



Mains Practice Question

Q. From 'rat-hole mining' to 'open cast mining', India has witnessed major mining disasters. The main reason behind these calamities is the unscientific, illegal and unsafe mining in India. As and when such disasters are in the news, the incumbent governments and administration address it at the immediate level. But there is indifference to providing sustainable solutions which frequently causes such disasters. After such calamities, an administrative tendency has also been observed which puts the blame on victims. The tacit consensus of the government and administration to unsafe mining activities in India and the attraction of miners are mainly linked to revenue and employment realization. But such activities also lead to widespread loss to the public exchequer and environmental degradation. Therefore, there should be a holistic preparedness to prevent such calamities and to comprehensively cope if they occur.

- a. Identify the underlying ethical issues in the above case.
- b. As competent authority, discuss some of the feasible strategies to prevent and combat such calamities. (250 words)

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In December 2018, 15 miners got trapped in an illegal "rat hole" coal mine in the Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya. The mine was flooded with water from the adjacent river, leaving the miners stranded inside the mine. No one survived this manmade disaster.

(a) There are many ethical issues involved in the above case:

- **Ecological issues:** Despite various environmental organisations flagging issues of unsustainable mining in hilly areas, no real efforts have been made to address this issue.
- **Child Labour and Trafficking:** Majority of the workers involved in 'rat-hole' mining are children. They are suited for this job because of their small anatomy that fits small mine tunnels. Rat-hole mining has encouraged child trafficking apart from engaging with immigrants from many states and even from the neighbouring countries Nepal and Bangladesh.
- **Corrupt officials:** Police officials often collaborate with mine owners in states where the open cast mining and rat hole mining are the norms.

(b) As competent authority, the following strategies can be taken up to prevent and combat such mining disasters:

- Sustainable mining as mandated by the new mineral policy should be comprehensively implemented to ensure safe operation of mines together with the minimum risk to health.
 - States with most mining-related deaths (Rajasthan, Jharkhand) should get priority attention for safety improvement.
- Independent committee should be appointed to look into all the issues related to mining disaster especially miners- politicians-administrators nexus under whom illegal mining thrives.
- Activities of mining mafia should be controlled through strict monitoring.
- Regular raids/checks should be conducted by security personnel and static security pickets including armed guards during the night hours should be deployed at pithead depots.
- Rat holes created by illegal mining should be filled up with stone and debris wherever possible. Concrete walls should be erected on the mouth of the abandoned mines to prevent access and

illegal activities in these areas.

- Those working in mines should be given proper gear and their working hours and condition should be regulated.
- Alternate job opportunities should be created to divert the unemployed people from going towards hazardous mining industry.

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