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CURRENT AFFAIRS

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Date –05-April 2025

ARMED FORCES (SPECIAL POWERS) ACT (AFSPA) STRENGTHING INDIA'S INTERNAL SECURITY

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) announced the extension of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) for another six months in parts of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland, starting Tomorrow. In Manipur, AFSPA will continue in all districts except for those under the jurisdiction of 13 police stations in five districts – Imphal West, Imphal East, Thoubal, Bishnupur, and Kakching. The state has been grappling with ethnic violence since May 2023. The law has also been extended in eight districts of Nagaland and parts of five others, while in Arunachal Pradesh, AFSPA applies to Tirap, Changlang, Land ongoing districts, and certain areas in Namsai district.

WHAT IS AFSPA?

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1958 is a law enacted by the Parliament of India that grants special powers to the Indian armed forces to maintain public order in "disturbed areas." It is primarily aimed at addressing insurgency, internal disturbances, and threats to national security in regions where the civil administration is unable to function effectively.

ARMED FORCES (SPECIAL POWERS) ACT (AFSPA) PROVISIONS

1. Section 3: Declaration of Disturbed Area: The Governor, UT Administrator, or Central Government can declare an area as "disturbed" through a notification in the Official Gazette.
2. Section 4(a): Use of Force: Armed forces can use force, even lethal, against individuals violating laws or bearing arms unlawfully.
3. Section 4(b): Arrest Without Warrant: Permits arrest of individuals without a warrant based on reasonable suspicion of unlawful activity.
4. Section 4(c): Search Without Warrant: Enables armed forces to search and seize property or premises without a warrant for expediency in operations.
5. Prohibition of Assembly: Prohibits gatherings of five or more in disturbed areas to prevent riots or unrest.
6. Section 6: Legal Immunity No legal proceedings can be initiated against armed forces personnel without Central Government approval.
7. Deterrence Mechanism: Intended to serve as a deterrent against insurgency and anti-national activities, especially in border regions.

8. Six-Month Periodic Review (SC Directive, 1997): The Supreme Court mandates that disturbed area status must be reviewed every 6 months.

ROLE OF AFSPA IN STRENGTHENING INTERNAL SECURITY

1. Tackling Insurgency in the Northeast: Enabled major operations against groups like NSCN-IM and ULFA, reducing insurgency in Assam and Nagaland.
2. Restoring Order in Jammu & Kashmir (since 1990): Helped suppress militancy from groups like Hizbul Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Taiba.
3. Quick and Decisive Action: The law provides operational freedom to act swiftly without procedural delays—vital in counter-insurgency.
4. Securing Border Regions: AFSPA aids in controlling cross-border terrorism and smuggling, especially along the India-Myanmar and India-Bangladesh borders.
5. Protection for Armed Forces: Section 6 immunity allows personnel to act in high-risk zones without fear of litigation.
6. Stability for Civil Administration: By reducing insurgency, AFSPA helped states like Assam and Tripura conduct elections and restore governance.
7. Curbed Drug Trafficking: Operations under AFSPA in Manipur have disrupted trafficking from the Golden Triangle.
8. Reduction in Violence: According to MHA data, insurgency-related incidents in the Northeast fell by 80% between 2014–and 2020.

ISSUE WITH ARMED FORCES (SPECIAL POWERS) ACT (AFSPA)

1. Human Rights Violations: 1,528 alleged fake encounters in Manipur (2000–2012) per SC; seen as widespread misuse of power.
2. Lack of Accountability: Section 6 makes prosecution of armed forces nearly impossible without Central approval, leading to impunity.
3. Alienation of Civilians: Continuous military presence fosters fear and resentment, especially among youth in conflict zones.
4. Prolonged Enforcement: AFSPA has remained in Nagaland since 1958, yet insurgency persists, showing limited effectiveness.
5. SC Criticism (2016): In the Extrajudicial Execution Victim Families Association case, SC said, "Excessive use of force is not justified".
6. Mental Health Impact: Reports of trauma, PTSD, and anxiety among civilians due to militarization of civilian spaces.
7. International Condemnation: Groups like Amnesty International and UNHRC have criticized AFSPA as a violation of international human rights norms.
8. Undermining Federalism: Central imposition of AFSPA without state consent (post-1972 amendment) raises questions on federal principles.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Phased Withdrawal: Gradually lift AFSPA from peaceful regions—as done in Tripura (2015) and Meghalaya (2018).
2. Jeevan Reddy Committee (2005): Recommended repealing AFSPA and replacing it with a more humane, rights-based law.
3. Institutional Oversight Mechanism: Establish an independent grievance redressal body to investigate alleged abuses.

4. Restrict Immunity Clause: Amend Section 6 to ensure judicial oversight over decisions to prosecute.
5. Regular Review of Disturbed Area Status: Ensure genuine 6-month reviews, with input from state governments and civil society.
6. Promote Political Dialogue: Engage groups like NSCN and ULFA through peace accords and dialogue (e.g. Naga Peace Accord, 2015).
7. Increased Investment in Development: Prioritize economic growth, infrastructure, and employment in conflict-prone regions to tackle root causes.
8. Training in Human Rights: Mandatory human rights training for armed forces operating in AFSPA areas, ensuring ethical operations.

CONCLUSION

AFSPA has played a critical role in maintaining internal security in insurgency-prone and border-sensitive regions like the Northeast and Jammu & Kashmir. It has enabled swift military responses, safeguarded national sovereignty, and helped restore civil governance in conflict zones. However, its prolonged enforcement, allegations of human rights violations, and lack of accountability mechanisms have led to widespread criticism. Balancing national security with constitutional rights is the need of the hour. A phased, region-specific withdrawal combined with political dialogue, developmental initiatives, and enhanced oversight can help India transition from a militarized approach to a more democratic and inclusive conflict resolution model. The future of AFSPA must align with both national integrity and the values of justice and human dignity.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1958:
1. AFSPA can be imposed only with the consent of the state government.
2. The Act empowers armed forces to arrest without a warrant.
3. The declaration of a "disturbed area" under AFSPA is reviewed every six months.
Which of the above statements is/are correct?
A. 1 and 2 only
B. 2 and 3 only
C. 1 and 3 only
D. 1, 2 and 3
Answer: B

MAINS QUESTIONS

Q. Critically analyze the provisions, significance, and challenges of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. Suggest reforms to ensure a balance between national security and civil liberties. (250 words, 15marks)

TRANSFORMING COAL USAGE: INDIA'S VISION FOR GASIFICATION BY 2030

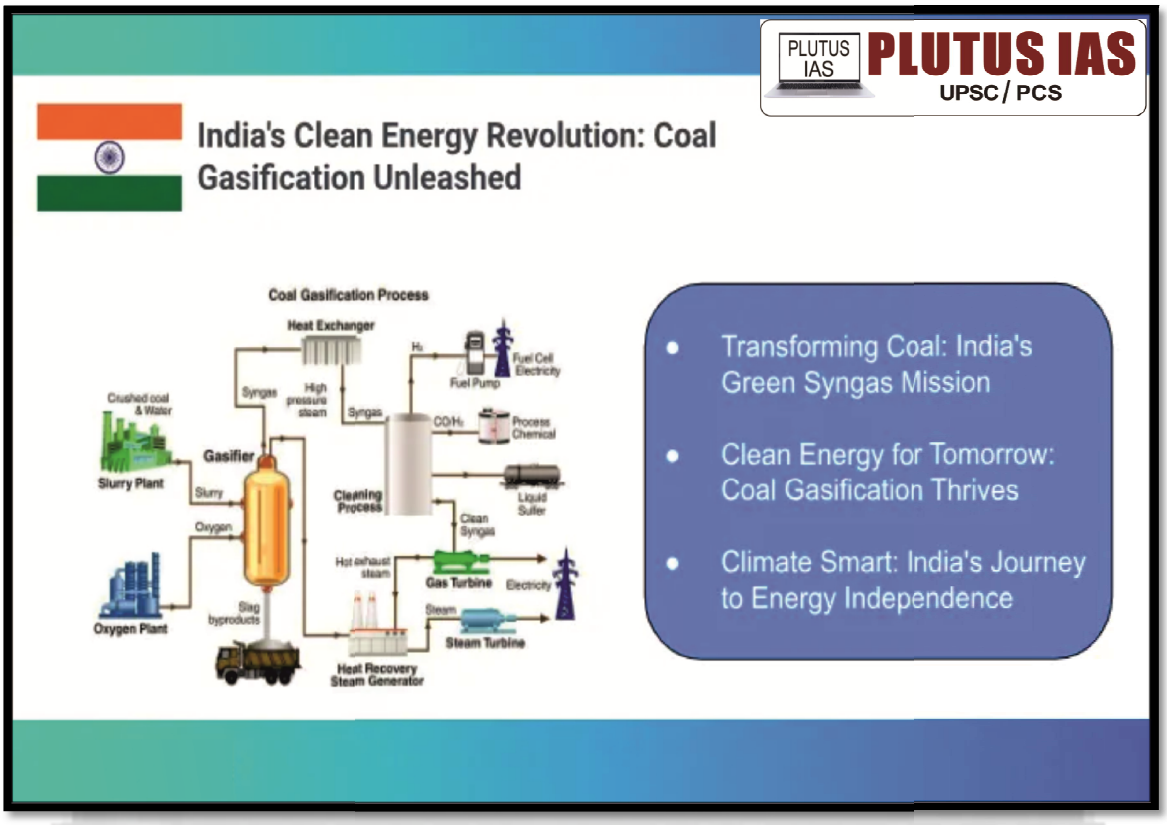
WHY IN THE NEWS?

Coal gasification has been making headlines due to the Indian government's push to develop 100 million tonnes (MT) of coal gasification capacity by 2030 as part of its strategy to reduce coal combustion and cut emissions. In recent months:The Ministry of Coal announced financial incentives and policy reforms to

promote coal gasification projects.Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) such as Coal India Ltd. and GAIL have unveiled plans for large-scale gasification units.States like Odisha and Chhattisgarh have identified land for dedicated gasification parks.

Global energy firms are exploring joint ventures with Indian companies for technology collaboration and investment.

The push for gasification is also seen as an essential component of India's energy transition and carbon neutrality roadmap. Additionally, coal gasification plays a crucial role in reducing fertilizer imports by enabling domestic urea and methanol production.



WHAT IS COAL GASIFICATION INITIATIVE?

Coal gasification is a process that converts coal into syngas (synthesis gas), which is primarily a mixture of hydrogen (H2), carbon monoxide (CO), and carbon dioxide (CO2). This syngas can be used for generating electricity, making chemical fertilizers, or as a substitute for natural gas in various industrial processes. Unlike traditional coal combustion, gasification enables cleaner and more efficient utilization of coal. The Coal Gasification Initiative in India is a national effort to promote the adoption of coal gasification technology, particularly to reduce dependency on imported fuels and transition towards cleaner energy alternatives. The Indian government has set a target to gasify 100 million tonnes of coal by 2030. This initiative is part of a broader vision for energy security, economic development, and environmental sustainability.

COAL IN INDIA:

India holds the fifth-largest coal reserves in the world and is the second-largest producer of coal. The majority of India's coal is non-coking, used primarily for power generation.

State	Type of Coal Found	Estimated Reserves (in billion tonnes)	Notable Features
Jharkhand	Coking, Non-Coking	83+	Major coal mining hub, rich in coking coal
Odisha	Non-Coking, Lignite	84+	Hosts Talcher and Ib Valley coalfields
Chhattisgarh	Non-Coking	57+	Korba and Mand Raigarh key mining regions
West Bengal	Coking	32+	Contains Raniganj coalfield
Madhya Pradesh	Non-Coking, Lignite	29+	Contains Sohagpur and Pench-Kanhan fields
Telangana	Non-Coking	22+	Godavari Valley coalfields
Maharashtra	Non-Coking, Lignite	12+	Wardha Valley and Kamptee fields
Tamil Nadu	Lignite	34+	Neyveli lignite reserves
Assam	Lignite, Bituminous	4+	Small but high-quality reserves
Meghalaya	Bituminous, Sub-Bituminous	3+	Unregulated mining concerns
Gujarat	Lignite	9+	Vast lignite deposits in Bhavnagar region

Top coal-producing states: Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh. **Major coal companies:** Coal India Limited (CIL), Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL). **Total coal reserves:** Over 319 billion tonnes (as per Geological Survey of India).

ISSUES WITH COAL GASIFICATION

1. High Capital and Operating Costs: Coal gasification plants are capital-intensive, often requiring significantly more investment than traditional coal plants. Maintenance, gas cleaning systems, and carbon capture technologies further increase operational expenses, making it less attractive for private investment without substantial government support.

2. Water Consumption: The gasification process consumes large quantities of water, which poses a serious concern in water-scarce regions. Water is needed not only for gasification but also for cooling and cleaning, straining local water resources and creating potential conflict in agricultural regions.

3. Carbon Emissions: Although cleaner than direct coal combustion, coal gasification still emits considerable carbon dioxide unless coupled with carbon capture and storage (CCS). Without CCS, the environmental benefits remain marginal, defeating the purpose of moving towards cleaner technologies.

4. Technology and Infrastructure Gaps: India lacks large-scale, proven gasification technologies suited to its variety of coal types. Additionally, infrastructure such as pipelines for syngas transport, CCS networks, and integrated industrial clusters are underdeveloped, delaying project implementation.

5. Low Efficiency with Indian Coal: Indian coal has high ash content and low calorific value, which hampers gasification efficiency. Specialized pre-treatment and advanced reactor designs are needed to overcome this, adding further complexity and cost.

6. Regulatory and Policy Uncertainty: Absence of clear long-term policies and incentives creates hesitation among investors. Frequent regulatory changes, overlapping jurisdiction between central and state governments, and lack of clarity on carbon pricing mechanisms further hinder adoption.

7. Environmental Risks: Improper handling of toxic byproducts such as tars, heavy metals, and wastewater can lead to soil and groundwater contamination. If not managed properly, gasification can pose similar ecological threats as conventional coal use.

8. Public Opposition and Land Acquisition: Like other large-scale industrial projects, coal gasification plants face resistance from local communities due to concerns over pollution and displacement. Land acquisition delays can stall projects indefinitely and raise legal as well as social tensions.

ALTERNATIVE SUSTAINABLE ENERGY METHODS

1. Solar Power: India has a vast solar potential, and costs have dropped significantly. Government initiatives like PM-KUSUM and solar parks aim to harness this. With over 300 sunny days in most regions, solar energy offers unparalleled scalability and rural development opportunities.

2. Wind Energy: Particularly in coastal states like Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, wind energy can provide large-scale power generation. India's wind power capacity ranks among the top five globally, indicating huge scope for further expansion.

3. Green Hydrogen: Hydrogen produced using renewable energy (electrolysis) can replace syngas in several industrial processes. It also has potential applications in fuel cells, aviation, and long-haul transportation.

4. Bioenergy: Biomass and biogas plants offer decentralized, renewable solutions in rural areas. These also promote waste-to-wealth initiatives and support sustainable agriculture practices.

5. Small Hydro Projects: Run-of-river hydroelectric projects provide clean energy without major environmental impacts. They can supply remote regions and contribute to regional grid stability.

6. Energy Storage: Battery and pumped storage systems are essential to address the intermittency of renewable sources. They enable load balancing and support uninterrupted power supply during peak demand.

7. Improved Grid Infrastructure: Smart grids and flexible transmission networks are needed to integrate renewable energy efficiently. Advanced monitoring systems can also help manage supply-demand fluctuations in real time.

8. Waste-to-Energy: Converting urban and agricultural waste into energy can address both waste and energy issues. It reduces landfill burden while generating local energy and creating green jobs.

CONCLUSION

The Coal Gasification Initiative represents a critical step in India's journey towards a more self-reliant and environmentally conscious energy landscape. While it offers notable advantages such as cleaner utilization of coal, energy security, and industrial development, it also faces serious challenges including high costs, environmental concerns, and technological gaps. To make the initiative successful, India must adopt a balanced strategy. This includes promoting R&D, incentivizing private sector participation, implementing strict environmental safeguards, and developing carbon capture mechanisms. Simultaneously, a robust push for sustainable alternatives like solar, wind, hydrogen, and bioenergy is essential. By aligning economic goals with ecological responsibilities, India can pave the way for a cleaner, secure, and sustainable energy future.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS

Q. Which of the following statements best describes the process of Underground Coal Gasification (UCG)?

(a) Extraction of coal through deep-shaft mining.
(b) Direct combustion of coal inside the earth for thermal energy.
(c) In-situ conversion of coal into syngas by injecting oxidants underground.
(d) Extraction of methane trapped in coal seams.

ANSWER: C

MAINS QUESTIONS

Q. How can coal gasification support India's industrial competitiveness, especially in the chemical and fertilizer sectors? Discuss with examples. (250 words, 15marks)