Maharashtra Bans Plastics

What is the issue?

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- Maharashtra may be gearing up for a stringent ban on plastic.
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- 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.
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- Hence, the government has notification a ban on manufacture, use, transport, distribution, wholesale and retail sale, storage and import of plastic bags.
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- The ban also covers disposable plastic products such as single-use disposable dishes, cups, plates, glasses, fork, bowl, container, spoon, straw, and wraps.
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- Notably, the ban is applicable to manufacturers and consumers as well as the chain in between, which includes shops, hawkers, vendors and offices.
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- **Exemptions -** While the ban is not applicable to PET bottles, a predefined and explicitly printed buyback price (on the bottle) has been mandated.
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- The price is slated to vary between Rs. 1 to Rs. 2, depending on the size.
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- Compostable plastic bags and plastic used for packaging of medicines, for plant nurseries, and for handling of solid waste, have been exempted.
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- 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.
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- ‘Plastic bag manufacturers’ and ‘retail traders’ approached the Bombay High Court against the decision, but their appeal was turned down.
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- ‘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.
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- 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.
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- 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.
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- Awareness for waste segregation, door-to-door campaign about the policy and establishment of multiple waste collection centres has already been done.
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- **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.
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- 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.
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- 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.
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- The overall appraisal also involves a report on the strength and performance of the recycler and waste-processing network of states.
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- 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.
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- 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.
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- More significantly, even in areas where total ban on plastics has been imposed, plastic bags are stocked, sold and used indiscriminately.
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- **Violation -** Delhi reportedly generates the largest quantity of plastic waste in India, but it hasn’t even provided its plastic management plan yet.
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- 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.
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- 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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- Independent experts say that while Maharashtra’s initiative is laudable, it still hinges on extremely efficient enforcement.
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- Efforts for proper implementation are being undertaken with seriousness, but manpower for regulating the ban is bound to remain a challenge.
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- Identifying suitable plastic packaging alternatives is key to sustain the ban in the long run as mere policing will not work.
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- 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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