

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF COAL

RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 3394
ANSWERED ON 23.03.2026

NEGLECT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS IN COAL MINING

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Will the Minister of COAL be pleased to state:

- (a) the justification for ongoing large-scale forest diversion and displacement of tribal communities to meet coal production goals, often overriding environmental clearances;
- (b) whether the Sustainable Development Cell has adequate authority and capacity to enforce environmental safeguards; and
- (c) the impact of such policies on India's commitments under climate change accords?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE FOR COAL AND MINES
(SHRI SATISH CHANDRA DUBEY)

(a): The requirement of forest land diversion for coal mining arises from the inherent, site-specific nature of coal deposits, which are often located beneath forested areas. As such, some degree of forest diversion becomes unavoidable to meet the country's energy security needs. However, this is not undertaken indiscriminately. All such activities are carried out under a stringent regulatory framework, including the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and the EIA Notification, 2006.

The process of approval for forest diversion involves multiple layers of scrutiny to ensure that environmental concerns are adequately addressed. Conditions such as compensatory afforestation, implementation of wildlife management plans, and scientific mine reclamation are mandated as part of project clearances. These measures are aimed at mitigating ecological impacts and ensuring long-term environmental sustainability.

At the same time, due importance is accorded to the rights and welfare of tribal communities. Compliance with the Forest Rights Act, 2006 ensures recognition of individual and community forest rights, including the requirement of Gram Sabha consent prior to project approvals. Mining projects are planned in a manner that minimizes displacement to the extent possible.

In cases where displacement is unavoidable, project-affected families, including tribal communities, are provided compensation and comprehensive Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) benefits in accordance with prevailing laws and policies. These include provisions for housing, livelihood support, employment opportunities, and development of civic

infrastructure. Additionally, coal companies undertake extensive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives to support socio-economic development in mining-affected areas.

(b): Sustainable Development Cell (SDC) of the Ministry of Coal, primarily plays a facilitative, advisory, coordinative and monitoring role. It guides and supports Coal and Lignite Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) in planning and implementing environmentally sustainable activities, such as afforestation, bio-reclamation of mined-out areas, efficient utilisation of mine water and overburden, development of eco-parks/ recreational parks, and adoption of energy efficiency measures, and regularly reviews their progress.

Enforcement of statutory environmental safeguards, including compliance with environmental and forest clearances is being done by the coal companies and is regulated by the concerned statutory authorities like MoEF&CC, SPCBs, CPCBs, CGWA, etc., under applicable laws. The Environment Departments of the coal companies along with Sustainable Development Cell (SDC) play a coordinating cum implementing along with advisory role in promoting environmental safeguards, monitoring compliance, and integrating sustainability practices in mining operations.

(c): While coal continues to play a critical role in meeting the country's energy demand, efforts are being made to progressively reduce the environmental footprint of coal mining and promote sustainable practices. Key measures include:

- i. **Ecological Restoration:** Large-scale afforestation, biodiversity conservation, and scientifically designed mine closure plans are undertaken to restore ecological balance in mining-affected areas. Reclaimed mine lands are increasingly being repurposed for productive and green uses.
- ii. **Emission Reduction:** Adoption of cleaner mining technologies such as blasting-free methods, coal beneficiation, and first-mile connectivity systems helps reduce dust, transportation emissions, and overall carbon intensity of operations.
- iii. **Renewable Energy Integration:** Significant emphasis is being placed on the development of solar power projects in mined-out areas. There is also a long-term strategic push to scale up renewable energy capacity, supporting India's transition towards a cleaner energy mix.
- iv. **Statutory Compliance:** All mining operations adhere strictly to Environmental and Forest Clearance conditions, ensuring minimization of land degradation, efficient water management, and compliance with emission norms.
