

# Single-use plastics ban: A big leap towards a better planet

In 2018, when India hosted World Environment Day on the theme Beat Plastic Pollution, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi gave a call for eliminating single-use plastics (SUP). A year later, in his Independence Day speech, PM Modi raised the issue again and said, "Can we free India from single-use plastic? The time for implementing such an idea has come. May teams be mobilised to work in this direction... Shopkeepers should sell jute and cloth bags. Customers should adopt ways to reduce plastic usage. We must also put technologies in use to abolish plastic usage."

There are very good reasons to stop using plastics. They harm the environment as well as the health of the people. Only a minuscule amount of plastics is recycled or destroyed in waste-to-energy facilities. Most end up in landfills, where they can take up to 1,000-plus years to decompose. Worse, plastics release toxic substances that leach into the soil and water. As they decompose, plastic breaks down into tiny pieces that eventually become microplastics. Newer research shows the presence of microplastics in soils, freshwater, and even the air we breathe. This is a matter of grave concern.

India's call to eliminate SUPs provided momentum, leading to significant action on plastic pollution around the globe. This culminated in the historic adoption of 'End Plastic Pollution: Towards an internationally legally binding instrument' at the United Nations (UN) Environment Assembly meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, in March. The UN Environment Program's executive director, Inger Andersen, called the agreement the most critical international multilateral environmental deal since the Paris climate accord.

In India, the ban on SUPs began on July 1. The ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEF) has also notified guidelines on the extended producer responsibility (EPR) for plastic packaging. The enforceable prescription of a minimum level of recycling of plastic packaging waste, collected under EPR by producers, importers, and brand owners, will strengthen the circular economy of plastic packaging waste. The EPR guidelines will also promote

the development of new alternatives and give a push to sustainable plastic packaging.

The guidelines also mandate the use of recycled plastic content in packaging. The step will generate demand for recycled plastic material. Questions have been raised on alternatives. The Modi government believes that development should not come at the cost of the environment, and efforts to save the environment should not halt development. With that basic principle in mind and PM Modi's call for Lifestyle for the Environment (LiFE), MoEF organised a national-level exhibition on alternatives to raise awareness. The states and Union territories (UTs) have been asked to organise similar fairs and provide incentives for an accelerated penetration of SUP alternatives.

A provisional standard on biodegradable plastic has been notified. The ministry of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) has made a provision in central government schemes to support MSME units manufacturing alternatives. States and UTs have also been asked to provide incentives to accelerate the penetration of SUP alternatives. MoEF is working with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade to take forward innovative ideas on alternatives under the StartUp India Scheme.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has issued one-time certificates to around 200 manufacturers of compostable plastic. In line with the Modi government's ease of doing business policy, the certificates do not require renewal. An online portal has been developed to facilitate the certification of these manufacturers. To support MSMEs, CPCB in association with the Central Institute of Petrochemicals Engineering & Technology (CIPET) is organising workshops for MSMEs to transition to SUP alternatives. Directions have been issued to e-commerce companies, leading sellers/users, and plastic raw material manufacturers on the ban. But the bid to save the environment can never achieve its desired results without *janbhagidari* (people's participation). To encourage citizens, awareness drives are underway.

CPCB has also undertaken comprehensive measures to make the SUP ban successful. Its Comprehensive Action Plan includes measures to reduce the supply of raw materials and plastic demand, roll out digital interventions for efficient monitoring and creating awareness and guidance to state boards for effective implementation of directions. The National Dashboard on Elimination of Single-Use Plastic and Plastic Waste Management has also been set up to monitor the implementation of the plan.

The ban is a significant step towards building a sustainable planet we can proudly hand over to the next generation. We can eliminate SUPs from our daily lives with everyone's participation and combined efforts. Living by the PM's vision of LiFE and adopting environmentally friendly alternatives are the only ways to build a sustainable future.



Bhupender Yadav



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## Significant step towards building a sustainable planet

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