Coal – The Indispensable

What is the issue?

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As socio-political & economic realities do not favour the prospects of renewable, an out of the box thinking for policy making is needed.

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How does the energy scenario look?

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- All major studies agree that coal is a dirty fuel and to tackle the problem of climate change, the government must exponentially increase the generation of renewables.
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- But they also agree that renewables cannot replace coal as the bulwark of the energy system in the foreseeable future.
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- Studies estimate that even by 2040, fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas) will together continue to contribute between 70 to 80% of our primary energy requirements.
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- As coal offers the cheapest source of energy, electricity infrastructure is built around this fuel.
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- Alternatives are not competitive enough and politicians & labour unions make it more difficult to substantively replace this fuel.
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How is the problem on the pollution front?

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- 13 of our cities rank amongst the most polluted in the world and India is touted to soon overtake China as the world leader in number of deaths

caused by respiratory illness.
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- Our per capita energy consumption is 521 kgs of oil equivalent currently and is expected to more than double by 2040.
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- Nearly a billion people would be looking at internal combustion engines for mobility, which will drastically aggravate pollution.
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What has been the evolving policy scenario?

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- **The studies -** All major studies have emphasised the importance of pushing India onto a low carbon pathway.
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- Most recommend the government to create an enabling ecosystems for augmentation of renewable energy and the development of clean energy technologies.
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- **New Technologies -** The TERI/Shell report has outlined certain “horizon technologies” that warranted particular focus.
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- These technologies as outlied were - 3rd generation bio-energy, advanced nuclear, coal gasification, geothermal, hydrogen fuel cells, high speed railways etc.
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- **Coal’s Indispensability -** But notwithstanding the greatest of efforts to promote renewable, the studies predominantly conclude that coal will continue to dominate the energy sector.
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- Also, the “Cheif Economic Advisor – Mr.Subramanian”, in particular, cautioned against the hype on renewables.
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- He pointed out that once the full cost of renewables are taken into account, there is little prospect of renewables achieving cost parity with coal in the foreseeable future.
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- Even after considering the social costs of the GHG emissions emitted by coal, it seems to still hold its ground.
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Can we afford to give up coal?

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- India is the only Country where energy demand is expected to continuously rise.
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- A quarter of our population does not have access to electricity, 40 per cent still use firewood and dung for cooking and lighting.
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- Against this backdrop, giving up coal would be politically, economically and socially naive.
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- Hence, the government should augment coal production along with supporting renewable inorder to meet the growing energy needs.
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How can we best approach the future?

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- While continuing to use coal, the best way is to be able to muster the courage to dream of a very different energy future.
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- Decision makers should engage with our energy sector with more radical imagination and break out of the conventional moulds.
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Socurce: Busniess Standard

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