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# Where is Bangladesh's freelance market headed?

AAQIB HASIB

Growing up in Bangladesh, there are very few career paths you are steered towards by family, teachers, schools and society. Most of these include traditional desk jobs.

You are either told to become an engineer, doctor, lawyer, executive, businessman, teacher and so forth. However, with every

difficult one can be to procure.

The last recorded unemployment rate of Bangladesh is around 4.7 percent, as documented by the World Bank. While this might skirt very close to an ideal unemployment rate for a country, the ground-level reality does not quite seem to reflect that.

Following the Russia-Ukraine



Aaqib Hasib is a sub-editor at The Daily Star.

markets shrinking as employers attempt to cope with rising costs.

However, one industry that does not seem to be slowing down is the freelancing market. A recent study by the Oxford Internet Institute (OII), shows that Bangladesh has the second-largest supplier of online labourers, with a labour share of 16 percent, trailing only India, which has a 24 percent labour share.

Experts suggest that Bangladesh is home to a population of 10 lakh freelancers, with 650,000 of them being in the field of IT. Past estimates from the ICT minister suggest that the latter group is earning around \$1 billion annually.

One of the biggest challenges surrounding the freelancing market seems to be a lack of information. While more and more freelancers are operating in the country each year, there is still not enough solid information available about earnings, opportunities and potential.

To find out, one has to directly step into the market and begin operating to figure out the value they will get for their skills and the types of opportunities available that align with their expertise.

In order to better make sense of this industry, I spoke with an experienced freelancer. Faisal Bin Iqbal, who primarily works as a content writer and SEO specialist, said, "For starters, Upwork, Fiverr, and PeoplePerHour are ideal. They will give you a taste of what freelancing is like and



The advent of AI and similar tools mean that freelancers cannot just sit idly by and stick to the status quo. VISUAL: FAISAL BIN IQBAL

what you need to do in order to land gigs. You'll also get a good understanding of the competition you'll be against. Then, move on to LinkedIn after you've gained some experience. It's harder to get good gigs on LinkedIn, but it's the perfect place if you're looking for long term jobs and projects. Also, gigs on LinkedIn have better pay."

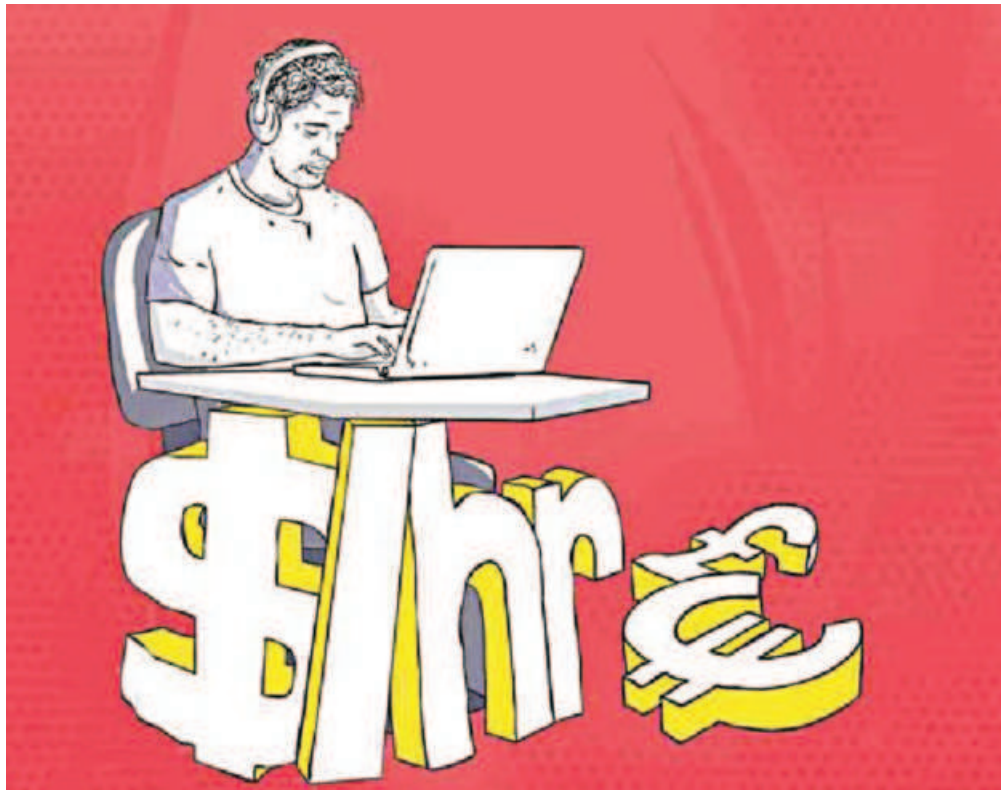
Speaking about some of the challenges, Faisal said, "Remittance benefits and general access to information are there. But we need better transparency when it comes to the tax laws. Right now, there exists a lot of confusion surrounding these laws, which says a lot about the state of transparency. Additionally, certain factors like load shedding and slow internet do cause problems for freelancers. However, day by day, things are getting better. The government is also taking the

initiative of turning people into skilled workers, especially for freelance marketplaces, which is a good thing."

Asked what changes he believes will help freelancers like him thrive, he shared: "People need to be trained, especially when it comes to client communications. There are a lot of talented individuals with great skills, but their lack of communication skills hinders their progress. If there were facilities to train these freelancers in this regard, it would have been much better."

Speaking about the "what" Dr Tanjiba Rahman, Chairman Bangladesh Freelancer Development Society, said, "If we look at China and how they handled their growing population, you will see they focused on adjusting their education system."

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VISUAL:

EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

passing year, there are fewer of these traditional jobs available. The job market in the country is incredibly competitive and one has to simply go out and start looking for a job to see how

war, the economic crisis that is still ongoing has left the country reeling. While the exact data is yet to be available, as all of this is happening in real time, experts pointed to the existing job

**"When we are able to implement skilled education and appropriate training, our population will shift their line of thought and stop aiming for traditional jobs. That will not only help curb unemployment, but will also help the population become more skilled."**

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