

Global tenders for sapphire extraction in Jammu and Kashmir

The Jammu and Kashmir government will float global tenders for the extraction of sapphires from mines in Doda district's Paddar in the next few weeks.

The mines have been closed for the past 17 years because of continuing violence in the state.

'Now things have changed. We are going to float global tenders for extraction of sapphire from the mines,' Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad told IANS here Monday. He said he hoped the tender process would be over before March, and the extraction would start by April.

A new system of tendering would be adopted this time. Besides advertisements in leading newspapers, the tenders would be put on the government website as well as delivered in person to embassies of countries like South Africa, which have interest and expertise in the extraction of precious stones.

Paddar, which is situated at more than 8,000 ft, is an impoverished area despite huge deposits of sapphires, known as 'neelam'.

All efforts to extract the stone have been futile with governments failing to woo business houses and contractors to work in the area, which faces severe wintry conditions and is prone to militant violence.

But Azad, who hails from Doda, is keen to get jobs for locals and also bring prosperity to the region.

'Our resolve is firm. We want to put this area on the world map, first through global tenders for sapphire mines, and then for extraction of sapphire. Paddar sapphires are of world class quality,' Azad said

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