

EDITORIAL

**Plastic bags ban**

The federal government is all set to place a complete ban on production and use of plastic bags in Islamabad. Adviser to the Prime Minister on Climate Change Malik Amin Aslam informed a Senate panel on Monday that the plan to stop the usage of polythene bags in the federal capital will come into effect on August 14. Manufacturers of potato chips bags have also been asked to collect all such bags and recycle them or they too will be banned. As he explained, this is being done because of the pollution these carrier bags cause in water bodies and land, also harming human health. The River Indus, he said, is the second most polluted river in the world due to plastic bags. And that every Pakistani consumes plastic equivalent to the size of a credit card, which is pretty scary.

There are no two opinions on that the damage they cause to the environment and food chains far outweigh the advantages that have made plastic bags so popular. Many countries have either outlawed plastic bags or have put a price on them to discourage excessive use. They have to go, but the question is how? The problem is that many livelihoods are attached to this industry. Representatives of plastic bag producers told the Senate committee that after the ban, 8,000 industrial units would close down, rendering a million workers unemployed. The climate change ministry officials challenged these figures, which may be exaggerated. But there is no denying the fact that a large number of manufacturers and their workers will suffer unless they are helped to shift to better and viable options. It is good to note that the government is planning to offer them alternatives. The PM's adviser said the government is working to adopt the Kenyan model of making biodegradable shopping bags from plants. Notably, though, Kenya at first announced a ban on production or sale of plastic bags, threatening violators with up to four years of imprisonment or hefty fines equivalent to \$40,000. That led to desired results but exacerbated the unemployment issue. Hence it later decided to go for the plant alternatives. We can surely benefit from that country's experience. The changeover to biodegradable materials can only be welcomed, but it may entail significant hiccups. Hopefully, the government will be on hand to assist manufacturers make the transition to its demands.

The policy so far is restricted to the federal capital since following the 18th Amendment climate change is a provincial subject. It is for the provinces to get their act together and rid their part of the country of the nuisance of plastic bags. They must follow the example of Islamabad; and towards that end undertake necessary legislation sooner rather than later.