

UT MATTERS PUDUCHERRY

It is time to impose ban on single-use plastic

Rajesh B Nair

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With Cabinet putting the decision on hold due to the model code of conduct, the use of plastic is widespread in Puducherry



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All eyes are on the government to see if it will keep its word on banning single use plastic items.

The Cabinet on January 31 had taken a decision to ban single use plastic items including carrybags, plates, disposable cups, sheets, straw, expanded polystyrene foam (popularly known as thermocol) and water pouches in the Union Territory from March 1.

The ban did not fructify as a notification prohibiting the manufacture and sale of single use plastic items was not issued due to the Model Code of Conduct that was in effect.

The plastic manufacturers had opposed the move as they feared the decision would lead to closure of several units involved in manufacturing such items in the UT.

After the Cabinet announcement in February, several retail outlets and hoteliers had shifted to alternative packing materials. With the government putting on hold the ban, plastic carrybags are back in shops.

“We hope the government will adhere to its decision. Time should be given to industrial units to shift to manufacturing alternate packing materials and create awareness among the public. But once a decision is taken, it should be implemented, said Vijayan, a resident of Saram.

He said one needs to check the stormwater drains in the town to see the hazardous impact of plastic on the environment. “Whenever there is heavy floods due to rain, we blame the choked stormwater drains. The presence of plastic items in the drains was identified as one of the major causes for flooding,” he said.

Though there is at present a ban on plastic items with less than 50 microns thickness, most of the wayside hoteliers use such materials for packing food items. “Maybe the government could stop its manufacture but did not achieve its objective of banning its use,” said Jayaraman, a resident of Reddiarpalayam.

According to the general secretary of the Association for Promoting Sustainability in Campuses, M. Nandivarman, scientists have confirmed that plastic causes serious environmental pollution, affecting the basic life support system such as soil, water and air. It also resulted in health ailments such as eye irritation, vision failure, difficulty in breathing, liver dysfunction and cancer, he said.

“With around two-thirds of all forms of plastic getting accumulated on the face of earth, it degrades slowly and leaches into the land and water. Hence, enforcement of rules and regulations for the production and use of plastic could ultimately help reduce its toxic effects on human beings, biodiversity and environment,” he said.

Assessment

Mr. Nandivarman, who teaches in the Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Pondicherry University, said vulnerability assessment of lakes prepared at the request of Lt. Governor Kiran Bedi had clearly shown the impact of plastic on waterbodies. The study was conducted in Oussudu, Bahour Kankan lakes and Aye Kulum.

The report had highlighted that the canals/ *vaikkal* have become dumping grounds for used plastic bags, thermocols, cups, plates, pipes, FRP and bottles. The dumping of plastic items had interrupted free flow of monsoon run-off and stimulated its disintegration in the active phase. The report had recommended several steps for rejuvenation of lakes

Sudalai. S, Assistant Professor, Centre for Pollution Control and Environmental Engineering, Pondicherry University, said everyone needs to be proactive to arrest the pollution plastic was causing to the environment.

“Plastic ban is not a term to be afraid of. It just says adapt to a new lifestyle for carrying things,” he said.

Before going into the ban, the government should encourage people to identify and manufacture alternative packing items. Skill development in producing alternate packing materials should be encouraged.

The life-cycle of the new products also need to be taken into account. Hoteliers should be encouraged to shift to banana leaf, teak leaf, vaathula leaf and mantharai leaf for serving and packing food.

Improve livelihood

Moreover, the increasing demand for leaves would help farmers take up large scale farming and improve their livelihood, he added.

In order to involve the next generation in the process of recycling, a small discount can be given to materials such as cookie holder, toothpaste cover on purchase of new products upon exchange.

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