerals and Jhar Mineral Resources.

On Wednesday, the second day of the auction, mining conglomerate Vedanta was the winner of two coal mines. Both the mines are fully explored. The total geological reserves are 1,288.28 mt, while the PRC is 20 mtpa.

Commercial mining

Under the commercial coal mining auction

process, a total of 57 coal mines, including these 10 mines, have been successfully auctioned till date with a total cumulative PRC of 140.75 mtpa.

With operationalisation of these mines the private sector will have a significant share in

domestic coal production and dependency on imported coal will reduce. The commercial auctions will generate a huge revenue to the government treasury and will help in the social development of the population surrounding the coal bearing areas.

Last month, Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi said that in the near future more than 107 coal blocks will be made available for auction.

By 2030, India's coal requirement will be 1.5 billion tonnes.

Source: The Hindu Business Line

Coal India to sell around 90 mt coal through e-auction route

The state-owned miner has been earning close to ₹4,400-4,500/tonne on sale through e-auction route this year

Coal India Ltd is expecting to sell close to 80-90 million tonne (mt) of coal through e-auction platform this year at an average premium of around 300 per cent over the notified price backed by higher demand and surge in international coal prices. While in volume terms, it may be marginally lower than the total sales through e-auction registered last year, the realisations are expected to be much higher due to the huge premium over notified price.

The state-owned miner has been earning close to ₹4,400-4,500 a tonne on sale through e-auction route this year as compared to the average realisation of around ₹1,400-1,500 a tonne through FSA (fuel supply agreement) route. It had earned a premium of around 30 per cent over the notified price (or close to ₹1,570 a tonne) same period last year.

Better profitability

It is to be noted that a higher sale through auction route would help the company garner better profitability as the average price realisation on e-auction is usually better than the sale through FSA route.

According to Pramod Agarwal, Chairman and Managing Director, CIL, sale through e-auction route might get curtailed if the demand of power increases substantially. However, as production starts picking up in the coming months and the anticipated drop in demand from power sector moving forward would help push up e-auction volumes.

“E-auction price in the first quarter was around ₹4,340 and we sold close to 20 million tonnes.

I don't have a figure right now, what is the quantity we have auctioned in Q2, but I presume that this trend of about 20 to 25 million tonnes will continue throughout the year and we will end the year with about 80 million to 90 million tonnes of e-auction coal. But this depends how the demand for the power comes up. If the demand of the power increases substantially, then our ability to do the e-auction reduces to that extent. Price as of now is still very high, and in certain cases, we are getting about 4,500 or even 300 per cent of premium. So, about this range will be maintained if it does not increase further. But at least this range will be maintained for e-auction price as well,” Agarwal said in the latest analyst transcript.

Demand from power sector to moderate

CIL is allowed to auction up to 20 per cent of its coal production through e-auction and it typically sells close to 16-18 per cent of the volume as it has to give priority to the power sector. Whenever demand from power sector goes up, its sale through e-auction platform reduces.

However, Agarwal was hopeful that the e-auction volume will increase in coming



months with the demand of the energy sector going down as has been the trend usually. The demand for power goes down in October, November and December months and with that, requirement of coal also goes down. The average stock at power houses has also improved to close to 28-29 mt as compared to same period last year when it was around 10-12 mt.

“This extra 16 mt will give them a lot of leverage and this will help us in giving coal to non-power sector also and this is not likely for next few days, perhaps the stock may go down. But after that, in October onwards or after 20th of September, the stocks of the power houses are unlikely to go down. That's whatever the trend we have seen, but nobody can say or confirm because it depends a lot on the monsoon condition and the temperature also. So, that is the situation. So, e-auction volume should increase in the coming months,” he said.

Author: Shobha Roy

Source: The Hindu Business Line

Why India needs to secure its critical minerals supply chains

Critical minerals are mineral resources, either primary or processed, which are essential for the production processes of an economy and for the national security of the country.

During the 26th session of the Conference of Parties, India committed to meeting half of its electricity requirements from renewable sources by 2030 compared to a quarter today, reducing the economy's carbon intensity to less than 45% cent in 2030 compared to 2005 levels, and achieving the net-zero emissions target by 2070. Achieving these goals would require a sharp ramp-up in the deployment of green technologies, including solar panels, wind turbines, and electric vehicles. Minerals, including cobalt, copper, lithium, molybdenum, nickel, and rare earth elements, play a critical role in the manufacture of these requisite equipment.

Critical minerals are mineral resources, either primary or processed, which are essential for the production processes of an economy and for the national security of the country. Their supplies may be disrupted due to a lack of availability or unaffordable price spikes. Additionally, these minerals lack substitutes and have low end-of-life recycling rates, which increases their supply risks. The geographic concentration of mining and processing of the minerals may also adversely impact their availability – particularly if they are mined or processed in only one or a handful of countries. While many of these critical minerals are mined in Australia, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, and South America, much of the processing of these minerals take place in China. For example, three-fifths of rare earth minerals, essential for clean energy, electronics, and defence technologies, are mined in China, while more than fourth-fifths are processed there.

While India is endowed with and produces over 85 minerals, some of the required critical mineral assets for the country's manufacturing sectors (particularly of green technologies) are not yet ready to be mined. There are also some critical minerals of which there exists no known resources within the country. To secure these minerals for the manufacturing sector, India would need to develop trade agreements

and supply chains with other mineral-endowed countries.

Currently in India, a joint venture of three Central Public Sector Enterprises, Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL), is taking charge of ensuring mineral security through facilitating supply chains, mine asset acquisitions, and G2G collaborations. A notable achievement of KABIL was the signing of an MoU between the Indian and Australian governments for co-operation in the field of mining and processing of critical minerals. However, much more must be done to secure India's global mineral supply chains, including the private sector involvement.

Other countries have recently taken sizeable steps to securing their mineral supplies. The multilateral Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) was announced in June 2022, with the goal of bringing together countries to build robust critical minerals supply chains needed for climate objectives. Involved in this partnership are the United States (US), Canada, Australia, Republic of Korea, Japan, and various European countries. While India is not included, it would be desirable to participate in such multi-country dialogues.

This is especially important in the context of recent global geo-political factors adversely affecting critical minerals supply chains, starting with the Covid-19 pandemic and followed by the Russia-Ukraine war. These supply chains may also be impacted due to a country's trade policies. One example is Indonesia – host to the world's largest nickel reserves – which has banned the export of raw nickel ore, as they seek to develop a domestic nickel processing industry. Another example is China, which has recently explored reducing the exports of certain rare earth minerals required in the manufacture of some defence equipment. India must strategise policies now to overcome potential challenges arising from likely supply chain disruptions.

Many countries, including the US, Japan, China and the European Union, have periodically assessed the criticality of various minerals specific for their respective needs and contemplated the price and risk mitigation mechanisms. However, India lacks in making similar

periodic assessments and being battle-ready regarding supply resilience of critical minerals.

A recent study by the Centre of Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) assessed the criticality levels of select 23 minerals for India's industrial sector, with a focus on the future needs for green technologies manufacturing. It highlights that India shall require much higher quantities of critical minerals for manufacturing electric vehicles and renewable energy technologies (solar panels, wind turbines, and hydroelectric turbines). These minerals include copper, indium, manganese and zinc for the manufacture of renewable electricity generation equipment, and increasing quantities of cobalt, copper, lithium, and rare earth elements for the manufacture of electric vehicles and the battery storage needed to balance a more renewables-intensive electricity grid.

On the domestic front, India can do much more in bringing out more critical mineral mining assets for production, including more focused exploration and increasing the number of mining assets brought out for auction. There is a proposed amendment to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 which would empower the government to auction mining concessions of certain critical minerals, which were previously only allowed to be mined by government companies. While domestic mining may not be enough for the large quantum of minerals needed for green technologies manufacturing, their import dependencies can be lessened. This would also bring in more jobs and boost the economy with intersectoral linkages to the manufacturing sectors, which is especially beneficial as some of the most impoverished people in the country are living above vast quantities of valuable mineral resources. However, of course, increased mining and processing must not come at the expense of environmental and social obligations.

India must take lessons from other advanced economies on how they are planning to secure their mineral needs and attempt to join multi-



national fora on assuring critical mineral supply chains – or use existing partnerships, such as Quad and BIMSTEC, to foster such dialogues. There must also be top-level decision making within the government to strategise on

how to create vertically integrated supply chains of green technologies manufacturing, or we may be in serious danger of missing out on our climate change mitigation targets.

Source: The Hindustan Times

The article has been published by Rajesh Chadha, senior fellow at Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) and Ganesh Sivamani, research associate, CSEP

As government reconsiders ban, Adani forays into beach sand mining

Industry sources say the entry of cash-rich corporate giant Adani Group into the sector is the strongest indication that the Union government is likely to revoke the existing ban on private players in beach sand mineral mining.

The Union government has proposed to revoke its 2019 ban on private entities mining beach sand minerals even as Gautam Adani's Adani Group registered two new companies dealing with the same minerals. The world's fourth richest man, whose investments range from media and telecom to coal and cement, is all set to step into the beach sand mining (BSM) industry to process and sell titanium dioxide, ilmenite, rutile, garnet, sillimanite, and leucocoxene.

In February 2019, the Narendra Modi government cited national security as a reason for keeping private players out of the extraction of these minerals which are used in the production of atomic energy. The total ban on export and beach sand mining by private companies was hailed as a visionary step toward safeguarding the strategic interests of the country.

In an apparent U-turn, on May 25 this year, the Ministry of Mines drafted a proposal to allow the return of private companies into the sector by amending the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1975 (MMDR Act) and invited suggestions/comments from various stakeholders including Union ministers, state governments, mining companies and the public. The consultation ended in August this year, and the amendments are expected to be tabled in Parliament as early as in the Winter Session.

A month before the government circulated the draft for public consultation, on 14th and 27th of April, the Adani Group informed Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) about the incorporation of two wholly owned subsidiaries named Alluvial Heavy Minerals Limited in Andhra Pradesh and Puri Natural Resources Limited in Odisha that would process and manufacture beach sand minerals, especially titanium dioxide (TiO₂).

Sources in the mining industry say the entry of a corporate giant like the Adani Group is the strongest indication that the Union government is likely to revoke the existing ban on private players in beach sand mineral mining.

Ministry of Corporate affairs documents with TNM show the objectives of the two new Adani companies are: "To carry on in India or elsewhere in the world, all or any industry, trade, importing & exporting of all type of goods, infrastructure developments including the business to develop and operate the coal & other minerals mines and blocks including development, processing of minerals, TiO₂ Slag manufacturing, Pigment manufacturing, titanium sponge & metal manufacturing, monazite processing, selling heavy minerals including, but not limited to Ilmenite leucocoxene, rutile, zircon, garnet, sillimanite, rare earth minerals processing, manufacturing and production of rare earth Chlorides, oxalates/carbonates, oxides, metals, manufacturing and production of sintered and bonded permanent magnet and sales thereof and operation of coal & other minerals blocks as contractor or subcontractor or in any other form and to prospect for, explore, mine, quarry, benefit-

ciate, develop, derive, discover, excavate, dredge for, open, work on mine, win, purchase, crush, polish, smelt, manufacture, process, generate etc."

Curtailing state's powers?

Importantly, the proposal also seeks to give the Union government the power to auction mining leases for these minerals, which have been the domain of state governments so far. State governments are designated owners of all the land in their respective territories. Meaning, states have primacy in the control of their natural resources and they play a significant role in auctioning mineral blocks and issuing of mining licences to private companies, after obtaining clearance from the Ministry of Mines.

If this proposed amendment goes through, state governments fear that they will lose their exclusive rights to issue mining licences and the move is being seen by critics as an attempt to curtail the powers of state. This could deepen the growing discord between the state and central governments and create a federal crisis. The proposed amendments are not only seen as an attempt to usurp the powers of the State government's but also a threat to national security.

It remains to be seen how the Modi government pushes the legislation through considering a majority of beaches are located along peninsular India in opposition ruled states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

According to industry insiders, if these proposed changes in the MMDR Act take shape,

smaller players who are involved in beach sand mining will not stand a chance. “Big corporations will have access to all the mines,” a source said.

The Premature termination of mineral concessions in TN

Following the ban on beach sand mining in 2019, the Union government instructed the state governments to terminate the mineral concessions granted in favour of private firms to mine beach sand minerals.

According to industry insiders, all private mining leases for beach sand minerals were terminated by the state governments with ‘retrospective effect’, barring a few mining leases where the companies approached the courts and got it stayed. Some of the private beach sand mining companies were granted leases for 30 to 50 years in states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Odisha.

According to a Tamil Nadu government Industries Department document related to premature termination of mining concession available with TNM, “In view of the amendment made to Schedule-I of the Atomic Minerals Concession Rules, 2016, and as requested by the Central Government in its order dated 01.01.2019, the State Government has to pass orders for premature termination of mining leases held by private parties/companies in Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Kanyakumari and Tiruchirappalli Districts.”

Illegal Beach Sand Mining in Tamil Nadu

In 2013, a major controversy erupted after allegations of large-scale illegal sand mining was reported in Thoothukudi district. The then Chief Minister J Jayalithaa ordered a probe and suspended the beach sand mining activity in the state. Seventy one large beach sand mining quarries

operating in Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari, Trichy and Madurai districts came under the scanner for illegal mining.

Later, a PIL was filed in the Madras High Court alleging collusion between bureaucrats and politicians in allowing illegal mining in southern Tamil Nadu. The petitioner alleged that due to the nexus between officials and private miners the state exchequer had suffered a loss of several lakh crores. The Madras High Court appointed senior advocate V Suresh as the amicus curiae and in his status report the amicus curiae had pointed out that about 90 lakh tonnes of beach sand had been illegally mined from 412.99 acres in Thoothukudi district.

In 2017, the Satyabrata Sahoo Committee which was appointed by the Madras High Court reported a mismatch of 69 lakh tonnes of minerals stocked and quantum declared by the leaseholders. However, the matter is still pending in the Madras High Court.

In April 2022, when the matter came up for hearing in the Madras High Court, the Ministry of Mines said that the matter related to regulation and controlling of illegal mining lie within the domain of the state government and the responsibility of preventing illegal beach sand mining is with the Tamil Nadu Government.

In this backdrop, the Modi government is likely to open up beach sand mining for private players once again. This time around, the likely entry of the Adani Group into the industry has raised eyebrows within the industry.

Beach sand minerals consists of several minerals such as ilmenite, rutile, zircon, garnet, sillimanite, monazite and leucoxene. In 2016, the Ministry of Mines made an amendment to Part B of the First Schedule of the MMDR Act and included beach sand minerals into the atomic min

eral category. Among these minerals monazite is an atomic mineral from which nuclear fuel thorium is extracted. Thorium, a strategic metal which is the primary source for India’s three-stage nuclear power programme.

The MMDR Act classifies minerals under three categories: A, B and C. Part A consists of Hydrocarbons or Energy Minerals. Part B consists of Atomic Minerals and is not open to private players. Part C consists of Metallic and Non-metallic Minerals.

Now, the Ministry of Mines proposes to create a new category or Part D for ‘Critical and Strategic Minerals’, and shift eight minerals from Part B to Part D. The minerals include Beryl and other beryllium-bearing minerals; Lithium-bearing minerals; minerals of the “rare earths” group containing Uranium and Thorium; Niobium bearing minerals; Titanium bearing minerals and ores such as ilmenite, rutile and leucoxene; Tantalum-bearing minerals; Zirconium-bearing minerals and ores including Zircon; beach sand minerals, that is, economic heavy minerals found in the teri or beach sands, which include ilmenite, rutile, leucoxene, garnet, monazite, zircon and sillimanite.

The new Adani companies want to process and sell heavy minerals including Ilmenite, rutile leucoxene, garnet, zircon, sillimanite; develop and process monazite; and process rare earth minerals.

The notification calling for public comment says the reason for the proposal is that the minerals are “technology and energy critical, have uses in the space industry, electronics, information and technology and communications, energy sector, electric batteries and the nuclear industry and are critical in net zero



emission commitment of India.” The government argued that the country is dependent on imports for most of these important commodities. These minerals have high economic importance and considerable supply risk due to geo-political uncertainties.

The curbs on illegal mining of beach sand minerals

In an attempt to curb illegal mining of beach sand minerals, the Union government undertook a series of measures from 2015 to 2021 under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In 2015, significant changes were made in the MMDR Act to regulate the mining industry. One notable move was to introduce an auction for allocation of all mineral concessions and empower the Union government to make separate rules for regulation of atomic minerals.

On July 11, 2016, the Ministry of Mines introduced the concept of “Threshold Value”, in order to ‘protect and conserve’ atomic minerals, by making changes in the Atomic Mineral Concession Rules 2016 (AMCR-2016). Through this

amendment, private companies were barred from mining beach sand if the threshold limit for the presence of monazite in a given beach was above 0.75 per cent.

In 2018, the Union government reversed its policy on exporting beach sand minerals by private firms. The Directorate General of Foreign Trade issued a notification imposing a ban on private players exporting beach sand minerals and decided that the export of beach sand minerals will be channelised only through the public sector undertaking Indian Rare Earths Limited (IREL).

However, on February 20, 2019 the Union government imposed a blanket ban on private companies engaged in beach sand mining. According to the Government of India, the decision to this effect was taken to “ensure complete government control over Monazite and Zircon occurring within the beach sand minerals”.

The Ministry of Mines amended the Atomic Mineral Concession Rules 2016 by bringing down the threshold value

from 0.75 to 0.00 for the presence of beach sand minerals like Ilmenite, rutile, leucoxene, garnet, monazite, zircon and sillimanite. The amendment put an end to mining of beach sand by private players along the Indian coastline, and mining operations can only be carried out by central and state government undertakings.

Further, in order to keep a check on illegal mining, the MMDR Act was amended and penal provisions were added.

Speaking to TNM, environmental activist G Sundarrajan pointed out that the increase in sea erosion due to climate change and human activity including mining will result in displacement of fishermen from the coastlines. “The entire issue of climate change is threatening our beaches. On the one hand, India is addressing the COP-26 summit in Glasgow offering ‘Panchamrit’ to the world, and on the other side you say you are going to mine the beach minerals. This move by the Union government reeks of nepotism. This will destroy the environment,” he said.

Source: The News Minute

GMDC conducts critical geological research at Ambaji Base-Metal Reserve

The reserve will also meet the demand for EV adoption in developing and developed markets, progressively reducing India’s reliance on copper imports.

Gujarat Mineral Development Corporation (GMDC), a prominent mining PSU entity and the country’s largest lignite supplier, has initiated geological research and on-ground design for mineral exploration activities over 1400 Ha area in and around the Ambaji mining lease in North-Eastern Gujarat.

The Ambaji Base-Metal Reserve is vital and strategic in addressing the predicted global copper deficit of up to 5 million tonnes by 2030-35. The Ambaji site is projected to feature a large Polymetallic deposit with trace levels of precious metals, increasing GMDC’s footprint in base metals and demonstrating the company’s commitment to broadening its mineral portfolio.

The reserve will also meet the demand for EV adoption in developing and developed

markets, progressively reducing India’s reliance on copper imports.

According to preliminary geological investigations, the Ambaji deposit is intrusive-based massive sulphide type (IHMS). The IHMS deposits are significant sources of base metals such as lead, zinc, and copper, as well as trace quantities of precious metals such as gold and silver.



Within the present drilling study scope, the reported resource at Ambaji is anticipated to be around 6.28 million tonnes with nearly 10% total metal content

(Copper, Zinc, and Lead combined).

While the resource model data is being prepared, the type of mineralization suggests that there is a strong likelihood of

resource augmentation, which will contribute to "AatmaNirbhar Bharat" with long-term growth.

Source: [Indiainfoline](http://indiainfoline.com)

SWASTHA

A GEMCOKATI EMPLOYEES INITIATIVE

Walking in nature daily: Unbelievably enhances wellbeing

Tune in to sounds, sights, and sensations.....

Right from the time we get up in the morning, most of us today throughout the world intentionally or unintentionally tune in to the most inseparable part of human existence, ever recorded in history –our electronic communicating devices. It's now rightly called a universal epidemic.

Each and everyone are gifted equally with 24 hours a day, not a second less or more, from the most privileged to the most underprivileged.

Sparing few minutes each day with Mother Nature keeps us connected to our roots and origin, thus enhancing our overall wellbeing irrespective of our circumstances, of course considering exceptional situations.

Most of us feel overwhelmed by always being "on" on social media, as it continuously bombards us with threats, political uncertainties, destructive impact of climate change on our future generation's lives, the risk of nuclear war, and also not forgetting the looming possibility of more covid variations.

Get away from these ever-present realities a bit and remind yourself of the value of simply being alive—and possibly hopeful—in these times.

Steps you can take, for even brief moments, by immersing yourself into the natural world by tuning into kinds of experience that enhance

your life. They are supported by research showing, that any amount of time spent outdoors increases wellbeing, calm, and a sense of connection with something larger than your own conflicts and concerns.

Get up from your computer, exit your office or home, and go outside, wherever you are. Take a walk. You don't need to find a park, necessarily, or a trail through the woods. Just walk anywhere that surrounds you with nature to some degree.

- Listen to the – SOUNDS

Focus on hearing the sounds that surround you as they come and go.

Just take in and enter into the multitude of sounds that occur as you walk along. It can be birds chirping, people's conversation, water flowing nearby, morning bells and so on...

Open yourself to hearing all the sounds that always surround you outside but that you've probably tuned out or ignored. Experience what you have eluded till date due to the constant internal sounds swirling around in our heads.

- See to the – SIGHTS

Look at all the things you see as you stroll along, but now really "see" them. Shift your vision. See the leaves on a tree, flowers, birds, the height of trees, variety of the flora and fauna. Look at each and everything in detail. Don't just look but see the specific features

and reflect on the marvelous creations.

- Feel to the - SENSATIONS

Open yourself to feeling the air and atmosphere that flows over you, the warmth or pleasantness of the weather around.

Feel the experience of sunlight flooding over your body as well as your bodily movements along the path.

A study from the University of Mannheim found that people who experience that sense of oneness with the universe show higher levels of life satisfaction, overall.

Another study from the University of British Columbia assessed how participants responded to spending even a bit of time in nature. Just some time outside allows for greater inner calm; it contributes to more focused, creative responses to everyday life.

Connection with nature pulls you away from attachment to external validations of your self-worth. It helps free you from what you believe will bring you fulfillment, such as money, power, and recognition. Being in nature, pulls you towards feeling more unity with life in all its forms; towards valuing human connection, the capacity for love, and appreciation of just being alive. So, tune in to the frequency of Mother Nature's gift of wellbeing.

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