Landfills

How do landfills catch fire?

- India's municipalities have been collecting more than 95% of the waste generated in cities but the efficiency of waste -processing is 30-40% at best. The municipal solid waste consists of about 60% biodegradable material, 25% non-biodegradable material, and 15% inert materials, like silt and stone.

- Municipalities are expected to process the wet and dry waste separately and to have the recovered by-products recycled.
- Unfortunately, the rate of processing in India's cities is far lower than the rate of waste generation, so unprocessed waste remains in open landfills for long periods of time.

- This openly disposed of waste includes flammable material like low-quality plastics, which have a relatively higher calorific value of about 2,500-3,000 kcal/kg, and rags and clothes.
- In summer, the biodegradable fraction composts much faster, increasing the temperature of the heap to beyond 70-80°C.
- A higher temperature coupled with flammable materials is the perfect situation for a landfill to catch fire. Some fires go on for months.

Is there a permanent solution?

- There are two possible permanent solutions to manage landfill fires.
- The first solution is to completely cap the material using soil, and close landfills in a scientific manner.
- This solution is unsuitable in the Indian context, as the land can't be used again for other purposes.
- Closed landfills have specific standard operating procedures, including managing methane emissions.

- The second solution is to clear the piles of waste through bioremediation excavate old waste and use automated sieving machines to segregate the flammable refuse-derived fuel (RDF) (plastics, rags, clothes, etc.) from biodegradable material.
- The recovered RDF can be sent to cement kilns as fuel, while the bio-soil can be distributed to farmers to enrich the soil.

THE HINDU

Online Safety Bill

- During a visit to the U.K. last week, WhatsApp's head Will Cathcart said that WhatsApp would not comply with the country's proposed Online Safety Bill (OSB) which will in effect outlaw end-to-end (E2E) encryption.

What is end-to-end encryption?

- E2E encryption ensures that a message can only be decrypted by the intended recipient using a secure decryption key that is unique to each sender-recipient pair and to each of their messages.
- Decryption, even by the messaging service provider, is impossible.
- Even if the platform's servers are compromised, without the intended recipient's decryption key, only a garbled string of characters will be available.

What is the Online Safety Bill?

- The Online Safety Bill is a proposed British legislation that seeks to improve online safety by placing certain "duty of care" obligations on online platforms.
- Most of the criticism is directed against clause 110 of the OSB which empowers the British telecommunications regulator, the Office of Communications, to issue notices to most kinds of internet service providers, including private messaging apps and search engines, to identify and take down terrorism content that is communicated "publicly" and Child Sex Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA) content that is communicated "publicly or privately", and to prevent such content from being communicated in the first place.
- Although the OSB does not mandate the removal of E2E encryption, it would de facto mean breaking it as messaging apps would have to scan all messages that are sent on their platform to flag and take down the terrorist and CSEA content.
- Since the clause also requires the platforms to "prevent" terrorism and CSEA content from being

communicated using the platforms, it would mean that WhatsApp would have to implement a client-side scanning mechanism to scan content on users' devices before it is even encrypted.

What if the platforms don't comply?

- If platforms do not comply, they may face penalties of up to £18 million or 10% of the platform's global revenue of the preceding accounting year, whichever is higher. Currently, the Bill has been passed by the House of Commons, and a House of Lords committee is examining the Bill.

Did India enact a similar law?

- Through the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, the Indian government made it mandatory for messaging platforms with more than five million users in India to "enable the identification of the first originator" of a message, or what is commonly called traceability.
- This is not the same as asking for scanning and flagging of all encrypted content; it is about getting to the first person who sent a message that may have been forwarded multiple times.

THE HINDU

Electricity public hearing

- Online hearings were the only option during the COVID-19 pandemic. Courts and quasi-judicial bodies across the country, including those in the electricity sector, opted for such hearings.
- These hearings proved to be a welcome step, as they circumvented transport and logistics issues while enabling wider attendance from remote locations, and allowed for quick convening and multiple meetings, which could have aided the consultative process.
- However, conducting online hearings is not without its challenges. Technological access and know-how are not uniform across the country, making it difficult for some to participate.
- The ERC (Electricity Regulatory Commission) (ERCs also has greater control of the platform in online hearings.
- To enable smoother participation, ERCs have taken measures such as providing step-by-step guidelines and orientation sessions.
- In Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, ERCs have set up facilitation centers across the States for public participation.

- These ERCs also provide a live-streaming feature, which has helped improve access, visibility, and transparency.
- Over the course of the last two years, significant infrastructure and experience toward online hearings have been built by institutions and individuals.
- But despite this, obstacles to participation persist and there is room for improvement in how online hearings are conducted.
- Issues such as poor Internet connections, technical mishaps, and the use of complex platforms and applications by ERCs hinder participation.

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China's approach in west ASIA

- About two years ago, Chinese academics began to signal changes in this approach: they indicated that China was looking at greater political involvement with the region on the basis of "quasi-mediation diplomacy" to promote its broad commercial, diplomatic and political interests rather than its hard security concerns.
- It recognized that many of the ongoing rivalries would not admit to quick resolutions.
- China was prepared to be content with managing these differences through diplomacy so that they did not escalate into conflict
- The agreement addresses the most serious regional confrontation it reduces regional tensions and puts in place the bases for further dialogue on improving relations and engaging on contentious issues.
- Saudi- Iran differences will be difficult to resolve: they result from Saudi Arabia's deep sense of strategic vulnerability vis-à-vis its northern neighbour and concerns that might destabilize regional states through the use of Shia proxies.
- Iran will need to play a more pro-active role to assure its neighbour of its benign intentions, an effort that would gain credibility with China's active engagement with the two regional powers.

Diplomatic challenges

- Regional security also needs the revival of the nuclear agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and linked with it, the management of Israel's aggressiveness.
- Soon after the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) announced it had seen traces of uranium

enrichment by Iran to 84%, just short of the weapon's grade.

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