

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW
MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES**
[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 9 | Issue 5

2026

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Underground Coal Mine Fires in Dhanbad, Jharkhand: A Need for Comprehensive State Legislation to Protect the Right to Life and Environment

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ABSTRACT

The underground coal mine fires in the Jharia Coalfield of Dhanbad, Jharkhand, constitute one of India's longest-running environmental and humanitarian crises. Burning continuously for over a century, these fires have caused extensive environmental degradation, air pollution, land subsidence, destruction of valuable coal reserves, and widespread displacement of local communities. Continuous exposure to toxic gases and particulate matter has resulted in serious public health concerns, including respiratory diseases, cardiovascular disorders, and other chronic illnesses, thereby threatening the fundamental right to life and a healthy environment guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. Although several central enactments, including the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, and the Mines Act, 1952, provide a general framework for environmental protection and mining regulation, they do not adequately address the unique challenges posed by underground coal mine fires. This article critically examines the constitutional and statutory obligations of the Union and the State Governments in preventing mine fires, protecting public health, ensuring environmental restoration, and rehabilitating affected communities. It argues that the absence of a comprehensive state-specific legal framework has contributed to fragmented governance and ineffective implementation of existing policies. The article proposes the enactment of a dedicated Jharkhand Underground Coal Mine Fire Prevention, Rehabilitation and Environmental Protection Act, establishing an independent statutory authority for fire prevention, environmental monitoring, scientific risk assessment, rehabilitation, compensation, and inter-agency coordination. Adopting a doctrinal research methodology based on constitutional provisions, statutory analysis, judicial precedents, government reports, and secondary literature, the article concludes that comprehensive state legislation is essential to uphold environmental justice, strengthen environmental governance, protect

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public health, ensure accountable rehabilitation, and secure the rights of present and future generations.

Keywords:

I. INTRODUCTION

Dhanbad, popularly known as the “coal capital of India”, has witnessed continuous underground coal mine fires, particularly in the Jharia coalfield. These fires release toxic gases such as carbon monoxide, methane and sulphur dioxide, together with particulate matter, into the atmosphere, posing serious risks to human health. Residents living near the affected areas frequently suffer from respiratory disorders, skin disease, eye infections, cardiovascular complications and other chronic illnesses. Jharia, located in Dhanbad district of Jharkhand, is one of the region’s eight administrative blocks and lies approximately 160 km from Ranchi, the state capital. The area is recognised for its vast reserves of high-quality coking coal and for the underground mine fires that have been burning continuously since the early 1900s. At present, nearly 70 underground fires cover an area of about 100 square kilometres, threatening around 4.6 billion tonnes of valuable coal reserves. This has increased India’s dependence on imported coking coal, resulting in an annual import cost of nearly US\$4 billion.¹

The coal reserves in Jharia play a vital role in supporting the country’s steel industry and overall economic development. To meet the growing demand for coal, the Government of India has planned to increase coal production. However, the ongoing mine fires have severely affected mining activities by destroying large quantities of coal and making substantial reserves inaccessible. It is estimated that the fires continue to consume 10–12 million tonnes of coal every year, causing significant economic losses.²

Apart from the loss of coal, the underground fires have created serious environmental challenges. The continuous release of greenhouse gases from the burning mines contributes to global warming and climate change. These concerns have gained international attention, particularly after the discussions at the COP21 Climate Summit in Paris. According to Sindhuja, the emissions from the Jharia mine fires make the region a major source of greenhouse gases, adding to environmental pollution.³

Several measures have been introduced by both the Central and State Governments to control the mine fires, but their success has been limited. The current approach focuses mainly on

¹ S. Sindhuja, *Environmental and Economic Impacts of Underground Coal Mine Fires in Jharia Coalfield*, 9 INT’L J. ENV’T RSCH. 215 (2015).

² S. Roy, *Coal Mine Fires and Environmental Challenges in Jharia Coalfield*, 43 J. ENV’T STUD. 115 (2017).

³ Sindhuja, *supra* note 1.

relocating families living in fire-prone areas to safer places. This rehabilitation programme is being implemented through the Jharia Rehabilitation and Development Authority (JRDA), established in 2004 to resettle residents who are not employees of Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL). At the same time, BCCL is responsible for relocating its own workforce from the affected locations.

The government is also encouraging opencast mining as an alternative to underground mining because it is more cost-effective and offers higher productivity in fire-affected areas. Once the rehabilitation process is completed, the remaining reserves of high-quality coking coal can be extracted more efficiently, helping to meet the country's industrial and energy requirements.⁴

Based on secondary sources, this paper examines the major impacts of the Jharia mine fires on the local population and the surrounding environment. It discusses issues such as displacement and migration, health risks, damage to infrastructure, environmental degradation, and the loss of livelihood faced by communities living in the affected areas.

The continued existence of these fires raises serious constitutional concerns regarding the protection of life, health and a clean environment guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

II. CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS

Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees every person the right to life,⁵ which has been judicially interpreted by the Supreme Court to include the right to a healthy environment.⁶

Article 48A directs the State to protect and improve the environment,⁷ while Article 51A(g) imposes a fundamental duty upon every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment.⁸

Several central enactments regulate environmental protection and mining, including:

- The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986;⁹
- The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981;¹⁰
- The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974;¹¹

⁴ A. BISWAS, *OPENCAST MINING AND REHABILITATION IN JHARIA COALFIELD* (Gov't of India 2015).

⁵ INDIA CONST. art. 21.

⁶ *Subhash Kumar v. State of Bihar*, (1991) 1 SCC 598 (India).

⁷ INDIA CONST. art. 48A.

⁸ *Id.* art. 51A(g).

⁹ The Environment (Protection) Act, No. 29 of 1986, INDIA CODE (1986).

¹⁰ The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, No. 14 of 1981, INDIA CODE (1981).

¹¹ The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, No. 6 of 1974, INDIA CODE (1974).

- The Mines Act, 1952;¹² and
- The Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, 2015.¹³

However, these enactments primarily provide a general regulatory framework and fail to address the specific legal and humanitarian issues arising from underground coal mine fires in Jharkhand.

III. PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS

The underground coal mine fires in the Jharia Coalfield, Dhanbad, constitute one of India's longest-running environmental disasters, with profound implications for public health. Unlike episodic industrial pollution, these fires have persisted for more than a century, continuously emitting toxic gases and particulate matter into the surrounding environment. According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), particulate matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀) concentrations in several mining regions frequently exceed the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS),¹⁴ thereby exposing nearby populations to chronic respiratory and cardiovascular health risks. The World Health Organization (WHO) has consistently identified ambient air pollution as one of the leading environmental determinants of premature mortality worldwide,¹⁵ estimating that it caused some 4.2 million premature deaths in 2019.¹⁶

The combustion of underground coal releases carbon monoxide (CO), carbon dioxide (CO₂), sulphur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), methane (CH₄), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and respirable particulate matter into the atmosphere. Chronic exposure to these pollutants has been scientifically associated with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), bronchial asthma, chronic bronchitis, ischaemic heart disease, stroke, and lung cancer.¹⁷ Fine particulate matter measuring less than 2.5 micrometres (PM_{2.5}) penetrates deep into the pulmonary alveoli and enters the systemic circulation, initiating inflammatory responses that affect multiple organ systems.

¹² The Mines Act, No. 35 of 1952, INDIA CODE (1952).

¹³ The Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act, No. 11 of 2015, INDIA CODE (2015).

¹⁴ See CENT. POLLUTION CONTROL BD., *National Ambient Air Quality Standards*, Notification No. B-29016/20/90/PCI-I (Nov. 18, 2009), GAZETTE OF INDIA, Extraordinary, pt. III, sec. 4, No. 217, https://cpcb.nic.in/uploads/National_Ambient_Air_Quality_Standards.pdf (prescribing the standards).

¹⁵ See WORLD HEALTH ORG., *WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines: Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀), Ozone, Nitrogen Dioxide, Sulphur Dioxide and Carbon Monoxide* 10–11 (2021), <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240034228>.

¹⁶ WORLD HEALTH ORG., *Ambient (Outdoor) Air Pollution* (Oct. 24, 2024), [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-\(outdoor\)-air-quality-and-health](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-(outdoor)-air-quality-and-health).

¹⁷ See WORLD HEALTH ORG., *supra* note 15, at 11 (causal relationships between PM_{2.5} exposure and COPD, ischaemic heart disease, lung cancer and stroke; nitrogen dioxide and paediatric asthma).

Children residing in fire-affected settlements represent one of the most vulnerable demographic groups. Owing to higher respiratory rates, developing pulmonary tissues, and immature immune systems, children absorb greater quantities of airborne pollutants relative to body weight than adults. Epidemiological studies have demonstrated that prolonged exposure to PM_{2.5} during childhood adversely affects lung development, increases the prevalence of asthma, and elevates the risk of recurrent lower respiratory tract infections. Furthermore, repeated illness contributes to school absenteeism and adversely affects cognitive development and educational attainment.

The elderly population similarly experiences disproportionate health impacts because of age-related reductions in respiratory and cardiovascular reserve. Long-term exposure to carbon monoxide reduces oxygen transport by forming carboxyhaemoglobin, thereby aggravating coronary artery disease and increasing the incidence of myocardial infarction and cerebrovascular accidents. Individuals with pre-existing hypertension, diabetes mellitus, or chronic cardiac conditions remain particularly susceptible to pollution-induced morbidity and mortality.

Maternal and reproductive health also warrants serious attention. Several international studies have reported statistically significant associations between prolonged exposure to ambient particulate matter and adverse pregnancy outcomes, including low birth weight, intrauterine growth restriction, preterm birth, spontaneous abortion, and congenital anomalies. These risks become more pronounced in socio-economically disadvantaged communities where access to antenatal healthcare remains limited.

IV. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CENTRAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS

The continuing underground coal mine fires in the Jharia Coalfield of Dhanbad, Jharkhand, represent one of the most persistent environmental and humanitarian crises in India. Despite decades of awareness, judicial interventions, scientific studies, and administrative initiatives, the problem remains unresolved, exposing thousands of residents to severe environmental degradation, public health hazards, land subsidence, and displacement. The prolonged existence of this disaster raises significant questions regarding the constitutional, statutory, and administrative responsibilities of both the Central Government and the State Government of Jharkhand.

India's constitutional framework does not merely empower governments to protect the environment; it imposes a positive obligation to safeguard the life, health, dignity, and environmental rights of every citizen. The doctrine of constitutional governance requires every public authority to act proactively where environmental degradation threatens fundamental

rights. Consequently, the failure to effectively prevent, control, and remedy the consequences of underground coal mine fires cannot be viewed merely as an administrative lapse but must be examined as a continuing breach of constitutional obligations.

A. Constitutional responsibility

The Constitution of India establishes a clear legal foundation for environmental protection and public welfare. Article 21 guarantees that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.¹⁸ Through progressive judicial interpretation, the Supreme Court has expanded the scope of Article 21 to include the right to live in a pollution-free environment,¹⁹ the right to health, and the right to human dignity.

Residents living above burning coal seams in Jharia are continuously exposed to poisonous gases such as carbon monoxide, methane, sulphur dioxide, and particulate matter. Frequent incidents of land subsidence have resulted in injuries, fatalities, destruction of residential property, and displacement of entire communities. These conditions directly interfere with the constitutional guarantee of a dignified life. Therefore, the Central Government and the State Government bear an affirmative constitutional obligation to eliminate these hazards and ensure adequate rehabilitation.

Article 48A of the Constitution directs the State to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.²⁰ Although it is incorporated as a Directive Principle of State Policy, judicial precedents have consistently recognised that environmental protection forms an integral component of good governance.²¹ Simultaneously, Article 51A(g) imposes a fundamental duty upon every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment.²² However, this constitutional duty is meaningless unless governments establish appropriate legal mechanisms enabling citizens to fulfil it.

B. Legislative and statutory responsibilities of the Central Government

The Central Government exercises primary control over coal mining through various legislative and administrative mechanisms. Coal remains a subject of national economic importance, and most mining operations within Jharia are undertaken by public sector undertakings operating under the Ministry of Coal. Consequently, the Union Government bears primary responsibility for ensuring that mining activities comply with environmental and safety standards.

¹⁸ INDIA CONST. art. 21.

¹⁹ See *Subhash Kumar*, *supra* note 6.

²⁰ INDIA CONST. art. 48A.

²¹ See *Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India*, (1996) 5 SCC 647 (India).

²² INDIA CONST. art. 51A(g).

The Ministry of Coal must formulate comprehensive policies for mine fire prevention, scientific monitoring, technological intervention, and sustainable mine closure. It must ensure that public sector enterprises adopt internationally accepted fire suppression technologies, continuous thermal monitoring systems, methane management mechanisms, and scientific excavation practices.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has a parallel responsibility under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 to regulate industrial activities that adversely affect ecological balance.²³ Environmental clearances granted to mining projects should incorporate strict compliance conditions concerning underground fire control, air quality management, rehabilitation measures, and environmental restoration. Failure to monitor compliance weakens the effectiveness of environmental governance.

Similarly, the Central Pollution Control Board has a statutory obligation to monitor emissions, assess pollution levels, conduct scientific environmental studies, and coordinate with State Pollution Control Boards.²⁴ Persistent exceedance of permissible pollution limits requires immediate regulatory intervention rather than periodic reporting alone.

The National Disaster Management Authority should also recognise underground coal mine fires as long-term technological and environmental disasters requiring specialised disaster risk reduction strategies. Such hazards differ significantly from conventional natural disasters because they continue over several decades and progressively intensify if left untreated.

C. Responsibility of the State Government of Jharkhand

Although coal mining falls largely within the administrative jurisdiction of the Union Government, the State Government retains extensive constitutional responsibilities relating to public health, law and order, municipal governance, land administration, housing, rehabilitation, healthcare, education, and disaster management.

The State Government functions as the primary public authority responsible for protecting citizens residing within affected districts. Its constitutional obligation extends beyond regulatory oversight and includes ensuring safe habitation, healthcare services, drinking water, sanitation, educational facilities, and emergency response systems.

The Department of Health should establish specialised respiratory disease surveillance programmes in fire-affected regions. Long-term exposure to toxic gases significantly increases

²³ The Environment (Protection) Act, No. 29 of 1986, INDIA CODE (1986), § 3.

²⁴ The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, No. 14 of 1981, INDIA CODE (1981), § 16; The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, No. 6 of 1974, INDIA CODE (1974), § 16.

the incidence of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, tuberculosis, cardiovascular disorders, and various occupational illnesses. Periodic medical screening and environmental epidemiological studies should therefore become mandatory public health measures.

The State Pollution Control Board must conduct continuous air quality monitoring instead of sporadic inspections.²⁵ Scientific data regarding particulate matter, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, methane emissions, and other toxic gases should remain publicly accessible in accordance with the principles of environmental transparency and public accountability.

Further, the Department of Revenue and Land Reforms must expedite the acquisition and allocation of safe rehabilitation land. Administrative delays in land acquisition have repeatedly postponed rehabilitation projects, forcing affected families to continue residing in dangerous locations.

D. Rehabilitation as a legal obligation

Rehabilitation cannot be treated merely as a welfare programme or a discretionary governmental policy. It constitutes a legal obligation flowing directly from Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.²⁶ The Supreme Court has consistently recognised that displacement resulting from development projects or environmental hazards requires fair compensation, adequate rehabilitation, and restoration of livelihood.

Thousands of families residing above underground mine fires continue to face repeated displacement without permanent resettlement. Many rehabilitation colonies suffer from inadequate infrastructure, limited employment opportunities, insufficient healthcare facilities, and poor educational institutions. Consequently, rehabilitation should adopt a rights-based rather than a compensation-based approach.

An effective rehabilitation framework should include:

1. Permanent housing with secure land titles.
2. Access to clean drinking water and sanitation.
3. Quality healthcare and educational facilities.
4. Employment generation and vocational training.
5. Social security for vulnerable households.
6. Continuous environmental safety monitoring.

²⁵ See The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, No. 14 of 1981, INDIA CODE (1981), § 17.

²⁶ INDIA CONST. arts. 14, 21.

Unless rehabilitation restores both livelihood and dignity, governmental responsibility remains incomplete.

E. Administrative accountability and inter-governmental coordination

One of the principal reasons underlying the persistence of underground mine fires has been fragmented institutional responsibility. Multiple agencies, including Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL), the Ministry of Coal, the Government of Jharkhand, municipal authorities, pollution control boards, and disaster management agencies, exercise overlapping jurisdiction without effective coordination.

The absence of a unified statutory authority has resulted in duplication of responsibilities, administrative delays, and a lack of accountability. Consequently, there is an urgent need to establish a specialised statutory institution empowered to coordinate environmental monitoring, mine fire suppression, rehabilitation, land acquisition, disaster management, and public health interventions under a single institutional framework.

Such an authority should possess independent scientific expertise, financial autonomy, regulatory powers, and statutory reporting obligations to Parliament and the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly.

F. Judicial responsibility and constitutional oversight

Indian constitutional courts have repeatedly recognised environmental protection as an inseparable component of the right to life. The Supreme Court has developed several environmental principles, including the Precautionary Principle,²⁷ the Polluter Pays Principle,²⁸ the Public Trust Doctrine,²⁹ and the principle of Sustainable Development,³⁰ all of which impose significant obligations upon governmental authorities.

Where executive agencies fail to discharge their statutory duties, constitutional courts possess jurisdiction under Articles 32 and 226 to issue directions ensuring the effective implementation of environmental laws.³¹ Public Interest Litigation has therefore emerged as an important constitutional mechanism for protecting affected communities.³²

²⁷ *Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum*, *supra* note 21; *A.P. Pollution Control Bd. v. M.V. Nayudu*, (1999) 2 SCC 718 (India).

²⁸ *Indian Council for Enviro-Legal Action v. Union of India*, (1996) 3 SCC 212 (India); *Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum*, *supra* note 21.

²⁹ *M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath*, (1997) 1 SCC 388 (India).

³⁰ *Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum*, *supra* note 21.

³¹ INDIA CONST. arts. 32, 226.

³² *See M.C. Mehta v. Union of India*, (1987) 1 SCC 395 (India).

However, judicial intervention cannot permanently substitute for administrative governance. Long-term environmental disasters require sustained executive action supported by legislative reform and scientific planning.

V. NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE LEGISLATIVE REFORM

The persistence of underground coal mine fires demonstrates significant deficiencies within the existing legal framework. Present environmental statutes primarily regulate pollution control but do not specifically address long-term underground mine fire disasters. Likewise, mining legislation focuses predominantly on extraction, safety, and mineral development rather than on integrated environmental restoration and community rehabilitation.

Accordingly, Parliament should enact a Comprehensive Coal Mine Fire Prevention and Rehabilitation Act specifically addressing:

1. Scientific detection and suppression of underground mine fires.
2. Mandatory environmental risk assessments.
3. Continuous satellite and thermal monitoring.
4. Independent environmental auditing.
5. Statutory rehabilitation standards.
6. Community participation in decision-making.
7. Dedicated rehabilitation funding mechanisms.
8. Criminal and civil liability for regulatory negligence.
9. Time-bound implementation obligations.
10. Parliamentary oversight and annual compliance reporting.
11. Annual environmental audits and public disclosure of reports.
12. Installation of modern fire detection and suppression technologies.

Such legislation would significantly strengthen environmental governance and reduce institutional ambiguity.

VI. UNDERGROUND COAL FIRE IN JHARIA COALFIELD: AN UNRESOLVED HUMANITARIAN, ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

Jharia Coalfield, situated in Dhanbad district of Jharkhand, has been experiencing underground coal fires since 1916, making it the site of one of the world's longest-burning coal mine fires. Over the last century, the persistent fire has caused extensive land subsidence, destruction of

residential settlements, severe environmental pollution, and large-scale displacement of local communities. The crisis has evolved from an industrial accident into a significant constitutional, environmental, and human rights issue demanding urgent legal intervention.

According to the Revised Jharia Master Plan (2025) approved by the Government of India, 81 high-risk sites have been identified for priority intervention. The Plan identifies 15,080 families living in dangerous fire- and subsidence-affected areas for rehabilitation.³³ Of these, 1,393 families had been shifted by December 2025, while 13,687 families were still awaiting relocation, with the target for completion set for December 2028. Government data further indicates that 18,272 rehabilitation houses have been taken up for construction, 16,876 houses have been completed at Belgaria (Jharia Vihar), and 5,350 houses have been allotted. The Revised Jharia Master Plan has a total financial outlay of ₹5,940.47 crore to address underground fire control, land subsidence, and rehabilitation.³⁴

The underground fire has resulted in toxic emissions, repeated land collapses, destruction of valuable coking coal reserves, and serious public health risks. Earlier government estimates have indicated that around 37 million tonnes of prime coking coal have already been destroyed because of the fire, causing substantial economic loss to the nation.

VII. CONCLUSION

The underground coal mine fires in the Jharia Coalfield represent one of India's most enduring environmental and humanitarian crises. For more than a century, these fires have caused irreversible environmental degradation, destruction of valuable natural resources, large-scale displacement, and severe threats to public health and human dignity. Despite the existence of several central enactments regulating mining and environmental protection, the continuing disaster demonstrates that the present legal framework is fragmented and inadequate to address the unique challenges posed by underground coal fires.

The Constitution of India guarantees every individual the right to life under Article 21, which the Supreme Court has consistently interpreted to include the right to live in a clean, healthy, and pollution-free environment.³⁵ The prolonged exposure of residents to toxic gases, land subsidence, unsafe housing, and inadequate rehabilitation reflects a continuing violation of these constitutional guarantees. Articles 48A and 51A(g) further emphasise the collective

³³ JHARIA REHAB. & DEV. AUTH., *Jharia Master Plan*, <https://www.jrdadhanbad.in/jharia-master-plan/> (last visited Oct. 2, 2026).

³⁴ Press Release, PRESS INFO. BUREAU, GOV'T OF INDIA, Cabinet Approves Revised Jharia Master Plan for Dealing with Fire, Subsidence and Rehabilitation of Affected Families in Jharia Coalfield (June 25, 2025), <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2139494>.

³⁵ Subhash Kumar, *supra* note 6.

responsibility of the State and citizens to protect and improve the environment.³⁶ Therefore, the failure to effectively prevent, control, and remedy the consequences of underground coal mine fires raises serious concerns regarding constitutional governance and administrative accountability.

This article argues that Jharkhand requires comprehensive state-specific legislation dedicated exclusively to underground coal mine fires. Such legislation should establish a statutory authority responsible for scientific monitoring, fire prevention, environmental restoration, public health protection, rehabilitation, compensation, and inter-agency coordination. The proposed law should incorporate internationally recognised environmental principles, including the Precautionary Principle, the Polluter Pays Principle, the Public Trust Doctrine, Sustainable Development, and the principle of inter-generational equity. It should also ensure transparency through periodic environmental audits, public participation, satellite-based monitoring, independent scientific assessment, and time-bound implementation of rehabilitation programmes.

Equally important is the need for stronger cooperation between the Government of Jharkhand, the Union Government, Bharat Coking Coal Limited, pollution control authorities, disaster management agencies, and local communities. Rehabilitation should not be viewed merely as relocation but as the restoration of livelihood, health, education, dignity, and social security. A rights-based approach to rehabilitation would better fulfil the constitutional promise of equality and human dignity.

Ultimately, the Jharia coal mine fire crisis is no longer merely a mining or environmental issue; it is a test of India's constitutional commitment to sustainable development, environmental justice, and the protection of fundamental rights. Enacting comprehensive state legislation, supported by effective implementation and coordinated governance, would not only safeguard the lives and health of present residents but also preserve valuable natural resources and ensure environmental security for future generations.

³⁶ INDIA CONST. arts. 48A, 51A(g).