



A worker at a plastic recycling factory in Saidpur upazila of Nilphamari is seen raking plastic chips into rows for drying under the sun. Once processed and packed, these chips are sold to various factories in the country while much of it is also shipped abroad, where they are reused to make new products.

PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER

Plastic recycling takes hold in northern districts

KONGKON KARMAKER

Bangladesh's northern region has turned into a plastic recycling hub as many people in eight districts are now engaged in turning hazardous waste such as discarded PET bottles and disposable syringes back into resources for these products.

Plastic has long been an integral part of human life across the globe even though its continued use poses a significant threat to the environment.

And in the absence of proper management, the growing number of discarded plastic products is starting to take its toll in Bangladesh.

However, the people of Rangpur and Dinajpur regions seem to have found a solution as nearly 1,000 plastic recycling factories have sprung up across eight districts in the region.

Aside from the obvious benefit of ensuring a cleaner environment, the initiative has generated employment for many locals, most of whom learned about how to recycle plastic from YouTube.

Environmentalists in the two districts said that thousands of tonnes of plastic waste are produced in the country each day.

This waste can be found lying on the

ground and choking waterbodies due to the lack of proper monitoring but thanks to the introduction of recycling plants, pollution has decreased at the local level while also generating employment for many marginal people.

Md Moti, a resident of Debiganj village under Dinajpur's Chirirbandar upazila, said he started his discarded plastic recycling business beside the Dinajpur-Rangpur highway with about 20 employees two years ago.

Moti crushes the plastic waste into crumbs after collecting them through ragpickers.

pollution," he said.

During a recent visit to different places in Dinajpur, Rangpur and Nilphamari, this correspondent found huge piles of discarded plastic items in the yards of local recycling plants.

Workers were seen drying processed plastic crumbs while others were busy breaking up various items taken from the pile.

Kabita Rani, a resident of Panga Matukpur village under Domar upazila of Nilphamari, has earned around Tk 5,000 per month ever since a plastic waste recycling factory opened in the area.

People of Rangpur and Dinajpur regions have found a solution to the plastic menace as nearly 1,000 plastic recycling factories have sprung up across eight districts

Like her, many other local people got employment there.

Kabita sells discarded plastic items to traders after collecting them from different places. She even works at the factory itself by sorting discarded plastic items to make extra earnings.

"I can support my family through the earning," she said.

Tapan Roy, a machine operator at the recycling factory, said his task is rather simple as it requires him to just operate the crumbling machine while others sort out the plastic chips after cleaning them.

After cleaning, the chips are dried in the sun before being packaged for sale,

he added.

Atia Parveen, a resident of Kamarpukur village under Saidpur upazila of Nilphamari, also found a better living through the factory.

"My four-member family is living better than ever," said Parveen, who was previously a housemaid.

Kamal Roy, owner of the plastic recycling plant, said he sells the chips to millers while much of the product is even exported.

"This plastic waste is reused for manufacturing plastic products," he said.

Roy went on to say that he learned about plastic waste recycling from YouTube and following his success, many people are now leaning towards this profitable business.

Imran Hossain, owner of a plastic recycling plant in Bangalipur village of Saidpur, said they buy old plastic bottles from various scrap shops at prices between Tk 20 to Tk 35 per kilogramme.

The waste is then washed in machines to rid them of any hazardous material before being dried and crushed.

"I think the industry could have expanded further by now with government support," Hossain added.

Bijan Kumar Roy, assistant director of the environment department in Rangpur, said plastic waste is a major threat to the ecosystem and so, the idea of recycling discarded plastic products is amazing.

"It is a great concept to protect the environment. Besides, many are becoming self-sufficient by working in these factories," he added.

Be competitive, stop relying on duty-free regime

Says first Dominican Republic envoy to Bangladesh

PORIMOL PALMA

Bangladesh should abandon the mentality of having a duty-free regime, cheap loans or foreign aid and focus instead on making products competitive by improving management efficiency, logistics and business environment as the country approaches graduation from the grouping of the least-developed countries (LDCs) in 2026.

That was the key suggestion from David Puig, ambassador of the Dominican Republic, in Dhaka.

"As an LDC, you rely on quota, cheap loan and aid. Now, you need to change that mentality and become competitive," he said in an interview with The Daily Star in Dhaka on March 23.

On the same day, he presented credentials to President Md Abdul Hamid to become the first envoy from the country to Bangladesh since the two nations established diplomatic relations in 2012.

"As Bangladesh is growing, it seeks to boost the relations," said Puig, who is based in Delhi as he is the ambassador of the Dominican Republic to India.

He is also the ambassador of the country to Bangladesh and other South Asian countries.

Over the past 25 years, the Dominican Republic, now a developing country, has experienced robust economic growth.

Bangladesh has expertise in textile industry and as the major destinations are the US and Europe, textile companies can also invest in the Dominican Republic and take advantage of its free trade zones and FTAs

In 2008, the Dominican Republic became an upper-middle-income country from a lower-middle-income one as per the criteria of the World Bank. The Caribbean island is now aspiring to become a developed nation by 2030.

Bangladesh achieved the lower-middle-income status in 2015 and has targeted to become a higher-middle-income country in 2031 and a developed one in 2041.

"My first suggestion for you is: do not wait. Plan it now. It is not only for the LDC graduation but also for the latter stages," Puig said.

The Dominican Republic has signed free trade agreements with the US and Europe, established free trade zones to attract foreign investors and provided incentives.

It went for manufacturing high-end products such as electronic devices and medical devices and became the third-largest manufacturer for medical devices in Latin America.

The country has upgraded its traditional tourism sector and become a major tourist destination, drawing more than six million tourists a year before the coronavirus pandemic hit the hospitality industry and five million last year.

"Improving the business environment and making it enabling for investors is crucial," said Puig, who joined the Dominican Foreign Service in 2004.

He says Bangladesh has expertise in the textile industry and as the major destinations are the US and Europe, textile companies can also invest in the Dominican Republic and take advantage of the free trade zones and FTAs with the American and European markets.

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Sri Lanka seeks further \$1b credit line from India

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka has sought an additional credit line of \$1 billion from India to import essentials amid its worst economic crisis in decades, two sources said on Monday, as the Indian foreign minister began talks with the government of its neighbour.

The island nation is struggling to pay for essential imports of food and fuel after a 70 per cent drop in foreign exchange reserves since January 2020 led to a currency devaluation and efforts to seek help from global lenders.

New Delhi has indicated it would meet the request for the new line, to be used for importing essential items such as rice, wheat flour, pulses, sugar and medicines, said one of the sources briefed on the matter.

"Sri Lanka has requested an additional \$1 billion credit line from India for imports of essentials," the second source said. "This will be on top of the \$1-billion credit line already pledged by India."

Both sources declined to be identified as the discussions were confidential.

The finance and foreign ministries of Sri Lanka, as well as India's foreign ministry, did not immediately respond to requests seeking comment.

Sri Lankan Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa signed the earlier credit line of \$1 billion this month in the Indian capital of New Delhi to help pay for critical imports. Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar met Rajapaksa on Monday after arriving in the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo late the previous day.

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A Sri Lankan woman celebrates when the first oil bowser with kerosene arrives as people wait to buy oil for cookers amid a shortage of domestic gas due to country's economic crisis, at a fuel station in Colombo on March 21.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Gazprom wants gas payments in euros from India's GAIL

REUTERS, New Delhi

Gazprom has asked India's largest gas transmitter GAIL (India) to pay for gas imports in euros instead of dollars, two sources said, in a sign the Russian energy giant seeks to wean itself away from the US currency in the wake of the Ukraine conflict.

European countries and the United States have imposed heavy sanctions on Russia since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine on February 24.

GAIL has a long-term gas import deal with Gazprom Marketing & Trading Singapore to annually buy 2.5 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas and has been settling trade with Gazprom in dollars.

GAIL, which imports and distributes gas, also operates India's largest gas pipeline network.