Deep Sea Mining Operations

Why in news?

The International Seabed Authority (ISA) has decided that it will start taking permit applications in July 2023 from companies that want to mine the ocean's floor.

What is Deep sea mining?

> *The deep sea ocean floor covers about two-thirds of the total seafloor.*

- Deep-sea mining is the *process of retrieving mineral deposits* from the deep seabed in the ocean *below 200m*.
- Deep-sea mining has metals crucial to making the transition to *clean energy*.
- Deep sea mining will be conducted to extract key battery materials such as cobalt, copper, nickel, and manganese from rocks called "***polymetallic nodules***".
- Research suggests that deep sea mining *could destroy habitats* and wipe out species.

What is the issue?

- **Moratorium** - Several nationals called for a moratorium on industrial mining at the ISA's council meeting.
- **Destroy deep-sea habitats** -The digging and gauging of the ocean floor by machines can alter or destroy deep-sea habitats.
- **Fine sediments** -Deep-sea mining will stir up fine sediments on the seafloor, creating plumes of suspended particles.
- **Biodiversity** - Whales, tuna and sharks could be affected by noise, vibrations and light pollution caused by deep sea mining.
- **Mining code** – In the absence of a mining code, the ISA's Governing council is uncertain about the process it should adopt for reviewing applications for mining contracts.

Quick Facts

International Seabed Authority

- **Establishment** - An autonomous international organization established in 1994 under
  - 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
  - 1994 Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the United

Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1994 Agreement).

- **Headquarters** -Kingston, Jamaica
- **Members** -168 Members which includes 167 Member States and the European Union
- **Exclusive Economic Zones** -ISA holds authority over the ocean floors outside of its 168 member states' Exclusive Economic Zones
- **Protects marine environment** -ISA has the mandate to ensure the effective protection of the marine environment from harmful effects that may arise from deep-seabed-related activities.

- **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** - ISA is the organization through which States Parties to UNCLOS organize and control all mineral-resources-related activities in the area for the benefit of humankind.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

- **Establishment** -Adopted in 1982
- **Function** - Lays down a *comprehensive law and order* in the world's oceans and seas establishing rules governing all uses of the oceans and their resources.
- Under UNCLOS, which *India ratified in 1995*, the sea and resources in the water and the seabed are classified into three zones:
    - **Internal waters (IW)** -It is on the landward side of the baseline which includes gulfs and small bays. Coastal states treat IW like land.
    - **Territorial sea (TS)** -It extends outwards to *12 nautical miles* from the baseline. The coastal nations enjoy sovereignty over air, sea, seabed and subsoil and all living and non-living resources therein.
    - **Exclusive economic zone (EEZ)** -This extends outwards to 200 nautical miles from the baseline.
- In EEZ, the coastal nations have sovereign rights for exploration, exploiting, conserving and managing all the natural resources therein.
- **The Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS)** -Serves as the secretariat of the Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- **Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty** - An international agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction within the framework of UNCLOS.

References

1. The Indian Express │Deep Sea Mining
2. IUCN │Deep Sea Mining Issues
3. ISA │About ISA
4. UNCLOS │About UNCLOS



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