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Plastic ban: Incentivise Options for Single-Use Plastic to Make a National Ban Possible

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India's second-populous state Maharashtra has started penalising all those found using plastic products, including single-use disposable items. The Devendra Fadnavis-led state government enforced the ban after issuing the Maharashtra Plastic and Thermocol Products (manufacture, usage, sale, transport, handling, and storage) notification in March this year.

The Problem of Plastic in India: Facts and Figures

- India is responsible for about 60% of all the plastic dumped annually in the world's oceans.
- Over 42% of our plastic use is in packaging.
- India produces 25,940 tonnes of plastic waste every day and nine million tonnes every year.
- Maharashtra is India's largest generator of plastic waste.

The Problem with the Practice of Banning

- **Lack of consultation with stakeholders** such as manufacturers of plastics, eateries and citizen groups: This leads to implementation issues and inconvenience to the consumers.
- **Exemptions for certain products** such as milk pouches and plastic packaging for food items severely weaken the impact of the ban.
- **No investment in finding out alternative materials** to plug the plastic vacuum: Until people are able to shift to a material which is as light-weight and cheap as plastic, banning plastic will remain a mere customary practice.
- **Lack of widespread awareness** among citizens about the magnitude of harm caused by single-use plastic: Without citizens 'buying in' to a cause, bans only result in creating unregulated underground markets.

- **No strategy to offset the massive economic impact:** Sweeping bans like the one in Maharashtra are likely to cause massive loss of jobs and disruption of a large part of the economy dependent on the production and use of plastic.

What Needs to be Done?

- **Incentivise** sustainable, eco-friendly and cost-efficient alternatives to plastic.
- The government and all stakeholders involved must work together to find affordable as well as convenient **alternatives** to plastics.
- Create **public 'buy-in' strategies** by making them aware regarding the harmful effects of plastic.