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31/12/2018 at 10:15 by Jan Bex

A first for our country: Indians invest 26 million in a factory that will make synthetic diamonds



The Indian company Heyaru Engineering wants to expand its site in the Lommel Kristalpark in five to ten years into the largest diamond factory in Europe, with 120 to 150 employees.

(PHOTOGRAPH: RAYMONDLEMMENS)

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The Indian company Heyaru Engineering is investing 26 million euros in a company that will make synthetic diamonds in Lommel.

Flanders supports the investment with 2 million euros. This was announced by Flemish Minister of Economy Philippe Muyters (N-VA) this weekend. Heyaru has the ambition to expand its site in Lommel over the next five to ten years into the biggest 'diamond factory' in Europe. An investment of 262 million euros, good for 120 to 150 employees in the long term. The proximity of Antwerp, where all the diamond expertise is, almost certainly played a role in the decision of the Indians.

A diamond factory. It sounds paradoxical for a noble mineral that has been extracted from the subsoil for many centuries with hard labor.

The hardest material on earth is nothing more than pure carbon, albeit formed after a long

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geological process under high pressure and high temperatures. And yet it is true that man can also make diamonds. In two ways: imitating the natural process under high pressure (press machines), or by allowing the layer after layer to condense carbon- laden gas heated in microwave ovens.

Make diamond is still young. In Flanders even completely new. "Only 2 percent of natural diamonds have the necessary hardness needed to be used in industrial and technological applications such as optics, telecommunication or energy. Synthetic diamonds therefore fill an important gap there II, says Minister Muyters in his communiqué.

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More pure

'When you look at the purely chemical composition, synthetic diamonds are exactly the same as natural diamonds, 'says Ken Haenen, professor of physics at UHasselt. Haenen has been studying synthetic diamonds with her colleagues at the Institute for Materials Research (IMO) for 21 years.

"Synthetically made diamonds can be even purer than what one gets from the earth. The brilliance of the jewel naturally comes from the sharpening of the rough diamond. But diamond has high-tech applications in addition to its jewelery and polishing function.

Diamond can thus be the ultimate material to switch electricity from high-voltage lines to 220 volts. Diamond can also be very useful for quantum technology - although additional research is needed.

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Diamond factories already exist. In Myanmar, China and the United States there are diamond companies, mainly for the jewelery market. Anyone who says diamonds in Belgium does not say Lommel yet, but Antwerp, the worldwide hub of the diamond trade. "In recent years we have seen more companies coming to Europe that make synthetic diamonds," says Margaux Donckier, spokesman for the Antwerp World Diamond Center. "Antwerp has been the world leader for diamonds for 570 years. Here is the expertise. We mainly trade natural diamonds. The share of synthetic diamonds in it is negligible. Although that share is likely to rise in the coming years. Because Antwerp also focuses on innovation. In May, for example, we launched a first automatic grinding machine. That can also be the coming years. Because Antwerp also focuses on innovation. In May, for example, we launched a first

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automatic grinding machine. That can also be perfect for synthetic diamonds. This too must first be sharpened first. I suspect that the proximity of Antwerp is one of the reasons why this company chooses Belgium. The only question is: do you want to make diamond diamonds or do you choose industrial applications?



(PHOTO: TOM PALMAERS)

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'Largest in Europe'

The question has been asked. What kind of diamond will Heyaru Engineering make in Lommel? Vikram Shah, the representative of Heyaru Engineering in Belgium: "In the first three years our focus in Lommel will be on synthetic gem diamonds, on synthetic jewel diamonds. In the longer term - but discussions are ongoing - the ambition is to further explore the possibilities of synthetic diamond for quantum computers and sensors together with IMO-IMOMEC, the collaboration between IMEC and UHasselt. One of the reasons that we come to Lommel is indeed the diamond research at UHasselt. But Limburg itself also has a lot to offer: there are many opportunities for innovative and sustainable production processes. With, among other things, the investment company LRM as a partner, the solar park in the Kristalpark with 90 megawatts is important to us. That way, the electricity we need will be sustainable," says Shah.

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"The signal from Flanders, which will support us with 2 million euros, is of course also important. We will be the first diamond making company of that size in Europe. In the first phase an investment of 30 million dollars (26.2 million euros), good for 12 to 15 employees. But in the longer term, in five to ten years, we want to multiply that investment to 300 million dollars (262 million euros). That means work for 120 to 1 50 people. "

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Solar Park

The arrival of the company is also crucial for the development of Kristalpark III. A 300 ha industrial park where with 300,000 solar panels the largest solar park in the Benelux is under construction. Jeroen Bloemen, spokesperson for LRM: "With Heyaru the first company that needs a lot of energy and will make use of the solar park will come. In a manner of speaking, they have a very large electrical outlet. It proves that our choice for sustainable energy at Kristalpark III, which LRM develops together with Lommel, has been the right choice. "Will LRM enter into a partnership with Heyaru? Jeroen Bloemen remains cautious: "It is in any case a company where we may participate."