

## Effecting the Ban on Single-Use Plastics

### Why in news?

Since July 1, 2022, India has banned the manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale, and use of single-use plastic items with low utility and high littering potential.

### Why are single-use plastics harmful?

*A 2018 U.N. Environment report defines single-use plastics as “plastic items intended to be used only once before they are thrown away or recycled.”*

- **Aquatic ecosystem-** Seabirds, fishes, turtles and marine mammals are found to have fishing gear or plastic bags in their stomach.
- Currently, marine litter is 60-80% plastic, which ultimately means that many sea creatures are swallowing this seawater soup instilled with toxic chemicals from plastic decomposition.
- **Pacific trash vortex-** The North Pacific Ocean contains a gyre of marine litter, known as the Pacific Trash Vortex that has an exceptionally high concentration of single-use plastic.
- It has been estimated to be twice the size of Texas.
- **Greenhouse gases-** When plastic is exposed to sunlight, it produces methane and ethylene, which have a detrimental effect.
- It has been determined that greenhouse gas emissions from the plastic lifecycle account for 3.8% of global greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Health-** The toxic chemicals used to manufacture plastic gets transferred to animal tissue, eventually entering the human food chain.
- Women are at larger risk of health complications due to a higher aggregate of exposure to plastic products.
- **Water potability-** Plastic production is causing deforestation and contaminating potable water.

### What efforts were taken by the government?

- **Amended Rules-** The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India has notified the Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021 and 2022.
- **Promotion of alternatives-** The Indian government has taken steps to promote innovation and create an ecosystem for accelerated adoption and availability of alternatives across the country.
- **Special teams-** To ensure the effective enforcement of the ban, national and State-level control rooms and special enforcement teams will be established to check the

illegal use of single-use plastics.

- **Border checkpoints-** To prevent the movement of banned single-use plastic items between States and Union Territories, border checkpoints have been established.
- **Grievance redressal-** In an effort to empower citizens to help curb the plastic menace, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has launched a grievance redressal application.
- **Awareness campaign-** The awareness campaign by the government has brought together entrepreneurs, start-ups, industry, Governments, regulatory bodies, experts, citizen organisations, R&D and academic institutions.
- **UNEA resolution-** India piloted a resolution on single-use plastics pollution at 4th United Nations Environment Assembly (2019) recognising the urgent need for the global community to address the issue.

### **What does the amended rules say on single use plastics?**

- **Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021**- The amendment basically aims to prohibit identified single-use plastic items, having low utility and high littering potentials, by the year 2022.
- Thickness of plastic carry bags to be increased from 50 microns
  - to 75 microns from 30th September, 2021
  - to 120 microns from the 31st December, 2022
- **Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2022-** The guidelines provide a framework to
  - Strengthen the circular economy of plastic packaging waste,
  - Promote the development of new alternatives to plastic packaging
  - Provide the next steps for moving towards sustainable plastic packaging by businesses

*Bangladesh became the first country to ban thin plastic bags in 2002.*

### **What are the challenges?**

- The ban will succeed only if all stakeholders participate enthusiastically and engage in effective engagement and concerted actions.
- Plastic or PET bottles, counted among the most recyclable types of plastic, have been left out of the scope of the ban.
- Almost 25 Indian States previously banned plastic at the state level but these bans had a very limited impact in reality.
- The challenge is to see how the local level authorities will enforce the ban in accordance with the guidelines.
- Banned items such as earbuds with plastic sticks, plastic sticks for balloons, etc., are non-branded items and it is difficult to find out who the manufacturer is and who is accountable for selling.

### **What is the need of the hour?**

- **Media Awareness-** The consumer needs to be informed about the ban through

advertisements, newspaper or TV commercials, or on social media.

- **Investment in R&D**- In order to find sustainable alternatives, companies need to invest in research and development.
- **Greener alternatives**- Greener alternatives such as compostable and bio-degradable plastic may be considered as an option.
- **Responsibility**- The solution to the plastic pollution problem is not the responsibility of the government alone, but of industries, brands, manufacturers and most importantly consumers.

## References

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/effecting-the-ban-on-single-use-plastics/article65836277.ece?homepage=true>
2. <https://www.naturespath.com/en-us/blog/single-use-plastics-bad-can/>

