

Plastic ban at stations bites into stall-owners' earnings

Stopped from selling snacks that come in plastic packets, stall-owners are losing up to Rs 5,000 every day

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The Central Railway's ban on the sale of food items that come in plastic packets at stations has knocked railway stallowners' business off track. From making brisk sales of chips, biscuits and other snacks, many of them have been forced to sell only munchies such as peanuts. The result: their everyday earnings have shrunk by Rs 4,000 to Rs 5,000.

Some stall-owners say if rail authorities don't ease the restriction soon they may be forced to pack up. Their customers, however, are not complaining. Many commuters Mirror spoke to said that though they missed buying snack packs before boarding their train to work or home, the sight of less plastic waste on platforms and tracks was a welcome change.

CR's ban on the sale of 25 food products that are packed in nonbiodegradable materials (plastic, metalised films, sulphite paper, aluminum foil) came into effect on May 22. Railway officials say the move will help reduce plastic refuse that clogs drains during monsoon, causing water-logging on tracks.

"I am losing business every day. People come to my stall and ask for packets of chips and biscuits, but all I have to offer is peanuts and bhel," said the owner of a stall at busy Dadar station. Stall-operators have been warned of hefty fines if they even sell snacks in plastic bags. "I have switched to small brown paper bags," he said.

A stall-owner at CST said that their profit margins were already thin before the ban was introduced, and now they faced the prospect of shutting shop. "We don't earn much from the sale of samosas and vadas as they have been priced nominally by CR. It was packaged products that helped us make some profit," he said.

He added instead of prohibiting plastic packets, railway officials should create awareness about cleanliness among commuters. "They are the ones who throw plastic on the platform instead of using the bin. Why should we suffer because of their bad practices?" he said.

Nearly 200 stall-owners at suburban stations have complied with the rule. They are planning to raise the issue with the Railway Board. Commuters, however, are not opposed to the ban. "It's a good step to keep platforms litter-free," said Nitin Deokar.

Another commuter, Umesh Waghmare, said that there should not be a blanket ban on packaged food items. "Many people spend more than an hour for one-way commute. Packets of chips and biscuits are an affordable option for the journey," he said.

ASHISH RAJE



With plastic bags banned, a stall worker at Parel serves munchies in paper bags



Railway stalls that used to stock rows of plastic snack packs now wear a barren look