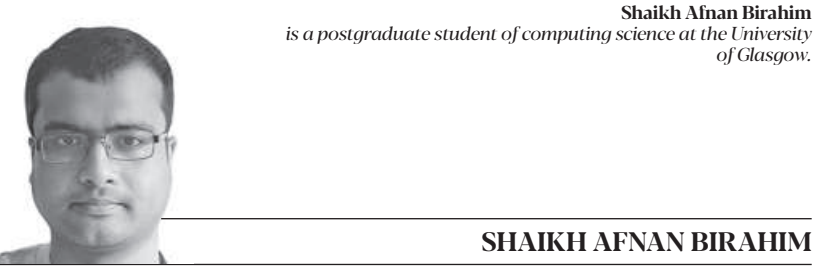


How can Bangladesh improve its waste management?



Sufia is a middle-aged woman working for ZeroWaste Tech, a startup in Dhaka. Every morning, she wears her safety jacket, gloves, boots, and helmet with the powered air-purifying respirator. After checking her smartphone in her allocated region, where the garbage is full and needs to be managed, she goes out with her other mates, collects garbage, and puts it in their targeted dump site near the city. The dump site has also classified areas such as plastics, biowaste, glass, e-waste, etc. Her team then divides the waste accordingly and puts them in each place. Then, the waste is processed further to minimise carbon emissions and can be converted into renewable energy.

This scenario, with the character and the startup, is imaginary, but it can be a reality.

Bangladesh has been facing severe problems in waste management for decades. Several initiatives have been taken, but they have not been effective due to their irregular implementation. The above-mentioned scenario can be made real especially in Dhaka, the most overpopulated city in Bangladesh, where garbage and waste can be seen everywhere, from main roads to narrow alleyways. In the rainy season, the problem intensifies tremendously because of poor drainage systems.

According to projections, the country's daily waste generation

rate is expected to reach 0.80 kg per capita per day by 2030 and 1.19 kg per capita by 2041. So effective measures should be taken right now.

Electronic gadget usage is rising around the world, and Bangladesh is no different. This rising usage leaves a vast amount of electronic waste, which should be appropriately discarded. At the same time, most of it should be recycled and used for new purposes. The challenges in recycling e-waste in Bangladesh include the lack of formal collection systems, insufficient recycling infrastructure, and limited public awareness about the environmental impact of improper e-waste disposal. Informal recycling practices often involve hazardous processes that frequently exacerbate the process and harm both the environment and workers.

Ideas from various countries can be adopted and implemented in Bangladesh to reduce as well as to manage waste in a better way. For example, any citizen can deposit waste into certain places proposed by government or private organisations and get cash or various credits. Those credits can be used for discounts on utility bills. Also, designated dustbins can be used for general and recyclable waste. This waste can be collected as soon as the bins are full, sending notifications to the waste management companies as the whole system will be based on IoT with the bins having sensors.

Japan, Canada, and the European Union have implemented Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), which holds producers (manufacturers, importers, sellers) accountable for making their products for the entire lifecycle, even after the consumer stops using them. This means that the producers are not only responsible for making the products but also must

renewable energy sectors to produce biogas. For instance, South Korea has implemented a mandatory food waste recycling programme where food waste is collected separately and processed into biogas and animal feed. Such a system not only reduces landfill usage but also contributes to renewable energy production and agricultural sustainability.

organic waste, into valuable fuels and energy can make a huge impact and significantly reduce waste.

Public campaigns to educate citizens about waste segregation, recycling, and the environmental consequences of improper waste disposal are crucial. Effective methods could include integrating waste management topics into school

plastic bags has largely been replaced with eco-friendly alternatives like jute and paper bags, but this practice should be implemented more strictly. Modern landfills equipped with gas recovery systems can also reduce the environmental impact of plastic waste and other non-recyclables. These systems capture methane, a potent greenhouse gas typically released from decomposing waste in landfills, which can be converted into renewable energy and reduce air pollution.

Additionally, setting up innovation hubs and providing access to research facilities could foster the growth of sustainable businesses and enrich the research sector for this cause. For instance, exploring methods like bioleaching, a process where bacteria safely extract valuable materials from electronic waste, can be a game-changer. This technique not only minimises environmental harm but also provides a sustainable approach to recycling and resource recovery. By encouraging such advancements, Bangladesh can pave the way for a more sustainable and efficient waste management system.

While many initiatives are being undertaken to reduce waste, a more cohesive and systematic effort is needed to overcome the flaws of the current waste management system. The government should establish clear and enforceable guidelines and strong legislation, and ensure practical policy implementation, which are essential to drive meaningful change in this respect. By learning from global best practices, fostering innovation, and raising public awareness, Bangladesh can transform its waste management system into one that is more sustainable, efficient, and environmentally responsible.



VISUAL : REHNUMA PROSHOON

be a part of the waste management of their products. They have some policies, like the take-back policy, which provides facilities for the consumers to return used products. They also have recycling obligations. These schemes encourage them to reduce waste by contributing to the government or third-party waste management initiatives.

Food waste can be redirected to

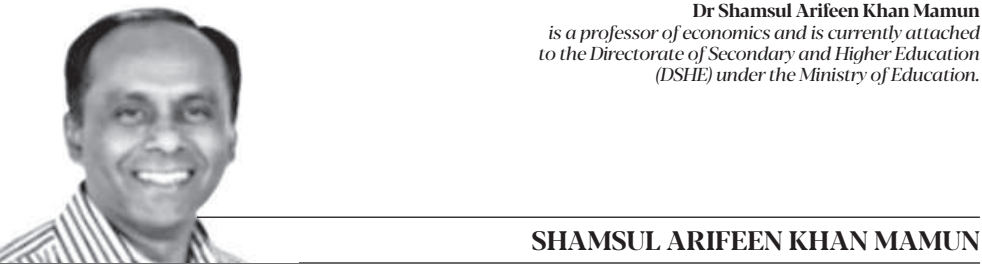
Bangladesh could adopt a similar model by establishing dedicated food waste collection and processing centres in urban areas.

Startups focusing on areas like waste-to-energy technologies, recycling infrastructure, and eco-friendly alternatives to plastics should be encouraged. For example, companies that focus on converting waste materials, such as plastic and

curricula to instil habits from an early age and organising interactive workshops in communities. Social media campaigns using influencers and local celebrities can also raise awareness and encourage sustainable practices. These approaches can ensure that the message reaches a diverse audience and promotes active participation.

Indeed, the widespread use of

Rethinking our labour market challenges



In a recent report on the labour market of Bangladesh published in *The Daily Star*, one of the key issues highlighted is the mismatch in the labour market, particularly between the oversupply of tertiary graduates and sufficient job creation. However, the concept of a “labour market mismatch,” in my view, has become an overused and overly simplistic explanation. This narrative diverts attention from deeper economic challenges, allowing policymakers and employers to shift the blame for unemployment and underemployment onto workers’ supposed lack of skills, rather than addressing the systemic issues at play. Education institutions—both colleges and universities—are responsible for the skill mismatch among graduates.

It is well understood that labour market mismatch may occur because of a lack of investment in key industries. When formal sector industries fail to grow or modernise in line with the demands, it is easy to claim that there is a shortage of skilled workers

rather than admit that the industry itself is lagging behind in innovation or that the economy has not created enough high-quality jobs. It is asserted that except for the ready-made garment (RMG) industry, other industrial bases such as the information and communication (ICT) sector are still weak in this regard. To be specific, the Asian Development Bank’s tracer study on ICT graduates in the country has found that job placement rate is as low as 57.6 percent.

The term “labour market mismatch” is often used as a blanket explanation, which can obscure more critical factors such as low wages and poor working conditions. Even when job vacancies exist, positions remain empty because they fail to meet workers’ expectations in terms of pay, benefits and/or job security. This is not a mismatch of skills, but a mismatch between what workers’ expectations are and what the employers are willing to offer.

As a consultant for the World Bank, I had

the opportunity to conduct a diagnostic analysis of the tertiary education sector in Bangladesh. As part of this effort, the World Bank conducted a tracer survey in 2017 that asked unemployed tertiary graduates whether they had rejected job offers. According to the findings, 26 percent of unemployed graduates reported being offered jobs but having chosen to refuse them. The reasons for refusal varied, with low salaries being the most common (46

One potential initiative is for the government to establish employment centres at the upazila level, under the Department of Labour. These centres could act as bridges between jobseekers and employers, offering job matching services, as well as running reskilling and upskilling programmes to equip recent graduates with the skills that align with current economic demands.

percent), followed by poor working conditions (16 percent), unsatisfactory job positions (11 percent), inconvenient job locations (13 percent), and other factors (14 percent).

This data highlights that, in many

industries, particularly the informal sector, poor working conditions—such as low wages, lack of job security, and limited benefits—are significant contributors to labour shortage. The issue of low wages is especially pronounced in the informal sector, where there is little standardisation of pay or clear paths for career progression. According to the 2017 World Bank tracer survey, tertiary graduates from colleges were offered an average monthly salary of Tk 15,000, which is insufficient given the rising living costs.

Moreover, many unemployed graduates, particularly those with tertiary education, tend to hold out for public sector jobs, which are seen as more stable and better paying, rather than accepting lower-paying jobs in the informal sector. This preference for public sector employment can extend their period of unemployment, further complicating the job market dynamics.

Therefore, attributing labour shortages solely to a lack of qualified candidates oversimplifies the issue. The real challenge lies in the quality of jobs being offered. Improving labour standards—through wage reforms, better working conditions, and more robust career pathways—could play a crucial role in addressing these shortages and reducing unemployment among graduates.

In my view, the solution to the labour market challenges requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both the demand and supply sides of the labour market.

First, both the government and the

private sector should invest in improved labour market information systems that can connect employers with jobseekers in real time. This would help reduce the gap between job openings and suitable candidates by providing timely, accurate data on available positions and the skills required. One potential initiative is for the government to establish employment centres at the upazila level, under the Department of Labour. These centres could act as bridges between jobseekers and employers, offering job matching services, as well as running reskilling and upskilling programmes to equip recent graduates with the skills that align with current economic demands.

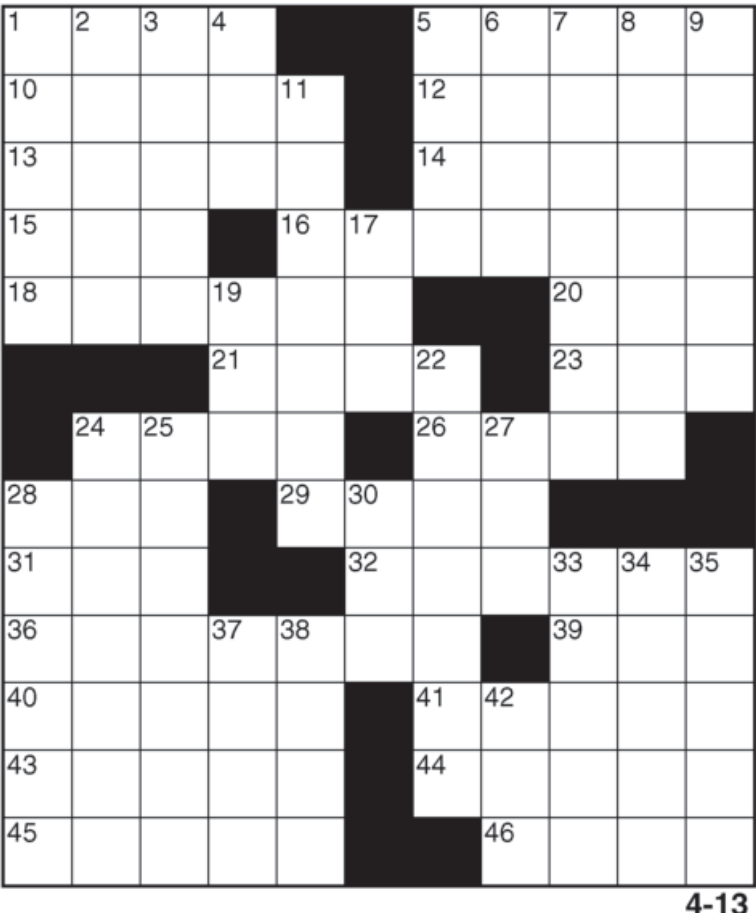
Second, the government should consider formulating and enforcing a minimum wage law that reflects the cost of living across different regions. Establishing minimum wage standards, and ensuring they are periodically adjusted for inflation and regional economic conditions, would make jobs more attractive to workers. This would not only help reduce the perception of a labour market mismatch but will also improve working conditions, creating a more motivated and productive workforce.

While some degree of mismatch may exist, the education system should not be held solely responsible for that. To resolve the labour market dysfunction, the underlying systemic issues must be acknowledged and addressed properly.

CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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