Single-Use Plastics (SUP) regulation

What is the issue?

- Single-use plastics (SUPs) are not regulated nationally in India and so the States are required to regulate it by themselves.
- This creates diverse categorizations, but from this one can also find a trend and create a national classification of SUPs.

Why defining SUP for regulation is not simple?

- **Dictionary definition** - SUPs or disposable plastics are products that are used only once before they are thrown away.
- But, this definition is not useful when it comes to banning and phasing-out SUPs.
- The reason is simple: It is practically impossible to ban all SUPs because we don't have viable alternatives for many.
- That is why no country in the world has come out with a regulation to ban all SUPs.
- In fact, the effort in most countries has been to target the most problematic SUPs.
- But, to identify the most problematic SUPs, we need to define and categorise them for regulatory purposes.

What are the SUP regulations in some Indian States?

- In India, we don't have a national categorisation of SUPs.
- In the absence of this, states are defining SUPs by themselves and the differences between them are quite stark.
- Considering that India is a single market, such differences are creating market distortions as well as hampering the enforcement of regulations.
- Let us look into the rules of some major states that have some ban on SUPs – Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

What is the regulation in Maharashtra?

- Maharashtra has classified SUPs into three categories - products that are banned, those allowed with EPR and those that are exempted.
- **Ban** - Plastic carry-bags, plastic & thermocol cutlery and dish used to package food in hotels, non-woven polypropylene bags, pouches for liquids

and decorative materials made from plastics and thermocol.
- **EPR** - For other SUPs, it has prescribed buy-back schemes as part of the Extended Producers Responsibility (EPR) of companies.
- Companies have been asked to put in place buy-back scheme for PET bottles and plastic packaging materials of thickness more than 50micron.
- **Exemption** - Plastic used for packaging medicines, and the use of compostable plastics for nurseries, horticulture, agriculture and handling of solid waste.

What is the regulation in Tamil Nadu?

- Tamil Nadu has categorised SUPs into two categories - products that are banned and products that are exempted.
- **Ban** - It has defined 'use and throwaway plastics' and banned them.
- The items included by the state are quite specific and don't figure in the list of other states.
- It has banned plastic flags, plastic sheets used for spreading on the dining table and plastic coated teacups.
- **Exemption** - Plastics used for forestry and horticulture nurseries and packaging of milk and milk products, oil, medicine and medical equipment.

What is the regulation in Uttar Pradesh?

- Uttar Pradesh has **only one category of SUPs** - products that are banned.
- **Ban** - All kinds of carry-bags and disposable cutleries. This ban is only enforceable in urban and industrial areas.

What could be done?

- As one can see, there is a vast difference in how states have categorised SUPs.
- We can synthesise the differences to arrive at a national classification of SUPs like the one categorization below.
- **Category 1: Products that should be banned** - All kinds of carry-bags, disposable cutleries, straws, pouches for liquids and small bottled water, decorative materials and flags, etc.
- **Category 2: Products that can be brought under buy-back EPR scheme** - PET/PETE bottles, plastic packaging used by hotels and takeaways, milk pouches and food packaging of more than 50-micron thickness, big plastic bottles of body care products and medicines, etc.
- **Category 3: Products that can come under non-buy-back EPR scheme** - Multi-layered plastics, small sachets and bottles, etc.
- Companies producing these products will have to work with local authorities

to ensure maximum recovery and recycling/end-use of these products.

- **Category 4: Products that can be exempted**. Compostable plastics, plastics used in nurseries, horticulture, agriculture and health sector.

Source: Financial Express

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