

COAL SHORTAGE IN POWER PLANTS



Issue

India's thermal power plants are facing a severe coal shortage, with average stock lasting only four days.

Background

India consumed 124 billion units of power in August 2021 compared to 106 billion units of power in August 2019, a signal of rising demand.

Details

- Coal fired thermal power plants account for 208.8 GW of India's 388 GW installed generation capacity, which has been fairly stable over the years.
- Thermal power plants hold the highest electric production with 66.4% of total power. This is more than hydropower or renewable energy.
- The shortage is more intense in non-pithead plants or plants which are not located close to coal mines as transportation time is more.

Reasons for shortage

- India's power consumption rates have increased in past couple of years as new households have been brought under electricity. This has boosted the demand.
- The months of August and September witnessed heavy rainfall in coal bearing areas of eastern India, which reduced the output drastically.
- The pandemic induced lockdown reduced power demand from industries. The power plants held very less stock during these months.

Implications

- If the current shortage situation persists, then there will be low power output from plants. To balance the demand and supply, power cuts have to be undertaken.
- Coal is also an important raw material for several industries including iron and steel. Diversion of coal for electricity production will affect their availability for these industries, resulting in increase in price of steel.

Measures by government

- Government is urging captive coal mines to boost their coal output to satisfy demands. They have been urging mining companies to improve their production capacity,
- Faster clearance has been given to newer coal mines. Coal blocks identified have been auctioned faster so that mining process takes place.
- The amount of coal transported has also been increased to ensure proper supply. The railway rakes carrying coal have been increased in the past couple of days

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