Oil Spill Disaster in the Solomon Islands

Why in news?

A major oil spill from a 700-ton cargo ship in the Solomon Islands is threatening the environment and biodiversity of the region.

What is the significance of Solomon Islands?

- The Solomon Islands is a sovereign state consisting of six major islands and over 900 smaller islands in Oceania lying to the east of Papua New Guinea.
- The country takes its name from the Solomon Islands archipelago, which is a collection of Melanesian islands that also includes the North Solomon Islands (part of Papua New Guinea), but excludes outlying islands, such as Rennell and Bellona, and the Santa Cruz Islands.



- The Island is environmentally sensitive and culturally important geography which is home to a protected UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- The East Rennell Island which is the largest raised coral atoll in the world, according to UNESCO.

How the recent accident impacts the region?

- A bulk carrier with 700 tons of oil meet with Cyclone Oma and spilt the oil in a part of Solomon Island.
- The ship was carrying bauxite meant for producing aluminium when it met with the accident on Solomon Islands' Rennell Island, gradually coughing out oil into the waters.
- Environmentalists fear whether the spill would endanger the coral atoll, the calamity has also affected human activity in the region.
- The spill from the ship is now threatening life, work and environment of the island.

What are the concerns in addressing oil spills?

- In regard to the recent accident the oil carrier has a Hong Kong

registration and is owned by an Indonesian mining company.

- Bintan Solomon Islands, the mining company that owned the oil, says it is not supposed to bear any responsibility for the spill.
- It is just a charter and has no liability for the shipping running aground, thus no one is ready to take the blame for a disaster
- In this case, international agencies and even governments that volunteered to help clean up the mess said they were disappointed by the response from those directly responsible for the spill.
- Earlier experiences with the world's worst oil spills, also show that those who were directly responsible have managed to dilute their responsibilities.

What is the way forward?

- Environmentalists and legal experts want a global watchdog to deal with spills.
- There are also demands for a contingency fund to compensate the victims and help in clean-up missions.
- Strict guidelines to shipping companies to share (with their clients) the blame and swift international legal processes irrespective of the geography of the accidents need to be formulated.
- Oil companies and their logistics partners must understand the world cannot afford oils leaks whose impacts on precious marine life and other organisms are very difficult to be ascertained.

Source: Business Line

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