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Coking Coal Notified as a Critical & Strategic Mineral

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In News: The Government of India has notified **Coking Coal** as a **Critical and Strategic Mineral** by including it in **Part D of the First Schedule** of the *Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957*.

What does this Notification Mean?

- Coking coal has been shifted from the **general coal category** to a **high-priority strategic category**.
- It grants the mineral **special legal and regulatory status**, enabling:
 - Faster approvals and clearances,
 - Improved ease of doing business,
 - Accelerated exploration and mining, including **deep-seated deposits**.

Legal and Institutional Framework

Governing Law

- **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act)**

Key Legal Provisions Used

- **Section 11C:** Empowers the Central Government to notify critical and strategic minerals.
- **Section 11D(3):** Ensures that **royalties and auction premiums accrue to State Governments**, even when auctions are conducted by the Centre.

Strategic Rationale Behind the Move

1. Import Dependence & Forex Drain

- India imports nearly **58 million tonnes** of coking coal annually.
- Around **95% of the steel sector's requirement** is met through imports, leading to significant foreign exchange outgo.

2. Steel Sector Vulnerability

- Coking coal is indispensable for the **blast furnace route** of steelmaking.
- The notification supports the **National Steel Policy target of 300 MT steel production by 2030**, shielding it from global supply shocks and price volatility.

3. Exploration of Deep-Seated Deposits

- Strategic status encourages:
 - Private sector participation,
 - Advanced exploration technologies,

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- Faster development of difficult geological reserves.

About Coking Coal

What is Coking Coal?

- Also known as **Metallurgical Coal**, it is a specific grade of bituminous coal.
- When heated in the absence of oxygen, it converts into **coke**, a hard and porous material essential for steelmaking.

Why is it Critical for Steel?

- Acts as:
- A **fuel**,
- A **reducing agent** (removes oxygen from iron ore),
- A **structural support** in blast furnaces.

India and Coking Coal: The Paradox

Resource Availability

- Estimated reserves: **~37.37 billion tonnes**
- Major belts:
- **Jharkhand** (Jharia, Bokaro),
- **West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh**

Key Challenges

- Insufficient domestic production.
- **High ash content** in Indian coking coal.
- Legacy mining issues:
- Underground fires,
- Land subsidence.
- Limited geological data and land acquisition hurdles.
- Inadequate coal washing (beneficiation) capacity.

Government Initiatives to Address Constraints

1. **Mission Coking Coal**
 2. **100% FDI** under automatic route in commercial coal mining
 3. **Revenue-sharing auction model**
 4. **First Mile Connectivity (FMC) Projects** (39 projects)
 5. Emphasis on coal beneficiation and technology adoption
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