

OPERATIONS

The woman leading the world's largest zinc producer

Mining Magazine spoke to Hindustan Zinc's chairperson, Priya Agarwal Hebbar

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Priya Agarwal Hebbar with employees at Hindustan Zinc | Credits: Hindustan Zinc

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On the occasion of [International Women's Day](#), *Mining Magazine* spoke to Hindustan Zinc's chairperson, Priya Agarwal Hebbar, about her experience as a woman in mining's C-suite.

We explored how the group is dismantling the "unconscious bias" that often stalls women's progress, despite record-breaking hiring milestones in STEM.

We also spoke about the company's pivot from being a traditional [zinc producer](#) to a leader in precious metals and rare earths.

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Q: Vedanta is targeting 35% women in STEM roles, and 50% across the board. What hurdles are you still fighting to ensure these women reach senior roles?

Vedanta currently has almost 23% women. Hindustan Zinc's women representation is over 25%, among the highest in global mining. And this is just the beginning for us. The biases today are often subtle rather than explicit. Assumptions about mobility to [remote locations](#), perceptions around life-stage continuity and stereotypes about operational intensity still exist. We address this through leadership acceleration programmes, structured mentorship, transparent succession planning and site-level infrastructure redesign.

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Representation at entry level is important. But the real benchmark is progression to decision-making roles. Good work sees no gender.



In India, advancing women's participation in mining requires navigating social norms, safety perceptions, infrastructure gaps, and deeply ingrained stereotypes about heavy industry. Mining sites are often remote, shifts can be demanding, and cultural expectations still shape career decisions for many women. Our approach has been systemic rather than symbolic. We have invested in gender-inclusive infrastructure, safe accommodation, secure transport, skill development, and policies that support long-term career continuity. But the most powerful change comes from visibility — when communities see women operating heavy machinery, leading smelter operations, and serving in underground rescue teams, perceptions begin to shift. The transformation must occur both inside and outside the company.

Q: Women have long played an important role in informal and small-scale mining in the country - how does this translate into larger scale, formal mining?

Women's participation in informal and small-scale mining has historically been substantial yet undervalued and unprotected. Transitioning that participation into formal mining changes the equation fundamentally. Formalisation brings structured training, rigorous safety standards, equal pay frameworks, social security benefits, and clear career pathways. Across our operations, women are integrated into core operational roles, technical functions, and leadership pipelines. This shift transforms invisible labour into recognised expertise. It moves participation from survival-driven engagement to aspiration-driven careers. In doing so, we are not only creating opportunities — we are restoring dignity, ensuring safety, and building a more inclusive industrial ecosystem that reflects India's true potential.

Q: In terms of redistribution, what steps does HZ take to ensure that their operations benefit communities?

For us, mining must create shared value beyond the life of the asset. Community development is integrated into our operational model. We invest in education, healthcare, women-led self-help groups, livelihood programmes, youth skilling and agricultural productivity enhancement.

Our approach focuses on measurable, scalable interventions that build long-term economic resilience. Redistribution is not philanthropy; it is responsible value creation. The wealth generated from natural resources must contribute to inclusive development. As India advances toward Viksit Bharat and a clean energy future, mining has the responsibility to drive sustainable and inclusive progress — and that remains central to our commitment.

Q: Silver now contributes nearly 44% of HZL's profits. With your goal to reach 2,000 tonnes of silver annually, how is this shift fundamentally changing HZL's

generation electronics. As decarbonisation accelerates globally, its strategic relevance will only deepen. Our ambition to reach 2,000 tonnes annually is about scale, yes, but it is also about meeting the national need. It reflects our confidence in our integrated mining-to-metal model, our operational excellence, and our ability to maximise value through advanced recovery technologies. [Hindustan Zinc](#) is moving decisively beyond its zinc and silver legacy to evolve into a multi-metal, future-ready enterprise, one that is poised to meet India's growing demand for critical minerals as a national priority.

Q: You recently secured HZL's first rare earth and potash blocks. How will these new ventures differ operationally from your traditional base metals core?

Securing our first rare earth and potash blocks is a strategic expansion in line with our vision of meeting India's critical mineral demand. Unlike traditional base metals, rare earth elements demand highly specialised separation technologies, advanced processing capabilities, and deeper integration with [downstream industries](#) such as clean energy and electronics manufacturing. Potash, on the other hand, connects directly to food security and agricultural productivity, areas that are equally critical to India's long-term resilience. Operationally, this means building new technical competencies, investing heavily in R&D, forging global technology partnerships, and ensuring efficient environmental stewardship.

Q: You've been vocal at Davos about India needing US\$1.7 trillion in mining investment. How is HZL modelling the "circular economy" to prove to global investors that mining can be truly sustainable?

Scale and sustainability must move together. Investors today look for long-term resilience, and that requires embedding circularity into core operations.

At Hindustan Zinc, we are advancing a circular economy framework by maximising metal recovery rates, reprocessing tailings, enhancing by-product value such as silver, and steadily integrating renewable energy into our operations. We are also focused on [water stewardship](#) and resource efficiency to reduce environmental intensity across the value chain.

This shift moves mining away from a linear extract-use-dispose model toward one that continuously regenerates value. For global investors, this is not conceptual, it is measurable through operational efficiency, lower carbon intensity and improved resource utilisation. Mining can be both responsible and profitable, and we are demonstrating that these objectives reinforce one another.

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