

PARLIAMENT QUESTION: MINERALS FOUND IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

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The referred matter is a statement made by Secretary General of ISA before media and press in an event during February 2023 at Gujarat Maritime Law University, Gandhinagar. Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) being the nodal agency for deep sea mineral exploration have two seabed mineral exploration contracts with the International Seabed Authority (ISA) in the Indian Ocean. The first seabed exploration contract for Polymetallic nodules (PMN) was signed in 2002 for exploration in an allocated area of 75000 sq. km in the Central Indian Ocean Basin and another for exploration of Polymetallic Sulphides (PMS) in the South-West Indian Ocean Ridge signed in 2016 in an allocated area of 10,000 sq. km.

PMN contains precious metals like copper, nickel and cobalt and PMS contain valuable metals like copper, zinc, lead, iron, silver and gold etc. Ministry has only undertaken survey for PMN mineral resource estimation in 75,000 sq. km contract area allocated by ISA. Based on the survey and exploration, Ministry has estimated nodules present in the contract area as 366 million metric tons (MMT). The grade of the nodules in our contract area contains Copper 1.09%, Nickel 1.14% and Cobalt 0.14%. In the PMS contract area location of active and inactive sulphide vents are identified. The seabed mineral exploration activities are executed following an approved plan of work by ISA under the contracts covering survey & exploration, environmental impact assessment, technology development for mining and metallurgical extraction process. Presently, the seabed mineral activities regulated by the ISA is limited to exploration stage only.

The PMN and PMS exploration activities are regularly reviewed by the expert committees formed by the Ministry. The deep-sea mining is not permitted as of now, as the regulations for exploitation of seabed mineral resources has not yet been finalised and adopted by ISA.

This information was given by Dr. Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology, Earth Sciences, MoS PMO, MoS Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, Department of Atomic Energy and Department of Space, in an oral reply in the Rajya Sabha today.

NKR/PSM/AV

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