



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

Global treaty on plastic pollution

Introduction

- Recently United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) voted to formulate an international legally-binding instrument by 2024 to end plastic pollution.
- The decision was taken at the UNEA session, and was agreed upon by representatives from 175 nations.

About the Resolution

- The resolution identifies the threat that plastic pollution poses to human health and all environments.
- It focuses on the need to undertake measures throughout the lifecycle of plastics in order to efficiently reduce their negative impact.
- The overall theme of the UNEA session was “strengthening actions for nature to achieve the sustainable development goals”.
- It recognises the role of the private sector and stakeholders in the implementation of the treaty.
- It promotes actions at local, regional and global levels while keeping in mind the importance of plastics for society.
- It also identifies the importance of indigenous communities and their age-old practices to keep the environments pollution-free.

Pros and Cons of a legally binding global treaty on plastics

- **Pros:**
 - A uniform set of laws applies to all countries thereby boosting the cumulative effort across globe to tackle plastic pollution.
 - Strengthens the global drive to curb the plastic pollution of all types – land, marine etc.

- Helps build a financial mechanism to boost the efforts towards fighting plastic pollution.
- **Cons:**
 - Not all countries could be able to abide by the treaty as alternative to plastic may be unaffordable or inaccessible or unavailable.
 - Goes against the common but differentiated responsibilities principle.

Plastic waste scenario in India

- According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), India generates close to 26,000 tonnes of plastic a day and over 10,000 tonnes a day of plastic waste remains uncollected.
- India's per capita plastic consumption of less than 11 kg, is nearly a tenth of the United States of America (109 kg).

Impact of Plastic Waste

- **Economic Losses**
 - Plastic waste along shoreline has a negative impact on tourism revenue (creates an aesthetic issue).
- **Implications for Animals**
 - Plastic wastes have profoundly affected animals in aquatic, marine, and terrestrial ecosystems.
 - Plastic ingestion upsets or fills up the digestive systems of the animals thus contributing to their death due to intestinal blockage or starvation.
- **Implications for Human Health**
 - The chemicals leached from the plastics contain harmful chemical compounds that impact human health leading to various hormonal and genetic disorders.
 - These chemicals can interfere with the functioning of the endocrine system and thyroid hormones and can be very destructive to women of reproductive age and young children.
- **Land Pollution**
 - Plastics leach hazardous chemicals on land, resulting in the destruction and decline in quality of the earth's land surfaces in term of use, landscape and ability to support life forms.
- **Groundwater Pollution**
 - The **leaching chemicals** and toxic elements **infiltrate** into the aquifers and water table, indirectly affecting groundwater quality.
- **Invasive Species:**
 - Plastic waste can also be a mode of transport for species into an environment where they were previously absent.

Measures taken so far to tackle plastic pollution

- Recently India issued draft rules that mandate producers of plastic packaging material to collect all of their produce by 2024.
- The Environment Ministry has notified the **Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021**.
- These rules prohibit specific single-use plastic items which have "low utility and high littering potential" by 2022.
- The permitted thickness of the plastic bags, currently 50 microns, will be increased to 75 microns from 30th September, 2021, and to 120 microns from the 31st December, 2022.
- The **Central Pollution Control Board**, along with state pollution bodies, will monitor the ban, identify violations, and impose penalties already prescribed under the **Environmental Protection Act, 1986**.
- India has also won global acclaim for its "**Beat Plastic Pollution**" resolve declared on World Environment Day last year.
- To encourage innovation in development of alternatives to single use plastic and digital solutions to plastic waste management, the **India Plastic Challenge – Hackathon 2021** was organized for students of Higher Educational Institutions and start-ups.

Way Forward

- As consumers, we should ensure that all plastic waste leaving our homes is segregated and is not contaminated with food waste.
- Managing plastic waste requires effective knowledge, not only among those who produce it but also among those who handle it.
- Citizens have to bring behavioral change and contribute by not littering and helping in waste segregation and waste management.
- **Startups and industries should think of newer ways of recycling plastic.**