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Budget 2021 puts green recovery at the centre of policy framework

The Union Budget 2021-22 presents a structured approach geared to put our country on the path of green recovery post the Covid-19 pandemic. The Budget has a long-term vision for this decade on environmental sustainability. It is marked by wisely planned investments in the control of air pollution, providing potable water, deep-sea biodiversity conservation and promoting renewable energy. Environment forms an integral part of Budget's six pillars.

The pillar on "Health and Wellness" has integrated air pollution management, waste and control of pollution, and investment in providing a potable water supply with a five-year plan. This includes the adoption of the "One Health" approach by linking the health of humans, and biodiversity and ecosystem services. Air pollution in urban cities is becoming an extremely critical issue and, according to the Global Burden of Disease study, 1.67 million deaths were attributable to air pollution in India. The high burden of death and disease caused by

air pollution and its accompanying adverse economic impact from loss of output could hamper India's ambition to become a US \$5 trillion economy by 2024. The gravity of the situation has been taken into account and the finance minister has done well by prioritising 42 urban centres with a million-plus population for acting on air pollution control with ₹2,217 crores. This can help create the infrastructure to build science-based evidence, which can feed into the action plans for these urban centres under the National Clean Air Programme.

India's urban population is expected to grow to 814 million by 2050, stressing our cities. There will be a need to boost the environmental infrastructure to mitigate the impacts of urbanisation. Issues of air quality, water availability, waste disposal and energy consumption must be addressed. Great forethought and meticulous planning have been put into increasing the depth and width of the Urban Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 in five years with a substantial allocation of ₹1,41,678 crores. The

mission will integrate waste management, reduce single-use plastic, make for effective waste management from construction and demolition activities and implement bioremediation of all legacy dump sites. Investment in increasing public transport of about ₹18,000 crores will further help in controlling air pollution.

Moving towards use of renewable energy to meet India's energy requirements is one of the priorities of this Budget. It has planned an investment of ₹2,500 crores in solar and renewable energy sources. The government has also announced a national hydrogen mission, to be launched in 2021-22, for generating hydrogen from green power sources. India can take become a pioneer in green power sources with its continued investments in non-fossil based fuels. This builds a good momentum towards meeting India's commitments in the Paris Agreement.

The government will launch a Deep Ocean Mission with a budget of ₹4,000 crores for the next five years. This mission will refine our understanding of ocean depths, through

mapping biodiversity and climate change issues and enabling technological research for ocean exploration along with implementing measures to conserve biodiversity. This should facilitate the adoption and implementation of nature-based solutions and build climate resilience.

It is encouraging to note that the Budget has also integrated substantial investments over the next five years in science and technology areas to encourage research on health and technology innovation. The proposed fund of ₹50,000 crores over five years will address the national priority thrust areas of enhancing security and promoting well being.

India aspires to be self-reliant and a global manufacturing champion and, to meet this objective, substantial investment is required with respect to technology research. Moving in the right direction, an investment of ₹1.97 lakh crores, over five years starting FY 2021-22 has been prioritised in 13 sectors.

The major challenges of this decade are climate change, air pollution, bio-

diversity loss and availability of fresh water required for the health and wellness of humankind. Rebuilding the ecological infrastructure is critical. The actions planned under this Budget will enable India to address these issues. The planned investments will enable conservation of resources whose scarcity affects the poorest. CII recommends that the government enable multi-level collaboration with industry, civil society, academia and institutions, among other stakeholders. The government also needs to ensure delivery of these actions through awareness creation at the sub-national level, supporting scientific data collection, technological innovation and uniform policy frameworks.

The government has taken bold steps towards integrating environment and climate change in the first Budget of the decade and CII is confident that this will enable inclusive and sustainable growth.

The writer is the director-general of the Confederation of Indian Industry