Non-fumigated wheat

Why in news?

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From March 31, 2017, the wheat imports to India must be **fumigated with methyl bromide** at the port of origin, else, the cargo would be disallowed from entering Indian shores.

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What is fumigation?

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- Fumigation is a **method of pest control** that completely fills an area with gaseous pesticides (or fumigants) that suffocates or poisons the pests within.
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- It is mainly used to control pests in buildings (structural fumigation), soil, grain, and produce.
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- It is also used during processing of goods to be imported or exported to **prevent transfer of exotic organisms.**
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Why is India insisting on fumigation?

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- It is seen as the most effective way to kill all pests, insects and nematodes.
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- **Substitution is a costly proposition** and a tricky one in colder climates.
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- Instead of methyl bromide, **aluminium phosphide can be used** as a fumigant.
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- But what can be done in 16 hours with methyl bromide takes three days

with aluminium phosphide and the cost also increases three times.
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What is the plant quarantine order?

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- The Plant Quarantine (Regulation of Import into India) Order, 2003 has a stipulation that all imports of agricultural produce be fumigated with methyl bromide.
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- However, the developed nations are agitated over this stipulation.
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- The reason being **Methyl bromide is forbidden in developed nations,** and its use was restricted by the Montreal Protocol due to its role in ozone depletion.
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- In the past, if fumigation is not done at the port of origin, the consignments cane be fumigated at Indian ports on paying a penalty of around of $375 per tonne against the normal fee of $75 per tonne.
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- But, from March 31, **fumigation will have to be done only at the port of origin.**
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What is the recent issue?

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- Some global companies, in collusion with importers, are **forging the certificates showing ships were fumigated.**
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- This could lead to tonnes of non-fumigated wheat entering India among imports over 5.5 million tonnes in 2016-17.
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- To avoid paying $375 per tonne, some importers showed wheat consignments were fumigated en route.
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What is government’s response?

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- The new rules from March 31 could permit some relaxations, given that imports have already been contracted.
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- In the meantime, India could allow import of wheat from countries till the time it analyses pest risk control reports sent by them.
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- The Press Trust of India recently said that the government was considering relaxing rules related to fumigating pulses imported from Canada.
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Source: Business Line

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