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

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