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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Closing Mines the Right Way: AAROH and the Restoration Agenda

 DOWN TO EARTH

24 July 2026

ENVIRONMENT

GS3

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

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THE LIFT LINE

“For a century we measured mining by what we took out of the ground. A mine closed scientifically asks a harder question: what do we put back, and for whom?”

The **Ministry of Coal** has released **AAROH**, described as India’s first comprehensive **Annual Report on Mine Closure**, recording the country’s first **scientifically closed** coal mines since independence. This editorial argues that scientific mine closure and land restoration are essential to both ecological recovery and a **just transition** in coal-dependent regions, and that AAROH, welcome as a first step, must scale with funding, monitoring and genuine community involvement.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Mine closure ties together environmental restoration, the energy transition and the social question of what happens to coal regions as India decarbonises. It is a fresh, specific hook for the broad GS3 theme of sustainable development.

It also rewards precision on an emerging concept, **scientific or progressive mine closure**, and its statutory backing, which most candidates will not know in detail.

GS Paper 3: Conservation, environmental degradation, land reclamation, and the economics of the energy transition and a just transition.

GS Paper 2: Government policies and the welfare of communities affected by structural economic change.

For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: **AAROH** is India’s first **Annual Report on Mine Closure**, released by the **Ministry of Coal**; it records around **42** coal mines **scientifically closed**, the first such closures since independence; it was launched alongside an **India-Germany (GIZ)** implementation arrangement; **scientific or progressive mine closure** means land reclamation, afforestation, water-body creation, repurposing and community **rehabilitation**; mining rules require a **Mine Closure Plan** and an **escrow fund** to guarantee closure spending; and a **just transition** protects workers and communities dependent on coal.

For **Mains**, frame the argument: closure is not the end of mining but the beginning of restoration, and India's coal wind-down must be ecologically sound and socially just.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

For most of India's history, coal mines were simply abandoned when exhausted, leaving scarred land, unstable overburden dumps, acid drainage and communities stranded without livelihoods. There was extraction without restoration.

Scientific mine closure reverses that logic. It treats the end of a mine as a planned ecological and social process: **reclaiming and re-contouring land**, **afforestation**, converting worked-out pits into **water bodies**, **repurposing** land for solar farms, plantations or other use, and **rehabilitating** the communities that depended on the mine. Modern mining rules require every mine to have a **Mine Closure Plan** backed by an **escrow fund**, so that money is set aside upfront to pay for closure rather than left to chance.

AAROH, the Ministry of Coal's first **Annual Report on Mine Closure**, marks the moment India begins to take this seriously at scale. It records around **42** coal mines **scientifically closed**, described as the first such closures since independence, and was launched with an **India-Germany (GIZ)** implementation arrangement bringing technical cooperation to the effort.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The central claim is that how India closes its mines matters as much as how it opens them, and that scientific closure is the bridge between ecological recovery and a just transition for coal regions.

Closure as Restoration, Not Abandonment

The core shift AAROH signals is conceptual: a mine's life does not end when the coal runs out. Land reclamation, afforestation and water-body creation can turn a degraded site into productive or ecologically valuable land, while repurposing can seed new local economic activity. Abandonment leaves a wound; scientific closure begins to heal it.

What Scientific Closure Involves

ELEMENT	WHAT IT DOES	WHY IT MATTERS
Land reclamation	Re-contours and stabilises mined land	Prevents erosion and hazards
Afforestation	Replants native vegetation	Restores ecology and carbon sink
Water-body creation	Converts pits into reservoirs	Supports water supply and habitat
Repurposing	Solar, plantation, other use	Creates new local livelihoods
Community rehabilitation	Supports displaced workers	Makes the transition socially just

The Just-Transition Test

The honest complication is that ecological restoration alone is not enough. Coal regions are also **human economies**, whole districts whose jobs, contractors and public services depend on the mine. A **just transition** requires that closure comes with retraining, alternative livelihoods and community participation, so that workers are not simply discarded as the sink is greened. AAROH is a genuine first step, but 42 closures are a beginning against a vast legacy of abandoned and ageing mines. The agenda scales only with sustained **funding, independent monitoring** and real **community involvement**, not paper compliance.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Every extractive activity ends; the test of sustainability is whether that ending is planned and just or left as a cost dumped on land and people. The analytical move is to ask who bears the legacy, the abandoned pit, the lost jobs, the polluted water, and whether the money and plan to address it were secured in advance. An escrow fund and a closure plan turn a future liability into a present responsibility. Assess any resource industry by the quality of its exit.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Coal mines historically abandoned -> scarred land, unstable dumps, stranded communities
-> Ministry of Coal releases AAROH (first Annual Report on Mine Closure) -> ~42 mines scientifically closed, first since independence, with India-Germany (GIZ) support -> reclamation + afforestation + water bodies + repurposing + community rehabilitation -> ecological recovery + just transition -> but must scale with funding, monitoring, community voice

WAY FORWARD

- 1 **Scale up scientific closure.** Move from 42 pioneering closures to a systematic programme covering the large legacy of abandoned and ageing mines, backed by adequate funding.
- 2 **Strengthen the escrow and monitoring.** Ensure Mine Closure Plans are properly funded through escrow and independently monitored, so restoration is real rather than a compliance formality.
- 3 **Centre the just transition.** Pair every closure with retraining, alternative livelihoods and social support for coal-dependent workers and districts, not only ecological restoration.
- 4 **Involve communities.** Give affected communities a genuine voice in how closed land is repurposed, from solar farms to plantations, so restoration serves local needs.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

- **UPSC GS3 (2021):** “Describe the key points of the revised National Wildlife Action Plan... how does it seek to strengthen the conservation... in the country?” (planning-for-restoration framing)
- **UPSC GS3 (2017):** On the environmental impact of mining and its regulation.
- **UPSC GS3 (2013):** On sustainable development and the mining sector.

Practice question (250 words, 15 marks): “Scientific mine closure is as important as responsible mining. In light of the Ministry of Coal’s AAROH report, examine how land restoration and a just transition together define the unfinished agenda for India’s coal regions.”

Sources: Down To Earth, Ministry of Coal

Source: Closing Mines the Right Way: AAROH and the Restoration Agenda — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

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