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Q6

"Inspite of adverse environmental impact, coal mining is still inevitable for development". Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2017 · GS I · 10 marks · Natural Resources and Industries

Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian sub-continent); factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India).

Core demand of the question

- "Inspite of adverse environmental impact, coal mining is still inevitable for development". Discuss
- Cover energy mix, industry, regional jobs, environmental harm, and cleaner transitions
- Keep the explanation within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Coal still backs Indian electricity and several heavy industries.

Mine belts depend on royalties and jobs, which ties regional development to the pit.

Open-cast and burning cause forest loss, pollution, displacement, and carbon.

Inevitability is about the present energy mix, not a permanent licence.

Washing, norms, reclamation, and a just shift to other power must cut the harm.

Flow diagram

Coal mining -> Power steel cement jobs
 Coal mining -> Forest water air CO2
 Power steel cement jobs -> Present development
 Renewables storage -> Lower coal share
 Forest water air CO2 -> Lower coal share

Conclusion

- Keep coal for residual baseload and hard-to-abate industry while closing the worst mines and plants first.
- Fund alternative livelihoods in coal belts so development does not mean only more extraction.

Coal mining remains hard to drop overnight because power, steel, and regional fiscs still run on it. Development that ignores the environmental bill is false development; the honest path is a time-bound, cleaner, smaller coal role, not a denial of either harm or present need.

Facts & figures

Thermal baseload

Coal plants that can run when variable solar and wind are low.

Jharia coal fires

Long-burning seam fires in Jharkhand that show the human and land cost of the coalfield.

Singrauli and Talcher

Major mining and pit-head power belts with heavy forest and pollution stress.

Coking coal

Metallurgical coal still used in conventional steel-making.

Just transition

Policy idea that coal-belt workers and states need new livelihoods as plants close.

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