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European Parliament Bans Single-Use Plastics

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The European Union Parliament has **voted to ban single-use plastic cutlery**, cotton buds, straws and stirrers as part of a sweeping law against plastic waste that despoils beaches and pollutes oceans.

- The directive will now pass through formalities before it is published in the EU rulebook. After that, EU member states **will have two years to implement the directive, i.e. the ban will come into force by 2021 in all EU member states.**
 - The United Kingdom too will have to follow the rules if it took part in and extended the Brexit transition period.
- By **2025, plastic bottles should be made of 25% recycled content, and by 2029, 90% of them should be recycled.**
- The ban **targets the top 10 disposable plastic products** including plates, balloon sticks, food and beverage containers made of expanded polystyrene and all products made of oxo-degradable plastic.
- **Tobacco companies will be required to cover the costs** for public collection of cigarette stubs, which are the second most littered single-use plastic item.
- Apart from the ban, the EU will also encourage member states to **reduce the use of plastic packaging and introduce stricter labelling rules.**

Single-Use Plastics

- Single-use plastics, or disposable plastics, are **used only once before** they are thrown away or recycled.
- These items are things like plastic bags, straws, coffee stirrers, soda and water bottles and most food packaging.
 - The single-use plastic products **also prevent the spread of infection.** Instruments such as syringes, applicators, drug tests, bandages and wraps are often made to be disposable.
 - Also, single-use plastic products have been **enlisted in the fight against food waste**, keeping food and water fresher for longer and reducing the potential for

contamination.

- However, there **can be challenges when it comes to disposing of some single-use products.**
 - Petroleum based plastic is **not biodegradable and usually goes into a landfill** where it is buried or it gets into the water and finds its way into the ocean.
 - In the process of breaking down, it **releases toxic chemicals (additives that were used to shape and harden the plastic)** which make their way into our food and water supply.
- The ultimate goal is that all these products can be **collected and converted into energy or recycled.**

Background

- Europe is **not the worst source of plastic pollution**, but this measure could **serve as an example to the world**, i.e EU's change of the economic model has a global impact
- **Other reasons** which prompted the EU to ban single use plastics are:
 - EU **recycles only 25% of the 25 million tonnes of plastics waste** it produces every year.
 - Growing concerns about plastic pollution in oceans and stories of dead whales with plastic in their stomachs. **Marine litter** has come under the spotlight because 85% of it is plastic. E.g.: **Great Pacific Grabage Patch**
 - **China's decision to stop processing waste** have prompted the bloc to take more drastic steps to tackle the issue.

European Parliament

- The European Parliament is the **only parliamentary institution of the European Union (EU)** that is **directly elected** by EU citizens aged 18 or older every five years since 1979.
- It has 751 Members of elected directly from the **28 Member States of EU.**

Way Forward

Although a welcome step, specially when environment has taken backstage with respect to economic growth globally. Without a **proper waste management infrastructure** and **sufficient recycling facilities**, it is difficult to achieve a **circular economy** or the objectives of this directive.