Balancing Ecology

Why in news?

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The Union Budget made a broad-brushed allocation of Rs. 2,675.42 crore to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

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What is wrong with the approach?

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- The budgetary approach to environmental protection appears to be as **fragmented and flawed** as the legal approach.
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- Even as the issues of forest management, resource conservation, pollution control and wildlife protection are manifest to be increasingly interconnected, they are treated in isolation with attention paid only at the macro-level.
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- Often proactive measures for environment are disproportionately counter-balanced by lax regulation in other sectors such as energy and large industries.
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- Illustratively, dedicating funds, however large or small, for the Environment Ministry, in the complete absence of corresponding measures to boost alternative energy sources, place curbs on polluting industries and vehicles and adopt sustainable development approaches to economic growth is a farcical exercise.
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- In the current Budget too, while there has been an increase in allocation to the MoEFCC, funding for renewable energy forms, solar use in rural areas, etc. has been reduced.
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- The pluses of additional funding have been offset by paltry efforts at consolidating environmental conservation.
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Is budgetary allocation is sufficiant?

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- In light of the increasing challenges faced by environment in India, budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Environment under various heads is obviously inadequate.
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- There has been superficial renaming of **‘Clean Energy Cess’ levied on coal, lignite and peat as ‘Clean Environment Cess’** with an increase in the rate of levy to Rs. 400 per tonne.
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- Even as climate change and increasing pollution have been matters of great concern, a measly sum of Rs. 40 crore and Rs. 74.30 crore have been allocated to the Climate Change Action Plan and Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), respectively.
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- While the national capital reeled under the heavy effects of air pollution, triggering heated debates on spiralling pollution levels in prominent urban pockets, the funding received by the CPCB is visibly unremarkable.
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- Similarly, heads of environment and ecology, coastal management, environmental monitoring and governance, National Afforestation Management have received funds sketchily with no accompanying rationale for such allocations or a clear framework for their utilisation.
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Are the funds utilized properly?

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- Budgetary flow for the schemes under the Ministry of Environment has been fluctuating in the past and can be best described as **insubstantial.**
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- The rise and slump in allocations have been perplexing as they do not appear to have been based on receipts and expenditures of the preceding financial year.
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- Even as it is difficult to negotiate and coordinate with the State governments to chart an effective framework for conservation projects

and streamline budgetary allocation, the funds dedicated to Central bodies such as the NTCA intuitively appear to be insufficient.
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- The expenditure budget for the MoEFCC reveals that under the Centrally sponsored schemes, transfers made to the States and the Union Territories remain grossly under-utilised.
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- These Centrally sponsored schemes include Project Tiger, Project Elephant, Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats and Conservation of Natural Resources and Ecosystems.
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- For instance, Project Tiger has barely managed to utilise half the funds allocated to it. The spectre of under-utilisation haunts State projects as well.
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What is the way ahead?

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- The need to **restraint in mindless propulsion of industrial growth** at the cost of environment is obvious, to address the problems of disappearing wildlife, increasing conflicts, deterioration of ecology and habitat destruction.
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- For this, scientific, sustained and intensive measures of conservation are required.
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- A small step in this regard would be to acknowledge the role of the environment in budgetary allocations and ensure rational dedication of funds.
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Source: The Hindu

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