

Environment Index and India

Why in news?

India has questioned its bottom ranking among 180 nations on the Environmental Performance Index (EPI).

What is Environmental Performance Index?

- The EPI is an international ranking system of countries based on their environmental health.
- It is a biennial index, first started in 2002 as the Environment Sustainability Index.
- The index is released by the World Economic Forum in collaboration with the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy and Columbia University Center for International Earth Information Network.
- The report measures how close countries are to meeting internationally established sustainability targets for specific environmental issues.
- EPI 2022 uses 40 performance indicators to assess and rank 180 countries.
- The 40 indicators are under the broad categories of
 - Climate change performance
 - Environmental health
 - Ecosystem vitality

What about the EPI assessment of India?

- **India's rank**- India has fallen from rank 168 in 2020 to a rank of **180** with a score of 18.9.
- India comes after Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Myanmar, the poorest performers.
- Denmark tops the list with a score of 77.9.
- **India's statement**- The Indian government has said that some of the indicators used for assessing performance are extrapolated and based on unscientific methods.
- It has cited two major concerns
 - Baseline data does not seem to have been used
 - There has been no explanation for the weightages assigned to certain indicators
- MoEFCC has said the shifting of weightage on many indicators has resulted in India's low ranking.



What is the objection with the projection?

India has set a net zero target for 2070, unlike developed nations that have set 2050.

- The government has objected to calculations of greenhouse gas projections for 2050, which ties into countries' net zero goals.
- **Time period**- The projection for greenhouse gas emissions has been computed based on the

average rate of change in emission of the last 10 years.

- **Neglect of other factors**- It has ignored to take into account a longer period, extent of renewable energy capacity and use, additional carbon sinks, energy efficiency etc.
- **Ignoring crucial carbon sinks**- The important carbon sinks that mitigate GHG, such as forests and wetlands, have not been taken into account.
- **Emission**- India's low emissions trajectory, unlike high historical trajectories of developed countries, has been ignored.
- **Low weightages**- The government has objected to the low weightage given to per-capita GHG emissions (2.6%).
- **Neglect of renewables**- No indicator talks about the renewable energy, energy efficiency and process optimization.
- **Quantity over quality**- The index emphasises the extent of protected areas rather than the quality of protection that they afford.

Do environmental scientists agree with the report?

- Some scientists have said that the climate change parameter of the EPI report is highly problematic.
- The weightages are the agency's discretion but giving climate change such a high weightage is problematic.
- The EPI 2022 makes an assumption that every country has to reach net-zero by 2050 ignoring the reality that developing countries will need more time.
- Also, the methodology that EPI has used for its 2050 projections, using last decade's emissions, is extremely crude.
- The low weightage given to per-capita GHG emissions automatically reduces the ranks of countries like India and China.

How seriously should the findings be taken?

- Despite the inconsistencies, the government should not ignore the fact that India was at 168th rank in 2020 and has never been in the top 150 countries since the index was started.
- We should get carried away by only the rank and must focus on sustainable developmental pathways.

References

1. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/environment-index-and-india-7963597/>