

Editorial

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AFSPA on Congress Manifesto: Why the CM seems nervous?

On the inclusion of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) issue on the election manifesto of the Congress Party, here in the state of Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh seem to be nervous. Instead of following to what the BJP leader Nirmal Sitharam, the Union Defence Minister of the country, Chief Minister N. Biren simply criticize the congress party for inclusion of the AFSPA issue in their Manifesto. He Even said that the inclusion of the issue of AFSPA by the Congress Party is nothing but befool the public. He had even stated that during sixty years of their rule there have been numerous cases of security forces murdering innocents, incidents, of crimes against women.

If one ponder on what N. Biren Singh had expressed regarding the inclusion of AFSPA issue in the Manifesto by Congress party - it is nothing but a statement of a nervous leader.

Every Manipuri remember Operation Blue Bird, Loktak Operation etc., family of over 1528 victims of fake encounter still fill their eyes with tears. If this is the case the Chief Minister of Manipur, who is a one time champion of Human Rights, before joining to politics should include a better option like AFSPA will be repeal if BJP come to power as what the Congress had stated about AFSPA was about reviewing it.

Everybody knows this could never be possible, as BJP leader Nirmala Sitharam, the Union Defence Minister, had already slammed the congress for inclusion of the AFSPA issue in their manifesto terming it as an aim to weaken the armed forces.

Perhaps for the first time in the history of parliamentary election of the country the Indian National Congress (INC) in its manifesto promises for amendment of the draconian act Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and the disturbed area act. This is something that arouses the people of the country living in North Eastern part of India and at Jammu and Kashmir as many innocent has been killed and many are left live in fear and anguish under the shadow of the draconian act. Leave aside other states which the AFSPA has been imposed, many mass protests for repealed of the draconian act had been witnessed in the state. The onetime Iron Chanu Sharmila, which seems to be forgotten by the people had underwent 16 years of fast-unto death protest - the longest fast protest in the history of mankind. Victims' families of extra judicial killing by the armed forces under the shadow of the draconian AFSPA still cry for justice with their eyes still wet with tears.

It is indeed a change seen in the Congress Party if it really concern about the draconian side of the AFSPA. The Congress before 2014 seems to be a different Political Party in 2019. The new president Rahul Gandhi is also seen changed in his performance. As per the new ideology of the party under the new leadership seem to have understood that India is a nation of various communities having diverse culture, traditions, religion and which followed different ideologies and speaks different languages. It is the exceptional beauty of India.

We Made Plastic. We Depend on It. Now We're Drowning in It. The miracle material has made modern life possible. But more than 40 percent of it is used just once, and it's choking our waterways.

Courtesy the [we're](#)
By Laura Parker

If plastic had been invented when the Pilgrims sailed from Plymouth, England, to North America—and the *Mayflower* had been stocked with bottled water and plastic-wrapped snacks—their plastic trash would likely still be around, four centuries later.

If the Pilgrims had been like many people today and simply tossed their empty bottles and wrappers over the side, Atlantic waves and sunlight would have worn all that plastic into tiny bits. And those bits might still be floating around the world's oceans today, sponging up toxins to add to the ones already in them, waiting to be eaten by some hapless fish or oyster, and ultimately perhaps by one of us.

We should give thanks that the Pilgrims didn't have plastic. I thought recently as I rode a train to Plymouth along England's south coast. I was on my way to see a man who would help me make sense of the whole mess we've made with plastic, especially in the ocean.

Because plastic wasn't invented until the late 19th century, and production really only took off around 1950, we have a mere 9.2 billion tons of the stuff to deal with. Of that, more than 6.9 billion tons have become waste. And of that waste, a staggering 6.3 billion tons never made it to a recycling bin—a figure that stunned the scientists who crunched the numbers in 2017. No one knows how much unrecycled plastic waste ends up in the ocean, Earth's last sink. In 2015, Jenna Jambeck, a University of Georgia engineering professor, caught everyone's attention with a rough estimate: between 5.3 million and 14 million tons each year just from coastal regions. She and her colleagues say, but is dumped carelessly on land or in rivers, mostly in Asia. It's then blown or washed into the sea. Imagine five plastic grocery bags stuffed with plastic trash. Jambeck says, sitting on every foot of coastline around the world—that would correspond to about 8.8 million tons, her middle-of-the-road estimate of what the ocean gets from us annually. It's unclear how long it will take for that plastic to completely biodegrade into its constituent molecules. Estimates range from 450 years to never.

Meanwhile, ocean plastic is estimated to kill millions of marine animals every year. Nearly 700 species, including endangered ones, are known to have been affected by it. Some are harmed visibly—strangled by abandoned fishing nets or discarded six-pack rings. Many more are probably harmed invisibly. Marine species of all sizes, from zooplankton to whales, now eat microplastics, the bits smaller than one-fifth of an inch across. On Hawaii's Big Island, on a beach that seemingly should have been pristine—no paved road leads to it—I walked ankle-deep through microplastics. They crunched like Rice Krispies under my feet. After that, I could understand why some people see ocean plastic as a looming catastrophe, worth mentioning in the same breath as climate change. At a global summit in Nairobi last December, the head of the United Nations Environment Programme spoke of an "ocean Armageddon."

And yet there's a key difference: Ocean plastic is not as complicated as climate change. There are no ocean trash deniers, at least so far. To do something about it, we don't have to remake our planet's entire energy system.

"This isn't a problem where we don't know what the solution is," says Ted Siegler, a Vermont resource economist who has spent more than 25 years working with developing nations on garbage. "We know how

to pick up garbage. Anyone can do it. We know how to dispose of it. We know how to recycle." It's a matter of building the necessary institutions and systems, he says—ideally before the ocean turns, irretrievably and for centuries to come, into a thin soup of plastic.

In Plymouth, under the gray gloom of an English autumn, Richard Thompson waited in a yellow slicker outside Plymouth University's Coxside Marine Station, at the edge of the harbor. A lean man of 54, with a smooth pate rimmed with gray hair, Thompson was headed for an ordinary career as a marine ecologist in 1993—he was working on a Ph.D. on limpets and microalgae that grow on coastal rocks—when he participated in his first beach cleanup, on the Isle of Man. While other volunteers zoomed in on the plastic bottles and bags and nets, Thompson focused on the small stuff, the tiny particles that lay underfoot, ignored, at the high tide line. At first he wasn't even sure they were plastic. He had to consult forensic chemists to confirm it.

There was a real mystery to be solved back then, at least in academic circles: Scientists wondered why they weren't finding even more plastic in the sea. World production has increased exponentially—from 2.3 million tons in 1950, it grew to 162 million in 1993 and to 448 million by 2015—but the amount of plastic drifting on the ocean and washing up on beaches, alarming as it was, didn't seem to be rising as fast. "That begs the question: Where is it?" Thompson said. "We can't establish harm to the environment unless we know where it is."

In the years since his first beach cleanup, Thompson has helped provide the beginnings of an answer: The missing plastic is getting broken into pieces so small they're hard to see. In a 2004 paper, Thompson coined the term "microplastics" for these small bits, predicting—accurately, as it turned out—that they had "potential for large-scale accumulation" in the ocean.

When we met in Plymouth last fall, Thompson and two of his students had just completed a study that indicated it's not just waves and sunlight that break down plastic. In lab tests, they'd watched amphipods of the species *Orchestia gammarellus*—tiny shrimp-like crustaceans that are common in European coastal waters—devour pieces of plastic bags and determined they could shred a single bag into 1.75 million microscopic fragments. The little creatures chewed through plastic especially fast, Thompson's team found, when it was coated with the microbial slime that is their normal food. They spat out or eventually excreted the plastic bits.

Microplastics have been found everywhere in the ocean that people have looked, from sediments on the deepest seafloor to ice floating in the Arctic—which, as it melts over the next decade, could release more than a trillion bits of plastic into the water, according to one estimate. On some beaches on the Big Island of Hawaii, as much as 15 percent of the sand is actually grains of microplastic. Kamilo Point Beach, the one I walked on, catches plastic from the North Pacific gyre, the trashiest of five swirling current systems that transport garbage around the ocean basins and concentrate it in great patches. At Kamilo Point the beach is piled with laundry baskets, bottles, and containers with labels in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, English, and occasionally, Russian. On Henderson Island, an uninhabited coral island in the South Pacific, researchers have found an astonishing volume of plastic from South America, Asia, New Zealand, Russia, and as far away as Scotland.

As Thompson and I talked about all this, a day boat called the *Dolphin* was carrying us through a light chop in the Sound, off Plymouth. Thompson reeled out a fine-mesh net called a manta trawl, usually used for studying plankton. We were close to the spot where, a few years earlier, other researchers had collected 504 fish of 10 species and given them to Thompson. Dissecting the fish, he was surprised to find microplastics in the guts of more than one-third of them. The finding made international headlines.

After we'd steamed along for a while, Thompson reeled the manta trawl back in. There was a smattering of colored plastic confetti at the bottom. Thompson himself doesn't worry much about microplastics in his fish and chips—there's little evidence yet that they pass from the gut of a fish into the flesh we actually eat. (See [We Know Plastic Is Harming Marine Life. What About Us?](#)) He worries more about the things that none of us can see—the chemicals added to plastics to give them desirable properties, such as malleability, and the even tinier nanoparticles that microplastics presumably degrade into. Those might pass into the tissues of fish and humans.

"We do know the concentrations of chemicals at the time of manufacture in some cases are very high," Thompson said. "We don't know how much additive is left in the plastic by the time it becomes bite-size to a fish."

"Nobody has found nanoparticles in the environment—they're below the level of detection for analytical equipment. People think they are out there. They have the potential to be sequestered in tissue, and that could be a game changer." Thompson is careful not to get ahead of the science on his subject. He's far from an alarmist—but he's also convinced that plastic trash in the ocean is far more than an aesthetic problem. "I don't think we should be waiting for a key finding of whether or not fish are hazardous to eat," he said. "We have enough evidence to act."

How did we get here? When did the dark side of the miracle of plastic first show itself? It's a question that can be asked about many of the marvels of our technological world. Since helping the Allies win World War II—think of nylon parachutes or lightweight airplane parts—plastics have transformed all our lives as few other inventions have, mostly for the better. They've eased travel into space and revolutionized medicine. They lighten every car and jumbo jet today, saving fuel—and pollution. In the form of clingy, light-as-air wraps, they extend the life of fresh food. In airbags, incubators, helmets, or simply by delivering clean drinking water to poor people in those now demonized disposable bottles, plastics save lives daily.

In one of their early applications, they saved wildlife. In the mid-1800s, piano keys, billiard balls, combs, and all manner of trinkets were made of a scarce natural material: elephant ivory. With the elephant population at risk and ivory expensive and scarce, a billiards company in New York City offered a \$10,000 reward to anyone who could come up with an alternative.

As Susan Freinkel tells the tale in her book, *Plastic: A Toxic Love Story*, an amateur inventor named John Wesley Hyatt took up the challenge. His new material, celluloid, was made of cellulose, the polymer found in all plants. Hyatt's company boasted that it would eliminate the need "to ransack the Earth in pursuit of substances which are constantly growing scarcer." Besides sparing at least some elephants, celluloid also helped change billiards from solely an aristocratic pastime to one that

working people play in bars. That's a trivial example of a profound revolution ushered in by plastic—an era of material abundance. The revolution accelerated in the early 20th century, once plastics began to be made from the same stuff that was giving us abundant, cheap energy: petroleum. Oil companies had waste gases like ethylene coming out of the stacks of their refineries. Chemists discovered they could use those gases as building blocks, or monomers, to create all sorts of novel polymers—polyethylene terephthalate, for example, or PET—instead of working only with polymers that already existed in nature. A world of possibilities opened up. Anything and everything could be made of plastic, and so it was, because plastics were cheap.

They were so cheap, we began to make things we never intended to keep. In 1955 *Life* magazine celebrated the liberation of the American housewife from drudgery. Under the headline "Throwaway Living," a photograph showed a family flinging plates, cups, and cutlery into the air. The items would take 40 hours to clean, the text noted—"except that no housewife need bother." When did plastics start to show their dark side? You might say it was when the junk in that photo hit the ground.

Six decades later, roughly 40 percent of the now more than 448 million tons of plastic produced every year is disposable, much of it used as packaging intended to be discarded within minutes after purchase. Production has grown at such a breakneck pace that virtually half the plastic ever manufactured has been made in the past 15 years. Last year the Coca-Cola Company, perhaps the world's largest producer of plastic bottles, acknowledged for the first time just how many it makes: 128 billion a year. Nestlé, PepsiCo, and others also churn out torrents of bottles.

The growth of plastic production has far outstripped the ability of waste management to keep up: That's why the oceans are under assault. "It's not surprising that we broke the system," Jambeck says. "That kind of increase would break any system not prepared for it." In 2013 a group of scientists issued a new assessment of throwaway living. Writing in *Nature* magazine, they declared that disposable plastic should be classified, not as a housewife's friend, but as a hazardous material.

In recent years the surge in production has been driven largely by the expanded use of disposable plastic packaging in the growing economies of Asia—where garbage collection systems may be underdeveloped or nonexistent. In 2010, according to an estimate by Jambeck, half the world's mismanaged plastic waste was generated by just five Asian countries: China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka. "Let's say you recycle 100 percent in all of North America and Europe," says Ramani Narayan, a chemical engineering professor at Michigan State University who also works in his native India. "You still would not make a dent on the plastics released into the oceans. If you want to do something about this, you have to go there, to these countries, and deal with the mismanaged waste."

The Pasig River once flowed majestically through downtown Manila, capital of the Philippines, and emptied into pristine Manila Bay. It was a treasured waterway and civic point of pride. It's now listed among the top 10 rivers in the world that convey plastic waste to the sea. As many as 72,000 tons flow downstream each year, mostly during the monsoon. In 1990 the Pasig was declared biologically dead.

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