

Towards a plastics-free Tamil Nadu

As the State braces to face the ban on single-use plastics from January 1, 2019, *The Hindu* features a countdown to the ban. It is seen as one of the most important moves by the government to address a pressing global issue locally, protect the environment and safeguard the health of generations to come.



BANNED ITEMS

Though plastics are banned in the hill stations and some district collectors are undertaking the initiative on their own, this is the first time the government has decided to ban plastics in all the districts. The G.O. does not permit any industry or

person to manufacture, store, supply, transport, sell or distribute use-and-throw plastics. It has, however, exempted certain classes of single-use plastics, including carry bags manufactured exclusively for export purposes; plastics used

for packing milk, milk products, oil medicines and medical equipment; plastic bags, which constitute or form an integral part of packaging in which goods are sealed prior to use at manufacturing/processing units.

Plastic-coated paper plates



Thermocol plates/cups

Plastic carry bags of all sizes and thickness



Plastic sheets/cling film used on plates



Plastic straws

Plastic flags



Plastic tumblers

Non-woven Polypropylene bags



Water pouches/packets



Plastic-coated paper cups



Plastic sheets used for spreading on dining tables

The following are alternatives to banned plastic items

- Plantain leaves, arecanut plates
- Aluminium foil
- Paper rolls
- Lotus / Mandharai leaves
- Glass/metal tumblers
- Bamboo/wooden/coconut shell products
- Paper straws
- Cloth/paper/jute bags
- Paper/cloth flags
- Ceramic ware
- Edible cutlery
- Earthen pots

Source: Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board

Over 2 lakh stand to lose jobs

ALOYSIUS XAVIER LOPEZ
CHENNAI

Hari Krishnan, 42, works in a small-scale unit in Perambur, Chennai, manufacturing plastic bags of 51 micron thickness for a popular retail brand.

He sits near gigantic machinery that fabricates tiny rolls of plastic bags using polyethylene granules sourced from States such as Gujarat, Maharashtra and Assam.

"I have worked for 20 years. I may lose my livelihood in one month. I am worried. I have not been able to acquire skills to do any other work," said Mr. Krishnan.

Fingers crossed

Nine technicians in the same unit are also keeping their fingers crossed, worried about the outcome of the State government's decision to ban plastic bags from January 1.

"I have been working here for the last 15 years. I need this job to educate my kids. Whenever we see any government vehicle near our plant, we are scared," said M. Vasanthi, an employee, who is the only earning member of her family.

S. Anandhi, an employee in a unit in Choolai, said work had reduced in the

last one month after the announcement.

"We may not get new jobs. We also do not have clarity on many aspects of the ban on plastics. Our unit manufactures plastic sheets of more than 51 micron thickness. But we do not know what will happen to us," she added.

According to data compiled by the associations of plastic manufacturers, the ban is likely to cause a loss of livelihood for two lakh persons employed by plastic manufacturing companies in various parts of the State.

"The State government's decision to ban plastics has caused a dip in revenue of 50% in November, when compared to the same period last year," said G. Sankaran, president of Tamil Nadu, Pondy Plastic Association.

"I started the business after completing graduation. I have worked hard, increased the turnover in the last 20 years. Our workers are dedicated. This is a wonderful team. But all of my employees have lost their morale. I was able to motivate the employees even after challenges such as floods and demonetisation," said Balaji, an entrepreneur.

Pointing to the reluc-

ance of the government to ban plastic used in packaging food products of MNCs, Mr. Balaji said such plastic would continue to reach dumpyards in cities such as Chennai after January 1.

"The Chennai Corporation should adopt scientific management of plastic waste," he said.

"They should not ban plastics without understanding the technical aspects," Mr. Balaji added.

Dip in revenue

According to data compiled by the industry, most of the 3,000 registered units in Chennai – in areas such as Porur, Moolakadai, Choolai, Washermenpet and Mint – have reported a dip in revenue in November.

"This month will be more challenging," said an entrepreneur.

At recent meetings at the Chennai Collectorate and the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board, representatives of plastic manufacturers objected to the decision, demanding that the government permit the units to operate for 10 years.

"The State produces 10 lakh tonnes per year. But the demand is 16 lakh tonnes. Units in other States will gain because of the ban in Tamil Nadu," said Mr. Sankaran.

SIDELIGHTS

■ Did you know that oil can be recovered from plastics since it is a petroleum byproduct? Pyrolysis plants can process different kinds of wastes, including hazardous waste and recover energy in the form of heat, electricity and bio-oil

■ The paper cups that most tea shops and juice shops use are also banned since they are coated with a thin plastic layer

■ In October, the European Parliament backed a ban on single-use plastics to counter pollution in seas, fields and waterways from 2021. Under this, European Union States would have to recycle 90% of plastic bottles by 2025 and producers would need to help cover the costs of waste management

It is a good initiative from the government. We have to start somewhere since plastics are harmful to the environment. Our club will give 1,500 cotton bags to residents in our area

S. KASTURI RANGAN
Choolaimedu Exnora
Innovators Club secretary

