

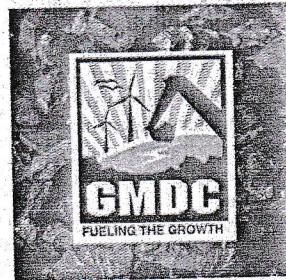
GMDC to spend ₹900 crore on first underground copper mine in Gujarat

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State-run Gujarat Mineral Development Corporation (GMDC) is planning to spend ₹900 crore on developing its first underground copper mine in North Gujarat. Expected to come up near the temple town of Ambaji and a sloth bear sanctuary, the company expects to commission the mine in the next three years.

"This will be the only copper mine to be developed in the country in the near future. It has more than 7 lakh tonnes of reserves, which primarily consist of copper, zinc and lead. Our exploratory drilling and sampling have revealed the presence of gold and silver. These base metals occur together," Roopwant Singh, Managing Director, GMDC, told *businessline*.

"We are currently solving the technical challenges.



Given the nature of the deposits and its proximity to Ambaji town and Balaram Ambaji sanctuary, we have to undertake underground mining operations, which are fairly challenging and need extensive planning. It will be our first underground mine," said Singh. GMDC is one of the largest lignite producers in India. The proposed mine, spread over 184 hectares, is located about 3 km from Ambaji town.

GMDC plans to on-board agencies from Australia and South Africa that have the ex-

perience to develop underground mines. "The proposed underground copper mine is expected to come up at a depth, which will be on a par with the Hindustan Zinc mines at Zarwar in Rajasthan," the IAS official added.

Concentrator plant

The metals found in the mining concentrate extracted from the mine will be separated in a concentrator plant set up near the mine. The extracts will then be sold to entities in the smelter business.

GMDC got this asset in 1973. A pilot plant set up in the 1990s never progressed to commercial production. The testing plant, which operated for 10 years, was closed after it failed to make the necessary downstream tie-ups.

A recent geo-magnetic survey conducted by GMDC revealed that the mineral concentration of copper reserves near Ambaji is more than 11.5 per cent of the total ore.

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