

## General Studies-3; Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

### Global Climate Policy

#### Introduction

- India asserted at the virtual Climate Ambition Summit, that it is well on its way to not just fulfilling its national pledge on emissions reduction, but exceeding the commitment.

#### India's Emissions status

- Among the 'major economies', India will meet its Paris Agreement target for 2030.
- Its per capita emissions are one-third of the global average and it will remain within its share of ecological space.
- The **Emissions Gap Report 2020** includes India among nine G20 members who are on track to achieve their unconditional commitments under the Paris pact, based on pre-COVID-19 projections.
- In sustainability benchmark like housing size and density, public bicycle transport and eliminating food waste, India is doing better than the West.

#### Inequality in Climate Treaty

- Inequity is built into the climate treaty, which considers total emissions, size, and population.
- India is the fourth largest emitter, even though, according to the United Nations, the richest 1% of the global population emits more than two times the emissions of the bottom 50%.
- Net zero or carbon neutrality by 2050, and the cap on emissions, applies only to countries with high per capita emissions, GDP and well-being.
- The link between well-being, energy use and emissions is not on the global agenda.
- Carbon neutrality meaning balancing emitting carbon with absorbing carbon from the atmosphere in forests does not hold good for latecomers like India.
- Such countries with young population, and are growing fast to reach comparable levels of well-being with those already urbanised.
- The challenge is to change wasteful behaviour in the West.
- Coal accounts for a quarter of energy use. It powered colonialism.
- India, with abundant coal reserves and per capita electricity use that is one-tenth that of the U.S., is under pressure to stop using coal.

#### Infrastructure Development and Carbon Emissions

- Reconstruction in the West after World War II led to acceleration of material use, resulting emissions and sharp rise in global temperature around 1970, before growth commenced in Asia.
- Urban transformation requires huge amounts of iron and steel, cement, construction materials and energy for infrastructure.
- In an urbanised world, two-third of emissions arise from the demand of the middle class for infrastructure, mobility, buildings and diet.
- Infrastructure worldwide has used half of total materials, mainly construction, cement and steel, which have no substitute, and will need half of the available carbon space.
- Peaking of emissions comes some 20-30 years after saturation of infrastructure has been achieved, as in the case of the West.
- With the population moving to cities, growth in per capita incomes drives consumption and vehicle emissions becomes the continuing driver of increasing levels of material use, far more significant than manufacturing.
- The problem with industrialisation and urbanisation designed in the colonial context: overly resource-intensive, defining progress as material abundance, and assuming that technology would solve the ecological problem.

## Emissions by Different Countries

- By 1950, the contribution of the U.S. to total emissions peaked at 40%. It has declined to approximately 26%, the largest in the world.
- North America and Europe, with less than one-quarter of the world population, are responsible for almost half of global material use.
- China, with four times the population of the U.S., accounts for 12% of cumulative emissions.
- Transport emissions are the fastest-growing emissions worldwide and have surpassed emissions from generation of electricity in the U.S. Transport emissions are the symbol of Western civilisation.

## India's Role

- India has the soft power to bring together the high and low emitters.
- India must highlight its unique national circumstances.
- For example, the meat industry, especially beef, contributes to one-third of global emissions.
- Indians eat just 4 kg of meat a year compared to those in the European Union who eat about 65 kg and Americans who eat about 100 kg. The average American household wastes nearly one-third of its food.
- India has the credibility and legitimacy to push an alternate 2050 goal for countries currently with per capita emissions below the global average.
- Emissions are the symptom, not the cause of the problem.
- India, in the UN Security Council, must push new ideas based on its civilisational and long-standing alternate values for the transition to sustainability.
- India needs to focus on future emissions and plan green investments that qualify for global climate funding.