SECL leads India in Scientific Mine Closure, Transforming abandoned Mines into Sustainable Community Assets

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South Eastern Coalfields Limited (SECL) has emerged as India's leader in scientific mine closure, having successfully completed the scientific closure of 28 abandoned mines, the highest among Coal India subsidiaries. The company accounts for 67 per cent of all abandoned mines scientifically closed in the country, while 25 mines were scientifically closed during FY 2025-26, the highest achieved by any organisation in India in a single year.

At SECL, mine closure is regarded as an integral stage of the mining lifecycle rather than the conclusion of mining activity. Once coal extraction is complete, the focus shifts to securing the site, restoring the landscape and preparing the land for productive future use through scientific reclamation and repurposing.

Of the 54 abandoned mines identified for scientific closure, SECL completed the closure of three mines during FY 2024-25 and 25 mines during FY 2025-26. The company has set targets to close 11 mines in FY 2026-27 and the remaining 15 mines in FY 2027-28, completing the scientific closure of all identified abandoned mines in phases.

To strengthen planning and stakeholder participation, District Mine Closure Advisory Committees (DMCACs) have been constituted across all 10 operational districts in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

Scientific mine closure at SECL involves securing abandoned mine workings through permanent sealing of underground openings, demolition of redundant infrastructure, treatment of subsidence areas, installation of safety measures, land reclamation, plantation and ecological restoration. Reclaimed land is subsequently assessed for productive reuse to support renewable energy, community infrastructure, livelihoods and environmental conservation. The company is currently implementing eight mine repurposing projects.

Among its major initiatives, the Kenapara Eco Park at Bishrampur has already been completed on reclaimed mine land. At Vivek Nagar UG, a 5 MW solar power project integrated with an Eco Park is under implementation. SECL has also commissioned 20 MW solar power plants at Bhatgaon and Bishrampur, while a 40 MW solar project at Pinoura UG is under implementation. In addition, a 55 MW solar power project at Jamuna UG and Govinda UG has been planned, extending the productive use of reclaimed mine land for renewable energy generation.

Several scientifically closed mines have also been repurposed into public infrastructure. At Korba 3&4 UG, reclaimed mine land has been integrated into the Bal Vihar Higher Secondary School campus. North Jhagrakhand UG now supports a public park and a water filter plant, while a former service building at Subhash Incline has been repurposed into a municipal water filter plant. At South Jhagrakhand 5&6 UG, a

former mine service building has been converted into a CISF Post, while South Jhagrakhand 10&11 UG has been developed into a public park. Banki 7&8 UG now houses a health centre and a weekly market, while Banki 5&6 UG has been developed as a community centre.

Environmental restoration remains central to every mine closure project. At Chachai UG, nearly 35,000 saplings have been planted following the sealing of mine openings and demolition of obsolete structures. Dense plantations have also been developed at sites including Ramnagar UG, Korea UG and Malga UG, while naturally regenerated vegetation has been preserved at Rajgamar 8&9 UG and Pure Chirimiri UG to support ecological recovery.

Alongside environmental restoration, SECL has organised skill development programmes and health camps across reclaimed mine areas. Training has covered computer education, tailoring, handicrafts, mushroom cultivation, pickle making and other livelihood activities for project-affected communities.

The company is also promoting sustainable livelihoods through productive utilisation of reclaimed mine land and mine water bodies. Pisciculture initiatives are expected to support annual fish production of 25 tonnes, generate 206 livelihoods and provide a potential annual income of ₹3 lakh per participating family.

Future repurposing proposals include eco-tourism, pisciculture, poultry farming and masala processing at Jamuna OC; honey processing, turmeric cultivation and cage culture at Baiga OC; and a training centre, compressed bio-gas (CBG) plant and fruit-bearing plantations at Banki UG, based on local conditions and future land-use requirements.

SECL Chairman-cum-Managing Director Harish Duhan said scientific mine closure represents the responsible completion of the mining lifecycle and reflects the company's commitment to sustainable mining.

"At SECL, mine closure is not the end of mining but the beginning of a new chapter. Our objective is to restore land, protect the environment and convert reclaimed mine areas into productive assets that generate clean energy, support livelihoods and serve local communities. Every scientifically closed mine reflects our commitment to responsible mining and sustainable development," Duhan said.

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