Marine Plastic Pollution

What is the issue?

- The global Marine plastic Pollution footprint is estimated to be 8-10 million tonnes annually.
- So a robust multipronged structured approach still remains the call of the hour.

What does this estimate reveal?

- A rough estimate suggests that close to 150 million tonnes (mt) of plastics have already polluted our oceans.
- Most of these plastics originate from land (i.e., it is not dumped into the ocean directly from vessels etc).
- Plastic packaging accounts for more than 62% of all items (including non-plastics) collected in international coastal clean-up initiatives.

What is India's position?

- Currently, India is considered the twelfth-largest source of marine litter.
- It is projected to become the fifth-largest by 2025.
- The Ganga has been documented as one of the top-five rivers dumping plastics into oceans.
- India consumes 16.5 mt of plastic annually, 43% of which was towards the manufacture of single-use plastic material.

What is the influence of the pandemic?

- The Covid-19 outbreak has exacerbated this situation, with the pandemic demanding the use of PPE that are often discarded in unscientific ways.
- [PPE - Personal Protective Equipment such as suits, masks and gloves]
- With India generating 101 tonnes/ day of Covid-19-related biomedical waste, the need to handle this stream of waste has grown significantly.

How do plastics reach water bodies?

- Mismanagement of plastic waste generated in coastal cities and urban centres are leading to this reaching the water bodies.
- Land-based sources are the main cause (up to 80% of total marine debris) of

marine plastic pollution.

- The common leakage routes are litter accumulated and carried via open drains into rivers and water bodies.
- Other upstream routes contributing to this cause include waste directly dumped into water bodies and waste from dump yards carried into local rivers or lakes.

What is the problem?

- Single-use plastics are a common part of the political discourse.
- But, the implementation of their phase-out has been marred by the **lack of a common definition** that could unite the states for this cause.
- The definition assumes greater significance as it would impact multiple stakeholders, thereby, impacting the use of specific types of plastics.
- The success of this transition would then also be governed by the availability of affordable alternatives to fill voids created.
- The scarcity of India-specific data and action-oriented research makes it even more challenging for policymakers.

What could be done?

- Addressing the 'bulk of issue' by **curbing land-based sources** of marine litter must be the initial focus.
- Understanding this linkage would provide a holistic approach towards addressing the issue.
- While phasing out of single-use plastics established a political consensus, a clear roadmap involving the cities needs to be drawn up.
- This could begin with arriving at a common understanding and definition agreed upon internationally.
- This understanding would need to trickle to the government tiers in the form of bye-law inclusions.
- This in turn will guide the cities to phase out single-use plastics by 2022.
- **Institutional framework** towards achieving the common goal would need to be chalked out and streamlined.
- To address this issue, a robust **multipronged structured approach** still remains the call of the hour.

Source: Financial Express



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