Climate conundrum and the plastic industry
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Climate change is the long-term shift in average weather patterns across the world. The human-led manipulation of natural processes and services over the past two centuries has now started to infuriate nature, which is angry enough to unleash its counterattack on human civilisation with its most impotent and lethal weapon: climate change. Climate Change is the defining issue of our time and we are at a defining moment. From a significant rise in global mean temperature to the human-induced intensity and frequency in extreme weather phenomena; from acidification of oceans to a steady rise in sea level; from fast-melting glaciers to rapid desertification; from the mass displacement of human societies to the resurrection of hunger and famines; from sweltering and scorching heat waves to havoc-wreaking bushfires; from water scarcity-led droughts to the glacier outburst flood lakes-caused flash floods, nature is striking back, with dire consequences for the global economy, security, health, infrastructure habitability of our ecosystem. Without drastic action today, adapting to these impacts in the future will be more difficult and costly. Every species is suffering from the changes on a massive scale. These changes are affecting the accelerated erosion of coastal zones. This is increasing the intensity of natural disasters, species extinction, and the spread of vector-borne diseases. The indiscriminate use of chlorofluorocarbons, deforestation, and the greenhouse effect are adding to the catastrophe. Developing countries, Pakistan included, have shown interest in discussions on adaptation measures, capacity-building, and climate finance. While the global objective is to curb emissions and protect people against climate change, the cost of funding climate action initiatives, such as greener infrastructure and turning to more renewable energy usage, are increasing. Climate change is accelerating, bringing the world dangerously close to irreversible changes. Industrial Revolution-led anthropological activities, coupled with a historically unprecedented rise in the human population, have disrupted the delicate balance maintained by different natural forces. They are now creating challenges to survival even for Homosapiens that defeated the harshest climate on Earth. The very acquisition of erstwhile unimaginable capability to influence natural processes clouded the thinking of humanity. The humans started disrupting the physical laws of nature to enslave the destructive power of nature to achieve their ulterior motives and nefarious strategic designs.

A survey report of the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) reveals that as many as 55 billion plastic bags are used annually. Moreover, their usage is increasing every year by 15 percent. Apart from this, it is pertinent to add here that the plastic industry has been generating direct employment opportunities for 0.2 million people while indirect jobs are reaching 0.6 million people. That the law currently in field regulating the manufacture, sale, use, and import of polythene bags–black or any other polythene bag below fifteen-micron thickness is the Punjab Prohibition on Manufacture, Use, Sale and Import of Polythene bags (Black Or Polythene bags Below Fifteen Micron Thickness) Ordinance, 2002. As per said ordinance of 2002, section 3 thereof stipulated that no person shall manufacture, sell, use or import black polythene bag or any polythene bag below fifteen-micron thickness or offer any kind of eatable and unedible goods in any black polythene bag or any polythene bag below fifteen-micron thickness. As per the law in the field i.e. the ordinance of 2002 and the Rules, 2004 made thereunder, the implementation of said law is mandatory upon the Government Agencies. Rather than focusing upon the implementation of relevant laws and rules, the respondent is keen to completely ban the plastic bags depriving the people of a cheap accessory of daily life and even putting many out of their jobs. The act of banning single-use plastic bags and taking no action against all other types of single-use plastic bags including Ghee pouches, snacks/ chips pouches, diapers, cigarette filters, chocolate wrappers, etc infringes on the right of reasonable restriction whereby only plastic items are being banned while there is completely silent about other single-use plastics. As the plastic industry is generating billions of rupees and sources of employment in Pakistan’s economy as well as in the world economy, competent authorities have to cadre the situation under the circumstances.

Unfortunately, it has taken a year to make us realise that governments, companies, and societies can function differently, and what these lifestyle changes can mean for the planet and human health. The global drive to start reducing carbon emissions before 2030 gives a 10-year window to begin decarbonising the world economy. The deepening global recession offers an opportunity for Pakistan to pursue a green economic corridor with China, work with the IMF and other development partners to manage economic and budgetary contraction, and to protect itself from climate threats. All government policies will now be seen through the prism of pandemics and climate disasters and construct some positive policies regarding use and ban of plastic.