Safety Standard of Coal Mining

What's the news?

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The Indian government has called for a **nationwide safety survey for the country's coal mines** after the deaths of 17 miners in the Rajmahal Open Cast Expansion Project in Jharkhand.

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How safe is the coal mining in India?

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- India's statistics indicate coal mining has **become safer over the past few decades.**
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- Between 1990 and 2015, the average number of serious injuries per metric tonne of coal mined has fallen from 2.7 to 0.27.
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- The average number of fatalities has also fallen from 0.69 to 0.07. But much of this is because of the greater mechanisation of mining which massively increases output per miner.
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- Government officials like to point out that India's coal mining fatality figures are better than those of the US. But the numbers are not wholly comparable.
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- Most of India's mining is of the reasonably safe **open-cast variety** while much of the mining in the US is deep underground and much more dangerous.
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- **India's safety record in underground mining is extremely poor.**
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- There are also questions about the validity of Indian numbers given the large number of illegal wildcat mines where accidents, let alone fatalities, never make it to the official statistics.
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What kinds of fatalities happen?

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- India’s coal industry has some obvious lacunae. It has among the highest rates of fatalities and injuries from the collapse of roofs and walls in the world.
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- Inundation fatalities have also seen an increase in the past few decades. India also has unusually high incidents of accidents caused by the surface movement of heavy machinery – strictly speaking not even a consequence of actual mining activity but a clear sign of administrative failings.
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What is the international scenario?

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- A number of bodies, ranging from the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) to various parliamentary panels, have recommended that coal sector **look more closely at the international practices of other nations.**
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- China, for example, has registered some of the biggest gains in mine safety in recent times. Australia has the best safety record of any country.
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Concluding remarks:

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- The fundamental reason that Coal India and others hesitate at such benchmarks, however, is that **all this requires capital expenditure.**
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- This, in turn, requires a genuine corporatisation and streamlining of these inefficient public sector units.
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Source: Hindustan Times

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