Minamata Convention

March 24, 2022

In news– Recently, the parties and various stakeholders discussed non-binding declarations in the second round of the fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata Convention on Mercury (COP-4.2) in Bali, Indonesia.

About the Minamata Convention on Mercury –

- It is the **most recent global agreement on environment and health, adopted in 2013** at a diplomatic conference held in Kumamoto, Japan **and entered into force August 16, 2017.**
- **The convention is named after the Japanese city Minamata**, to symbolise the city that went through a devastating incident of mercury poisoning.
- It was designed to protect human health and the environment from anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds.
- The treaty also addresses the direct mining of mercury, its export and import, its safe storage and its disposal once as waste.
- **Some 137 parties or countries** from Africa, Asia-Pacific, eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, western Europe and other regions have been working together to control the supply and trade of mercury, reduce the use, emissions and release of mercury and raise public awareness.
- **The non-binding declaration calls upon parties to:**
    - **Develop practical tools** and notification and information-sharing systems for monitoring and managing trade in mercury
    - **Exchange experiences and practices relating to combating illegal trade in mercury,** including reducing the use of mercury in artisanal and small-scale gold mining
    - **Share examples of national legislation** and data

and information related to such trade

- The declaration has undergone two out of three written consulting stages and is widely expected to be adopted at the conclusion of the summit.
- The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) too voiced its support to the convention.
- An alarming increase in global illegal mercury trade, notably in the **artisanal and gold mining (ASGM) sector** prompted Indonesia to propose a non-binding Bali Declaration(recent) on combating it.

About Mercury-

- It is a **naturally occurring element.**
- **It can be released to the environment from natural sources – such as weathering of mercury-containing rocks**, forest fires, volcanic eruptions or geothermal activities – but also from human activities.
- Due to its unique properties, mercury has been used in various products and processes for hundreds of years.
- Currently, **it is mostly utilized in industrial processes that produce chloride (PVC) production**, **and polyurethane elastomers.**
- It is extensively used to **extract gold from ore in artisanal and small-scale gold mining, which is the** single largest source of human-made mercury emissions.
- It is **contained in products such as some electrical switches** (including thermostats), relays, measuring and control equipment, **energy-efficient fluorescent light bulbs, some types of batteries and dental amalgam.**
- It is **also used in laboratories, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, including in vaccines** as a preservative, paints, and jewellery.
- Mercury is also released unintentionally from some industrial processes, such as coal-fired power and heat generation, cement production, mining and other metallurgic activities such as non-ferrous metals

production, as well as from incineration of many types of waste.