

Concerns with Plastic Consumption

What is the issue?

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Consumption of plastic in the Asia-pacific region is getting higher and hence companies need to demonstrate their own reduction commitments.

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What is the background?

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- Asia consumes 50% of global plastic packaging, which could quadruple by 2050.

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- Food, beverage and healthcare represent 75% of plastic packaging use.

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- New consumption patterns, including Asia's rising appetite for e-commerce and food delivery add to demand for plastic packaging.

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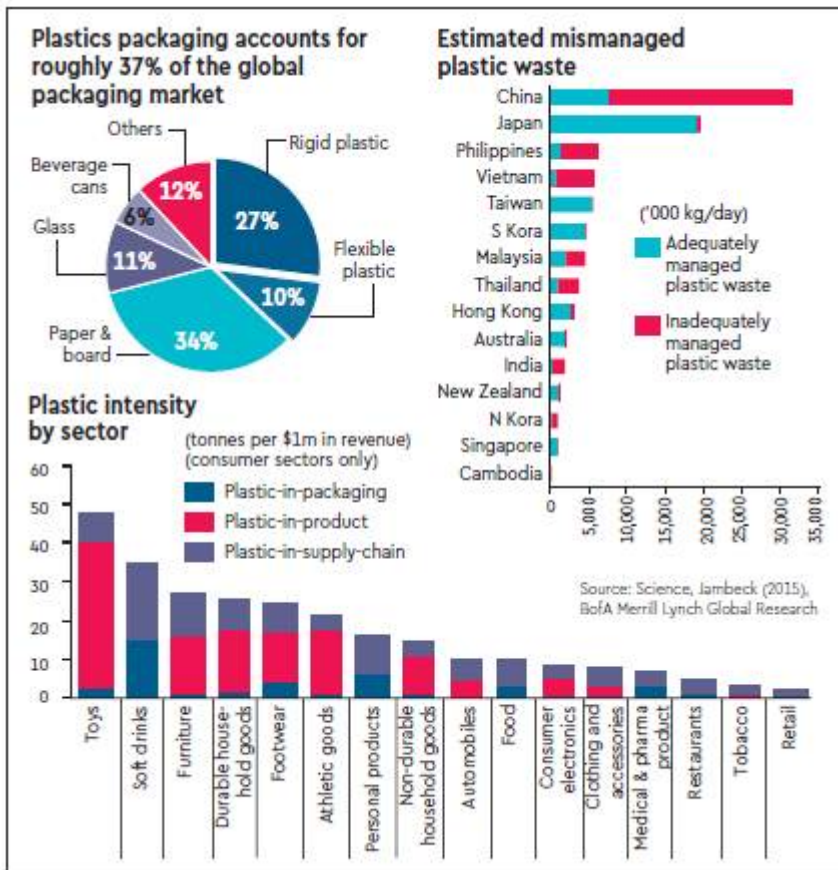
- However, recycling rates are low, with the exception of Japan (83%) and Taiwan (35%).

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- Hence the region contributes 82% of plastic waste which leaks into oceans with China, India and ASEAN contributing 2.7-7.3million tonnes per annum.

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What are the concerns?

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- Plastic represents 37% of packaging in Asia, worth \$150 billion.

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- Though there are obvious benefits of using plastic like durability, safety, hygiene, and lightweight, 95% is designed for short-term (single) use and could take more than 500 years to biodegrade.

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- Since the early 1950s, more than 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic has been produced globally.

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- But only 9% of plastic waste ever produced has been recycled, 12% incinerated and 79% ended up in landfills, dumps or the natural environment.

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- Plastic waste dumping in the ocean is becoming an increasing environmental concern.

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- The major rivers in Asia carry more than 90% of plastic waste in the ocean.

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- The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) estimates that the cost, due to plastic pollution, to tourism, fishing and shipping industries was \$1.3billion in the region alone.

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- Also, majority of the plastic waste in Asia is “mismanaged”, wherein low economic value contributes to nearly 45% of Asia’s plastic waste getting mismanaged (i.e., dumped).

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What is the reason behind low plastic waste collection rate across the world?

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- **Low economic value** - 80% of plastic waste has low residual value such as plastic bags.

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- Alternatively, higher recycling for aluminium cans (55%) fetches sufficiently high selling prices relative to collection costs, thus making it economically attractive.

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- **Poor separation at source** - Plastic collection often involves co-mingling of paper, glass and aluminium and majority of the sorting occurs manually.

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- **High rate of pigment contamination** - Clear plastics have the highest value and are preferred in the recycling market.

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- Dyed and pigmented plastics contain contaminants and are often disposed rather than recycled.

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- **Cheaper to dump or export than to recycle** - With the absence of subsidies from the government, it is often cheaper to export and dump plastic waste in landfill.

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What should be done?

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- In January 2018, China banned the import of plastic waste.

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- Prior to the ban, China imported up to 56% of global exported plastic waste.
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- The largest exporters of waste to China included the US, the UK, the EU and Japan.
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- After China's ban, we are likely to see more stringent plastic waste policies introduced across the globe and in Asia.
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- Also, there is growing acceptance of plastic reduction in many companies in Asia.
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- Thus, reduction in quantity of material per package and use of recycled material by the companies will demonstrate commitment to plastic waste reduction in the future.
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Source: Financial Express

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