



Child waste collectors often get injured and infected by toxic or harmful waste while rummaging through the garbage with their bare hands.

After page 4

None of these organisations has ever been held responsible for this exploitative practice.

Shah Alam, owner of Dhanmondi Nagarik Shomaj Unnayan and general secretary of the Association of Primary Collection Service Providers says, "We cannot deny that many employers are recruiting child labour. Most of these are unregistered organisations who try to maximise profit by recruiting women and children who can be recruited with meagre salary."

Air Commodore Md Zahid Hossain, chief waste management officer at Dhaka South City Corporation, says, "Actually we only monitor whether these organisations are functioning or not. We don't monitor whom they are recruiting and how much they are paying to their workers. However, you have raised a very important issue. Next time, we shall try to monitor these issues too."

On the other hand, waste collection



There is no monitoring from the city corporations to ensure minimum wage, health and safety facilities and job security for the waste collectors.

Dhaka, a megacity of 180 million people, produces 4,700 tonnes of solid waste every day. Unfortunately, to manage this massive amount of waste, the country depends mostly on unskilled women and children.

and waste picking has created a means of livelihood for destitute children such as Limon and Alamgir. "At first, I got a job at a restaurant. The manager of the restaurant used to flog me mercilessly for the slightest mistakes. So, I quit that job and took up this job of waste collection. There is freedom and income in this job. However, *mohajon* often seizes the tips we get from the landlords during Eids. Other than this, I am okay with this job," says Limon. Shah Alam echoes similar sentiments, arguing, "By employing these children, we have been supporting hundreds of families. You should also take this issue under consideration."

However, AKM Maksud, executive director of Grambangla Unnayan Committee considers that these arguments stem from a sheer absence of accountability and utter ignorance about the rights of children. "In a densely populated city like Dhaka, waste collection has become a profitable business where they [child workers] are becoming victims of the worst forms of exploitation. Due to

complete absence of monitoring, these employers can do whatever they like with their child workers. They pay nominal wage, they don't bother about health and safety facilities, and they don't care about job security. As a result, the workers, most of whom are illiterate women and children, don't even know what they are being deprived of," he argues.

To make matters worse, in a list of 38 processes/activities declared hazardous for children by the Bangladesh government and the International Labour Organisation, waste picking or waste collection are not included. However, article three of the ILO convention 182 states, "The worst forms of child labour comprises.....(d)work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of the children."

According to Mahmudul Hasan Khan, programme manager of BLF, "Neither the Child Act 2013 nor the ILO's 'Compendium of hazardous child labour lists and related legislation for Bangladesh' have any provision to address this—one of the worst forms of child labour in Bangladesh. To rehabilitate these children, it is necessary to provide livelihood support with education, and which needs a considerable amount of well-organised investment. Without formulating specific policy to address this issue, sustainable rehabilitation of these children involved in waste collection and waste picking will be very difficult."

Dhaka, a megacity of 180 million people, produces 4,700 tonnes of solid waste every day. Unfortunately, to manage this massive amount of waste, the country depends mostly on unskilled women and children. While Bangladesh is taking leaps in human development indices, this stark instance of widespread human rights violation will definitely taint our nation's image.

The writer can be contacted at shahnawaz.khan@thedailystar.net