



# SARFARAZ ALI'S journey towards sustainability

An entrepreneur and advocate for sustainable development, Sarfaraz Ali serves as the CEO and Executive Director of Khulshi Mart and K Bakery. Beyond his leadership roles, he lends his expertise as a Board Member to several organisations. His obsession with establishing sustainable practices in his organisation, especially the latest venture Earth Matters Ltd., is what got our attention and here is an excerpt from the tête-à-tête with the industrialist.

**Q. Given the global urgency to address climate change and environmental degradation, how do you see the role of businesses, particularly in the retail industry, evolving in terms of sustainability and social responsibility?**

Retailers have a big role to play in terms of sustainability and social responsibility. For example, in most developed countries, the practice of carrying reusable containers is the norm. People take these containers to the store, fill them up with items, and take them home. This results in reducing waste from packaging, as no new containers or carrying bags are used. This concept is not fully caught up yet, even in foreign countries. However, this is what retailers should encourage in order to be fully sustainable. I believe this is our ultimate goal, and we have to work accordingly to make an impact. We have plans to incorporate this practice more prominently. Adopting sustainability practices goes beyond a personal choice; founders and entrepreneurs should think of their businesses and take decisions keeping sustainability in mind.

**Q. In terms of reducing waste, particularly plastic waste, what steps have you taken to encourage customers and suppliers to adopt more sustainable practices, and what challenges have you**

**encountered in changing behaviours?**

One of our key strategies in our pursuit to adopt more sustainable practices has been raising awareness internally and externally. I believe that initiating change necessitates starting at the core, which is why we have provided extensive training to all of our employees. These training sessions focus on the importance of sustainability. We ensure that our employees are aware of how we plan to reduce our carbon footprint and implement eco-friendly systems within our processes. As a result, they've been our biggest advocates in this mission, informing customers about all the steps that can be taken to reduce waste, reuse, and recycle products.

We've installed a "Sustainability Zone" at our outlet, which remains stocked with informative leaflets that customers can take with them and learn about sustainability. We also actively engage our audience on social media to raise awareness, with different sustainability-focused content. However, one of our key challenges is a shift in mindset. For many, the concept of sustainability can seem difficult. Hence, we're making information accessible and easily understood in the simplest way. You don't need to make a complete lifestyle change immediately. Instead, you can start by incorporating small actions and watching them turn into habits. Small

actions taken individually can result in a massive, collective impact. Hence, we always try to incentivize our customers to make a positive change in their lives for the betterment of our environment.

**Q. The "Road to Sustainability" includes significant steps towards carbon neutrality and the use of sustainable materials. Can you elaborate on the strategies and technologies you've implemented to achieve these goals?**

Our primary goal with our "Road to Sustainability" is to achieve carbon neutrality. From this year onwards, we have started going paper-free within Mart Promoters Ltd. We have implemented different technologies to ensure that all correspondence is done efficiently to reduce paper usage. Apart from

that, we have moved to a new office space that uses sustainable materials, an efficient electric system, and solar energy. Moreover, we've already started using compostable plastic bags. As a result, from the time a shipment enters our facility until it reaches our customers, our operations are free of plastic. Through such initiatives, we have been able to reduce our carbon footprint as a community, and we hope to see the impact of this throughout our country and beyond. By making these changes, we are not only helping the

environment but also creating a more sustainable future for generations to come.

**Q. Looking towards the future, what are the next big steps for you and your enterprises in the journey towards sustainability?**

This year marks the launch of my newest venture, Earth Matters Ltd., a company that strives to find and provide sustainable solutions for plastic pollution. Our product line comprises compostable bags, and we aim to expand the scope of using 100 per cent compostable materials by including other disposable products such as coffee cups, utensils, etc.

From installing solar panels to planting trees and reducing water usage, I believe that every step

that we take will bring us closer to our goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2025. Additionally, we've begun to undertake vertical farming at our facility. Vertical farming is an innovative technique for growing organic produce that makes use of small spaces to grow crops on vertically layered shelves. Ideally, having such facilities at the outlet itself can help us reduce packaging and carbon emissions from transportation by growing crops and selling them to customers at the same point.

I have recently attended the ChangeNOW 2024 conference in Paris, France, and I'm quite excited about collaborating with global partners to bring about collective change. I'm proud to be a part of the global narrative, as we fuel initiatives to actively propel Bangladesh forward on par with other countries in the journey towards a better world.

**Photo: Courtesy**

