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1. Global plastic treaty talks

Why in News?

Global leaders will gather in Canada's capital this week to discuss progress in drafting a first-ever global treaty to rein in soaring plastic pollution by the end of the year.

The hoped-for treaty, due to be agreed at the end of this year, could be the most significant deal relating to climate-warming emissions and environmental protection since the 2015 Paris Agreement, which got 195 parties to agree to keep global temperatures from rising beyond 1.5C.

But negotiators have a tough task in Ottawa, with countries divided over how ambitious the treaty should be.



Why are we having plastic treaty talks?

At the U.N. Environmental Assembly in 2022, the world's nations agreed to develop a legally binding agreement by the end of 2024 to address the world's plastic pollution crisis.

The treaty is meant to address plastics through their entire lifecycle – from when they are produced, to how they are used and then disposed of.

What's the problem with plastics?

While plastic waste has become a global menace polluting landscapes and waterways, producing plastics involves releasing greenhouse gas emissions. The plastic industry now accounts for 5% of global carbon emissions, which could grow to 20% by 2050 if current trends continue.

Plastic production is on track to triple by 2060 – unless the treaty sets production limits, as some have proposed. Most virgin plastic is derived from petroleum.

What is the challenge in Ottawa?

This week's talks are set to be the biggest yet, with some 3,500 people registered to attend including lobbyists, business leaders, lawmakers, scientists and environmental non-profits. But countries have become divided on the issues.

At the Nairobi talks in November, the draft treaty under review ballooned from 30 pages to 70 as some countries insisted on including their objections to more ambitious measures like production limits and phase-outs.

Countries are now under pressure to find common ground before the final negotiations are held in December in Busan, South Korea.

What do countries want in the treaty?

Many plastic and petrochemical-producing countries including Saudi Arabia, Iran and China – known collectively as the group of Like-Minded Countries – have opposed mentioning production limits.

They blocked other countries from formally working on proposed treaty language calling for production caps, chemical disclosures or reduction schedules.

Meanwhile, the 60-nation "High-Ambition Coalition", which includes EU countries, island nations and Japan, wants to end plastic pollution by 2040.

Backed by some environment groups, this coalition has called for common, legally binding provisions to "restrain and reduce the production and consumption of primary plastic polymers to sustainable levels." They also are proposing measures such as phasing out "problematic" single-use plastics and banning certain chemical additives that could carry health risks.

The U.S. says it also wants to end plastic pollution by 2040. But unlike the High-Ambition Coalition, it wants countries to set their own plans for doing so, and to detail those plans in pledges sent regularly to the United Nations.

What does the petrochemical industry want?

The trade group Global Partners for Plastics Circularity represents major petrochemical producers including members of the American Chemistry Council and Plastics Europe. The group argues that production caps would lead to higher prices for consumers, and that the treaty should address plastics only after they are made.

These companies want to focus on encouraging the reuse or recycling of plastics, including deploying technology that can turn plastic into fuel, though a previous Reuters investigation found enormous obstacles in this method.

In terms of transparency about chemicals used in production, the group says companies should be allowed to disclose those chemicals voluntarily.

What do corporate brands want?

More than 200 consumer-facing companies including Unilever, PepsiCo and Walmart have joined the so-called Business Coalition for a Plastics Treaty.

Like the petrochemical industry, these companies that rely on plastic packaging for their products have been a major presence in the plastics negotiations. But they support a treaty that includes production caps, use “restrictions and phase-outs, reuse policies, product design requirements, extended producer responsibility, and waste management.”

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian express

2. Policy for Global EV Makers

Why in News?

The Union government on March 15 approved a policy to promote India as a manufacturing hub for Electric Vehicles (EVs). The minimum investment cap has been set at ₹4,150 crore.

What does the policy stipulate?

The policy broadly clears the path for global EV makers like Tesla and Chinese EV maker BYD to foray into the Indian markets. The central goal of this policy is to enable transitioning to localised production in a commercially viable manner and plan as per local market conditions and demand. The most significant provision is the reduction of import duty on electric vehicles imported as a Completely Built Unit (CBU) with a minimum cost, insurance and freight (CIF) value of \$35,000 to 15% (for a five-year period) from the present 70%-100%.



This is provided the maker sets up a manufacturing unit within three years. The policy also stipulates that a total duty of ₹6,484 crore or an amount proportional to the investment made — whichever is lower— would be waived on the total number of EVs imported. It must be noted that, a maximum of 40,000 EVs can be imported under the scheme at not more than 8,000 units a year, provided the minimum investment made is \$500 million. Another important aspect of the scheme is localisation targets. Manufacturers have three years to set up their manufacturing facilities in India. They are expected to attain 25% localisation by the third year of incentivised operation and 50% by the fifth year. Should the localisation targets not be achieved, and if the minimum investment criteria as defined under the scheme is not meet, the bank guarantees of the manufacturers would be revoked.

What about domestic players?

Tata Motors had opposed the Tesla proposal. It argued that lowering duties would hit the domestic industry and "the investment climate will get vitiated." However, many experts have pointed out that most Indian players are leading in the segments below ₹29 lakh as of now, and hence this policy benefit (from 15% import duty) will likely be for Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) catering to consumers in the higher end of the market.

How does it cater to Indian markets?

While penetration in the two- and three-wheeler segment has been significant, passenger vehicles have seen only a 2.2% contribution thus far. This is mainly due to lack of proper charging infrastructure, range anxiety, and limited number of products in the affordable range due to limited localisation. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in a July 2023 report had observed that India may require at least 13 lakh charging stations by 2030 to support "aggressive EV uptake."

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: The Hindu

3. Why was the BJP candidate declared winner in Surat?



Why in News?

The BJP's candidate from the Surat Lok Sabha constituency in Gujarat has been declared elected unopposed. This follows the rejection of the nomination paper of the candidate set up by the Congress party and the withdrawal of nominations by other candidates.

What is the law for nomination?

Section 33 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act) contains the requirements for a valid nomination. As per the RP Act, an elector above 25 years of age can contest Lok Sabha election from any constituency in India. The proposer(s) of the candidate should however be elector(s) from that respective constituency where the nomination is being filed. In case of a recognised party (national or State), the candidate needs to have one proposer. Candidates set up by unrecognised parties and independents need to be subscribed by ten proposers. A candidate can file up to four nomination papers with different set of proposers. This is to enable the acceptance of nomination of a candidate even if one set of nomination paper is in order.

Section 36 of the RP Act sets out the law with respect to the scrutiny of nomination papers by the Returning Officer (RO). It provides that the RO shall not reject any nomination for a defect

that is not of a substantial character. However, it specifies that signature of the candidate or proposer found not genuine is a ground for rejection.

What is the current issue?

In the present case, the candidate of the Congress party for the Surat constituency, Nilesh Kumbhani had filed three sets of nomination papers. The proposers for these three nomination papers were his brother-in-law, nephew and business partner. A BJP worker objected to Mr. Kumbhani's nomination alleging that the signatures of his proposers were not genuine. The RO also received affidavits from the proposers claiming that they had not signed the nomination papers of the candidate. He sought reply/clarification from the candidate within a day on the objections raised. As the proposers could not be produced before the RO within the stipulated time for scrutiny, all three sets of nomination papers were rejected.

The election rules allow for a substitute candidate to be fielded by a political party. The nomination of this substitute candidate would be accepted if the nomination of the original candidate is rejected. In this case, the Congress party had fielded Suresh Padsala as its substitute candidate. However, the nomination paper of the substitute candidate was also rejected for the same reason, that is of the proposer's signature not being genuine. The other nominations were either rejected or withdrawn paving the way for BJP candidate Mukesh Dalal to be declared winner.

What is the legal recourse?

There have been at least 35 candidates who have been elected unopposed to the Lok Sabha. Majority of them were in the first two decades after independence with the last being in 2012. In the instant case, however, the Congress party has alleged that the proposers were coerced to backtrack on their signatures. It has approached the Election Commission (EC) seeking to set aside the decision of the RO and restart the election process.

However, it is unlikely that the EC would act on this request as Article 329(b) of the Constitution read with RP Act provides that no election shall be called into question except by an election petition before the concerned High Court. One of the grounds on which such an election petition can be filed is improper rejection of nomination papers. Hence, the legal recourse available is to file an election petition in the Gujarat High Court.

The RP Act provides that High Courts shall endeavour to conclude such trials within six months, which has mostly not been followed in the past. Speedy disposal of election petitions would be a step in the right direction.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu