Challenges in Prohibiting Plastic Pollution

Mains: *GS III - Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental impact assessment.*

Why in News?

Recently, environmental activists and health experts are drawing attention to how the plastic industry mirrors the tobacco industry's strategies and how plastic pollution increases in Global South nations like India.

How plastic industry influences policy making?

- Plastic industries backed by fossil fuel giants, *mirrors tobacco industry strategy* to evade its scrutiny and its responsibility.

Shifting of Responsibility
• **Tobacco industry** - Advertisements for tobacco run with a disclaimer *"smoking is injurious to health"* while promoting the product. • **Plastic industry** – Plastic-makers have *blamed consumers for not recycling* while diverting attention from corporate accountability.
Funding to Mislead Public Relations (PR)
• **Tobacco industry** - Tobacco companies have historically *funded studies denying their effects on the body*. • **Plastic industry** - The plastic industry promoted recycling as a resolution from the 1980s despite *privately acknowledging its economic and technical impracticality at measures*. • Some plastic industry groups started public campaigns saying that plastic can be recycled. They did this to stop governments from banning plastic.
Greenwashing
• **Tobacco industry** - Tobacco companies *marketed "light" and "mild" cigarettes as safer.* • **Plastic industry** - Likewise plastic industries labelled, "biodegradable or compostable". • This in turn can give consumers a *false impression of these plastics' real-world environmental impact*. - *Coca-Cola was accused of greenwashing* after quietly dropping its goal of 25% reusable packaging by 2030 and scaling back key recycling targets while continuing to promote its sustainability credentials.

Public relations (PR) *is the set of techniques and strategies related to managing how information about an individual or company is disseminated to the public, and especially the media.*

Greenwashing *refers to misleading the general public into believing that companies, sovereigns or civic administrators are doing more for the environment than they actually are. It may involve making a product or policy seem more environmentally friendly than it is in reality.*

Why Global South is vulnerable to increasing plastic pollution?

- **Shifting focus of producers** - Plastic producers of developed nations are shifting towards Global South countries because the rules are less strict comparing to Global North.
- **Limited public awareness –** It results in increasing demand and consumption of harmful plastics by the public.
- **Demand by consumers –** *Plastics products are cheap and easy to carry.*
    - **OECD's 'Global Plastic Outlook' report in 2022 -** Plastic consumption is *projected to more than double in Sub-Saharan Africa and triple in Asia* while its growth in North America and Europe will be moderate in same period of time.
- **Weaker environmental laws –** Global South countries have weak law to control the plastic pollution.
- **Lack of enforcement –** Even the existing regulation are not enforced consistently and strictly.
- **Inadequate waste management systems –** These nations doesn't have proper waste collection and recycle system.

What are challenges in regulating plastic pollution in India?

- **Lack of coverage –** India's ban of 19 single-use plastics covers *only around 11% of its single-use plastic waste*.
- **Weak enforcement –** The ban on selected items are has been changeable and exceptions are also provided for certain productions.
- **Increasing waste generation** – It creates pressure on existing systems.
- **Health risks –**People suffer from *respiratory illnesses and infections*.
- **Social risks –** Sanitation workers live below the poverty line, *lacking stable incomes and less social protections.*

Measures Taken in India
• **Plastic Waste Management Rules 2016 – It was amended in 2022 which p**rohibiting identified single use plastic items that have low utility and high littering potential. • *Extended producer responsibility* require manufacturers to take responsibility for plastic they generate, financially and operationally. • **NAMASTE Scheme -** National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem was launched in 2024. • It aims to *integrate waste pickers into formal waste systems* by providing safety measures, health insurance under Ayushman Bharat, and access to social security benefits

National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (Namaste) *is a Central Sector Scheme. It is a joint initiative of the MoSJE and the Ministry of Housing and*

Urban Affairs (MoHUA).

What lies ahead?

- Launching *public education campaigns* may raise awareness about the false environment claims of companies with regard to plastic recycling.
- Countries can implement rigorous and legally binding labeling protocols to ensure accurate representation of plastic recyclability.
- Legally *recognizing and incorporating waste pickers into formal waste management processes* can be done to ensure that they receive employment rights and social benefits.

Reference

The Hindu| Influence of Plastic Industry in Green Policies

