Waste Shipments and Waste Trafficking

Why in News?

India, Turkey, Indonesia raise concerns over EU's regulation on waste shipments at the WTO Committee on goods.

What is a waste shipment?

- **Waste** – It is any *unwanted or unuseful material*.
- These are objects that have been discarded since these materials aren't functioning anymore.
- Economic growth and globalisation have led to a worldwide increase of waste transport across borders, by road, rail and boat.
- **Waste shipment** - Waste exports and imports are called waste shipments.
- Waste shipments must follow rules called waste shipment controls.
- **Waste shipment controls** - Rules for importing and exporting waste apply in
    - The country where the shipment starts
    - The country where the shipment ends
    - Any country the waste passes through on its intended journey (known as 'transit countries')
- **Significance** – *Exporting countries can sell their trash for money*.
- *Importing countries profit more* from this waste material through recycling and up cycling.
- It also *enhances international ties*.
- Many wealthy countries transfer their recyclable waste to other countries because it is less expensive, helps them meet their recycling targets, and reduces local landfill.
- It contributes to the *preservation of the Earth's natural equilibrium*.

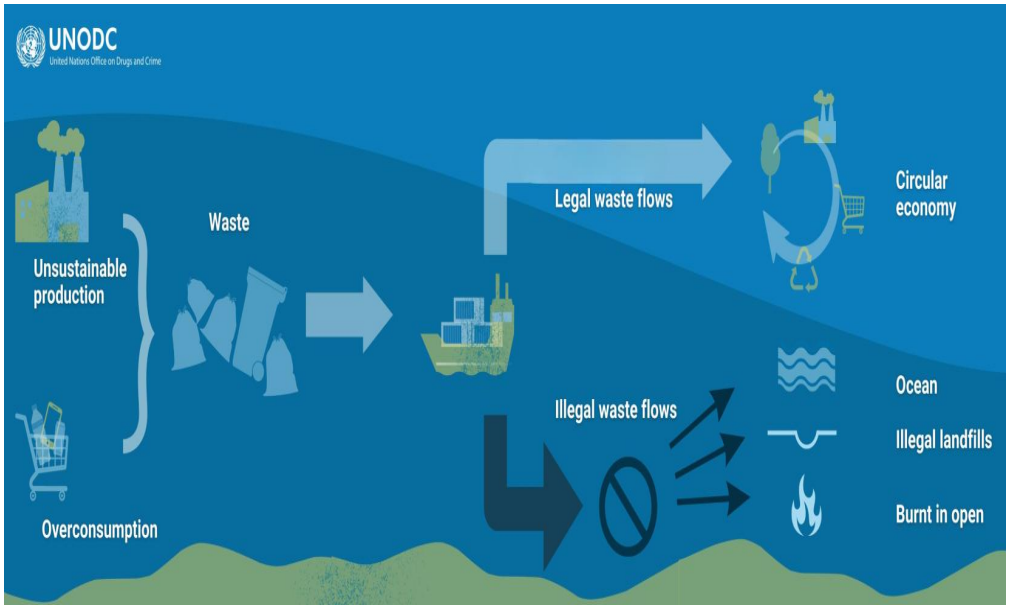
What are the new EU regulation on waste shipments?

- **Waste exports from the EU to non-EU countries** – It have increased by 72% since 2004, amounting to 35 million tons per year in 2023, per the EU.
- **Importing countries** - *Turkey was the largest recipient* importing a volume of 12.4 million tonnes.
- *India was the second-largest destination* for waste exported from the EU in 2022, receiving 3.5 million tonnes of waste from the bloc, per EU data.
- **New regulations** – Exports of EU waste to non-OECD countries will *only be allowed* if these countries inform the European Commission that
    - They are *willing to import waste*
    - They demonstrate that they have the *ability to manage it in a sustainable manner*
- These new requirements will apply from May 21 2027.
- **Objective** – To ensure that countries importing EU waste are able to show that their

regulations lead to a similar level of environmental protection.
- It has provisions would ensure that the conditions under which the waste imported by other countries were broadly equivalent to those in the bloc.

What is waste trafficking?

- **Waste trafficking** – It is *the illegal trade of waste* which is widely considered a high-profit, low-risk crime worth billions of dollars per year.
- **Trafficked waste** – It includes *plastic, e-waste, metal, and paper,* with mixed materials, *textiles, vehicle parts, industrial and medical* waste.
- **Flow of wastes** – Illegal waste typically flows *from higher-income countries* in Europe, North America and Asia to middle and lower-income countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa.
- **Vulnerable regions** - The *ASEAN region* has been a prominent destination for illegal waste shipments in the past years.
- *Malaysia, Indonesia, Viet Nam and Thailand* in particular have faced challenges due to increased waste imports.



- **Impact on importing nations** – Upon arrival at destination, take-back or repatriation procedures are a major challenge as shipments often cannot be traced to their countries of origin.
- Abandoned or unclaimed containers at ports exacerbate the issue, further complicating enforcement and investigation efforts.
- **Environmental and health hazard** - Most waste ends up in illegal landfills, the ocean, or burnt in the open which can affect human health and damage ecosystems.

India faces environmental and safety concerns as around 8.8 lakh million tonnes of waste tyres, mainly from developed countries, are dumped, burnt, or retreated for resale in the aftermarket.

- **Hinders economic development** – It deters development, intensifying economic

disparities, or hurting people's livelihoods.
- **Undermine transition to circular economy** – Waste trafficking can prevent waste from being re-used or re-purposed leaving the demand for raw materials unchanged.

The circular economy promotes the share, repair, reuse, recycling, and reduction of materials.

What are the challenges in controlling waste trafficking?

- It is *hard to detect, investigate, and prosecute*.
- **A cyber-enabled crime** – *E-commerce platforms and social media* can help facilitate illegal waste trade transactions.
- **Lower penalties** – Penalties are *not as high* as those for the trafficking of other illicit goods like drugs, thus making it an attractive business for criminals.
- They are *usually unproportioned to the damage caused*.
- **Different definitions of waste** – *Different countries have different interpretations* of legal definitions of waste, leading to varying levels of enforcement.
- **Inconsistent waste regulations** - They are *complicated and inconsistent across borders*.
- Criminal actors exploit these loopholes to conduct their illicit activities.
- **Corruptions** – Common tactics include false declarations, a lack of or incorrect notifications to circumvent regulations and avoid controls, along with missing or inadequate licenses or documents.

What are measures taken to control waste trafficking?

- **Global initiatives** – The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) developed a Legislative Guide on Waste Trafficking.
- It is to support States in enacting or strengthening domestic legislation to prevent and combat waste trafficking.
- **UNODC Unwaste project** – It is funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented in cooperation with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).
- It aims to fight waste trafficking between the EU and Southeast Asia by supporting the transition towards a circular economy.
- **Mapping waste trafficking** – A first-ever mapping of waste trafficking trends from Europe to Southeast Asia has been published *by the UNODC and the UNEP*.
- **Basel convention** – It controls the *transboundary Movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal*, which was adopted in 1989.
- It *aims to reduce hazardous waste generation* and the promotion of environmentally sound management of hazardous wastes, wherever the place of disposal.

What lies ahead?

- Pursue good environmental governance and robust environmental rule of law.
- Promote Projects such as Unwaste in tackling issues through a multi-sector, multi-disciplinary approach.
- There should be transparency on how a country could be listed as an eligible one for

exports.

- Hindrances should be minimised for countries that want to obtain waste for reuse as raw materials and excessive administrative and certification requirements should be avoided.

References

1. The Hindu Business Line| EU Regulation on Waste Shipments
2. UNODC| Waste Trafficking