

New accord to curb the export of plastic waste

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Manifest pedagogy:

Plastic as an environmental hazard and International Convention like Basel Convention for regulation of plastic waste are important areas of preparation for both Prelims and Mains. The key features of Plastic Waste Management Rules 2016 along with state specific regulations and guidelines can be asked in the both prelims and mains exam.

In news

Meeting of United Nations-backed conventions on plastic waste and toxic, hazardous chemicals.

Placing it in the syllabus

Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation

Static dimensions

- Basel Convention

Current dimensions

- Recent amendments to Basel convention
- About the new Accord
- Plastic regulation and its Status in India

Content

The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal

Background

It was adopted on 22 March 1989 by the Conference of Plenipotentiaries in Basel, Switzerland, in response to a public outcry following the discovery, in the 1980s, in Africa and other parts of the developing world of deposits of toxic wastes imported from abroad.

The 1970s and 1980s awakening environmental awareness and corresponding tightening of environmental regulations in the industrialized world had led to increasing public resistance to the disposal of hazardous wastes – in accordance with what became known as the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) syndrome – and to an escalation of disposal costs. This, in turn, led some operators to seek cheap disposal options for hazardous wastes in Eastern Europe and the developing world, where environmental awareness was much less developed and regulations and enforcement mechanisms were lacking. It was against this background that the Basel Convention was negotiated in the late 1980s, and its thrust at the time of its adoption was to combat the “toxic trade”, as it was termed. The Convention entered into force in 1992. India is also party to the convention, India ratified it in 1992.

Objective

The objective of the Basel Convention is to **protect human health and the environment against the adverse effects of hazardous wastes**. Its scope of application covers a wide range of wastes defined as “hazardous wastes” based on their origin and/or composition and their characteristics, as well as two types of wastes defined as “other wastes” – household waste and incinerator ash.

Aims and provisions

The provisions of the Convention center around the following principal aims:

- The reduction of hazardous waste generation and the promotion of environmentally sound management of

- hazardous wastes, wherever the place of disposal;
- The restriction of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes except where it is perceived to be in accordance with the principles of environmentally sound management; and
- A regulatory system applying to cases where transboundary movements are permissible.

Recent amendments to Basel convention

- The Basel Convention in May 2019 agreed to an amendment that requires exporting countries to obtain **PIC(prior informed consent)** from importing countries that are receiving contaminated, mixed or unrecyclable plastic waste. Multiple stakeholders have hailed this development as “historic”. It is expected to lead to better management of plastic waste and greater transparency in the process. However, the convention’s inherent issues warrant a closer examination.
- Backers say the amendment will make the global trade in plastic waste more transparent and better regulated, protecting humans and the environment.
- Accordingly, The US and other developed countries now will not be able to send the plastic waste to developing countries that are part of the Basel convention.

About new accord

An agreement on tracking thousands of types of plastic waste emerged at the end of a two-week meeting of United Nations-backed conventions on plastic waste and toxic, hazardous chemicals. Following are the **key highlights and its significance**;

- One-hundred-and-eighty-seven participants agreed to make global trade in plastic waste more transparent and better regulated and to ensure that its management is safer for human health and the environment.

- The **legally binding framework** emerged at the end of a two-week meeting of UN-backed conventions on plastic waste and toxic, hazardous chemicals that threaten the planet's seas and creatures. **The pact comes in an amendment to the Basel Convention.**
- The deal affects products used in a broad array of industries, such as healthcare, technology, aerospace, fashion and food, and beverages.
- The deal is a crucial first step towards stopping the use of developing countries as a dumping ground for the world's plastic waste, especially those coming from rich nations.
- Accordingly, countries will have to figure out their own ways of adhering to the accord. Even the few countries that did not sign it, like the United States, could be affected by the accord when they ship plastic waste to countries that are on board with the deal.
- The agreement is likely to lead to customs agents being on the lookout for electronic waste or other types of potentially hazardous waste more than before.

Plastic regulation and the Status in India

In India, the **Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management and Transboundary Movement) Rules of 2016**, issued by the Union environment ministry, are **based on the Basel Convention**. However, the rules impose a higher standard in relation to plastic waste and prohibit its import.

India was the host country for **World Environment day 2018 with the theme of "Beat Plastic Pollution"** and India played a major role in it. The United Nations Environment Assembly has **adopted 2 resolutions** piloted by India on single-use plastics and sustainable nitrogen management.

The theme aimed that people may strive to change their everyday lives to reduce the heavy burden of plastic pollution. People should be free from the over-reliance on

single-use or disposables, as they have severe environmental consequences. We should liberate our natural places, our wildlife – and our own health from plastics. Meanwhile, the **Indian government pledged to eliminate all single use of plastic in India by 2022 and following are the states who have banned the plastic;**

- **Maharashtra**
- Telangana
- Himachal Pradesh
- Tamil Nadu

Other states

Uttar Pradesh and **Karnataka** have also banned products which qualify as single-use plastics but haven't used the term in their notifications. While Karnataka's notification came in 2016, Uttar Pradesh announced the ban on August 15, 2018.

Sikkim was way ahead of all these states, but only when it comes to plastic bags, which the state banned in 1998. In 2016, it announced a ban on the use of plastic bottles and Styrofoam and thermacol disposable plates and cutlery, not a blanket single-use plastic ban.

The Bihar government also imposed a similar ban from October 25, 2018. Bihar's ban was confined to the use of plastic carry bags. The manufacture, import, store, distribution, selling, and the transport was banned. The only exemption granted to this ban was the use of plastic carry bags less than 50 microns for storage of bio-medical waste.

Andhra Pradesh made a similar announcement in October 2018, as did Assam and Meghalaya in August 2018.

Most of the states in India have banned plastic bags below 50 microns which has the following reasons;

- The plastic bags below 50 microns are difficult to

recycle and

- The difficulty in recycle will lead to the increased cost of it and eventually discourage the buyer to purchase it