



ISSUES IN ILLEGAL COAL MINING - GS III MAINS

Q. Why is India vulnerable to illegal coal mining? How do illegal coal mining impacts Indian population and environment? Discuss (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Three choke to death inside illegal coal mine in Gujarat*

What's in the news?

- Three labourers died of asphyxiation at an illegal coal mine in Gujarat's Surendranagar district.

History of Coal Mining in India:

1. Nationalization Phases:

- Coal mining was nationalized in two phases: coking coal in 1971-72 and non-coking coal in 1973.

2. Central Legislation:

- The Coal Mines (Nationalization) Act, 1973, governs coal mining eligibility.

3. State Responsibility:

- Illegal mining is a law-and-order issue, making state governments responsible for addressing it.

4. Persistent Issue:

- Despite nationalization, illegal mining remains prevalent due to high coal demand and local economic dependence.
- For example, recent incidents include worker deaths in Gujarat, Jharkhand, and West Bengal, highlighting ongoing illegal mining activities.

Reasons for Illegal Coal Mining in India:

1. High Coal Demand:

- Coal meets 55% of India's energy needs, often outstripping legal supply, prompting illegal mining.

2. Poverty and Unemployment:

- Coal-rich areas often face poverty and unemployment, driving locals to illegal mining.

3. Weak Regulations:

- In remote areas, inadequate monitoring and resources lead to weak enforcement of mining regulations.



4. Coal Mafias:

- Illegal mining is often controlled by “coal mafias,” supported by local authorities, as seen in multiple cases.

5. Political Support:

- Allegations suggest political leaders support illegal mining.
- For instance, in Assam, BJP leaders were accused of backing illegal operations.

6. Economic Dependency:

- Local economies depend on mining, making illegal operations lucrative once legal mines close.

Impacts of Illegal Coal Mining:

1. Lack of Safety Equipment:

- Workers often lack helmets, masks, and other safety gear, leading to fatalities from toxic gas inhalation, as seen in the Surendranagar incident.

2. Structural Risks:

- Illegal mines lack proper support, causing landslides, as occurred in Jharkhand and West Bengal.

3. Toxic Exposure:

- Miners face high levels of toxic substances like lead and mercury, increasing health risks.

4. Untrained Workers:

- Many workers are untrained, lacking emergency response skills.

5. Operator Negligence:

- Exploitation and negligence by mine operators worsen the danger.

6. Revenue Loss to the State:

- Revenue loss due to the illegal mining of coal and resource depletion.

WAY FORWARD:

- Regular monitoring with the help of technology like Drone based monitoring and surveillance.
- Strict action and impose huge penalties on coal mafias.
- Transparent auctioning without political influence.
- Saturation approach in schemes, particularly in underdeveloped areas. So that the people won't see the illegal unregulated coal mining as a lucrative job.



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Go back to basics:

Coal Sector in India:

- Fifth-largest coal reserves in the world and stands as the second-largest consumer of coal.
- All India Production of coal during 2023-24 was 997.25 MT.
- Occurs in rock sequences mainly of two geological ages, namely Gondwana and tertiary deposits.
- About 80 percent of the coal deposits in India is of bituminous type and is of non-coking grade.
- Over 97 percent of coal reserves occur in the valleys of Damodar, Sone, Mahanadi and Godavari.
- Gevra coal mine of Chhattisgarh became the largest coal mine last year.(Earlier Jharia was the largest coal field).

