HCFI Dr KK Aggarwal Research Fund

Round Table Environment Expert Zoom Meeting on "Implementation Challenges in Banned Single Use Plastic Items and Plastic Waste Management"

January 29, 2023 (Sunday, 12 noon - 1 pm)

- Last year, the government banned some single use plastic (SUP) products effective from 1st July. From December 2022, plastic bags <120 micron were also banned. Polythene bags under 75 microns had already been banned in September 2021.
- Implementation of the ban is a big challenge as despite the ban, these bags continue to be used as they are easily available. The ground reality is not as it should have been after 6 months of the ban.
- Multilayered plastic (MLP) is a major challenge.
- The biggest challenge is lack of seriousness on the part of citizens. People are careless about the rules and regulations. Authorities have to work to change this mindset. As responsible citizens, we should follow these rules and stop using the banned SUP items.
- The definition of the banned items needs to be clearer as there is lot confusion among the citizens about these items. The message should very clearly trickle down the line as to what is banned and what is not.
- There is lack of awareness about the SUPs and what items are banned among the general public.
- The government authorities also do not have a thorough knowledge of what banned items are to be seized. For instance, plastic sheet if used for wrapping sweet box is banned, but if it is used to wrap some other industrial product in a manufacturing unit, it is allowed. The thickness criteria applies only to plastic carry bags, but the authorities also seize plastic sheets/rolls.
- Some ban has to be implemented at the manufacturing level. Certain bans have to be implemented at the retailer level. This rule therefore has to come out with lot of clarity. There is lot of communication gap between the various organizations involved. Training programs are required.
- The livelihood of millions of people will be affected if there is blanket ban on SUPs. The government has not come out with alternate solutions for industries, much in advance to allow for smooth transition, engaged in manufacturing the banned SUPs. The question of employment of lakhs of people makes it difficult to execute it as a blanket ban.
- There is a regular demand of such types of SUP banned items. The alternatives available are very costly and they are also available in very small quantities. Hence, parallel to the ban, the government should have developed a market for alternative products.
- Only 19 items have been banned. States have the power to include more single use items to this list. Only Sikkim has added plastic bottles to the list of banned items.
- Use of carry bags is allowed in Delhi. There is a mindset that plastic bags are SUPs and hence are banned.
- The authorities are also not clear about what actions to take. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has no provision for financial penalty.
- Just inspecting the stores for the banned items will not serve the purpose. The problem occurs after use. It should be intercepted at the point where it is going to be used or is being disposed after use.
- There should be knowledgeable people with powers to take action legally. There should be delegation of powers. The pollution control boards should have powers similar to the excise department. Another challenge is that the pollution control boards are understaffed and new staff is not being recruited.
- The reasons for failure should be identified and discussed to learn from them.
- The biggest challenge is of enforcement of the rules. There is no specific state machinery for this.
- Shopkeepers also complain that they do not have proper alternatives to SUPs, which acts as a deterrent for the implementation.
- India generated 41.26 lakh tonnes of plastic waste in 1 year from 2020 to 2021. Almost half of all plastic used in India in 2017 (around 160 lakh tonnes in total) was SUP.
- Most SUPs find their way into landfills and either cannot be, or are not, recycled.
- The need to tackle this problem has been identified at both the national and international level. India

was one of the 175 countries that pledged to develop a legally binding international treaty to curb plastic pollution across the world.

- The government's SUP Public Grievance App enables citizens to report and track SUP-related complaints with pictures.
- We need to control our needs in order to reduce plastic pollution.
- Public is not involved when rules are being framed.
- Instead of ban, efforts should be made to improve their recycling. There is no use of the ban if sustainable alternatives are not available.
- A complete review of the Rules is needed. A government-citizen partnership is needed to tackle the increasing problem of plastic pollution.

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Round Table Environment Expert Zoom Meeting on "Green Initiatives in Union Budget 2023-24"

February 12, 2023 (Sunday, 12 noon - 1 pm)

- The Union Budget 2023-24 presented on February 1, 2023 has many green initiatives. This budget indicated the commitment of the government of India to green growth and also efforts to combat climate change.
- The budget has addressed the issues of global warming and moving towards a more sustainable future.
- Green growth has been identified as one of the seven key priorities "saptarishi" of the budget.
- A capital investment of Rs. 35,000 cr has been made by the Petroleum Ministry towards energy transition, energy security and net zero goals.
- The budget also has an investment of Rs. 20,700 cr for the creation of an inter-state transmission system for the evacuation of 13 GW of renewable energy from Ladakh. Rs. 19,700 cr has been allocated for the National Green Hydrogen Mission. There are other green initiatives including natural farming. Around 1 cr farmers will be facilitated to adopt natural farming.
- Government has to try to implement circular economy. The GOBARDhan (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan) scheme to be established for promoting circular economy by creating 500 new 'waste to wealth' plants.
- Battery energy storage systems with capacity of 4000 MWh will be set up. Another key proposal relates to the establishment of a viability gap funding mechanism to support the creation of battery energy storage systems with a capacity of 4,000 MWh.
- The budget presents a promising outlook for India's environment and sustainable development and also the PM's vision for LiFE (lifestyle for environment) and move India towards an environmentally conscious lifestyle.
- The government has done lot of conscious efforts in bringing forward the fact that we have to take some initiatives on the environment. There is the old vehicle scrapping policy. The important thing however is how these old vehicles will be recycled.
- A consciousness has to be developed among people, even the poor, about the hazards of plastic, air pollution and such environmental issues.
- The Union Budget has lot of schemes. But it remains to be seen how they will be implemented at the ground level.
- Scrapping of old motor vehicles is not really a green initiative. This is not a boost to green initiative but boost to promote economic development. There are areas where these vehicles can be plied within prescribed limits. We accept that circular economy is a very important aspect; on the other hand, we are discarding a running vehicle just because of a time limit.
- Green budgeting aims to provide decision makers, parliament and public with a clearer sense of the potential environmental impacts of budgeting choices.
- India is the first country in the world where environment is already included in the constitution.
- India holds the key to hitting global climate change targets given its sizeable and growing energy needs.
- Budget 2023-24 devoted a fair amount of space to the green industrial and economic transition needed. With the electric vehicle (EV) revolution poised to take off as every automobile major rolls out new EV models to tap demand, the availability of indigenously produced lithium-ion batteries has become a necessity, especially to lower the cost of EVs. The Budget hearteningly proposes to exempt customs duty on the import of capital goods and machinery required to manufacture lithium-ion cells used in EV batteries.

- About 5.9 million tonnes of lithium has been found in the state of Jammu and Kashmir by the Geological Survey of India.
- Following words were completely absent in the budget speech: Nature, wildlife, environment, ecology, ecosystem, pollution and conservation (except uses such as "business environment" and "growth ecosystem"). It is a budget with a stated focus on climate action. There is a massive rise in allocation for infrastructure projects, with huge environmental implications. Collectively they demonstrate the deep contradictions in the government's approach to sustainable development.
- There is nothing in this budget that pushes the growth of renewable energy or increases consumption of renewable energy in rural areas. This is not the budget for clean energy.
- A Green Credit Program was announced to incentivize environmentally sustainable actions by companies, individuals and local bodies. While the intention is to bring about a change, there is a lack of direction as to how this scheme will be implemented.
- The budget also talked of biodiversity conservation including conserving wetlands, mangrove plantation and natural farming.
- India must ensure that financial support is directed towards low-carbon technologies. We need to find areas of environmental degradation and areas of economy where environmental degradation has the greatest impact and take steps to address them.
- The Economic Survey 2023 did not have much analysis on this front that could have informed the green budget.
- Several programs such as National Adaptation Fund, Climate Change Action, National Mission on Himalayan studies found no allocation in this year's budget.
- Our dependence on fossil fuel is around 60% to 70%. Hence, green energy is not an option, it is a necessity.
- With regard to EV policies, other than the central government policy on incentives for using EV, other states are not doing much. The EV Policy of Delhi government is considered one of the best EV policy in the country. They match the same subsidy/incentive as the central government. Rests of the states have to do more.
- We need to look at how many vehicles we want to run on the roads. This is adding to the problems for green initiatives.
- India is still a developing country and development requires many things which produce carbon. Hence, a balance is required. There is a need for regulation in the infrastructure projects that have been initiated as this is adding to the problem of pollution. The environmental and carbon footprints of these initiatives have to be identified.
- The budget allocation is very small and is not targeted to the right place. More needs to be done. There is huge gap between what is being stated and what is actually happening.
- All states have to ramp up their initiatives to cut down on emissions.
- Biomethanation can be done in the path towards green energy.
- Mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions requires decentralization of solid waste, enabling local communities to be part of the solution. This is proving to be very challenging.
- Support at the community/ward level is missing, which hinders setting up of smaller capacity units of biogas. The city plans are producing more emissions rather than reducing them. Cycle tracks and pedestrian paths need to be prioritized.
- Horticulture waste is mostly unattended. A strategy from the municipality on how to handle wood portion is needed as only leaves can be composted. The biomass from horticulture waste needs to be attended to.
- The budget does not focus much on waste management. Waste is a major cause of land, air and water pollution. Budget for decentralized waste management is lacking.
- Waste to energy plants with burn technology have been included in renewable energy. This fails the objective of being carbon neutral.
- Focus should not only be to reduce pollution but also greenhouse gases.
- Short-sighted speedy development is harmful. Guidelines are necessary and we also need to be clear about agro-based industries, techno-based industries and manufacturing industries. Else this may lead to problems in the form of natural calamities by not planning what we should have at what place.

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