

Ban on single use plastics

July 1, 2022

Manifest Pedagogy:

Recycling is the best choice for plastic, but the process and systemization are still being developed. Although there are very few recycling facilities, the plastic production model is quite large and difficult to manage. So a restriction on single-use plastic would be beneficial. To reap the rewards of the prohibition, the government needs to educate the populace and business organizations.

In News: The Centre has defined a list of single-use plastic items that are banned from July 1st, 2022.

Placing it in syllabus: Environment

Static Dimensions:

- About single-use plastic

Current Dimensions:

- About the news
- The items being banned
- Why are these items being banned?
- Enforcement of the Ban
- Other countries' approach towards single-use plastic

Content:

About the news-

- The Ministry for Environment, Forest and Climate Change had issued a gazette notification in 2021 announcing the ban, and has now defined a list of items that will be banned.
- The manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of following single-use plastic, including

polystyrene and expanded polystyrene, commodities are prohibited with effect from the 1st July, 2022.

About single-use plastic-

- It refers to plastic items that are used once and discarded.
- Single-use plastic (SUP) has among the highest shares of plastic manufactured and used from packaging of items, to bottles (shampoo, detergents, cosmetics), polythene bags, face masks, coffee cups, cling film, trash bags, food packaging etc.

Threats from usage of single use plastics-

- When plastic remains in the environment for long periods of time and does not decay, it turns into microplastics, first **entering our food sources and then the human body**, and this is extremely harmful.
- A 2021 report by one of the Australian philanthropic organizations the Minderoo Foundation said **single-use plastics account for a third of all plastic produced globally**, with 98% manufactured from fossil fuels.
- According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), SUP also accounts for the majority of plastic discarded (around **130 million metric tonnes globally in 2019**), all of which is burned or buried in landfills or discarded directly into the environment or ends up in the ocean, thus threatening marine life also.
- On the current trajectory of production, it has been projected that SUP could account for **5-10% of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050**.
- The report found that India features in the top 100 countries of SUP waste generation at **rank 94** (the top three being Singapore, Australia and Oman).
- **Domestic production of 11.8 million metric tonnes annually**, and import of 2.9 MMT, India's net generation

of single-use plastic waste is 5.6 MMT, and **per capita generation is 4 kg.**

The items that are being banned-

- Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) have announced a ban on earbuds, balloon sticks, candy and ice-cream sticks, cutlery items including plates, cups, glasses, forks, spoons, knives, trays, sweet boxes, invitation cards, cigarette packs, PVC banners measuring under 100 microns, and polystyrene for decoration.
- The **Ministry had already banned polythene bags under 75 microns in September 2021, expanding the limit from the earlier 50 microns.**
- From December, 2022, the ban will be extended to polythene bags under 120 microns.
- The ban is being introduced in phases to give manufacturer's time to shift to thicker polythene bags that are easier to recycle.
- According to the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016, there is also a complete ban on sachets using plastic material for storing, packing or selling gutkha, tobacco and pan masala.

The Union environment ministry notified the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2021, under the Environment Protection (EP) Act on August 12, 2021. There are different penalties for companies, organisations, and government departments under the Act for violation of rules.

Why are these items being banned?

- The choice for the first set of single-use plastic items for the ban was based on difficulty of collection, and therefore recycling.
- These items are difficult to collect, especially since most are either small, or discarded directly into the

environment like ice-cream sticks.

States such as Maharashtra have their legislation prohibiting single-use plastic products. However, such **bans were ineffective earlier because transport of single-use plastic and trade across the borders could not be stopped** and that a national ban provides much more power to states.

Challenges-

- Of the single-use plastic industry the production and sale of the banned items is miniscule. The largest share of SUP is that of packaging with as much as 95% of single use belonging to this category from toothpaste to shaving cream to frozen foods.
- The ban can increase the cost of the products.
- The MSMEs which are currently manufacturing single-use plastics, employs nearly 200,000 people directly and around 450,000 indirectly and would be urged to shift to making alternatives. But there is difficulty in finding affordable alternatives.
- There are no clear guidelines issued regarding alternatives.

Enforcement of the Ban-

- The ban will be monitored by the CPCB from the Centre, and by the State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) that will report to the Centre regularly.
- Directions have been issued at national, state and local levels for example, to all petrochemical industries to not supply raw materials to industries engaged in the banned items.
- Directions have also been issued to SPCBs and Pollution Control Committees to modify or revoke consent to operate issued under the Air/Water Act to industries engaged in single-use plastic items.
- Local authorities have been directed to issue fresh

commercial licenses with the condition that SUP items will not be sold on their premises, and existing commercial licenses will be canceled if they are found to be selling these items.

- The CPCB issued one-time certificates to 200 manufacturers of compostable plastic and the BIS passed standards for biodegradable plastic.
- Those found violating the ban can be penalized under the EP Act 1986, which allows for imprisonment up to 5 years, or a penalty up to Rs 1 lakh, or both.
- Violators can also be asked to pay Environmental Damage Compensation by the SPCB. In addition, there are municipal laws on plastic waste, with their own penal codes.

Global response against the use of plastic-

- 124 countries, parties to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), including India, signed a resolution to draw up an agreement which will in the future make it legally binding for the signatories to address the full life of plastics from production to disposal, to end plastic pollution.
- **Bangladesh** became the first country to ban thin plastic bags in 2002.
- **New Zealand** became the latest country to ban plastic bags in July 2019.
- **China** issued a ban on plastic bags in 2020 with phased implementation.
- **Eight states in the US have** banned single-use plastic bags, beginning with California in 2014. Seattle became the first major US city to ban plastic straws in 2018.
- As of July 2019, **68 countries** have plastic bag bans with varying degrees of enforcement.
- On July 2, 2021, the Directive on Single-Use Plastics took effect in the **European Union (EU)**.
 - The directive bans certain single-use plastics for

which alternatives are available; single-use plastic plates, cutlery, straws, balloon sticks and cotton buds cannot be placed on the markets of the EU member states.

- The same measure applies to cups, food and beverage containers made of expanded polystyrene, and all products made of oxo-degradable plastic.

Way forward-

- Behavioral Change in consumers and promoting the **3 R's- recycle, reuse, reduce.**
- Promoting **Circular economy** that is reuse, sharing, repair, refurbishment, remanufacturing and recycling of resources to create a closed-loop system, thus minimizing the use of resources, generation of waste, pollution and carbon emissions.
- Promote **alternatives like cotton, khadi bags and biodegradable plastics.**
- More R&D (Research & Development) and finances for sustainable alternatives are needed.
- Citizen participation and volunteering by citizen groups is needed to educate people and create awareness about the issue and promote an eco-friendly lifestyle.

Mould your Thoughts:

1. What are the concerns regarding single use plastic? Discuss the reasoning behind the government's decision to ban them and how it will impact the environment.

Approach to the answer-

- About Single use plastic
- Threats posed by Single use plastic
- The items being banned and reason for the same.
- Benefits of the ban
- Way forward and Conclusion.

