Banning Single-Use Plastic

For Prelims: Single- Use Plastic, Plastic Waste Management Rules 2016, CPCB, Environment protection Act 1986

For Mains: Plastic Waste Pollution and Management, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Conservation

Why in News?

Recently, the Centre has defined a list of single-use plastic items that will be banned from 1st July 2022.

- The manufacture, import, stocking, distribution, sale and use of notified single-use plastic, including polystyrene and expanded polystyrene, commodities shall be prohibited with effect from the 1st July, 2022.

What is single-use plastic?

- **About:**
  - It refers to plastic items that are used once and discarded.

- **Highest Shares of Plastic Manufactured and Used:**
  - **Single-use plastic** 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.
- **Accounts for a Third of all Plastic Produced Globally:**
  - According to a 2021 report of the Minderoo Foundation, an Australian philanthropic organization, single-use plastics account for **a third of all plastic produced globally,** with **98% manufactured from fossil fuels.**
- **The Majority of Plastic Discarded:**
  - Single-use plastic also accounts for the majority of plastic discarded – **130 million metric tonnes globally in 2019** — all of which is **burned, buried** in landfills or **discarded** directly into the environmen.
- **Contribution to Greenhouse Gas Emissions:**
  - On the current trajectory of production, it has been projected that single-use plastic could account for **5-10% of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.**
- **Data for India:**
  - The report found that **India features in the top 100 countries** of single-use plastic waste generation – **at rank 94** (the top three being **Singapore, Australia and Oman**).
  - With 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.**

Why these items?

- The choice for the first set of single-use plastic items for the ban was based on **the difficulty of collection, and therefore recycling.**
- **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.
- The largest share of single-use plastic 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 items chosen are of low value and of low turnover and are unlikely to have a big economic impact, which could be a contributing reason.

How will the ban be enforced?

- **Monitored by:**
  - 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 Issued:**
  - 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 licences** will be cancelled if they are found to be selling these items.
- **Promoting Compostable and Biodegradable Plastics :**
  - The **CPCB issued one-time certificates to 200 manufacturers of compostable plastic and the** BIS **passed standards for** biodegradable plastic.
- **Penalty:**
  - Those found violating the ban can be penalised under the **Environment Protection 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.
  - There are municipal laws on plastic waste, with their own penal codes.

How are other countries dealing with single-use plastic?

- **Sign Resolution:**
  - In 2022, **124 countries**, parties to the **United Nations Environment Assembly, 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.
  - As of July 2019, 68 countries have plastic bag bans with varying degrees of enforcement.
- **Countries which Ban Plastic:**
  - **Bangladesh:**
    - **Bangladesh** became the **first country to ban thin plastic bags** in 2002.
  - **New Zealand:**
    - New Zealand became the latest country to ban plastic bags in July 2019.
  - **China:**
    - China issued a ban on plastic bags in 2020 with phased implementation.
  - **US:**
    - 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.
  - **European Union:**
    - In July, 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.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. Why is there a great concern about the 'microbeads' that are released into environment? (2019)

(a) They are considered harmful to marine ecosystems.
(b) They are considered to cause skin cancer in children.
(c) They are small enough to be absorbed by crop plants in irrigated fields.
(d) They are often found to be used as food adulterants.

Ans: (a)

- Microbeads are small, solid, manufactured plastic particles that are less than 5mm and do not degrade or dissolve in water.
- Mainly made of polyethylene, microbeads can also be prepared from petrochemical plastics such as polystyrene and polypropylene. They may be added to a range of products, including rinse-off cosmetics, personal care and cleaning products.
- Because of their small size, microbeads pass unfiltered through the sewage treatment system and reach the water bodies. The untreated microbeads in the waterbodies are taken up by the marine animals, thus producing toxicity and causing harm to the marine ecosystem.
- In 2014, Netherland became the first country to ban cosmetics microbeads.
- **Therefore, option (a) is the correct answer.**

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