



The organisation engages local associations in Uttara to help waste collectors.



PHOTOS: COURTESY GARBAGEMAN members and volunteers wear safety gear while at work.

# A MODERN APPROACH FOR A GREENER NATION

SUMAIYA KABIR

GARBAGEMAN, a youth-led and tech-based recycling company, was founded in Bangladesh in 2018. At a time when sustainable development and waste management is a major challenge for cities like Dhaka, GARBAGEMAN provides a door-to-door waste collection service, where the goal is to stop Dhaka's wastes from being dumped at landfills. The wastes are then turned into recycled resources.

The organisation collects organic wastes, such as vegetables, fruits and bones and inorganic wastes such as plastic, paper, glass and other materials from different homes. Then, they take these to their recycling facilities, where the inorganic wastes are recycled, and the organic wastes are made into compost to produce high quality fertilisers, suitable for using in gardens, organic farms and green factory landscaping.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, GARBAGEMAN has been particularly trying to engage people in behavioural changes. As people are spending most of their days at home, it is a good time to add some healthier practices to people's lifestyles. GARBAGEMAN is encouraging citizens to consciously separate items such as plastic, paper or glass when throwing out the trash, which are

being collected by the organisation for recycling. Monstar Lab Bangladesh is also helping them design an app for this purpose, which they will be launching soon. The company is facilitating several other noteworthy programmes, during this pandemic.

Waste collectors fall under the essential workers category. However, this fact is not socially acknowledged to the extent that it should be. For years, they have been vulnerable, working without any safety gear and under extreme conditions.

"There are community organisations that these cleaners work under, but ultimately, the whole sector of recycling waste does not have very formal standards of procedure," said Fahim Uddin Shuvo, CEO, GARBAGEMAN. "We identified that the problem was in the lack of safety gear as well as training, in relation to how and why to use the equipment and an overall understanding of the severity of COVID-19."

The organisation has been distributing safety equipment and daily food to these essential workers, because the pandemic has stopped their earnings from door-to-door garbage collection and selling scraps.

Since GARBAGEMAN does not want this to be a one-time effort, they have also approached the house owners' asso-



A waste collector wearing personal protective equipment, provided by GARBAGEMAN.

ciations and other community organisations that have these workers on their payroll. In their first phase, they supplied safety equipment and food to nearly 250 of these workers in 14 sectors of Uttara, and 150 workers in Tejgaon. Currently, they're raising funds for the workers in Gulshan. Additionally, they are trying to create a database of information about every worker.

Fahim mentioned that Footsteps Foundation, Socio Economic Backing Association (SEBA), Dhaka Rotary Club, the Global Shapers Dhaka Hub, and

Resource Co-ordination Network Bangladesh (RCNB) have been of great help with their initiative. However, he claimed that there are certain limitations.

For GARBAGEMAN, this initiative was an immediate crisis response. It would, perhaps be best if any non-profit organisation took up this project for the long haul. The health risks of waste collectors should be considered on a regular basis, not just during a global emergency. "We need to address their needs and focus on enabling them to enhance their performance. It needs to be a continuous pro-

cess, which will ideally not be possible without the support of the Dhaka City Corporation," said Fahim.

GARBAGEMAN wants to empower the waste collectors and scrap sellers of Dhaka by creating a model shop for them, complete with safety gear, training and connections to the local communities. They have surveyed a bunch of scrap sellers and hope to invest in them soon, after the pandemic subsides. The organisation goes live on Facebook every Thursday on 'Trash Talk', their newly launched online discussion show. They connect people who have been working in the waste management sector, with individuals who know the socio-economic or technical aspects of it, such as employees from UNDP in Bangladesh.

When asked about the disposal of masks and gloves that has become a hazardous problem during the pandemic, the CEO requested everyone to stop randomly throwing used gloves or masks on the streets to avoid further spread of diseases, or to at least consider covering them before discarding to avoid affecting the waste collectors. He also said that people can wear the reusable masks and gloves, approved by WHO, in order to reduce waste. "We should have designated collection points for these items," concluded Fahim.



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## YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

### National Geographic Call for Proposals for Big Cats Conservation (Prize Money \$100,000)

The National Geographic Big Cats Initiative (BCI) seeks to advance conservation efforts benefitting big cat populations, protecting and restoring them, and their habitats via field-based, action-oriented, direct, and quantifiable strategic programs. The goal of this fund is to identify projects that will help reduce the decline of African big cats in the wild.

DEADLINE: Oct 21, 2020 | Grants



### Athens Photo World Award 2020

Athens Photo World (APW) aims at promoting the work of photographers and photojournalists, familiarizing the public with contemporary photojournalism and highlighting photojournalism's contribution to recording history as it is written, in an effort to encourage photojournalists from around the world and support their commitment to their work and vision.

DEADLINE: July 19, 2020 | Competitions

### Norwegian Refugee Council is looking for Grants Coordinator in Cox's Bazar 2020.

NRC has been present in Bangladesh since 2016, working through partnerships with local NGOs. They have since scaled up our presence in Bangladesh, obtaining legal registration in November 2018, allowing them to better respond to the Rohingya influx.

DEADLINE: June 28, 2020 | Miscellaneous

## ACHI Foundation reaches out to people in need



ACHI Foundation members and volunteers distribute relief packages to families in need, using a token system.

PHOTO: COURTESY

RASHEEK TABASSUM MONDIRA

With the motto, 'Chilam, Achi, Shakbo', seven friends, Ilhaan Abdullah, Sheikh Nashwan, Ibtesham Hossain, Faraaz Ahmed, Zarfasha Chowdhury, Aneeq Islam and Zareb Islam took up an initiative to help communities that have been harshly affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Consisting of students from Sunbeams School and Scholastica, ACHI Foundation started their journey in May 2020.

"Growing up in Dhaka, we sadly tend to normalise the difficult lives of underprivileged communities. Spreading awareness or having discussions on social media alone cannot change their lives," explains Ilhaan, the chairman of ACHI Foundation. "Recognising our opportunities, we started our journey to help others."

During the month of Ramadan, members of the foundation distributed iftar and relief packages to families in need. They intend to support daily wage earners and working-class families. Their relief packages include rice, lentils, onions, salt, cooking oil and soaps, among other essentials. So far, they have distributed relief packages to 2,000 people and cooked meals to 1,000 people. "The work we do might be insignificant compared to the scale of the problem, but we aim to do

our best," shares Ilhaan.

Including the seven executive members, 15 volunteers are currently working in the foundation. Each one of them has a designated job, working in finance, human resources and advertising, among other areas.

ACHI Foundation is mainly active in Gulshan, Banani, Niketon, Tejgaon, Dhanmondi, Lalmatia, and Mirpur, and plans to expand their operations in Uttara. When they step out, the volunteers take precautionary measures, such as wearing masks, gloves, protective goggles, face shields and hair caps, when necessary.

Members of the foundation follow a systematic method. They mark circles on the roads to maintain social distancing rules. They also use a token system while distributing the packages, to make the process more manageable and to prevent repetition. "These methods make it easier for us to deal with large groups of people, provided that everyone follows the rules," shares Ilhaan.

ACHI Foundation further aims to provide personal protective equipment to ambulance drivers as well as delivery agents. They also plan to work on pollution and the climate crisis, in an attempt to build a greener Dhaka. "We want to do our part and give back to this country, as much as we can," concludes Ilhaan.