

Myanmar Teaks

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Why in News?

- Since the 2021 military coup in Myanmar prompted Western sanctions on timber trade from that country, India has emerged as a favourite pit-stop for Myanmar's teak.
- This was revealed by an investigation by a leading Indian News Paper, in collaboration with International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.

News Summary: Myanmar teak trade

- Report of an investigation, by investigative journalists, has revealed that India has become the second largest importer of conflict wood from Myanmar.
 - China is the largest importer.
- India has not banned teak imports from Myanmar – for exports to the US and EU.

Why is teak imported from Myanmar described as “conflict wood”?

- Since the February 2021 coup in Myanmar, the military junta has also taken control of Myanmar Timber Enterprises (MTE).
 - MTE the state-owned company which has exclusive rights over the country’s precious timber and teak trade.
- The MTE has held an estimated dozen timber auctions since the coup. The revenue generated after the sales are a key revenue stream for the military regime.
- Hence, pro-democracy supporters have termed the imported teak from Myanmar as “Conflict Wood.” Sometimes, it is also called known as “blood teak.”
 - The term used to describe teak timber that has been illegally harvested in conflict zones or other areas of instability, such as Myanmar’s ethnic conflict zones.
 - The term “blood teak” is used to draw parallels to “blood diamonds,” which are diamonds mined in war zones and sold to finance armed conflict.

What is so special about Myanmar teak?

- Teak from Myanmar’s deciduous and evergreen forests is considered the most tensile and durable hardwood, resistant to water and termites.
- This prized wood is in demand for high-end furniture, veneer and ship-decking – much sought-after by the luxury yacht industry.
- Adding to its value, ironically, is Myanmar’s shrinking forest cover and depleting teak reserves.
- Global Forest Watch says the country, over the last two decades, has lost forest cover roughly the size of Switzerland.

What steps have been taken to check the illegal harvesting of timber and teak from Myanmar?

- In 2013, the European Union introduced the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR), which put the onus on timber merchants to do sufficient due diligence to disallow illegal timber from entering their markets.
- A year later, Myanmar itself banned the export of whole logs.
- Finally, months after the February 2021 military coup, both the EU and the US imposed sanctions on all timber trade with Myanmar and categorised MTE as a banned entity.

What are the loopholes which are being exploited by the teak traders?

- **DNA testing on the hardwood**
 - Timber traders often claim that their buyers were free to do DNA testing on the hardwood for traceability of origins.
 - However, this science is a nascent one even in the developed world and has not been introduced in India either by timber traders or by police forces.
- **False claim by traders**
 - The traders often put a false claim that the shipment being exported to EU was paid for before the 2021 coup.
- **Origin of the wood**
 - Trade data reveals some Indian companies simply put Asia in the column for origin of the wood, without specifying which country.
 - Also, traders wrote “imported” in the space for declaring where the teak was purchased from.

Role of the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC)

- FSC is an international, non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting responsible management of the world’s forests.
- Since its foundation in 1994, FSC has grown to become the world’s most respected and widespread forest certification system.
- The FSC has made significant efforts to prevent the trade of the illegally harvested teak from Myanmar, but the trade continues to persist.
- One of the challenges faced by FSC is the limited resources and capacity to monitor and enforce its certification standards across the entire supply chain.
- FSC relies on third-party certification bodies to verify compliance with its standards, and there have been cases where these bodies have failed to identify or address violations of FSC’s standards.

Q1) What is Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC)?

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Q2) What is European Union Timber Regulation (EUTR)?

EUTR is a regulation that was adopted by the European Union in 2010 to address illegal logging and promote sustainable forestry practices. The EUTR prohibits the placement of illegally harvested timber and timber products on the EU market.

Source:

[Myanmar teak trade: Highly prized, highly dodgy](#) | [Indian Express](#) | [International Consortium of Investigative Journalists](#) | [FSC](#)

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