

Picking Out Plastic

Recycling is integral to addressing the problems posed by plastic packaging material

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has put 52 producers, brand owners and importers, including big online retailers such as Amazon and Flipkart, and companies such as Patanjali Ayurved and Britannia, on notice, for failing to take responsibility for their plastic waste. These and other entities with a large plastic footprint need to respond with alacrity. It is eight years since the concept of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) was incorporated into the Plastic Waste Management Rules, but municipal and pollution control authorities have failed to persuade commercial giants to put in place a system to collect and process the waste. Tighter rules in 2016 and some amendments two years later put the onus on producers and brand owners to come up with an action plan for the retrieval of waste within six months to a year, but that too failed to take off. Mountains of garbage with a heavy plastic load have been growing in suburban landfills, out of sight of city dwellers. Without determined steps, the crisis is certain to worsen. It should be noted that the retail sector expects e-commerce to grow from about \$38.5 billion-equivalent in 2017 to \$200 billion by 2026. Given the role played by packaging, the waste management problem is likely to become alarming. There is also a big opportunity here, which the trade, municipal governments and pollution control authorities need to see. The two prongs of the solution are packaging innovation that reduces its use by using alternatives, and up scaling waste segregation, collection and transmission.

Recovering materials from garbage should be a high priority, considering that India is the third highest consumer of materials after China and the U.S.; the Economic Survey 2019 estimates that India's demand for total material will double by 2030 at current rates of growth. Plastics may be less expensive than other inputs in manufacturing, but recycling them into new products extends their life and provides a substitute for virgin material. Keeping them out of the environment reduces clean-up and pollution costs. Unfortunately, in spite of legal requirements, municipal and pollution control authorities fail to see this and mostly pursue business-as-usual waste management methods. Recyclable waste is rendered useless when it gets mixed with other articles. Online retailers have not felt compelled to take back the thousands of poly bags, plastic envelopes and air pillows used to cushion articles inside cardboard boxes. This is in contrast to more developed markets where they

are trying out labels on packages with clear recycling instructions. These companies can form waste cooperatives in India, employing informal waste-pickers. In such a model, consumers will respond readily if they are incentivised to return segregated plastic waste. Making municipal and pollution control authorities accountable is also equally important.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Integral		Essential, fundamental, basic, intrinsic.
Entities		Creature, individual, being, organism.
Alacrity		Eagerness, willingness, enthusiasm, ardour.
Incorporate		Absorb, include, subsume, assimilate.
Persuade		Prod, encourage, exhort, ignite, instil.
Giants		Gigantic, huge, mammoth, cyclopean.
Amendments		Change, metamorphosis, altercation.
Onus		Responsibility, burden, liability, obligation.
Come up with		Produce, a new idea.
Retrieval		Recovery, regain, recoup, recoup, reclaim.
Take off		Flourish, become popular.
Suburban uninteresting.		Residential, commuter / dull, boring,
Dwellers		Inhabitants, denizens.
Alarming		Dangerous, perilous, deleterious, chancy.
Prong		Spike, point, tip, projection.
Innovation		Change, alteration, revolution, transformation.
Upscale		Highend, exclusive, expensive, superior.
Segregation		Separation, keeping apart, isolation.
Transmission		Transference, transferral, conveyance.
Garbage		Wastage, refuse, rubbish, detritus.
Render		Provide, contribute, offer, proffer.
Incentivise		In courage, prod, revitalize, enkindle.
Accountable		Answerable.

Trend with Caution

The consolidated codes on labour laws need a thorough vetting and discussion in Parliament

As part of its commitment to simplify and consolidate labour rules and laws under four codes, the Union Cabinet has cleared the Occupational, Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, a week after it approved the Code on Wages Bill. The latter seeks to include more workers under the purview of minimum wages and proposes a statutory national minimum wage for different geographic regions, to ensure that States will not fix minimum wages below those set by the Centre. These steps should be welcomed. The Code on labour safety and working conditions include regular and mandatory medical examinations for workers, issuing of appointment letters, and framing of rules on women working night shifts. Other codes that await Cabinet approval include the Code on Industrial Relations and the Code on Social Security. Unlike these pending bills, especially the one related to industrial relations that will be scrutinised by labour unions for any changes to worker rights and rules on hiring and dismissal and contract jobs, the two that have been passed should be easier to build a consensus on, in Parliament and in the public sphere. Organised unions have vociferously opposed changes proposed in the Industrial Relations code, especially the proviso to increase the limit for prior government permission for lay-off, retrenchment and closure from 100 workers as it is currently, to 300. The Economic Survey highlighted the effect of labour reforms in Rajasthan, suggesting that the growth rates of firms employing more than 100 workers increased at a higher rate than the rest of the country after labour reforms. But worker organisations claim that the implementation of such stringent labour laws in most States is generally lax. Clearly, a cross-State analysis of labour movement and increase in employment should give a better picture of the impact of these rules.

Simplification and consolidation of labour laws apart, the government must focus on the key issue of job creation. The Periodic Labour Force Survey that was finally made public in late May clearly pointed to the dire situation in job creation in recent years. While the proportion of workers in regular employment has increased, unemployment has reached a 45-year high. The worker participation rate has also declined between surveys held in 2011-12 and 2017-18. The government's response to this question has either been denial, as was evident after the draft PLFS report was leaked last year, or silence, after it was finally released. In such a situation, the government should be better off building a broader consensus on any major rule changes to existing worker rights rather than rushing through

them for the sake of simplification. The consolidated code bills should be thoroughly discussed in Parliament and also with labour unions before being enacted.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Consolidated		Strengthen, secure, stabilize.
Vetting		Checking, examining, scrutinizing.
Purview		Range of experience / thought.
Statutory		Lawful, legitimate, legal.
Mandatory		Obligatory, compulsory, binding.
Scrutinise		Examine, inspect, survey, investigate.
Hire		Rent, lease, charter.
Consensus		Agreement, harmony, concurrence, accord.
Sphere		Globe, ball, orb, spheroid.
Vociferous		Out spoken, straight forward, forthright.
Proviso		Condition, stipulation, provision.
Lay off		Temporary, dismissal.
Retrenchment		Temporary, dismissal.
Reforms		Changes, transformation, metamorphosis.
Implementation		Put into practice.
Stringent		Strict, exacting, draconian.
Lax		Slack, slipshod, negligent, remiss, careless.
Tread		Work, step, stride, pace, march, tramp.
Dire		Terrible, dreadful, appalling, frightful.
Decline		Decrease, mitigate, abate, relegate.
Enact		Make law, legislate approve, ratify.