UN's Emissions Gap Report 2019

Why in news?

The Emissions Gap Report 2019 was recently released by the United Nations Environment Programme.

What is the Emissions Gap Report?

- The Emissions Gap could also be called the "Commitment Gap".
- It measures the gap between what countries need to do and what they are actually doing to tackle climate change.
- In other words, it is the difference between current actions to reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs) and what is needed to meet the target.
- The Emissions Gap Report 2019 measures and projects three key trendlines:

1. amount of GHG emissions every year up to 2030
2. commitments countries are making to reduce their emissions and the impact these commitments are likely to have on overall emission reduction
3. pace at which emissions must be reduced to reach an emission low that would limit temperature increase to 1.5°C, affordably

- The report also identifies key opportunities for each country to increase the pace of emission reduction necessary to close the gap.

What does the 2019 report highlight?

- The 2019 report presents the latest data on the expected gap in 2030 for the 1.5°C and 2°C temperature targets of the Paris Agreement.
- Even taking into account the current Paris pledges, the world is on track for a 3.2°C temperature rise.
- It estimates that there would have to be a 2.7% average annual cut in emissions from 2020 to 2030 for temperature rise to be contained at 2°C.
- The more ambitious 1.5° C target would require a 7.6% reduction.
- But, countries with large emissions, such as the U.S., China, the EU nations and India, will face more challenging demands.
- To bridge the gap, the report looks at the potential of the energy transition particularly in the power, transport and buildings sectors.
- It also looks at efficiency in the use of materials such as iron, steel and cement.

Are climate efforts on the right track?

- Climate warnings issued over the years have failed to impress most politicians.
- But, the EU, where public pressure to act on climate change is high, is working on legislation to bring about net zero emissions.
- The EU is considering an emergency declaration.
- The British Parliament adopted a resolution earlier in 2019.
- The U.S. has initiated the process of withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, but there is considerable sub-national support for climate action.
- The U.K., responsible for a large share of historical emissions, has turned its net zero 2050 goal into a legal requirement.
- However, the emissions gap findings make it clear that such symbolism can do little to mitigate the effects of dangerous climate change.
- Hundreds of millions of people could still face the extreme impacts.

What could India do?

- For the rich nations as above, the road to lower emissions is mainly through innovation and higher efficiencies in energy use.
- On the other hand, China and India have to reconcile growing emissions with development needs.
- Their best options are:
    i. scaling up of investments in renewable energy
    ii. moving to clean technologies in buildings and transport
    iii. greater carbon sequestration
- Here, as the UN report points out, India could do much more.
- India needs to -
    i. provide more consistent support for renewable energy
    ii. have a long-term plan to retire coal power plants
    iii. enhance ambition on air quality
    iv. adopt an economy-wide green industrialisation strategy
    v. expand mass transport
- In the key area of buildings, the energy conservation code of 2018 needs to be implemented under close scrutiny.
- With a clear vision, India could use green technologies to channelize its faltering economy, create new jobs and become a climate leader.

Source: The Hindu, UN Environment



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