Global Environment Outlook - Lessons for India

What is the issue?

- The Global Environment Outlook from the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) was released recently. Click here to know more.
- It necessitates that India rethinks on its model of growth and recognises the human cost involved in environmental concerns.

What are the concerns in India?

- The report notes that East and South Asia have the highest number of deaths due to air pollution.
- Reportedly, air pollution killed about 1.24 million in India in 2017.
- The linear model of economic growth depends on the extraction of ever-higher quantities of materials.
- This eventually leads to chemicals flowing into air, water and land.
- This results in ill-health and premature mortality, and affects the quality of life.
- The burden is particularly worse for those unable to insulate themselves from these effects.
- Also, as India's population grows, agricultural yields are coming under stress due to increase in average temperature and erratic monsoons.
- The implications of these forecasts for food security and health are all too evident.
- This is, in particular, serious for the 148 million people living in severe weather 'hotspots'.

What should India do?

- India could save at least $3 trillion in healthcare costs if it implemented policy initiatives consistent with Paris climate goals.
- India should increasingly recognise the human cost of poorly enforced environment laws.
- Policies should aim at curbing the use of fossil fuels and toxic chemicals across the spectrum of economic activity.
- Monitoring of air quality in cities through scaled-up facilities would bring about a consensus on cutting emissions of greenhouse gases.
- It would provide the impetus to shift to cleaner sources of energy.

- All older coal-based power plants in India should conform to emission norms at the earliest.
- Otherwise, they should be shut down in favour of renewable energy sources.
- Transport emissions are a growing source of urban pollution, and a quick transition to green mobility is needed.
- In the case of water, the imperative is to stop the contamination of surface supplies by chemicals, sewage and municipal waste.
- As the leading extractor of groundwater, India needs to make water part of a circular economy.
- Water should thus be treated as a resource that is recovered, treated and reused.
- New storage areas could act as a supply source when monsoons fail, and help manage floods when there is excess rainfall.

Source: The Hindu

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