

Maharashtra Bans Plastics

What is the issue?

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- Maharashtra may be gearing up for a stringent ban on plastic.
- But experience from across the country suggests that claims on reigning in plastic are stronger on paper than on the ground.

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What does the ban encompass?

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- Ban Environment experts have been blaming plastics for choking of nullahs in Mumbai and the flooding in parts of the city during monsoons.
- Hence, the government has notification a ban on manufacture, use, transport, distribution, wholesale and retail sale, storage and import of plastic bags.
- The ban also covers disposable plastic products such as single-use disposable dishes, cups, plates, glasses, fork, bowl, container, spoon, straw, and wraps.
- Notably, the ban is applicable to manufacturers and consumers as well as the chain in between, which includes shops, hawkers, vendors and offices.
- **Exemptions** While the ban is not applicable to PET bottles, a predefined and explicitly printed buyback price (on the bottle) has been mandated. \n
- The price is slated to vary between Rs. 1 to Rs. 2, depending on the size.
- Compostable plastic bags and plastic used for packaging of medicines, for plant nurseries, and for handling of solid waste, have been exempted.
- Plastic used for packaging of milk, those manufactured for export in SEZs and plastic wrap for material at the manufacturing stage are also not ban.

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What are the challenges in implementing the ban?

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- **The Affected** Maharashtra has 2,500 units making plastic bags, employing 56,000 people and they owe nearly Rs. 11,000 crore to banks.
- 'Plastic bag manufacturers' and 'retail traders' approached the Bombay High Court against the decision, but their appeal was turned down.
- 'Clothing Manufacturers' have spoken against the ban, stating that apparel trade employs 30 lakh people in India and depends on plastic packaging.

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- Alternatives Packaging The State is not directly providing alternatives to banned items and has relied on people for solutions.
- In this context, Mumbai Corporation has invited manufacturers of alternative products to showcase their wares at a three-day exhibition.

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How is the ban going to be implemented?

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- **Authority** Collectors, forest officers, police and Pollution Control Board officials have been empowered to implement the ban and take legal action. \n
- Local bodies are training a cadre of inspectors to keep a constant vigil and a operating procedure for levying penalty has also been given out.
- Awareness for waste segregation, door-to-door campaign about the policy and establishment of multiple waste collection centres has already been done.
- **Fine** Penalty for violating the ban starts from Rs. 5,000 (first offence), Rs. 10,000 (second time) and Rs. 25,000 (third time) with three months in jail. \n

In case one fails to pay the minimum penalty, the civic body can file a
prosecution complaint before the court, which will decide the fine.
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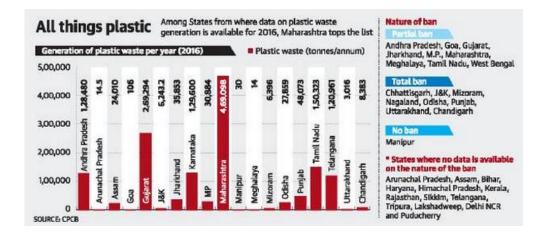
What is the countrywide status on plastic management?

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- India generates an estimated 5 million metric tonnes of plastic packaging waste each year, of which less than half is recycled.
- Centre's "Plastic Waste Management (PWM) Rules 2016", mandate all States to annually apprise the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the steps taken to reign in plastic use.
- \bullet The overall appraisal also involves a report on the strength and performance of the recycler and waste-processing network of states. \n
- Sadly, in CPCB's latest report in 2016, it was noted that only 24 States/UT have complied with the centre's directions for appraisal.

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How do states fare in regulating plastics?

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 Poor implementation - Most States, while claiming total ban, implement ban only in specific towns or cities or only on particular type of plastics.

- In fact, they don't even set-up proper monitoring system for use of carry bags as per the specified guidelines of the union government.
- More significantly, even in areas where total ban on plastics has been imposed, plastic bags are stocked, sold and used indiscriminately.
- **Violation** Delhi reportedly generates the largest quantity of plastic waste in India, but it hasn't even provided its plastic management plan yet.
- While law requires that all plastic recyclers register themselves, there were around 312 unregistered plastic recycling units across the country.

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- **Single Use Plastic** Around 43% of manufactured plastics are used for packaging, and most of this is "single-use" plastic.
- So far, not one of the 24 States that report their plastic waste management performance has plans in place to tackle single use plastics.

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Will Maharashtra's ban work?

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- \bullet Independent experts say that while Maharashtra's initiative is laudable, it still hinges on extremely efficient enforcement. \n
- Efforts for proper implementation are being undertaken with seriousness, but manpower for regulating the ban is bound to remain a challenge.
- Identifying suitable plastic packaging alternatives is key to sustain the ban in the long run as mere policing will not work.
- Kerala and Sikkim have the most creditable plastic waste management policies and Maharashtra would do well by adopting their best practices.

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Source: The Hindu

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