Russian Oil Spill

Why in news?

Russia declared a state of emergency, five days after a power plant fuel leak in its Arctic region.

What happened?

- This leak caused 20,000 tonnes of diesel oil to escape into the Ambarnaya river, turning its surface crimson red.
- This river is part of a network that flows into the environmentally sensitive Arctic Ocean.
- The emergency measures were announced within Russia's Krasnoyarsk Region, located in the vast and sparsely populated Siberian peninsula.
- The power plant is located near the Region's Norilsk city, around 3000 km northeast of Moscow.

How did the leak happen?

- The thermoelectric power plant at Norilsk is built on permafrost, which has weakened over the years owing to climate change.
- This caused the pillars that supported the plant's fuel tank to sink, leading to a loss of containment on 29th May 2020.
- Around 20,000 tonnes of diesel oil was released into the Ambarnaya river, which has since drifted 12 km on its surface.
- Norilsk Nickel is the Russian mining giant that owns the plant.
- It said that it had reported the leak in a "timely and proper" way.
- It also said that the pillars had held the tank in its place for 30 years without difficulty.
- It has also been blamed for another leak in 2016, when pollutants from its plant leaked into another river in the region.

What has Russia done so far?

- The leak, which took place on May 29, came to the notice of the Region's governor, Alexander Uss, on May 31.
- Uss told President Vladimir Putin during a videoconference that he became aware of the spill after information appeared in social media.
- Putin ordered a probe into the incident.

- Boom obstacles were placed in the river, but they were unable to contain the oil because of shallow waters.
- So far, three criminal proceedings have been launched, and the head of the power plant has been detained.
- The state of emergency declared on June 3 would bring in extra forces and federal resources for the clean-up efforts.

What is the extent of the damage?

- The river would be difficult to clean, given its shallow waters and remote location, as well as the magnitude of the spill.
- World Wildlife Fund described this as the second-largest known oil leak in modern Russia's history in terms of volume.
- The Russian chapter of activist group Greenpeace said damages to the Arctic waterways could be at least 6 billion rubles (over $76 million).
- It has compared the incident to Alaska's 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster.
- Its estimate does not include atmospheric damage due to greenhouse gases and soil pollution.
- The installed buoys will only help collect a small part of the pollution, nearly all the diesel fuel will remain in the environment.

What are the clean-up measures being suggested?

- During the video conference with Putin, the Russian minister of natural resources opposed setting the vast quantity of oil afire.
- The minister recommended diluting the layer with reagents.

Source: The Indian Express

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