

WILL A BAN KILL PLASTICS' MENACE? PROBABLY NOT, CLAIM EXPERTS

Despite a blanket ban earlier, lack of enforcement resulted in use and improper disposal leading to pollution

IT WAS IN 2002 that Tamil Nadu first decided to act against the menace of plastic waste and moved to form a legislature on it. It was the first state in India to do so

ON MAY 9, 2002, the then Chief Minister Jayalalithaa announced that the bill, introduced in the Assembly a day earlier, would be referred to a House Select Committee for further discussion

THE FIRST ATTEMPT STARTED IN 2002



The bill sought to ban the use of "non-recyclable" plastic carry bags, cups, plates and tumblers and a range of plastic articles in food establishments

Under the legislation, the use of articles made of non-reusable plastic such as forks, spoons, cords or strings, sheets and mats and the distribution of newspapers and periodicals in plastic wrappers would be banned



Any violation of the ban on the sale, storage and use of prohibited plastic articles will attract fines of up to **₹25,000**

In the same year, at an exhibition organised by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board in Chennai, Jayalalithaa held up a coconut broom to demonstrate that it is better than the plastic ones

At that time, the most strident criticism of the bill came from the Tamil Nadu Plastic Manufacturers Association. It issued an advertisement claiming that more than four lakh workers employed in 5,000 plastic manufacturing units in the state are in danger of losing their jobs as a result of the ban

Sixteen years on, if the government imposes a ban on plastic bags less than 60 micron thick and 8x12 inches size now, consumers will have to shell out more money for the same size of bags

While the bags of 8x12 inches size and 40 micron thickness would cost Rs 1.35, those of 60 micron thickness would cost nearly Rs 2.10

According to a statement from the environment minister, released on August, 2017, the generators of waste have been mandated to take steps to minimise generation of and prevent littering with plastic waste

It noted that the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 also mandate the responsibilities of local bodies, gram panchayats, waste generators, retailers and street vendors to manage the plastic waste



THE CHENNAI CORPORATION HAD PUT INTO EFFECT A BAN ON PLASTIC BAGS LESSER THAN 40 MICRONS THICK IN 2015. BUT IT HAD LITTLE EFFECT

TUBA RAQSHAN

CHENNAI: Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami's announcement of a ban on manufacture, sale, storage and usage of disposable plastic across Tamil Nadu from January 1, 2019 is a populist move rather than a strategic one, claim city experts. Unless the state government has a plan to create sustainable infrastructure to phase out one of environment's biggest nemesis - the disposable plastic.

Blanket bans don't work, at least, not in the long run, claim environmentalists. The Greater Chennai Corporation had, in August 2015, announced a ban on plastic bags with a thickness of 40 microns. But, lack of enforcement by the civic body resulted in these non-recyclable plastics either choking the waterbodies or poisoning the landfills.

The AIADMK government had announced a similar ban in 2002, which was hardly implemented. "While we welcome this step, this is not the first time AIADMK led government imposed such a ban. In 2002, Jayalalithaa framed a law banning non-recyclable plastic but it was withdrawn on Jan 30, 2003 without a valid reason," stated a release from PMK leader S Ramadoss. "The present plastic ban has been imposed based on the guidelines framed by a committee set up 15 years ago. Hope this doesn't vanish like the previous one," it added.

To combat the plastic menace, it is imperative to understand the economics that drive the use of plastic, said Mathew Jose, the CEO of Paperman, an enterprise that encourages recycling in the city's households. "Ninety-eight per cent of the country is driven by economics, where cost powers every decision. In that scenario, plastic is amazing - it is cheap and flexible enough to be made into

anything. There is an ecosystem that has thrived around it for years."

"In the Indian economy - which is highly cost-sensitive - plastic just makes sense. For example, a restaurant will find it sensible to use plastic cutlery, because it is cheap and effective. If the restaurant were to employ two people to wash the reusable containers, the costs will increase by 40 per cent, which will be transferred to the buyer, eventually reducing the patronage," Jose said. He pointed out that plastics need to be phased out over time. "There are eight million people in the city and single use plastic has made life easier. There should be a budget allocated for research on bioplastics in top institutions in the city for alternatives," he added.



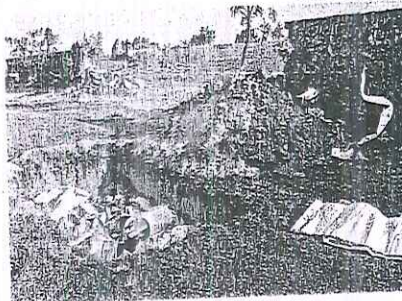
Joining in on this, Kripa R, a researcher at CAG, stressed on the need for a vision-based approach to the issue and said that a moral transformation cannot be expected. "The CM has gone on record stating the ban, but does it mean that they are going to target production and supply of plastic from a certain period? Does this mean that we have to use the existing plastics products?" said Kripa.

The researcher also pointed out the failure to ban plastics of thickness less than 40 microns should be a learning experience for the state. "It is not enough to announce a ban but enforce a mechanism in place for non-compliance, like a fine," said Kripa.

An expert in waste policy, Dharmesh Shah, said that political will is critical to successful implantation of a plastic-free city, which is often missing after announcement of a ban. "It is the poor political will that is stopping us. All the government must do is to simply follow the law, implement the Plastic Waste Management Rules 2016," said Shah. "Hire more staff to monitor and provide punitive powers for the officers, to deal with offenders," he added.

DefExpo's 'dirty secret' buried six feet under at Thiruvaidanthai

Photo: Justin George



the Villa Road - only to dump it in a vacant plot in the interior roads.

When DT Next visited the spot, there was an open pit dug up in the vacant land, and plastic waste that was cleared from the expo's venue had been dumped inside. Due to the wind, some of the trash has been strewn around. Nasrin, a resident living near the Villa Road, said that the garbage has merely been shifted to an interior spot, away from the main roads. "There are a few lotus ponds here, which are now polluted by Styrofoam and plastic waste from the expo site," she said. Several research reports have confirmed that burying plastic can leach harmful chemicals, polluting the soil and water.

Harsha Koda, a resident of OMR, who regularly uses this route on his way to Mamallapuram, was angered that the multi-crore DefExpo failed to follow the Swachh Bharat programme.

"This incident of covering up plastic waste by burying it underground shows that there is a lack of understanding of waste management among the staff. Swachh Bharat should create awareness and compliance among its own workers and officials," added the member of Federation of OMR Residential Associations (FOMRRA).

An official from the local administration conceded that due process hasn't been followed in waste disposal, but assured that efforts would be taken to fix the situation.

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Harsha Koda, Resident of OMR

CHENNAI: On World Environment Day, as India is the global host for UN's event themed 'Beat Plastic Pollution', at Thiruvaidanthai in Kancheepuram, the site of the DefExpo this year, plastic waste has been dumped into an open pit dug in a vacant plot, raising questions whether the Centre's Swachh Bharat scheme is applicable to its own events.

The massive DefExpo 2018 in April, which celebrated the country's military equipment production prowess, came under the scanner after plastic waste was left dotting the landscape a month after the stalls had been dismantled. Following media reports, the local administration had cleared out the waste from the areas surrounding

Photo: Justin George