



# A fresh warning

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## **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.
- 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%.
- 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.

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