

Date: 26 July 2024

Illegal Coal Mining

(The Hindu, 26-07-24)

On July 13, three workers died of asphyxiation inside an illegal coal mine in Gujarat's Surendranagar district

- In June 2023, three people, including a ten-year-old child, were reportedly killed after an illegal mine collapsed in the Dhanbad district of Jharkhand.
- Similarly, at least three people were killed in October 2023 after a coal mine collapsed during illegal extraction in West Bengal's Paschim Bardhaman district.

Why is illegal coal mining rampant in India?

According to the Ministry of Coal, illegal mining in India is mostly carried out in abandoned mines or shallow coal seams in remote or isolated places. Several factors contribute to illegal coal mining in India.

- The high demand for power in India translates into a **high demand for coal**, which often outstrips the legal supply, prompting illegal supply.
- Many areas that are rich in coal are also situated close to homes for populations struggling with **poverty and unemployment**, which contributes to illegal mining in these areas.
- In remote areas, mining regulations can be weak due to **inadequate monitoring** and lack of resources, leading to weaker enforcement.
- Illegal coal mining also allegedly receives **tacit support from political leaders** in areas where it is prevalent, making it difficult to curb.

Why do so many workers die in illegal coal mines?

- The lack of safety equipment and protocols
- Exposure to toxic gases like carbon monoxide
 - The miners in the Surendranagar incident also died of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Unsafe working conditions prone to cave-ins and landslides
- Exposure to harmful substances like lead and mercury
- Untrained workers lacking knowledge of risks and emergency procedures

Why do governments struggle to cut down illegal coal mining in India?

- Since it is a law and order issue, the Union government often shifts the blame to State authorities.
- The high demand for coal as a fuel makes illegal mining rampant and challenging to control.
- Local economies in many areas depend on mining, and once official operations run their course, illegal mining takes its place to support the local community.
- The legal framework governing mining is complex, which can possibly lead to bureaucratic hurdles and inefficiency in governance, allowing illegal mining to exist.

Can you answer the following question?

Examine the socio-economic and regulatory factors contributing to the persistence of illegal coal mining in India. Suggest comprehensive measures to address this issue.

The 'geo-calculus' of the Moscow visit

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What was the significance of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Russia?

- First bilateral trip in Modi's third tenure
- Occurred two years after the start of the Ukraine war
- Signaled a shift in India's assessment of the conflict
- Drew criticism from Ukraine and the United States

How has India's stance on the Ukraine conflict evolved?

- India now views the conflict as likely to result in a frozen status quo
- The joint statement referred to the conflict "around Ukraine" rather than "in Ukraine"
- India has consistently abstained from UN votes criticizing Russia
- New Delhi has shown reluctance to support Ukrainian requests beyond humanitarian aid

What geopolitical messages did Modi's visit convey?

- Prioritized meeting Putin over attending the SCO Summit with Xi Jinping
- Demonstrated India's desire to keep Russia from aligning too closely with China
- Asserted India's strategic autonomy amid growing U.S. partnerships in the Indo-Pacific
- Reminded global partners that India has diverse strategic options and asserted its "freedom of choice"

How does the visit impact India-Russia economic relations?

- Focused on geo-economic strategies to circumvent Western sanctions
- Aimed to sustain the recent growth in bilateral trade (from \$5-10 billion to \$65 billion)
- Explored new payment mechanisms for oil imports
- Discussed cooperation in Russia's Far East and the Chennai-Vladivostok maritime corridor
- Considered mutual investments in energy sectors

Can you answer the following question?

Analyze the strategic and economic implications of Prime Minister Modi's recent visit to Russia. How does this visit reflect India's evolving foreign policy approach in the context of the Ukraine conflict and changing global dynamics?

