

Tarballs

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In news– Several beaches in Mumbai and Goa witnessed black oil-emanating balls/ Tarballs(sticky tarballs with foul fuel smell) lying on the shore.

What are tarballs?

- They are **dark-coloured, sticky balls of oil that form when crude oil floats on the ocean surface.**
- A tarball is a blob of petroleum which has been weathered after floating in the ocean.
- Tarballs are **formed by weathering of crude oil in marine environments.**
- They are **transported from the open sea to the shores by sea currents and waves.**
- Tarballs are usually coin-sized and are found strewn on the beaches.
- However, over the years, they have become as big as basketballs and can weigh as much as 6-7 kgs.
- Most of the time, the presence of several tarballs **indicate an oil spill.**
- In India, Tarballs reach the **western coast** during the monsoon.
- According to the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), wind and waves tear the oil slick into smaller patches that are scattered over a much wider area and various physical, chemical and biological processes (weathering) change the appearance of the oil.
- It is suspected that the oil comes from the large cargo ships in the deep sea and gets pushed to the shore as tarballs during monsoon due to wind speed and direction.
- The tarballs that travel towards the coast can get stuck to the fishing nets installed in the sea, making it difficult for fishermen to clean.
- In addition, it could affect marine life, especially

filter feeders like clams and oysters.

- Microbes such as bacteria and fungi presumably play an important role in tarball degradation.