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● SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BAN

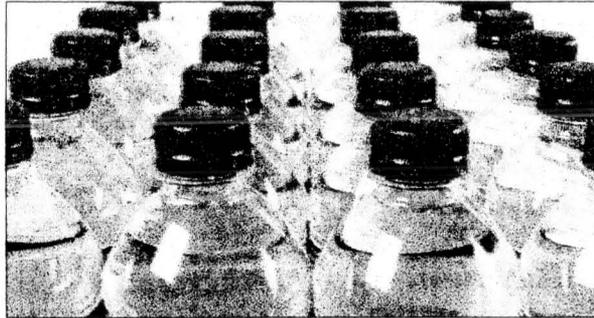
Packaged drinking water may be excluded

FE BUREAU

New Delhi, September 9

THE GOVERNMENT MAY exclude packaged drinking water (1 litre or more) from single-use plastic ban — likely to come into effect from October 2 — while simultaneously facilitating alternatives so that the transition to non-plastic packages does not inconvenience public. Food and consumer affairs minister Ram Vilas Paswan favours a ban on plastics, but admits that no concrete alternative of packaged drinking water is available now.

“We have not got any concrete alternative of packaged drinking water. Therefore, I have asked all manufacturers to send their suggestions by September 11,” the minister said, adding that these recommendations would be sent to



the inter-ministerial panel headed by the Cabinet secretary. Paswan on Monday held a discussion with bottled water industry and various government departments to find a suitable alternative for single-use plastic bottles for drinking water.

The inter-ministerial panel will take a decision on what items to be banned under the single use plastic and whether

the restriction will be imposed in one go or in a phased manner. The government's quality controller — Bureau of Indian Standards — does not have a definition of 'single-use' plastic and is waiting for the panel's report which will also come out with a definition.

The government plans to ban plastic bags, cups, plates, small bottles, straws and certain types of sachets and the

restriction will cover manufacturing, usage and import, *Reuters* had reported last month. In his Independence Day address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said steps would be taken from October 2 to make India free from single-use plastic.

Stating that recycling is not a permanent solution, Paswan said there is a need to find an alternative, which is equally affordable and reliable. Even pure paper bottle is not an alternative as some plastic is mixed, he said and added that even glass bottle in general cannot replace. He also said any ban would not affect employment as the alternative would create jobs.

All India Association of Natural Mineral Water Industry's secretary Behram Mehta, who participated in the discussion, said the packaged bottle water

industry uses PET (polyethylene terephthalate), which is 100% recyclable, used globally and does not fall under single-use plastic as per EU standards. He said any ban on this will adversely affect the ₹30,000-crore bottled water industry.

Meanwhile, addressing the global conference of parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Modi said India would put an end to single-use plastic in coming years. He also said it is time the world says goodbye to it.

“Another form of land degradation, which, if not prevented, would become impossible to reverse. This is the menace of plastic waste. Apart from having adverse health implications, this is going to render land unproductive and unfit for agriculture,” Modi said.