

## **Syria (Capital: Damascus)**

Recently, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a rebel militia, seized Aleppo, the 2nd largest city of Syria.

Political Features:

It is located on east coast of Mediterranean Sea in southwestern Asia.

Boundaries: Turkey (North), Iraq (East & southeast), Jordan (South), Israel and Lebanon (South West).

Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria in 1967 Six-Day War.

Important cities: Damascus (along River Barada), Homs, Palmyra.

Geographical Features:

Climate: Syria experiences a largely Mediterranean climate.

Mountain Ranges: Anti-Lebanon (Separate Syria & Lebanon), Al-Ansariyyah etc.

Highest point: Mount Hermon

Major Rivers: Euphrates, Tigris, Orontes etc.

## Plastic pollution treaty negotiations adjourn in Busan, South Korea

Countries negotiating a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution concluded their fifth session without finalization of a treaty.

The Treaty being negotiated, has been mandated by a 2022 UN Environment Assembly resolution.

It seeks to address the full life cycle of plastic, including its production, design and disposal.

Factors leading to non-finalization of treaty

**Production Capping:** Demand for production cap goals by European union, Latin American and African countries was opposed by countries including India and China.

**Unclear definition:** Lack of clear language on elimination of certain plastic chemicals and products.

Draft text clearly defined plastic and plastic products but did not reflect definitions of microplastics, nanoplastics, primary plastic polymers, and recycling.

India's stance

**Impact on Development:** India stated its inability to support any measures to regulate the production of primary plastic polymers as it could impact development rights of nations.

**Defining Scope:** Scope of instrument should be limited to addressing plastic pollution only without overlapping with the mandate of other multilateral environmental agreements.

**Phase out period:** India did not support inclusion of any list with phase out dates, at this stage.

**Assistance:** Due consideration to national circumstances and capabilities should be given and provision of financial and technical assistance, including technology transfer to developing countries, should be included.

### Plastic pollution

**Status:** Globally, over 460 million metric tons of plastic are produced every year, out of which 19-23 million tonnes of plastic waste leaks into aquatic ecosystems.

**Implications:** Plastic pollution can alter habitats and natural processes, reducing ecosystems' ability to adapt to climate change, directly affecting millions of people's livelihoods, food production capabilities and social well-being.

**Link with Climate Change:** Around 98% of single-use plastic products are produced from fossil fuel, resulting in greenhouse gas emissions.

## **Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill, 2024 passed in Rajya Sabha**

It seeks to further amend the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Act, 1948.

The Act regulates the exploration and extraction of natural gas and petroleum.

Salient features of the bill

Delinking of petroleum operations from mining operations.

Expanded Definition of Mineral Oils: Originally including only Petroleum and Natural gas has now expanded to include any naturally occurring hydrocarbon, coal bed methane and shale gas/oil.

It also clarifies that mineral oils will not include coal, lignite or helium.

Introduced concept of “petroleum lease”: It means a lease for the purpose of prospecting, exploration, development, production, making merchantable, carrying away or disposing of mineral oils.

Rule making power of Central Government: It retains powers to regulate leases, conservation, and royalties, while adding provisions for lease mergers, facility sharing, environmental protection, and dispute resolution.

Decriminalising the provisions of the Act by introducing penalties.

Adjudication of penalties: Appeals against the decisions of the Adjudicating Authority will lie before the Appellate Tribunal specified in the Petroleum and Natural Gas Board Regulatory Board Act, 2006.

Significance of the amendment:

Ensuring Energy access, security and affordability, Reduce import dependence, Attract investment in the sector and Robust enforcement mechanism.

About Petroleum and Natural Gas Board Regulatory Board (PNGRB)

Genesis: It is a statutory body formed under the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board Act, of 2006.

Functions: Regulation of refining, transportation, distribution, storage, marketing, supply and sale of petroleum products and natural gas.

One of the tasks of PNGRB is to ensure competitive markets for gas.

Appeals against the decisions of PNGRB go before the Appellate Tribunals for Electricity.

## **Report titled ‘Stepping back from the precipice: Transforming land management to stay within planetary boundaries’ released**

Report has been released by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in collaboration with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

### **Key Highlights of Report**

**Centrality of Land:** Land is the foundation of Earth’s stability as it regulates climate, preserves biodiversity, maintains freshwater systems and provides food, water and raw materials.

Land is central to seven of the nine planetary boundaries, which are scientifically determined thresholds within which humanity can operate safely.

Crossing these thresholds can lead to catastrophic environmental change and destabilize the Earth system.

**Land Degradation:** Driven by human activities, such as unsustainable agricultural practices, conversion of natural ecosystems, deforestation and urbanisation.

**Impact:** Land degradation affects an area of 15 million sq km, and 1.2 billion people globally. Economic cost of land degradation is estimated to range between 6.3 and 10.6 trillion US Dollar annually.

### **Recommendations of the Report**

Enabling factors such as supportive frameworks, economic incentives, clear property and resource-use rights, and effective coordination between actors.

Substantial public and private investments, in particular better integration and prioritisation of sustainable land use in all national and international funding.

Scientific framework like the planetary boundaries can serve as a practical guide for policymakers to make evidence based policy decisions.

## **FSSAI Issues Advisory for E-commerce Food Business Operators (FBOs)**

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) advisory aims to ensure the safety, quality, and authenticity of food products being sold online.

### **Key Points of the Advisory**

**Regulatory Compliance:** E-commerce platforms must ensure food products sold comply with Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations 2020.

Online claims must align with those on physical labels to avoid misleading consumers.

**Food Safety and Hygiene:** Platforms must train last-mile delivery personnel to ensure that delivery staff are well-trained in food safety and hygiene practices.

**Shelf-Life Requirements:** Food products delivered must have a minimum of 30% shelf life remaining, or at least 45 days before expiry at the time of delivery.

**Seller Accountability:** Platforms must prominently display the FSSAI licence and registration numbers of sellers and Hygiene ratings of the food business operators.

### **Significance of the advisory**

Essential for ensuring the safety, quality, and authenticity of food products sold online.

Enhances transparency and trust, fostering consumer confidence and mitigating risks of foodborne illnesses.

### **About FSSAI**

**Established:** Under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.

**Ministry:** Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

**Role:** Laying down science-based standards for articles of food and regulating their manufacture, store, distribution, and sale.

**Organizational Structure:** It consists of a Chair person appointed by the Centre along with twenty-two members out of which one-third shall be women.

## **Supreme Court issues directions for effective compliance of POSH Act**

Directions were issued to all States and Union Territories for uniform implementation of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act).

Directions issued by Court

Appropriate Government should notify District Officers for every district to discharge functions under the POSH Act.

Duties of District Officers include:

Ensuring constitution of Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) within organizations in the district.

Section 4 of POSH Act requires every employer to constitute ICC, which receives complaints, initiates enquiry, and recommend actions.

Constitute the 'Local Committee' as stipulated under Section 6 of POSH Act.

Local Committee receives complaints of sexual harassment from establishments, where Internal Complaints Committee has not been constituted due to having less than 10 workers or if complaint is against the employer.

Designate one Nodal Officer in every Block/Taluka/Tehsil in rural or tribal areas or municipality in urban areas.

Jurisdiction of Local Committee extends to the area of concerned district.

Every state could think of instituting a SHeBox for registering of complaints.

Sexual Harassment electronic Box (SHe-Box) aims to provide a single window access to every woman to facilitate registration of sexual harassment complaints.

### **Key Provisions of POSH Act 2013**

**Definition of Sexual harassment:** It covers all forms of sexual harassment including physical contact, demands for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography, or any other unwelcome physical, verbal, or non-verbal sexual conduct.

**Applicability:** It applies to all workplaces, including government, private sector organizations, hospitals, non-governmental organizations, locations visited during employment (including employer-provided transport), and even residential spaces.

**Complaint Committees:** Provides for establishment of Internal Complaints Committee and Local Committee.