Plastic Waste Management

What is the issue?

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There is a need for coordinating and systematising the efforts for reducing the use of and the ban on plastic.

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What is the need?

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- India generates an estimated 16 lakh tonnes of plastic waste annually.
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- Every piece of plastic ever disposed of is damaging the earth.
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- Plastic persists in the environment for generations.
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- A fraction of the plastic disposed of is recycled.
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- But most of it eventually ends up in the ocean.
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- It stays in the earth, floating in the ocean or in dump sites outside city limits.
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- It may be broken down into microparticles and in the food chain.
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- Plastic waste, mixed with organic and sanitary matter, reduces its recyclability drastically.
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- The best way to reduce plastic pollution is to reduce and phase out its consumption.
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What are the measures taken?

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- India’s Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 specified some regulations.
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- **Ban**- It called for a ban on plastic bags below 50 micron thickness.
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- It also called for phasing out, within 2 years, of the manufacture and sale of non-recyclable, multi-layered plastic.
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- Following this, more than 20 Indian States have announced a ban on plastic bags.
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- Bengaluru announced a complete ban on the manufacture, supply, sale and use of thermocol and plastic items.
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- This was irrespective of thickness, and included carry bags, banners, buntings, flex, flags, plates, clips, spoons, etc.
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- The exceptions are plastic for export, packaging material for use in forestry, milk packets and hospitals.
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- There are stiff fines that cover manufacturing and disposal.
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- However, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) report highlighted that this ban was barely effective.
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- **Companies** - The responsibility for collection of used plastic and multi-layered plastic sachets lies with producers, importers and brand owners.
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- The onus of disposal and recycling of products and materials is with producers, rather than on taxpayers and governments.
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- Companies should have already submitted plans, in 2016, for waste collection systems.
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- This is based on extended producer responsibility (EPR).
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- It could be done either through their own distribution channels or with the local body concerned.
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- However, none of this has happened at any perceivable scale.
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- Companies say that plastic waste is too complex or pretend to be completely unaware of these rules.
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How to address this?

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- Citizens need to be made **aware** of these rules for better implementation.
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- Governments need to work with citizens to collect **fines** in case of violations.
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- Mandatory segregation and recycling of plastic waste must be implemented before it is eventually phased out.
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- **Companies** - Companies need to be held accountable in terms of their environmental and social responsibilities.
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- Several companies produce the same type of packaging.
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- So, instead of each collecting and recycling only its own packaging, companies can collectively implement EPR.
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- Geographically dividing a region into zones and handling the waste generated could be an option.
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- This also reduces collection, transportation and recycling costs.
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- **Segregation** - In order to realise the potential for recycling, waste must first be segregated at source.
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- This includes separation of dry (plastic, paper, metal, glass) and wet (kitchen and garden) waste at source.
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- **Research** - There should be research on waste generation quantities and trends.
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- It should also contribute to find innovative alternatives to plastic.
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- There is also a need for strategies to deal with the plastic that has already been disposed of.
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Source: The Hindu

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