

Topic 1: A fresh warning: what GEO-6 means for India

India must recognise the human cost of poorly enforced environment laws

The sixth edition of the Global Environment Outlook from the UN Environment Programme has come as another stark warning: the world is unsustainably extracting resources and producing unmanageable quantities of waste. The linear model of economic growth depends on the extraction of ever-higher quantities of materials, leading to chemicals flowing into air, water and land. This causes ill-health and premature mortality, and affects the quality of life, particularly for those unable to insulate themselves from these effects. The UN report, GEO-6, on the theme “Healthy Planet, Healthy People,” has some sharp pointers for India. It notes that East and South Asia have the highest number of deaths due to air pollution; by one estimate, it killed about 1.24 million in India in 2017. As India’s population grows, it must worry that 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, more so for the 148 million people living in severe weather ‘hotspots’. Evidently, the task before India is to recognise the human cost of poorly enforced environment laws and demonstrate the political will necessary to end business-as-usual policies. That would mean curbing the use of fossil fuels and toxic chemicals across the spectrum of economic activity.

There are some targeted interventions that only require the resolve to reduce air and water pollution, and which in turn promise early population-level benefits. Aggressive monitoring of air quality in cities through scaled-up facilities would bring about a consensus on cutting emissions of greenhouse gases, and provide the impetus to shift to cleaner sources of energy. It is significant that GEO-6 estimates that the top 10% of populations globally, in terms of wealth, are responsible for 45% of GHG emissions, and the bottom 50% for only 13%. Pollution impacts are, however, borne more by the poorer citizens. Combating air pollution would, therefore, require all older coal-based power plants in India to conform to emission norms at the earliest, or to 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 in which it is treated as a resource that is recovered, treated and reused. But water protection gets low priority, and State governments show no urgency in augmenting rainwater harvesting. New storage areas act as a supply source when monsoons fail, and help manage floods when there is excess rainfall.

WORD		MEANING	SYNONYMS
Enforced	Adjective	Caused by necessity or force; compulsory.	
Stark	Adjective	Severe or bare in appearance or outline	Focused, Crisp, Distinct, Obvious, Evident
Unsustainable	Adjective	Not able to be maintained at the current rate or level.	Insupportable, Refutable, Unjustified, Unwarranted, Unjustifiable

Unmanageable	Adjective	Difficult or impossible to manage, manipulate, or control.	
Premature	Adjective	Occurring or done before the usual or proper time; too early	Untimely, Early, Too Soon, Too Early
Mortality	Noun	The state of being subject to death.	Impermanence, Temporality, Transience, Ephemerality,
Insulate	Verb	Protect (someone or something) from unpleasant influences or experiences	Protect, Safeguard, Shield, Defend, Shelter, Screen
Yields	Verb	Produce or provide (a natural, agricultural, or industrial product)	Produce, Bear, Give, Supply, Provide,
Erratic	Adjective	Not even or regular in pattern or movement; unpredictable.	Unpredictable, Inconsistent, Changeable, Variable,
Implication	Noun	The action or state of being involved in something	Incrimination, Involvement, Connection, Entanglement
Evidently	Adverb	In a way that is clearly seen or understood	Obviously, Clearly, Plainly, Perceptibly
Political will	Noun	Political intention or desire (in early use not as a fixed collocation); (later) specifically the firm intention or commitment on the part of a government to carry through a policy, especially one which is not immediately successful or popular.	
Curb	Noun	A check or restraint on something.	Restraint, Restriction, Check, Brake, Rein, Control
Fossil fuels	Noun	A natural fuel such as coal or gas, formed in the geological past from the remains of living organisms.	
Spectrum	Noun	A wide range.	Range, Gamut, Sweep, Scope, Span
Intervention	Noun	The action or process of intervening.	
Aggressive	Adjective	Ready or likely to attack or confront;	Hostile, Belligerent, Bellicose, Antagonistic
Monitor	Noun	Observing, checking	Detector, Scanner, Recorder
Consensus	Noun	General agreement	Agreement, Harmony, Concord, Concurrence, Consent,
Greenhouse gases	Noun	A gas that contributes to the greenhouse effect by absorbing infrared radiation. Carbon dioxide and chlorofluorocarbons are examples of greenhouse gases	
Impetus	Noun	The force or energy with which a body moves	Momentum, Propulsion, Impulsion,
Combat	Verb	Take action to reduce or prevent (something bad or undesirable)	Fight, Battle Against, Do Battle With
Imperative	Adjective	Of vital importance; crucial.	Vital, Crucial, Critical, Essential,
Contamination	Noun	Being made impure by polluting or poisoning.	
Sewage	Noun	Waste water and excrement	Dirt, Muck, Grime, Mud, Mire, Sludge

		conveyed in sewers	
Augmenting	Verb	Make (something) greater by adding to it; increase.	Increase, Supplement, Expand, Extend, Raise, Multiply
Harvest	Noun	The process or period of gathering in crops	Gathering In Of The Crops,

Topic 2: Softer, slower: on Brexit vote

Parliamentary votes give the British PM hope that a hard Brexit can be avoided

With the overwhelming vote on Thursday to seek a delay to the exit from the EU, Britain’s Parliament might have actually given Prime Minister Theresa May another chance to push her existing deal for Brexit. A day earlier, a majority of the MPs decided to rule out, under all circumstances, Britain’s crashing out of the EU without an agreement. With the catastrophic consequences of a hard Brexit option thus foreclosed, from Britain’s perspective at least, there is good reason to think that the worst is over for the U.K., although there is no clue yet to the direction of the exit. Both these proposals had been rejected as part of earlier amendments to the draft withdrawal bill, and the votes this week reflect a significant shift in Parliament’s stance. Yet, a delay to the March 29 deadline to leave the EU can only bring a temporary respite from uncertainty. For one thing, Ms. May’s controversial withdrawal agreement was on Tuesday emphatically rejected by the House of Commons for the second time in as many months. But a silver lining for her, despite the setback, was the smaller margin of defeat this time. Some die-hard Brexiters who voted down her deal in January have since grown increasingly concerned about the prospect of a delayed Brexit or no Brexit at all, and chose to endorse it this week. The shift has encouraged Ms. May to seek a third vote on her deal next week. The calculation in Downing Street is that with the hardliners’ preferred option of a ‘no deal’ Brexit virtually eliminated and a looming indefinite delay, more Tories will rally behind her proposals. The group to especially watch is Northern Ireland’s Democratic Unionist Party, which props up Ms. May’s minority government.

Should Ms. May’s gambit next week succeed, the government intends to seek from Brussels an extension, until June, to complete the exit formalities. Conversely, another failure would risk a delay in the U.K.’s ultimate withdrawal by months. The U.K. would then have to hold polls in May to elect new Members of the European Parliament. For EU leaders, the duration of the extension is less of a concern than the potential for a concrete outcome, given the differences within and between the main U.K. parties. Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, is on record that he would recommend a longer extension, to the other 27 heads of EU governments when they meet next week. Developments this week have dealt a huge blow to hardline eurosceptics in the U.K., whose narrow nationalist delusions have made them impervious to the economic cost of disengagement from the world’s largest single market. The harm they have already inflicted on the polity and society must be contained. It would be unwise of them to impede the efforts to avoid a hard Brexit.

WORD		MEANING	SYNONYMS
Overwhelming	Adjective	Very great in amount.	Very Large, Profuse, Enormous, Immense,
Circumstances	Noun	fact or condition connected with or relevant to an event or action.	Situation, Conditions
Catastrophic	Adjective	Involving or causing sudden great damage or suffering.	Destructive, Ruinous, Disastrous, Calamitous
Consequences	Noun	A result or effect, typically one that is unwelcome or unpleasant.	Sequel, Effect, Reaction, Repercussion,
Perspective	Noun	A particular attitude towards or way of regarding something; a point of view.	Outlook, View, Viewpoint, Point Of View
Amendment	Noun	A minor change or addition designed to improve a text, piece of legislation, etc.	Revision, Alteration, Change, Modification
Reflect	Verb	Throw back (heat, light, or sound) without absorbing it.	Send Back, Throw Back, Cast Back, Give Back
Significant	Adjective	Sufficiently great or important to be worthy of attention; noteworthy.	Remarkable, Outstanding, Important,
Stance	Noun	The attitude of a person or organization towards something; a standpoint	Attitude, Stand, Point Of View, Viewpoint
Respite	Noun	A short period of rest or relief from something difficult or unpleasant.	Interval, Intermission, Interlude, Recess, Lull, Pause
Uncertainty	Noun	The state of being uncertain.	Unpredictability, Unreliability, Riskiness
Controversial	Adjective	Giving rise or likely to give rise to controversy or public disagreement	Contentious, Disputed, Contended
Emphatically	Adverb	In a forceful way.	Vehemently, Emphatically, Fiercely, Forcefully,
Despite	Preposition	Without being affected by; in spite of	Notwithstanding, Regardless Of
Endorse	Verb	Declare one's public approval or support of	Uphold, Support, Defend, Maintain, Confirm, Ratify, Approve,
Prefer	Verb	Like (one thing or person) better than another or others; tend to choose	Favour, Be More Partial To, Incline Towards, Lean Towards
Looming	Verb	Appear as a vague form, especially one that is large or threatening.	
Tory	NOUN	(in the UK) a member or supporter of the Conservative Party	
Gambit	Noun	An act or remark that is calculated to gain an advantage, especially at the outset of a situation.	Advantage, Upper Hand, Edge, Lead,
Conversely	ADVERB	Introducing a statement or idea which reverses one that has just been made or referred to.	Inversely, The Other Way Round
Potential	Adjective	Having or showing the capacity to develop into something in the	Possible, Likely, Prospective, Future, Probable

		future	
Eurosceptics	Noun	A person who is opposed to increasing the powers of the european union.	
Delude	Verb	Make (someone) believe something that is not true.	Mislead, Deceive, Fool, Take In, Trick, Dupe
Impervious	Adjective	Unable to be affected by.	Unaffected By, Untouched By, Immune To,
Inflicted	Verb	Cause (something unpleasant or painful) to be suffered by someone or something.	Administer To, Deal Out To, Mete Out To, Serve Out To, Deliver To, Apply To
Unwise	Adjective	(of a person or action) not wise or sensible; foolish.	Injudicious, Ill-Advised, Imprudent
Impede	Verb	Delay or prevent (someone or something) by obstructing them; hinder.	Hinder, Obstruct, Hamper, Handicap

