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52 coal mines opened in 5 years to fuel power drive

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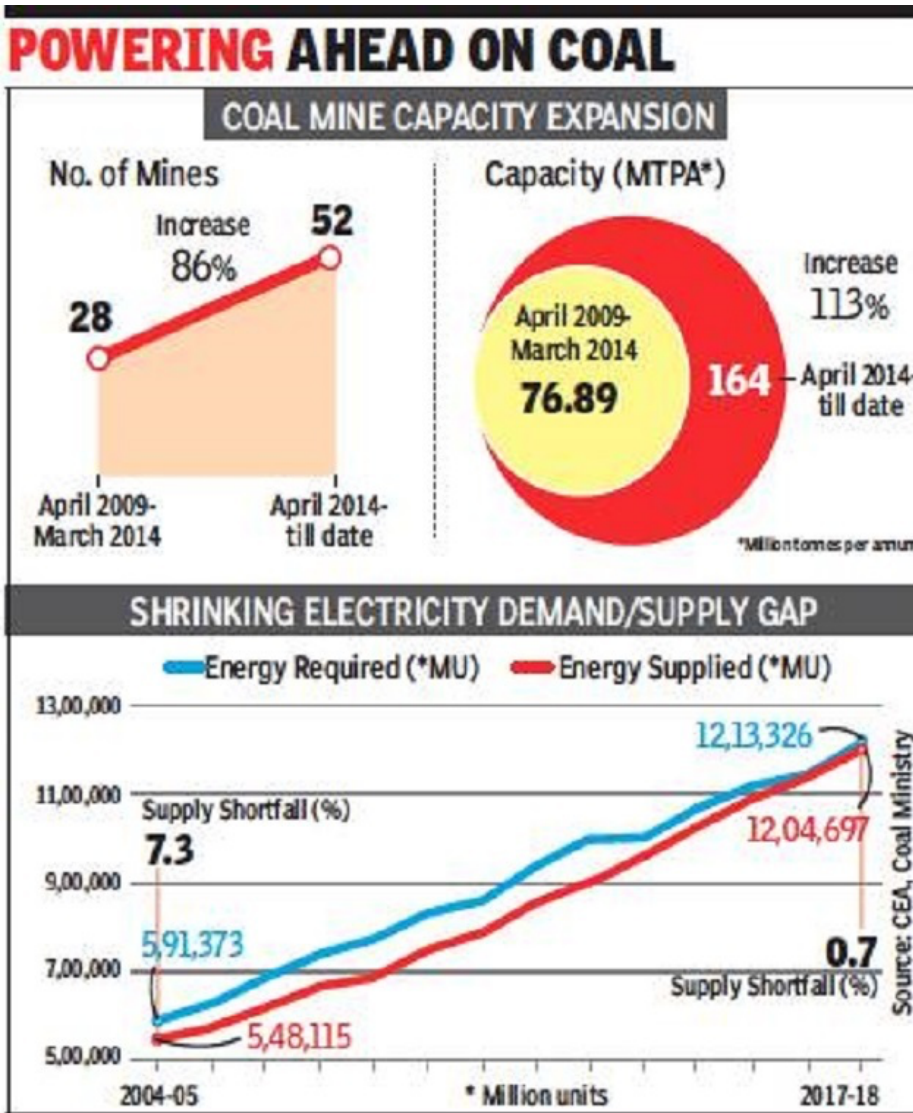


NEW DELHI: The Narendra Modi government has opened 52 new coal mines since coming to power in May 2014 to fuel its flagship village and household electrification programmes without tripping the system, officials told TOI.

These 52 mines represent 86% growth over the number of mines added in the five-year period between 2009 and 2014, when most projects were stuck in red tape, especially pertaining to environment and forest clearances, before the NDA government took over.

The officials said structural reforms in the government's functioning since 2014 made it possible to quickly open such a large number of coal mines,

a cumbersome process involving approvals and permissions from various statutory authorities.



The new mines have added 164 MT (million tonne) to India's annual coal production capacity, marking 113% increase over capacity added during the 2009-2014 period. Since 57% of power is generated in India by burning coal, these mines allowed the government to rapidly move towards universal electricity access without creating shortages.

This is borne out by data in the Central Electricity Authority's latest annual report, which shows demand-supply gap narrowing to 0.7% in 2018, down by 90% from 2009-10 level, and energy supply rising 120% over the 2004-2005 period. But for these new mines, this would not have been possible as the electrification drive has been pushing up demand for power by 5-6%.

On December 19, coal and railway minister Piyush Goyal told Parliament in a written reply that all-India coal production stood at 433.9 MT during the April-November period of 2018-19 financial year, indicating a growth rate of 9.8%. During the same period, state-run Coal India Limited's production stood at more than 358 MT, marking a growth rate of 8.8% over the previous corresponding period.

In April, the government completed the task of hooking up all the 18,452 un-electrified inhabited villages to the national power

grid under the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana. It is now in the process of bringing power to all households without electricity by giving free connections under the Saubhagya scheme. So far, 91.9% of the 2.48 crore households identified without power have been electrified.