# Jharia Coal Fires

## Why in news?

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- Jharia is estimated to have nearly 80 underground fires in the years since 1916.
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- The Government has decided to shift all major public utility assets from areas around the coalfield
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## What has been the problem in Jharia over the years?

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- Jharia coalfields are in Jharkhand’s Dhanbad district and span over 160 square kilometres.
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- Unsafe and illegal mining has led to fires in coal deposits under the surface of these coalfields.
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- They now pose a risk to the population living on the surface like cave-ins and gas spills and are a threat to rail transport.
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- Most of the affected mines date back before Independence and nationalisation (private owners ran collieries earlier), when the thrust was on production and profit, with little regard for safety.
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## What is the extent of the problem?

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- When the coal mines were nationalised in 1971, at least 70 mining areas within Jharia were on fire.
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- The problem later spread to seven more mining zones.
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- Rail routes, including the key Dhanbad-Chandrapura line that is currently in focus, fall in the affected region.
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- The number of affected areas has reduced to about 67, as around 10 fires have been extinguished using different methods.
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## What is being done now?

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- The principal secretary to the PM held a meeting and sought time-bound action on shifting out arterial railway lines through Jharia, and rehabilitation.
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- The Jharia Rehabilitation and Development Authority (JRDA, formed by the Centre) has now been asked to look into the possibility of putting prefabricated structures at the resettlement site to increase the number of houses as quickly as possible.
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- The railways has been asked to draw up its diversion plan for the Dhanbad-Chandrapura line.
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## What is the issue in diverting?

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- Unlike a couple of the other affected rail lines, the nearly 41-km Dhanbad-Chandrapura line is used by 37 pairs of daily train services.
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- Besides, there are goods train that carry excavated coal from the mines.
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- If the rail line is shut, it could lead to revenue losses close to Rs 2,500 crore.
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- Besides, creating a new diversion alone is expected to cost around Rs 3,000 crore.

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- There is pressure from the local population, several thousand of whom depend on the line, not to close down the line.
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**Source: The Indian Express**

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