Environmental Performance Index, 2018

What is the issue?

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- India ranks 177 among 180 countries in the Environmental Performance Index 2018.
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- A drop in the index from previous year calls for a relook at the country's environmental policy.
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What is the Environmental Performance Index?

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- EPI is a biennial report by Yale and Columbia Universities along with the World Economic Forum.
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- The report ranks 180 countries on 24 performance indicators.
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- It is spread across 10 categories covering environmental health and ecosystem vitality.
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- Switzerland leads the world in sustainability, followed by France, Denmark, Malta and Sweden in the recent EPI.
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What is India's status?

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- India is among the bottom 5 countries on the index, at 177th place.
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- This is a drop of 36 points from 141 in 2016.
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- Emerging peer economies, Brazil and China, ranks 69 and 120, respectively.
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- In the environmental health category, India is at the bottom of the list.
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- And in terms of air quality it is placed third last.
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- The overall drop is attributed to poor performance in the environment health policy and high pollution related deaths.
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- Pollution from solid fuels, coal and crop residue burning, and emissions from motor vehicles are the major causes.
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- Population growth, industrial production and automotive transportation continue to increasingly degrade the air quality.
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Why is environmental degradation a serious concern?

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- Environmental degradation is beyond being seen as just a cost of development.
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- **Health** - The report highlights air quality as the leading environmental threat to public health.
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- In India, deaths attributed to ultra-fine PM2.5 pollutants have largely risen over the past decade.
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- Air pollution is causing an estimated 1.4 million premature deaths in India.
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- **Economy** - The above rate translates to a welfare loss equivalent to around 8% of India's GDP in 2013.
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- In addition, the cost of lost labour productivity was nearly 0.8% of GDP.
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- Even these estimates do not reflect a true picture of the impact.
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- This is because the lack of scientific understanding of several other key ecological impacts limits the impact assessment.
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- Sadly, the poor are affected disproportionately because of environmental degradation.

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What are the measures in this regard?

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- The government has set some ambitious targets for environmental protection in the recent years.
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- It includes:
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i. strict environmental standards for coal-fired power plants
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ii. target to implement Bharat Stage VI emission norms from April 1, 2020
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iii. efforts to produce and sell electric vehicles in the country by 2030
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iv. revision of National Solar Mission, accelerating transition to renewable sources of power
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v. accordingly, revising the target for setting up solar capacity from 20 GW to 100 GW by 2021-22
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vi. assurance to clean up highly polluted Ganga by 2018
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What are the shortfalls?

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- Unfortunately, there appears to be a big gap between policy goals and action.
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- India seems to be moving in the right direction on solar targets.
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- However, balancing it with other goals is seriously lacking.
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- Evidently, the promise of implementing strict power plant emission norms by December 2017 has been relaxed.

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- Annual electronic waste collection target for electronics manufacturers was set at 30% of the products sold in the market.
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- However, this has now been relaxed to 10%.
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- The automobile industry has stated that full conversion to electric vehicles was realistically possible only by 2047.
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- This is in contrast to the government's targets.
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- CAG, in a recent report, highlighted the lag in developing an action plan and poor fund utilisation in the clean-up of the Ganga.
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What should be done?

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- The environmental costs of development should be duly recognised in addressing environmental problems.
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- Transition to renewables, especially solar energy, should be accelerated by offering subsidies.
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- On the other hand, the more polluting fuels should be priced higher.
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- Strict environmental standards for coal plants should be put in place.
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- Similarly, the transition to electric vehicle use should be aided by higher pricing of petrol and diesel.
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- Existing environmental laws and regulations should be implemented properly with more political will.
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- The country's poor environmental performance calls for taking forward the environmental targets more seriously.
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Source: The Hindu

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