

## National Network

## GSI strikes gold in Rajasthan, across 25 km

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**JAIPUR, MARCH 8** The Geological Survey of India (GSI) has struck huge reserves of gold ore in Rajasthan's Banswara district. While the commercial viability of mining these is being evaluated, GSI claims the reserves can yield gold worth more than Rs 5,500 crore.

"Nearly 250 lakh tonnes of gold ore is embedded in a 25-km stretch across the tribal district," GSI deputy director-general (western zone) PC Bakliwal said. The GSI, which estimates that 95 tonnes of gold can be mined from the area, found these reserves after 12 years of excavation in Bhukia and Jagpura regions of Banswara.

"Preliminary findings in 1992-93 had indicated presence of good-quality reserves here. After years of digging, we have narrowed down our search to nine blocks where the mineral quality is extremely good," he said. Rocks in this belt, the GSI said, date back to the pre-protozoic age, which ended 1,500 million years ago. "Inherently, gold is embedded in such rocks," said Bakliwal.



Internationally, such deposits are considered commercially viable if more than 2 gm of gold can be extracted from every tonne of ore. "The Banswara reserves can yield between 2.5 and 6 gm of gold per tonne," Bakliwal said. It's based on this arithmetic that the GSI arrived at its 95-tonne estimate.

Minister of Mines and Forests Laxmi Narain Dave told *The Indian Express* that the state government would soon announce its plans on tapping the reserves.

Rajasthan has reasons to be gung-ho about the find, which follows the discovery of crude oil in the Thar Desert. Like the Thar, which is likely to see a lot of development because of oil fields, the government is hoping Banswara, a backward tribal area, benefits from its newfound natural wealth. Bakliwal said the area could become the focus of gold mining in India as reserves in southern India have been depleted.

However, mining the ore may not be easy. Much of the area falls under forest land, where mining is not allowed. Initial findings by Hindustan Zinc Limited also indicate the ore contains large quantities of other minerals like copper, which makes extraction of pure gold difficult.

"Several MNCs have shown interest after they heard of the GSI findings. Many others have applied for mining licences. We are weighing our options," official sources said.