# BEAT PLASTIC POLLUTION

The Daily Star
DHAKA WEDNESDAY JUNE 4, 2025
JAISHTHA 21, 1432 BS
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# PLASTIC ISN'T CHEAP

## We're all paying for it

PHOTOS: **ANISUR RAHMAN**

**PRIYAM PAUL**

In the back alleys of Dhaka, plastic bags flutter like defeated flags—caught in drains, wrapped around tree roots, buried in the dust of everyday life. From household groceries to street snacks, the nation's dependence on single-use plastic is visible in every corner of urban and rural Bangladesh. What was once hailed as a miracle of modern convenience has now morphed into one of the most pervasive threats to our environment and health. Microplastics have found their way into our rivers, our soil, even our bodies. And yet, the plastic keeps coming. With World Environment Day 2025 rallying the globe under the banner #BeatPlasticPollution, Bangladesh stands at a critical juncture—caught between past efforts and the urgent need for coordinated, long-term solutions.

Dr Ainun Nishat, Professor Emeritus at BRAC University, explains: "The world is increasingly recognising that both plastic and polythene pose serious threats to environmental and public health. In Bangladesh, the primary concern lies in the widespread use of single-use plastics. While producers often blame consumer behaviour, the reality is that single-use plastic significantly contributes to environmental degradation. If reused multiple times, its impact would be far less severe."

He further notes that plastic and polythene account for almost 90 percent of urban drainage blockages. These materials do not decompose, instead clogging drainage systems and causing frequent waterlogging. "Paper can be recycled six or seven times with ease," he adds, "making it a far more sustainable alternative. We must regulate polythene strictly if we are to safeguard our environment."

The data paints a stark picture. A 2023 World Bank study found that Bangladesh's annual per capita plastic consumption has tripled in just 15 years, rising from 3.0 kg in 2005 to 9.0 kg in 2020. In Dhaka, the figure is a staggering 22.25 kg per person per year. The majority of this plastic comes from packaging, particularly low-density polyethylene (LDPE)—a material commonly used in single-use bags and wrappers. LDPE waste in Dhaka has risen from 16.8 tonnes per day in 2005 to 323 tonnes in 2020.

**A 2023 World Bank study found that Bangladesh's annual per capita plastic consumption has tripled in just 15 years, rising from 3.0 kg in 2005 to 9.0 kg in 2020. In Dhaka, the figure is a staggering 22.25 kg per person per year. The majority of this plastic comes from packaging, particularly low-density polyethylene (LDPE)—a material commonly used in single-use bags and wrappers. LDPE waste in Dhaka has risen from 16.8 tonnes per day in 2005 to 323 tonnes in 2020.**

Packaging accounts for 73 percent of Bangladesh's total plastic waste, with over 40 percent of household LDPE waste generated from single-use shopping bags. Of the 977,000 tonnes of plastic waste generated annually, nearly 70 percent is mismanaged—either dumped, burned, or littered. In Dhaka, only 31 percent of waste is collected by authorities. The situation in rural areas is even more dire.

This mismanagement extends beyond urban centres. Plastic waste is a major contributor to marine pollution, especially in the Bay of Bengal, which is fed by the Ganges-Brahmaputra system. While 20 percent of marine plastic originates from sea-based activities, the remaining 80 percent comes from land, underscoring the inland roots of this coastal crisis.

Though Bangladesh led the way in banning plastic bags, enforcement has faltered over time. The initial 2002 ban showed promise, reducing visible waste. But without affordable and accessible alternatives, plastic usage crept back. In October 2024, polypropylene bags were banned in super shops, but experts agree that without stronger public engagement and viable replacements, these bans alone cannot succeed.

Some companies, however, are showing the way forward. Unilever Bangladesh has partnered with the Chattogram City Corporation and YPSA to involve over 3,000 waste workers in collecting flexible plastics and integrating them into a formal recycling value chain.

"By 2023, we collected as much plastic as we used annually, and we repeated this in 2024. We're on track for 2025," says Shamima Akhter, Director of Corporate Affairs, Partnerships, and Communications at Unilever Bangladesh. "We engaged communities in 41 wards and brought scrap dealers into the loop. It's a circular solution that improves livelihoods and reduces waste."

Encouragingly, Bangladesh's financial sector is also rising to the challenge. Under Bangladesh Bank's guidance, banks and financial institutions are now required to incorporate sustainability into their operations through dedicated green finance mechanisms. These initiatives support environmentally responsible investments, from solar energy to waste management.

According to Bangladesh Bank's Quarterly Review Report on Sustainable Finance (October–December 2024), BDT 489.53 crore was disbursed specifically for circular economy and eco-friendly projects under the Green Finance category. In total, banks disbursed BDT 7,620.20 crore, while non-bank financial institutions contributed BDT 1,025.50 crore to green finance during this period.

M. Shamsul Arefin, Managing Director of NCC Bank, believes the next frontier lies in shaping values from a young age. "We advocate for the integration of environmental education into school banking programmes. Future generations must grow up with a deep respect for sustainability and ecological stewardship. Through collective action and a shared vision, we can secure a greener, more resilient future for our country and the world."

Plastic waste is not just an environmental issue—it's a national wake-up call. The way forward demands an integrated, multi-sectoral response: strict regulation, public awareness, private sector innovation, and sustained financial backing. Without coordinated and urgent action, Bangladesh risks drowning—quite literally—in its own waste.

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# BANKING on a Greener Future

Bank Asia

## Sohail R K Hussain, Managing Director, Bank Asia

**Bank Asia also expresses its full solidarity with this year's theme: #BeatPlasticPollution. On this special day, let us take an oath to eliminate plastic use and focus on practical solutions to combat plastic pollution—to save Mother Nature, and in doing so, protect ourselves and future generations.**

**The Daily Star (TDS):** What role do you see banks playing in promoting environmental sustainability in Bangladesh?

**Sohail R K Hussain (SRKH):** Bangladesh Bank is well aware of the country's environmental degradation and has, from time to time, issued directives to all scheduled banks, as well as introduced various refinance schemes to support environment-friendly industries. To promote environmental sustainability in the country, the following issues may be taken into consideration:

**Implementation of Green Banking Guidelines**
Bangladesh Bank (BB), the central bank, introduced Green Banking Guidelines in 2011, and subsequently launched the Sustainable Finance Policy in December 2020 (amended in October 2023). These guidelines require banks to formulate Green Banking policies, establish Green Banking units or help desks, allocate budgets for green finance, monitor environmental and social risks in lending practices.

**Financing Green Projects**
Banks in Bangladesh are providing finance for environment-friendly projects such as renewable energy (solar panels, biogas), energy-efficient industries, waste management and recycling plants, organic and climate-resilient agriculture.

**Increased Use of Green Refinancing Schemes**
Bangladesh Bank has introduced refinancing schemes for banks and financial institutions to encourage investment in green technologies and industries.

These offer concessional loans for solar home systems, biogas plants, solar irrigation pumps, green-featured buildings and various green projects.

**Environmental Risk Assessment**
Banks are now required to integrate Environmental and Social Risk Management (ESRM) into their credit risk analysis.

Loans to industries must meet specified environmental compliance standards, thereby discouraging pollution, climate change, and deforestation.

**Promoting Sustainable Corporate Practices**
Through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, banks promote awareness of climate change and support local environmental projects.

Banks frequently fund tree plantation drives, awareness campaigns, and disaster relief efforts in climate-affected regions.

Fintech can play a vital role in sustainable financing by connecting investors with green projects.

**Green Bonds and Sustainable Finance**
Although still emerging, green bonds and sustainability-linked financial products are gaining interest in Bangladesh's banking sector.

These instruments can help mobilise funds for climate-resilient infrastructure and low-carbon growth.

**TDS:** Can you highlight any specific green finance initiatives, sustainable investment strategies, or eco-friendly banking practices your institution has adopted recently?

**SRKH:** Bank Asia recognises its responsibility to protect the environment and the wellbeing of the people of the country. Since its inception, Bank Asia has been committed to ensuring a safe, clean, and green environment. Our principle always avoids financing environmentally hazardous businesses. Some of our notable green initiatives include the Solar Energy project (e.g. Spectra Solar Park – Tk 2,525.00 million); Green and Sustainable Agriculture in various rural areas (current outstanding Tk 1,337.61 million); Effluent Treatment Plants (ETPs) in garment industries (total outstanding around Tk 834.26 million); Green Building Initiatives (e.g. Shayham Knit Composite – Tk 220.00 million); and Hybrid Hoffman Kilns in brickfields (e.g. Eta & Tiles – Tk 350.00 million) as part of our commitment to a green economy.

Additionally, under our social business programme, we have signed an agreement with the Rural Development Academy (RDA) for the

installation of two solar irrigation pumping systems in the drought-prone Barind area. The project, titled "Two-storied Agriculture with Solar Power Irrigation System and Its Multipurpose Use", features an 11.6 kW solar-powered irrigation unit capable of discharging 50,000 litres of water per hour. It supports irrigation for up to 20 acres of agricultural land and directly benefits 45 farming families. This system not only ensures reliable and cost-effective irrigation using renewable energy but also secures access to safe drinking water for marginal and poor farmers—thereby contributing to increased agricultural productivity and rural development overall.

In terms of eco-friendly banking practices, we are reducing our own environmental footprint by promoting digital banking—for instance, minimising paper use, increasing the adoption of digital platforms, and reducing energy consumption at physical branches.

**TDS:** How is your bank aligning its long-term corporate strategy with global environmental goals?

**SRKH:** Bank Asia has already taken the lead in localising and implementing the SDGs. To help reduce the global average temperature and achieve net-zero emissions under the Paris Agreement, we have introduced a Sustainable Finance Policy and incorporated ESRM guidelines into our loan screening processes. The Sustainable Finance Components and Sectors under this policy are aligned with 15 out of the 17 SDGs, addressing areas such as poverty, health, education, gender equality, net-zero transition planning, nature-based solutions, the circular economy model, and climate change.

**TDS:** As a corporate leader, what message would you like to share on World Environment Day about the responsibility of financial institutions in building a greener, more resilient future?

**SRKH:** The theme for World Environment Day 2025 is #BeatPlasticPollution.

Our planet is choking on plastic. For decades, plastic pollution has seeped into every corner of the world—leaching into the water we drink, the food we eat, and ultimately into our bodies. While plastic pollution remains a serious concern, it is also one of today's most solvable environmental challenges, with several practical solutions at hand.

Plastic waste—whether in a river, the ocean, or on land—can persist in the environment for centuries. It exacerbates the triple planetary crisis: climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution. Its detrimental effects on health, the economy, and ecosystems cannot be ignored. Urgent, effective, and robust action is required.

The world is waking up to this problem, and governments, industries, and other stakeholders are beginning to act. It is high time we reduce the production and consumption of single-use plastic, which must be replaced with durable and sustainable alternatives. World Environment Day 2025 will focus on ending plastic pollution.

Bank Asia also expresses its full solidarity with this year's theme: #BeatPlasticPollution. On this special day, let us take an oath to eliminate plastic use and focus on practical solutions to combat plastic pollution—to save Mother Nature, and in doing so, protect ourselves and future generations.


# TRANSFORMING LIVES FOSTERING SUSTAINABILITY

## Present Sustainable Finance Highlights

Total Investment
**BDT 144,949.09 million**

**13** Sectors Covered

**50.99%** of Bank Asia PLC's financing dedicated to sustainability

### Green Finance

- Renewable Energy **BDT 2,015.22 million**
- Energy & Resource Efficiency **BDT 3,353.21 million**
- Alternative Energy **BDT 2,756.07 million**
- Green Agriculture **BDT 19.55 million**
- Green CMSME **BDT 87.23 million**
- Liquid Waste Management **BDT 834.26 million**
- Circular Economy & Eco-Projects **BDT 3,475.24 million**
- Environment-Friendly Brick Production **BDT 532.91 million**
- Green/Environment Friendly Establishments **BDT 1,849.16 million**

**Total Financing in Green Projects: BDT 14,922.85 million**

### Sustainable Linked Finance

- Sustainable Agriculture **BDT 1,318.06 million**
- Sustainable MSME **BDT 8,233.89 million**
- Socially Responsible Financing **BDT 2,934.20 million**
- Working Capital & Demand Loan for Green Products **BDT 117,540.09 million**

**Total Financing in Sustainable Linked Projects: BDT 130,026.24 million**

### Major Sustainable Investments

Spectra Solar Park (35 MW)
**BDT 2,525 million**

Energy-Efficient Machinery
**BDT 190 million**

Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) System
**BDT 190 million**

### IMPACT

**28%** Rice yield boost in coastal saline soil (Collaboration with Khulna University)

**211** Water tanks, each with a 5000-liter capacity, were donated to farmers in Bandarban

**45** Families benefited from solar-powered irrigation on 20 acres of land in Rangpur

www.bankasia-bd.com

**Bank Asia PLC. remains committed to ensuring sustainable growth and a greener future**

SUPPLEMENT

# BEAT PLASTIC POLLUTION

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## Renewables Power
# OUR SUSTAINABILITY ROADMAP

banglalink

## Huseyin Turker, Chief Technology and Information Officer (CTIO), Banglalink

**Altogether, our renewable energy initiatives are currently generating approximately 1.57 GWh of clean energy, helping us reduce emissions by more than 700 tonnes annually. Renewable energy is not just a part of our operations; it forms the foundation of our vision for a sustainable digital future.**

**The Daily Star (TDS):** Telecom networks are energy-intensive. How is Banglalink reducing its carbon footprint and improving energy efficiency across its infrastructure?

**Huseyin Turker (HT):** Digital technologies impact energy use and emissions both directly and indirectly. According to the International Energy Agency, data centres and data transmission networks are responsible for approximately 1 percent of global energy-related greenhouse gas emissions. Being at the forefront of innovation and connectivity, we recognise our responsibility to utilise technology in an environmentally sustainable manner. We are committed to responsible growth and have taken significant strides to address this issue. Our networks are equipped with a suite of smart energy-saving technologies, including AI-based energy-saving features, deep sleep modes, Power Star, and device-aware energy optimisation systems. In 2024 alone, these smart features helped us reduce our annual energy consumption by approximately 8.8 gigawatt-hours (GWh), resulting in a reduction of over 4,000 tonnes of carbon emissions. However, we remain fixated on saving even more energy.

We've highly optimised our data centres, improved cooling systems, and rethought space utilisation. By doing so, we managed to save an additional 2 GWh of electricity and cut more than 900 tonnes of emissions. Additionally, we have upgraded to more energy-efficient telecom equipment, resulting in reduced energy consumption and contributing a further 2 GWh in energy savings, as well as a 900-tonne reduction in emissions. A significant effort to replace traditional air conditioners with free cooling units at more than 1,900 tower sites enabled the saving of 17 GWh in electricity and 7,000 tonnes of carbon emissions. We've deployed highly efficient power systems to reduce diesel consumption, saving over 159 kilolitres of fuel and reducing emissions by 400 tonnes in 2024. In total, our energy efficiency efforts are cutting emissions by more than 7,000/6,000 tonnes. We also refrain from using paper and printers in our office to demonstrate our commitment to sustainability. These are not isolated efforts; they represent Banglalink's culture of sustainable innovation.

**TDS:** Has Banglalink adopted any initiatives to deploy renewable energy solutions, such as solar-powered towers or green data centres?

**HT:** Indeed. Renewable energy solutions are a core part of our sustainability roadmap. Within our network, we have deployed solar power systems at our network sites and increased the use of renewable energy sources, including solar, wind, and hydropower. Our Radio Access Network (RAN) sites are powered by solar systems that collectively produce approximately 1.5 gigawatt-hours (GWh) of electricity annually, resulting in a reduction of over 500 tonnes of carbon emissions. We have reached a significant milestone by introducing solar power into our data centre operations, making us the first telecom operator in Bangladesh to do so. Our 80-kilowatt (kW) solar system at the data centre generates around 0.13 GWh per year, saving more than 60 tonnes of carbon emissions.

We're also collaborating with national power authorities to implement specialised power lines at key facilities. We estimate that this will reduce fuel consumption by 88,000 litres annually, equivalent to over 200 tonnes of carbon emissions. Altogether, our renewable energy initiatives are currently generating approximately 1.57 GWh of clean energy, helping us reduce emissions by more than 700 tonnes annually. Renewable energy is not just a part of our operations; it forms the foundation of our vision for a sustainable digital future.

**TDS:** Digital inclusion can drive sustainability. How is Banglalink using its digital services to promote environmental awareness or green practices among customers?

**HT:** At Banglalink, digital inclusion is deeply

integrated with our sustainability goals. Our digital services are built upon the 6C model. This model is designed to enhance connectivity, community, content, creativity, commerce, and care, which support our broader DO1440 strategy. This strategy aims to offer meaningful digital experiences for every minute of the user's day. We were globally recognised for this strategy in 2023 with the GSMA Award for Best Service for Connected Consumers at the MWC in Barcelona.

A key example of our sustainability-driven digital innovation is the Early Warning System we developed to help communities prepare for disasters such as Cyclone Mocha. More than one million unique smartphone users received real-time updates that allowed them to assess their proximity to the cyclone and take necessary precautions. This initiative was recognised as the 'Best Sustainability Excellence Initiative in Disaster Response' at the Bangladesh Sustainability Excellence Awards 2023.

**TDS:** What role do you think the telecom sector should play in supporting Bangladesh's climate resilience and digital sustainability goals?

**HT:** Telecom players have a crucial role to play in helping Bangladesh meet its climate and sustainability objectives. Our parent company, VEON, has long established an Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) forum that drives sustainability best practices across all operating companies. Since 2017, Banglalink has reduced carbon emissions by more than 200,000 tonnes, and we continue to work towards our goals in collaboration with national policies and regulatory expectations. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all our stakeholders, particularly the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), for their guidance and ongoing support. In Bangladesh, the regulator has outlined sustainability commitments, such as the use of green technology, in its licensing guidelines, which we strictly follow.

This sector can further contribute by investing in smart infrastructure, enabling climate-resilient connectivity in vulnerable areas, and leveraging big data and artificial intelligence (AI) to support disaster preparedness and sustainable urban planning. However, to achieve this, the industry needs a favourable regulatory environment, progressive policy support, and formal recognition of sustainability efforts by the government.

**TDS:** On this World Environment Day, what is your message about the intersection of technology and environmental stewardship?

**HT:** The message should be clear: we must leverage the full potential of innovation and technology in building a greener, more inclusive world. The telecom industry, given its scale and reach, has significant potential to reduce energy consumption, minimise waste, and move towards carbon neutrality, aligning with the 'Three Zero Theory' proposed by Chief Adviser Dr Muhammad Yunus. Achieving net-zero carbon emissions should not be a far-fetched vision; all we need is a can-do attitude. At Banglalink, we are ready to do our part. We invite all industry stakeholders, including policymakers, to join us in creating an environmentally responsible digital future.

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# ENABLING INCLUSIVE, Green, and Climate-Resilient Development

Eastern Bank PLC.

## Ali Reza Iftekhar, Managing Director and CEO, Eastern Bank

**The Daily Star (TDS):** What role do you see banks playing in promoting environmental sustainability in Bangladesh, especially in the context of climate change and green growth?

**Ali Reza Iftekhar (ARI):** Banks are uniquely positioned to act as catalysts in Bangladesh's transition toward a greener economy. As financial intermediaries, we have both the ability and the responsibility to provide capital to environmentally sustainable sectors. At Eastern Bank (EBL), we believe that climate change is not merely an environmental concern but also a significant financial risk that demands urgent and proactive action. That is why we have embedded environmental considerations into our lending and investment decisions. From integrating climate risk assessments into our financing framework to collaborating with international development institutions like IFC, DEG, ADB, FMO, and JIM Foundation, we are aligning our operations with both national climate priorities and global sustainability standards. We believe that through responsible banking, we can accelerate Bangladesh's journey towards a low-carbon, climate-resilient future.

**Our green loan portfolio has expanded significantly—from 18% in 2023 to 35% in 2024. We have financed over 204 projects that enhance energy and resource efficiency, and supported 23 LEED-certified factories and buildings.**

**TDS:** Can you highlight any specific green finance initiatives, sustainable investment strategies, or eco-friendly banking practices your institution has adopted recently?

**ARI:** At EBL, we are driving sustainability through a diverse range of green finance initiatives as well as internal eco-conscious practices. Our green loan portfolio has expanded significantly—from 18% in 2023 to 35% in 2024. We have financed over 204 projects that enhance energy and resource efficiency, and supported 23 LEED-certified factories and buildings that reflect our commitment to promoting green infrastructure.

We are also proud to have invested in two new renewable energy projects in 2024, directly contributing to Bangladesh's clean energy transition. We have also initiated carbon accounting through the JIM Foundation, allowing us to track financed emissions from our business and set targeted carbon emission reduction strategies.

Digitalisation is a core pillar of our sustainability strategy. By streamlining LC documentation and adopting e-learning, e-certification, e-leave systems, and digital performance appraisals, we have saved over one million sheets of paper. In 2024, our digital transaction volume rose by 51% compared to the previous year—demonstrating our strong commitment to reducing environmental impact through technology-driven solutions.

On the operational front, our Green Head Office is equipped with solar power generation, rainwater harvesting, and on-site water and waste treatment facilities. We have eliminated single-use plastics across our premises, introduced hybrid vehicles into our fleet, and adopted energy-efficient technologies, including motion-sensor lighting and optimised HVAC systems, to reduce the environmental footprint of our offices.

**TDS:** How is your bank aligning its long-term corporate strategy with global environmental goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Bangladesh's national climate priorities?

**ARI:** EBL's corporate strategy is strongly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Bangladesh's national climate objectives. Our green finance and climate initiatives directly support key SDGs—particularly Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), Goal 13 (Climate Action), and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

We are working actively to contribute to Bangladesh's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), including the national target of reducing carbon emissions by at least 6.73% by 2030. To achieve this, we have embedded sustainability into our strategic roadmap by promoting climate-resilient infrastructure, financing clean energy solutions, and measuring Scope 3 emissions, particularly those from our financed activities.

Moreover, our strategic partnerships with global DFIs such as IFC, DEG, FMO, the OPEC Fund, and ADB allow us to mobilise not just financial resources, but also technical expertise to strengthen our capacity in climate finance. These partnerships enable us to stay ahead of emerging environmental risks and global regulatory trends while supporting the broader national development agenda.

**TDS:** As a corporate leader, what message would you like to share on World Environment Day about the responsibility of financial institutions in building a greener, more resilient future?

**ARI:** On this World Environment Day, my message to the financial sector is simple but urgent: finance must be a tool for sustainability. We must become enablers of inclusive, green, and climate-resilient development.

Through strategic green investments, carbon-conscious lending, and partnerships with innovators across industries, EBL is demonstrating that business success can go hand-in-hand with environmental stewardship. By greening our own operations and promoting sustainability across our value chain, we are helping to build the resilience needed to face the environmental challenges ahead.

This is a defining decade. It is time for all financial institutions to take bold and decisive steps—to finance not only economic growth but also the well-being of people and the planet.

## 1. GREEN FINANCE

**Total invested amount**

- BDT **2,090** Crore
- **35.24**% of total Term Loan disburse

## 2. KEY SECTORS FUNDED

- Energy & resource efficiency
- Green/environment friendly establishments
- Circular economy & eco-projects
- Renewable energy

## 3. RENEWABLE ENERGY FINANCING

- Total disbursement – BDT **34.78** crore
- Financed **20**MW + renewable energy capacity

## 4. NEWLY LAUNCHED GREEN INITIATIVES

- EBL Climate Action Awards- honouring 5 pioneers transforming climate resilience (in partnership with French, German & Danish Embassies)
- Pioneer in banking sector to integrate climate risk into financing — in partnership with DEG, JIM Foundation & IFC

## 5. INNOVATIVE SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS

- Green loans / ESG-focused savings schemes
- Sustainable agriculture financing – BDT **735** crore

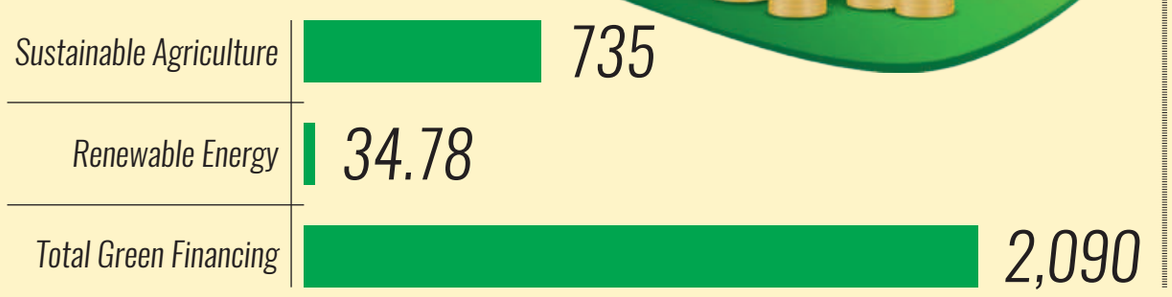
## 6. INTERNAL GREEN OPERATIONS

**Paperless banking adoption**

- Paperwork reduced in LC processing by **40–45**%, saving **1** Million+ sheets
- All employees participated in e learning, e-certification exams saving **200,000**+ pages
- Using e leave & e appraisal saving physical paperwork
- Double sided printing on all office documents

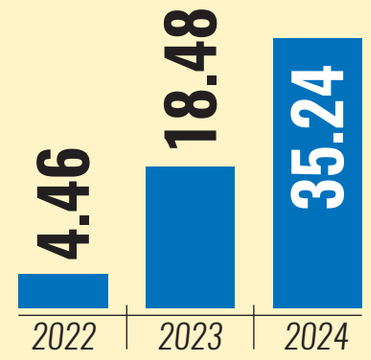
## Key Investment Statistics in 2024

(in BDT crore)




## GREEN PORTOFLIO

(in %)



### Green Head Office

- Rainwater harvesting
- On site water & waste treatment
- Solar glass louvers → **16** kW solar power every day
- **12** Solar-Powered Branches

### Carbon footprint reduction initiatives

- Calculating Financed Emission **(Scope 3)** since 2023 with support from JIM Foundation and DEG
- Started Calculating Internal Carbon Emission **(Scope 1 & Scope 2)** with Ernst & Young Advisory Services Bangladesh Ltd.
- Partnering with DHL with their Go Green Initiative for using Sustainable Aviation Fuel cutting trade document transport emissions by **30** %

### Energy Smart Office

- Motion sensor lighting
- Efficient AC settings
- Maximising sunlight usage
- Hybrid cars

### Awards & Recognitions

- Reconised as sustainable bank by the Bangladesh Bank in 2023
- Awarded as Best Climate Focus Bank on the 24th National Conference and Green Expo

### Leveraging Digital Channels

- BDT **60 000**+ million in salaries via EBL Connect
- **10** million+ Skypay transactions
- NRB accounts opened **100**% online
- **51** % jump in digital transactions volume (2024 vs 2023)

### CSR and Community Initiatives

- Free water bottle distribution during heat wave – Dhaka & Chattogram
- Tree plantation program on World Environment Day
- Installation of RO water purification plant in salinity-prone Shyamnagar, Satkhira, providing safe drinking water to **2,000** people across **400** households
- Collaborative tree plantation at Bhasanchar, Noakhali supporting coastal forestation and benefitting **37,000** residents with fruit and medicinal plants

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# NET-ZERO COMMITMENT
## at the Core of Our Strategy

Prime Bank

### Md Ziaur Rahman, Deputy Managing Director and Chief Risk Officer, Prime Bank

**Prime Bank has successfully completed the Proof of Concept (POC) for the "Green LC," executing Bangladesh's first inland LC on a locally developed blockchain-based digital trade platform. "Green LC" is Bangladesh's first-ever locally developed digital trade platform, with Prime Bank issuing the inaugural LC transaction.**

**The Daily Star (TDS):** What role do you see banks playing in promoting environmental sustainability in Bangladesh, especially in the context of climate change and green growth?

**Md Ziaur Rahman (MZR):** The growing urgency surrounding the climate crisis compels banks to recognise their potential role in fostering positive environmental change. It is imperative for banks to assume responsibility and confront pressing climate challenges by financing necessary transformations. The financial sector is vital in the fight against climate change, and the banking industry is particularly well-equipped to facilitate the shift towards a low-carbon economy. Providing financial support at concessional interest rates for renewable energy initiatives, energy-efficient projects, environmentally friendly establishments, and clean transportation is essential.

Furthermore, within the banking institution, we are witnessing changes such as the installation of additional ATMs and Cash Deposit Machines (CDMs), which promote the use of electronic banking methods. Encouraging customers to engage in online banking, mobile banking, and digital banking allows them to conduct their transactions at any time and facilitates online payments. Additionally, transforming internal communication within the bank and with customers—from traditional methods to digital communication channels such as email and WhatsApp—and utilising digital platforms for meetings, proposal presentations, and credit assessments is crucial. Implementing energy-efficient and low-carbon emission electrical equipment within the bank, and effectively managing internal operations, will contribute to reducing our overall carbon footprint.

**TDS:** Can you highlight any specific green finance initiatives, sustainable investment strategies, or eco-friendly banking practices your institution has adopted recently?

**MZR:** Prime Bank has successfully completed the Proof of Concept (POC) for the "Green LC," executing Bangladesh's first inland LC on a locally developed blockchain-based digital trade platform. "Green LC" is Bangladesh's first-ever locally developed digital trade platform, with Prime Bank issuing the inaugural LC transaction. This milestone signifies a major leap in trade digitisation, paving the way for a fully digital, paperless, and seamless trade ecosystem. This initiative aligns with Bangladesh Bank's directive encouraging financial institutions to adopt electronic solutions for all stages of LC transactions—including transmission, advising, presentation, acceptance, and subsequent processes.

Prior to this successful execution, Prime Bank and technology partner Spectrum Software & Consulting (Pvt.) Ltd. initiated the project, which was subsequently supported by three additional leading banks. These banks joined and significantly contributed to this transformative initiative. Their combined efforts have established a secure, transparent, and efficient digital trade ecosystem.

This milestone reinforces Prime Bank's commitment to digital innovation, setting the stage for a future where trade operations are fully digital, paperless, and seamless.

**TDS:** How is your bank aligning its long-term corporate strategy with global environmental goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Bangladesh's national climate priorities?

**MZR:** Sustainable development necessitates a comprehensive approach that requires transformative shifts, particularly in knowledge, policy, and institutional frameworks across all segments of society. The SDGs and the Paris Agreement represent collaborative global responses to this pressing challenge. We are devoted to aligning with the United Nations and its partners in creating a more equitable world where no individual is marginalised.

Prime Bank is honoured to be a member of the Net-Zero Banking Alliance, and we successfully released our inaugural Climate Strategy document at the end of 2024. Prime Bank is at the forefront of an economic transition aimed at providing value to investors, clients, and customers. Committing to achieving net-zero emissions is a fundamental aspect of our corporate strategy and signifies our commitment to environmental stewardship.

Prime Bank aspires to lead in sustainability, showcasing that responsible banking practices can coexist with financial success. Together, we can create a greener, more inclusive economy for generations to come.

**TDS:** As a corporate leader, what message would you like to share on World Environment Day about the responsibility of financial institutions in building a greener, more resilient future?

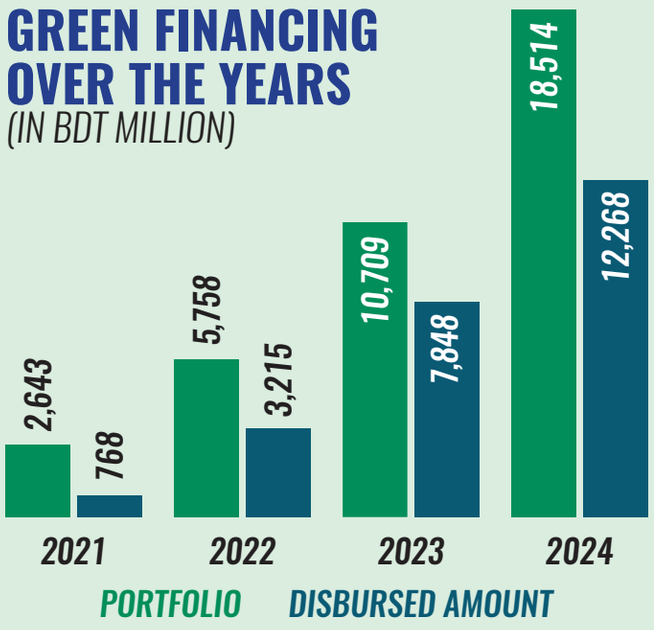
**MZR:** We need to possess the bravery to venture into new paths and adopt an economic model that is not only low in carbon emissions and environmentally sustainable but also transforms poverty, inequality, and the absence of financial access into new market opportunities for intelligent, forward-thinking, profit-driven enterprises.

Taking decisive action today can instigate systemic change within the financial sector and help foster a more sustainable future. Our stakeholders can have confidence that our commitment is supported by tangible actions, quantifiable results, and a progressive vision for climate resilience.

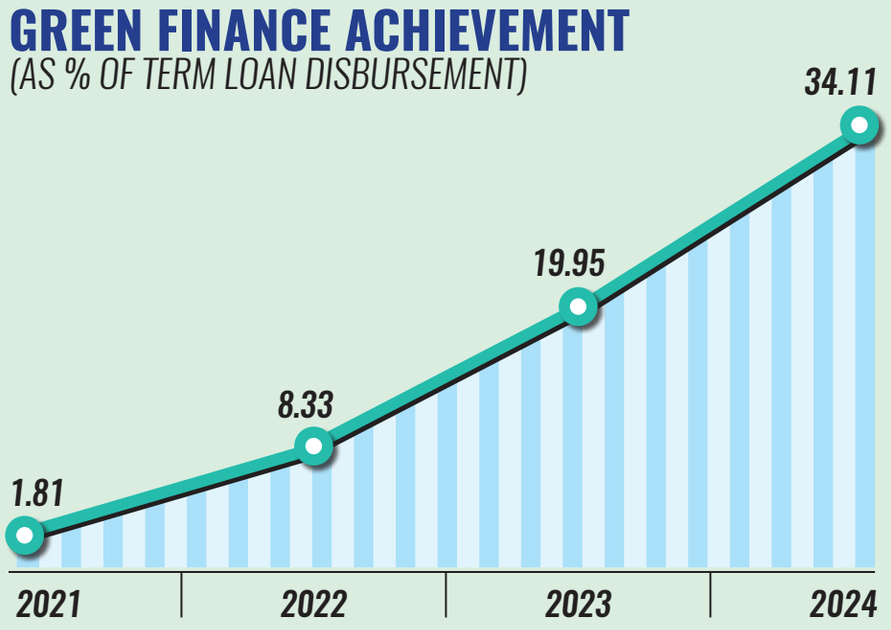
## SUSTAINABILITY ACHIEVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- *Launched customised automated platform for the Environmental & Social Risk Management process*
- *Prime Bank is a part of Net Zero Banking Alliance of UNEP FI*
- *Published "Climate Strategy" outlining strategies, measures, and key initiatives based on NZBA recommendations*
- *Successfully completed "Proof of Concept" of the first Island Green LC*
- *Launched braille books on Consumer & SME Banking, YouTube content in sign language and sign-language video call channel at call center as a part of financial inclusion*
- *Supported the installation of water filtration system in 6 schools and 6 hospitals in Dhaka, 8 schools in Chattogram, 3 schools in Sunamganj and 3 schools in Kushtia*
- *Empowered an entire fishermen village by installing solar panels in Sonadia Island of Cox's Bazar*
- *Top Sustainable Bank 2022 & 2023, recognised by Bangladesh Bank*

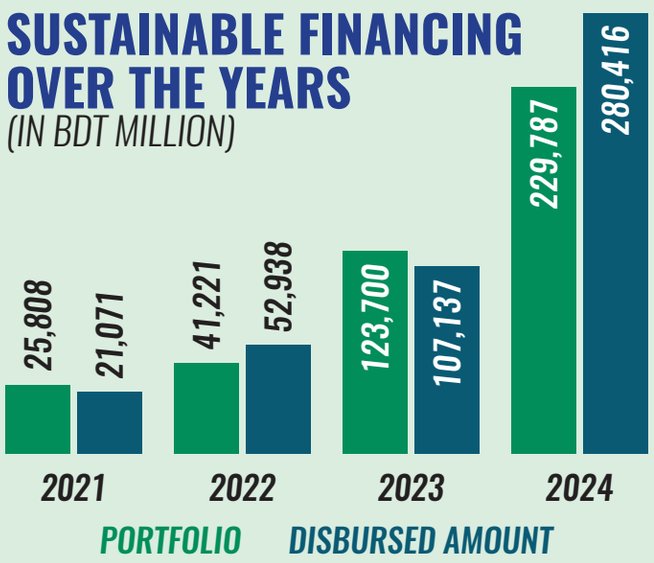
## GREEN FINANCING OVER THE YEARS
*(IN BDT MILLION)*



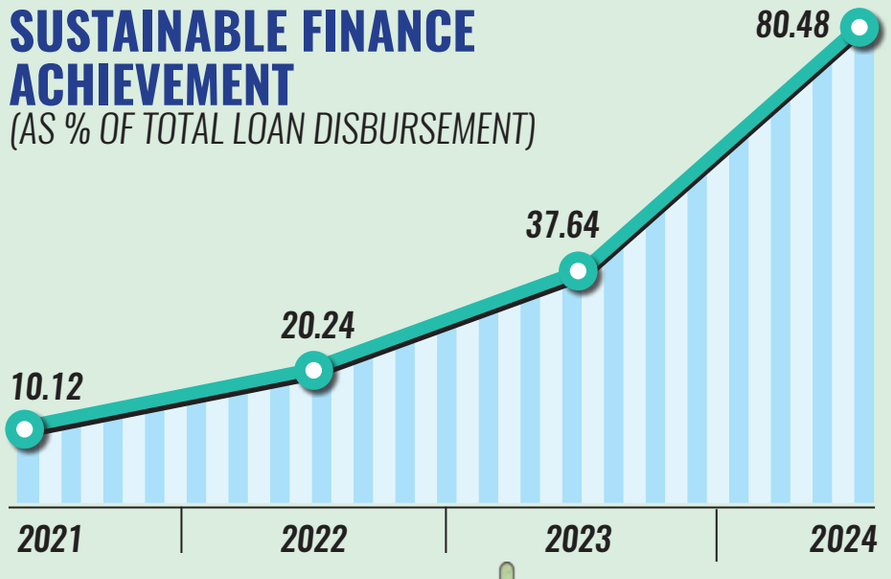

## GREEN FINANCE ACHIEVEMENT
*(AS % OF TERM LOAN DISBURSEMENT)*

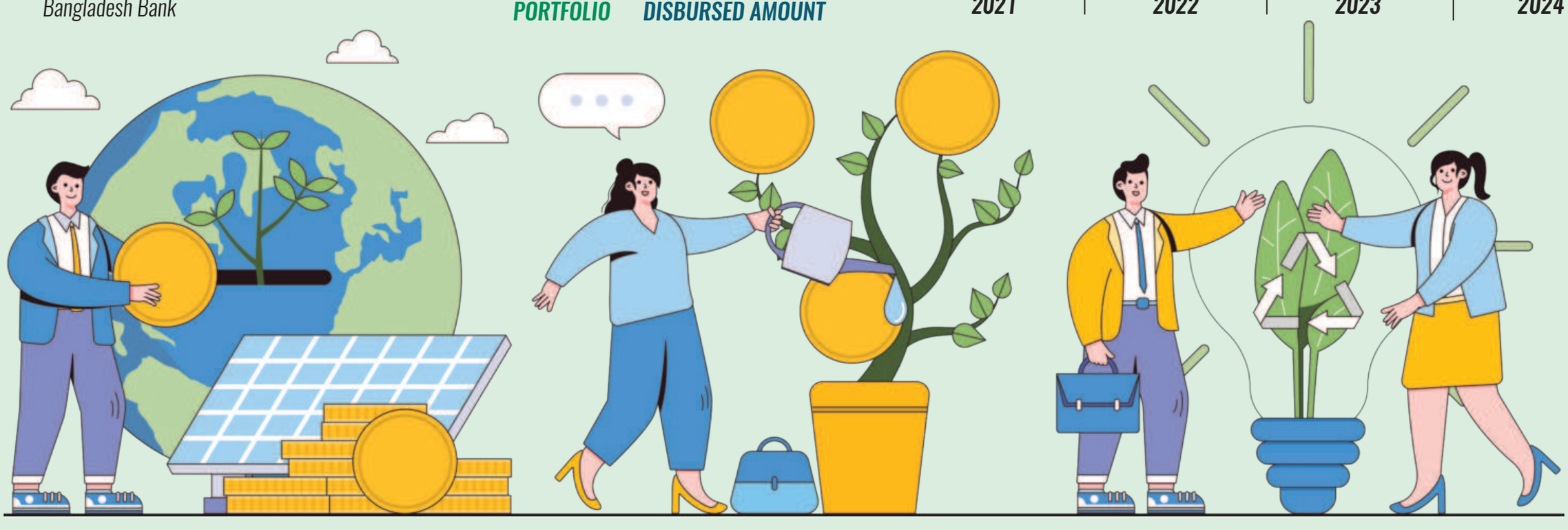



## SUSTAINABLE FINANCING OVER THE YEARS
*(IN BDT MILLION)*




## SUSTAINABLE FINANCE ACHIEVEMENT
*(AS % OF TOTAL LOAN DISBURSEMENT)*



SUPPLEMENT

# BEAT PLASTIC POLLUTION

The Daily Star
DHAKA WEDNESDAY JUNE 4, 2025
JAISHTHA 21, 1432 BS
S6

## Sustainability is no longer optional— IT IS IMPERATIVE

Mashrur Arefin, Managing Director & CEO, City Bank

**As part of its broader sustainability commitment, City Bank has also pledged to plant one tree for every Green Savings Account opened. In 2024 alone, the bank recorded 20,001 accounts—reflecting strong customer interest and growing public engagement in green banking.**

**The Daily Star (TDS):** What role do you see banks playing in promoting environmental sustainability in Bangladesh?

**Mashrur Arefin (MA):** In the context of climate change and green growth, banks in Bangladesh have been playing a pivotal role as catalysts for sustainable development. They are channelling financial resources into projects aimed at reducing environmental impact, enhancing climate resilience, promoting renewable energy, improving food security, and empowering women.

In 2024 alone, the banking sector collectively disbursed BDT 30,653.78 crore in Green Finance and BDT 459,483.82 crore in Sustainable Finance. Among the leading contributors, City Bank disbursed BDT 3,336 crore in Green Finance, supporting initiatives such as greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction, renewable energy-based project development, pollution prevention (including waste management), green building construction, and others.

Additionally, the bank disbursed BDT 40,234 crore in Sustainable Finance, which was directed towards sustainable agriculture, support for MSMEs, women's empowerment, and other socially responsible sectors.

The banking industry is also actively supporting green initiatives such as rooftop solar installations, construction of green buildings, procurement of energy-efficient machinery, water use efficiency, recycling, and waste management through low-cost green loans with only a 5% interest rate, backed by refinance schemes from the central bank.

As financial intermediaries, banks are aligning with the national agenda to meet Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets, promote green economic growth, and transition towards a climate-resilient and sustainable economy.

**TDS:** Can you highlight any specific green finance initiatives, sustainable investment strategies, or eco-friendly banking practices your institution has adopted recently?

**MA:** City Bank has taken several proactive steps to promote green finance and sustainability across different sectors, aligning with Bangladesh's broader climate and green growth goals.

i. Joining the Net-Zero Banking Alliance of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP FI):

City Bank became the first bank in Bangladesh to join the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative's (UNEP FI) Net-Zero Banking Alliance (NZBA), marking a significant milestone in the country's banking sector. Through this commitment, the bank aims to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from both its internal operations and lending portfolios.

As part of this initiative, City Bank conducted a comprehensive assessment of GHG emissions associated with its internal activities and financed emissions from its lending portfolio. With support from Deloitte, the bank set science-based emission reduction targets and publicly disclosed them—demonstrating transparency and leadership in climate action.

ii. Introducing the Green Savings Account:

Recognising the gap in green liability products within Bangladesh's banking sector, City Bank launched the pioneering Green Savings Account in February 2024. This innovative product ensures that all deposited funds are exclusively allocated to environmentally sustainable projects, fully aligned with Bangladesh Bank's Green Finance Taxonomy.

iii. Advancing Paperless Financial Products:

City Bank's Nano Loan is a fully paperless, environmentally friendly loan product designed to promote financial inclusion while reducing paper consumption. As of December 2024, over 506,000 customers have accessed this digital loan product, with a total disbursement exceeding BDT 1,452 crore across more than 2.5 million loan accounts, showcasing large-scale adoption of eco-friendly banking solutions.

**TDS:** How is your bank aligning its long-term corporate strategy with global environmental goals?

**MA:** City Bank is strategically aligning its long-term corporate objectives with national and international environmental frameworks, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by embedding sustainability into the core of its operations and financing activities.

The bank's strong focus on sustainable and green finance is reflected in impressive year-on-year growth of 167% and 201%, respectively, between 2023 and 2024. This underscores its commitment to supporting projects that promote clean energy, emission reduction, waste management, and climate resilience.

A key highlight of this commitment is the financing of large-scale renewable energy projects, such as a 60 MW wind power plant and a 100 MW solar power plant. These initiatives directly support SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), contributing to the nation's transition towards a low-carbon economy.

In 2024, City Bank allocated BDT 1,237.36 crore towards sustainable agriculture, benefiting 347,641 end borrowers. This support is critical to advancing SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), both of which are vital to Bangladesh's socio-economic development.

Sustainability is also being actively integrated into City Bank's internal operations. The bank has installed 90 solar systems across its head office, branches, sub-branches, remote ATMs, and agent outlets, reducing its own carbon footprint. Additionally, to foster environmental awareness among employees and build a culture of environmental stewardship, City Bank commemorates World Environment Day each year through a week-long series of programmes and initiatives.

**TDS:** As a corporate leader, what message would you like to share on World Environment Day about the responsibility of financial institutions in building a greener, more resilient future?

**MA:** Banks are not merely financial intermediaries—we are catalysts for sustainable growth. Climate change and environmental challenges present both risks and opportunities for our industry.

To effectively manage these risks, integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations into risk assessment is essential. At the same time, we must seize the opportunities by prioritising green finance, supporting renewable energy, and investing in innovative, eco-friendly solutions that drive both environmental progress and economic development.

Sustainability is no longer optional—it is imperative. Beyond financing, we must also foster a culture of environmental responsibility within our institutions. Adopting internal ESG practices and raising awareness among employees are critical steps. Additionally, banks can leverage CSR initiatives in collaboration with NGOs and development organisations to elevate environmental awareness within communities.

I firmly believe that by working together with our customers, partners, and regulators, we can lead with purpose and innovation to build a sustainable financial ecosystem—for the benefit of both people and the planet, today and for generations to come.

### 1 SUSTAINABLE/GREEN FINANCING

*Total green finance*
- *BDT* **3,336** *Crore*
- **34**% *of total term loan (except staff loan)*
- *Sustainable agriculture - BDT* **1,237** *Crore to* **347,641** *borrowers*
- *Sustainable MSME - BDT* **4,359** *Crore*
- *NGO MFI (Socially Responsible Financing) - BDT* **1,067** *Crore*

### 2 RENEWABLE ENERGY FINANCING

- *Total disbursement - BDT 213 Crore*
- *Contributed to a total of 160 megawatts of installed renewable energy capacity*
- *Financed 100 MW for solar power plants and 60 MW for wind power pants*

### 3 PAPERLESS BANKING ACHIEVEMENTS

- *43% app based accounts*
- *Active users of Citytouch app - 747,549*
- *Introduced Nano Loan, with fully paperless loan processing facility*
- *Record-breaking disbursement of BDT 857 Crore of Nano Loan through Citytouch in 2024*
- *Achieved 73% year-on-year growth in app-based Nano Loans, serving 3 million+ customers*
- *Disbursed BDT 1,452 Crore in Nano Loans to 2,535,867 accounts till Dec 2024 from inception*
- *Discontinued POS slip print for customers*

### 4 INNOVATIVE SUSTAINABLE PRODUCT

- *First bank in Bangladesh to introduce Green Savings Account (Green Liability Product)*
- *Automated ESDD interface to conduct ESG risk assessment of lending portfolio*

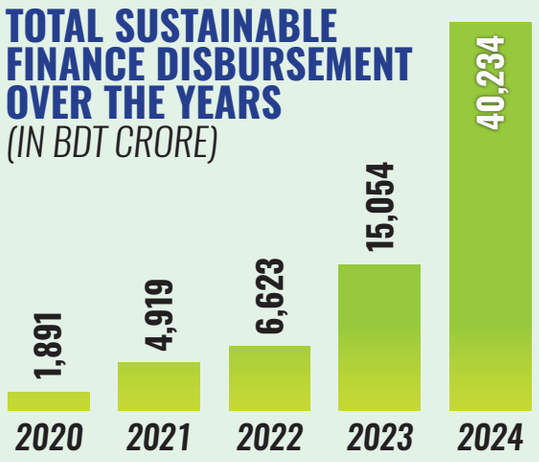
### 5 CSR AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- *Total CSR Expenditure (2024) - BDT 8 Crore*
- *Number of Beneficiaries - 79,049+*

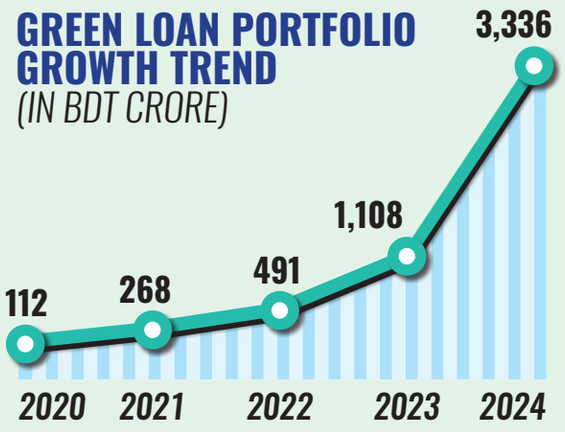
### 6 AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

- *Ranked among top 10 banks in Bangladesh Bank's Sustainability Rating for 4 consecutive years (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023)*
- *Ranked among the top 10 sustainable banks by UK-based Sustainability Magazine*
- *Awarded as Best Climate Focus Bank in Bangladesh by the Institute of Energy at the University of Dhaka and the Greentech Foundation, in collaboration with USAID*
- *First Bank to join Net Zero Banking Alliance or UNEP FI*

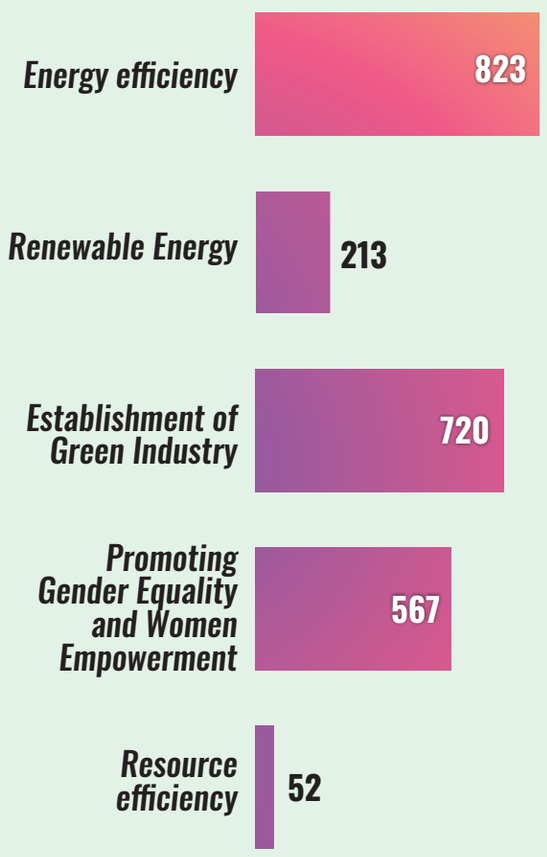
**TOTAL SUSTAINABLE FINANCE DISBURSEMENT OVER THE YEARS**
*(IN BDT CRORE)*



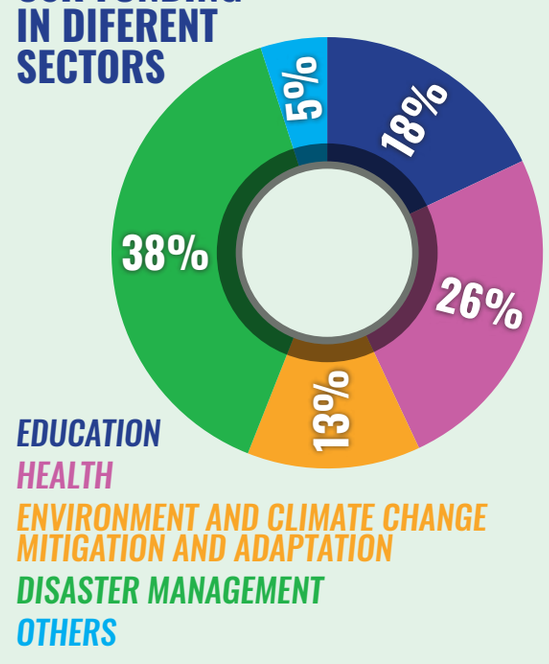

**GREEN LOAN PORTFOLIO GROWTH TREND**
*(IN BDT CRORE)*



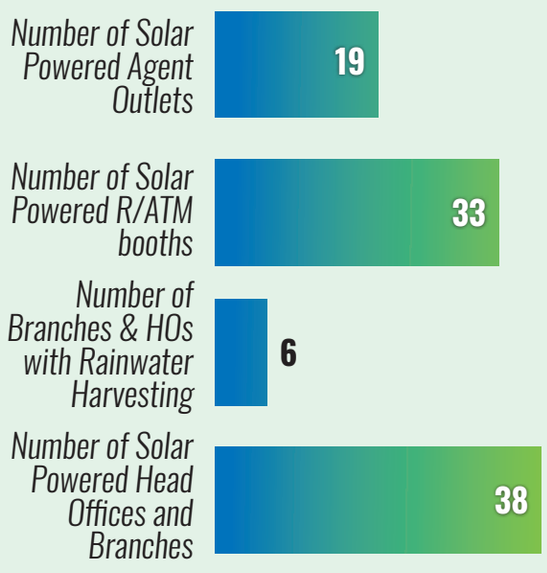

**FUNDING IN KEY SECTORS UNDER SUSTAINABLE FINANCING**
*(IN BDT CRORE)*




**CSR FUNDING IN DIFERENT SECTORS**




**INTERNAL GREEN OPERATION STATISTICS**
*(AS OF 2024)*



# BEAT PLASTIC POLLUTION

The Daily Star
DHAKA WEDNESDAY JUNE 4, 2025
JAISHTHA 21, 1432 BS
S7

NCC Bank
with you always

# Prioritising Green Finance for a LOW-CARBON FUTURE

## M. Shamsul Arefin, Managing Director, NCC Bank

**We advocate for the integration of environmental education into school banking programmes, ensuring that future generations grow up with a deep respect for sustainability and ecological stewardship.**

**The Daily Star (TDS):** What role do you see banks playing in promoting environmental sustainability in Bangladesh?

**M. Shamsul Arefin (MSA):** Banks and financial institutions in Bangladesh are playing a progressively vital role in promoting environmental sustainability, particularly in the face of climate change and the pursuit of green growth. One of the cornerstone developments has been the implementation of the Environmental and Social Risk Management (ESRM) Guidelines issued by Bangladesh Bank, which began in 2011. This pioneering effort set a global precedent by integrating environmental considerations into the credit decision-making process.

The ESRM framework includes detailed procedures for transaction screening, escalation mechanisms, covenant integration, corrective action planning, and exclusions based on environmental and social risks. These policies ensure that banks are not only compliant but also proactive in mitigating environmental and societal risks, aligning with both local and international best practices.

Furthermore, recent regulatory initiatives such as the Sustainability and Climate-related Financial Disclosure Guideline emphasise the importance of transparency and accountability. The principle of "We cannot mitigate what we cannot measure" underpins this guideline, encouraging banks to quantify and report emissions arising from both operations and financing activities. This development fosters a culture of environmental consciousness and enables more informed, strategic action toward carbon reduction.

Together, initiatives in green finance, climate finance, sustainable finance, and carbon accounting form a cohesive roadmap towards a greener Bangladesh. These collective efforts represent a transformational shift in the banking sector's commitment to environmental sustainability.

**TDS:** Can you highlight any specific green finance initiatives, sustainable investment strategies, or eco-friendly banking practices your institution has adopted recently?

**MSA:** At NCC Bank, environmental sustainability is a strategic priority embedded in our corporate DNA. Both our Board of Directors and management are deeply committed to integrating sustainable practices into our operations and financing activities.

We are proud to be among the few Bangladeshi banks currently implementing the Sustainability and Climate-related Financial Disclosures, with technical support from the JIM Impact Model. Moreover, NCC Bank has recently become a signatory to the Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials (PCAF), a global alliance dedicated to standardising the measurement and disclosure of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions financed by financial institutions. This affiliation marks a significant step in aligning with global benchmarks and fostering transparency in climate-related disclosures.

To reduce our carbon footprint, we have discontinued paper receipts at all ATMs and are actively expanding our digital infrastructure. Our flagship digital platform, NCC Icon, provides seamless corporate online banking capabilities. Simultaneously, our mobile application offers convenient and sustainable digital banking services for retail customers and SMEs. We've also implemented green PIN systems to reduce paper usage.

Green finance has become a high priority at NCC Bank. We are offering green finance products across all branches and sub-branches, supporting projects in renewable energy, energy efficiency, green buildings, and more. Through customer engagement sessions, awareness campaigns, and personalised consultations, we are promoting the benefits and accessibility of green financing—helping to reshape market perceptions and catalyse broader adoption.

**TDS:** How is your bank aligning its long-term corporate strategy with global environmental goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Bangladesh's national climate priorities?

**MSA:** NCC Bank is strongly aligned with both the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Bangladesh's national climate strategies. We contribute to key climate-related SDGs, including: SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation; SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy; SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities; and SDG 13: Climate Action.

Our financed portfolio supports a range of sustainable initiatives such as renewable energy projects, energy-efficient machinery, effluent treatment plants, environmentally friendly brick kilns, green infrastructure, and blue economy initiatives. Under our CSR programmes, we have contributed to safe drinking water projects and expanded banking services to rural and underserved regions, promoting financial inclusivity and access.

Looking ahead, NCC Bank is working on setting carbon goals integrated with our strategic roadmap. We are preparing to publish our first Annual Sustainability Report in 2025, based on 2024 data, which will detail our progress and future commitments toward a sustainable, low-carbon economy. Our approach to green finance is being solidified through dedicated strategies, capacity building, and an unwavering focus on impact.

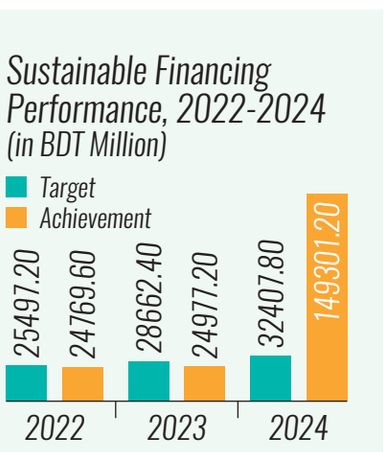
**TDS:** As a corporate leader, what message would you like to share on World Environment Day about the responsibility of financial institutions in building a greener, more resilient future?

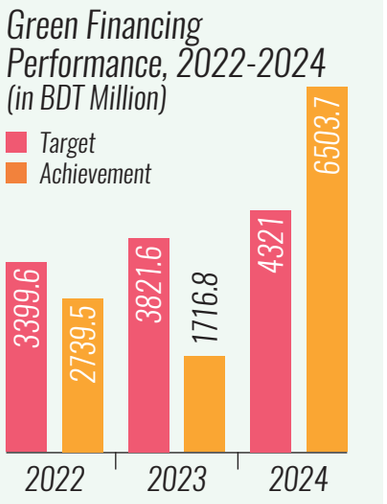
**MSA:** I urge every corporate and individual stakeholder to recognise that restoring our planet is a shared responsibility—one that must be rooted in long-term strategies and meaningful action. It is imperative that national level SMART carbon goals—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound—be established, understood, and implemented across all sectors.

Financial institutions have a unique role to play. We must embrace our capacity as enablers of change by channelling finance into green projects, embedding sustainability into core operations, and fostering environmental awareness through education and outreach. Incentivising sustainable behaviour through rewards can accelerate this transition.

There are already commendable efforts by the government, Bangladesh Bank, and several banks and financial institutions to promote climate-responsive financial practices. It is essential that banks leverage these platforms, broaden green financing portfolios, and take a proactive stance on sustainable corporate social responsibility.

We also advocate for the integration of environmental education into school banking programmes, ensuring that future generations grow up with a deep respect for sustainability and ecological stewardship.



## GREEN FINANCE IN 2024

- **Total Finance** - BDT **6503.70** *million*
- **29.50%** *of total term loan except staff loan (disbursement)*
- *Disbursed the highest green finance in the banking industry in* **Q3-2024** *(Ref: "Quarterly Review Report on Sustainable Finance", Bangladesh Bank)*

## SUSTAINABLE FINANCE IN 2024

**Total Finance**
BDT 149,301.21 *million*

81.42% *of total loan except staff loan (disbursement)*

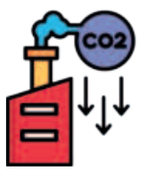
## RENEWABLE ENERGY FINANCING

*Net Metering Rooftop Solar System for* BDT **5.10** *million*

*One project under renewable energy financing*

*LEED-certified buildings:* **17**

## CARBON FOOTPRINT REDUCTION INITIATIVES




*Replacing traditional lights with energy-efficient tube lights and installation of auto sensor system for lights and air condition*

## AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

*Received prestigious "Top Ten Remittance Award-2023" from the "Centre for Non- Resident Bangladeshi"*

*Awarded "Best Commercial Bank of The Year Bangladesh 2024" at the International Business Magazine Awards 2024*

## INNOVATIVE SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS

- *Green loans*
- *Sustainable agriculture financing*
- *ESG-focused savings schemes (upcoming)*

## CSR & COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

| | |
|---|---|
| *Celebrated Earth Day 2024 by hosting an Art Fest featuring the children of the employees of the Bank. Around 50 kids participated in the competition* | *Provided BDT 2 (Two) Crore to the Chief Adviser's Relief Fund for the flood affected people of the country* |
| *Organised Green Olympiad for raising awareness about Green Finance among the employees of the bank* | *Unveiled smart digital and paperless banking services at the bank's 31st Anniversary* |
| *Donated public health safety kit and providing access to pure drinking water in Uttara, Dhaka* | *Launched Green PIN service for cardholders* |
| *Launched Green Brochure for customer awareness* | *Engaged with JIM Foundation for carbon accounting* |
| *Organised financial literacy training program including sustainable finance for Women Entrepreneurs in Bogura* | *Distributed agricultural materials & machinery free of cost at Pabna, Feni & Anwara, Chattogram* |

## KEY SECTORS FUNDED

| | PRODUCT DETAILS | AMOUNT IN BDT MILLION |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | *Installation of Energy Efficient Machineries including Boiler* | **3501.70** |
| 2 | *Blue Economy Financing: Maritime Transport* | **2177.00** |
| 3 | *Health and Healthcare Services* | **324.60** |
| 4 | *Establishment of Green Industry certified by appropriate authority (In Bangladesh - SREDA, Internationally - USGBC-LEED, BREEAM, CASBEE, EDGE, GRIHA)* | **218.90** |
| 5 | *Biological ETP* | **90.00** |
| 6 | *Financing in Green/Clean transportation projects (cycles, hybrid car, green vehicles those run on wind, solar energy, electricity, hydrogen, bio-fuels etc.)* | **67.10** |
| 7 | *Concerning Factory working environment and safety (Fire defense system, disaster defense and prevention system, workers' health safety system)* | **65.10** |
| 8 | *Jute Products Manufacturing Plant* | **40.00** |
| 9 | *Artificial Intelligence* | **13.00** |
| 10 | *Net Metering Rooftop Solar System* | **5.10** |
| 11 | *Environment Friendly/Brick Kiln Efficiency Improvement Project (Tunnel Kiln, HHK and other eco-friendly bricks)* | **1.20** |
| 10 | *Total* | **6503.70** |

# BEAT PLASTIC POLLUTION

The Daily Star
DHAKA WEDNESDAY JUNE 4, 2025
JAISHTHA 21, 1432 BS
S8

Unilever

# We collect as much plastic as WE USE IN BANGLADESH

## Shamima Akhter, Director of Corporate Affairs, Partnerships, and Communications at Unilever Bangladesh Ltd.

**If we can support waste workers by providing dignified jobs and improving their livelihoods, collection rates can improve further. Empowering this informal sector is vital to increasing recycling and achieving a more sustainable plastic waste management system in Bangladesh.**

**The Daily Star (TDS):** Could you please share your insights on Unilever's approach to plastic management?

**Shamima Akhter (SA):** Unilever recognised the plastic challenge early and incorporated it into its global sustainability framework, which is built around four pillars: Climate, Nature, Plastic, and Livelihoods. Plastic is treated as a distinct pillar, reflecting our strong commitment to tackling plastic pollution as part of our sustainability agenda.

Although we began addressing plastic issues in 2015, our efforts significantly expanded from 2020, including in Bangladesh. Globally, there is growing acknowledgement that everyone has a role to play in reducing plastic pollution. We approach this challenge through three models: Reduction, Collection, and Circulation.

In Bangladesh, our conversations about plastic waste management began in 2019, and actual work on the ground started in 2020. The main challenge with plastic is that as virgin plastic use increases and collection systems remain inadequate, much of it ends up as waste. We don't sell plastic, but we use it to package products because it offers safety, durability, and cost-effectiveness. In fact, plastic's environmental footprint is often lower than many alternative packaging materials. However, widespread overuse and improper disposal have created a significant problem. Plastic was originally designed for reuse, but today it's mostly single-use. But too much plastic is ending up in the environment, and our packaging is part of this problem. That's why our ambition is an end to plastic pollution through reduction, circulation and collaboration.

Reducing plastic means continuously minimising the amount we use through redesign and innovation. We strive to avoid plastic where possible and focus only on recyclable plastics—because if the plastic isn't recyclable, it can't be properly recycled. This focus on reduction is the first essential step in our plastic initiative.

**TDS:** What motivated your focus on plastic collection efforts?

**SA:** Collection is a critical part of effective plastic waste management. Globally, there is a shared understanding that producers must take responsibility for bringing their packaging back—this makes collection essential. No single organisation can manage collection alone. It requires regulations, well-designed processes, and commitment to invest in collection systems. Plastic is reusable and recyclable, but without a strong recycling infrastructure, this potential cannot be realised. Such systems often do not develop naturally; they require active effort to build and improve.

Since 2020, we have been working actively in Bangladesh on these three pillars: reduction, collection, and recycling. We track our progress with scorecards across the entire value chain. The recurring World Environment Day theme, "Beat Plastic Pollution," highlights the urgency of this global issue.

Bangladesh recycles 37% of its plastic, well above the global average of 9%. This relatively high rate is largely due to the informal waste management sector. Informal waste workers form the backbone of this recycling ecosystem.

If we can support these workers by providing dignified jobs and improving their livelihoods, collection rates can improve further. Empowering this informal sector is vital to increasing recycling and achieving a more sustainable plastic waste management system in Bangladesh. We call it an initiative because for every unit

of plastic we use in our packaging, we commit to collecting an equivalent amount from the environment. As long as this commitment stands, we will continue this work.

Bangladesh's Solid Waste Management Rules clearly state that waste management is not solely the responsibility of the government—brand owners must also participate. Yet the country lacks a unified master plan. Different cities handle waste differently. Given our global target to collect more plastic than we produce by 2025, we felt the need to take the first step.

**TDS:** What motivated Unilever Bangladesh to launch a waste management initiative in Chattogram?

**SA:** Our journey began in 2020 with a project in Narayanganj City Corporation, partnered with UNDP, but we discontinued it after a year due to design issues. In 2022, we started work with YPSA in Chattogram—a city where much waste ends up in the sea. Chattogram's geography made it a strategic choice. The Chattogram City Corporation joined, creating Bangladesh's first tripartite waste management initiative involving a city corporation, a development actor, and a corporate entity. By 2023, we collected as much plastic as we used annually, repeating this in 2024 and on track for 2025. Over these years, we engaged communities in 41 wards and integrated scrap dealers into the value chain.

Bangladesh recycles plastic bottles well, but flexible plastics are under-recycled due to contamination and low value. Our focus was efficiently collecting flexible packaging, which now makes up about 70% of our plastic collection—something never done before. We proved these polythene wrappers have recycling value, reducing pollution and increasing recycling.

Another success is working with existing value chain actors. Their livelihoods depend on this sector, so we designed incentives to encourage collecting better-quality plastic. We also improved their income and safety by providing training, safety gear, and medical insurance (added this year alongside life insurance through MetLife). These efforts have significantly improved the livelihoods of 3,000 waste workers.

Collaboration with Chattogram City Corporation is crucial. While we don't provide financial support, they monitor the waste management process and give us access to their infrastructure and waste workers. They revived ward-level waste management committees, which now verify collection data monthly and ensure waste workers receive incentives. This data is sent to a central database for certification. Consumer awareness is growing too, with opinion leaders and youth volunteers helping, as locals in Chattogram take pride in this initiative.

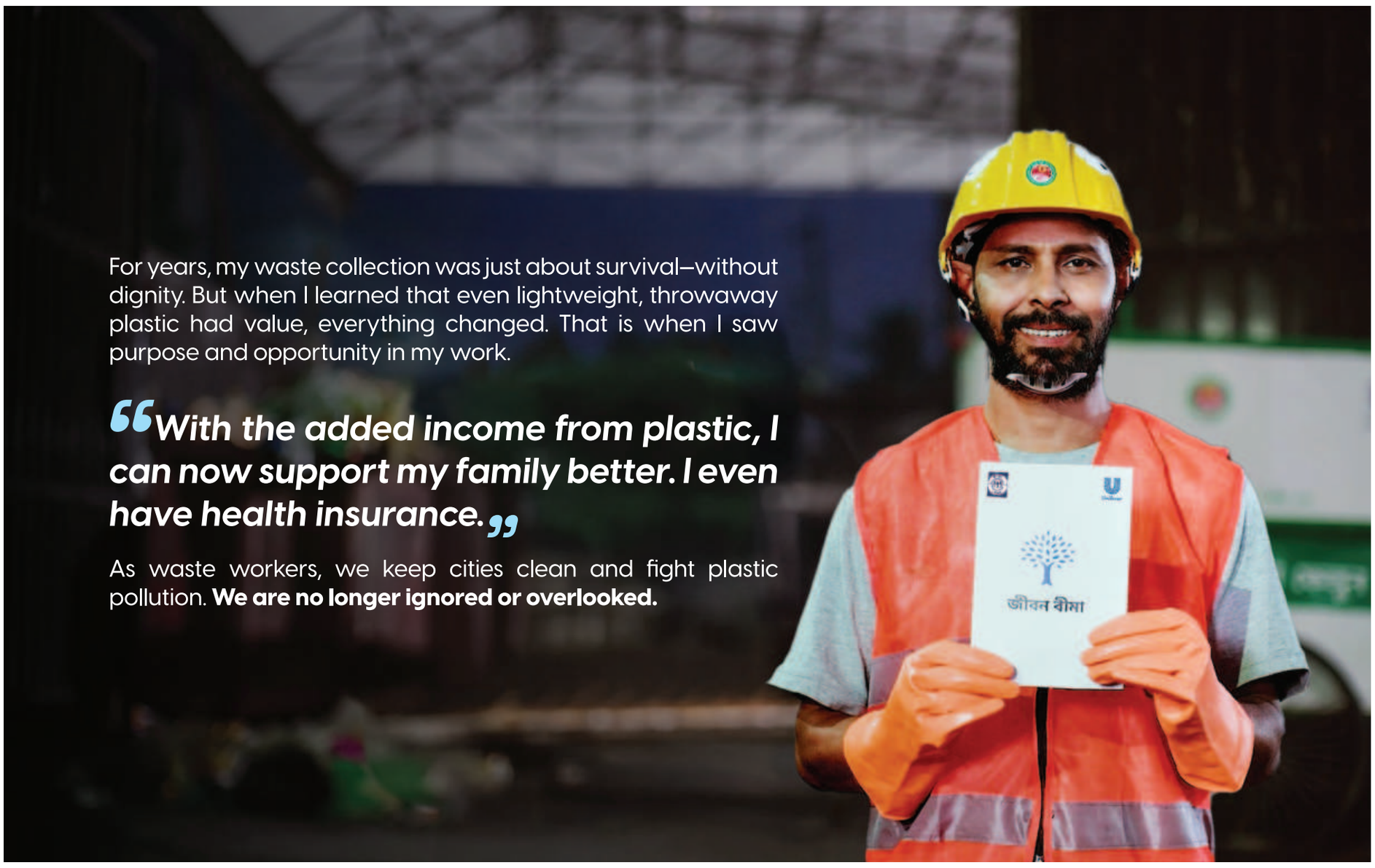
**TDS:** What are your future plans for plastic waste management and advancing sustainability efforts?

**SA:** Unilever is currently may be the only company in Bangladesh committed to collecting as much—or more—plastic than it uses. Each year, we're also reducing plastic use in different areas. But we are just one player. According to the World Bank, the largest source of plastic waste in Bangladesh is non-branded polythene, which doesn't enter any formal system. Solving this issue requires collective action and awareness across the entire ecosystem.

Looking ahead, we plan to continue our current efforts while strengthening two key areas. First, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) must be enforced. It's not enough for Unilever alone to act—other companies must participate. Broader involvement will bring greater impact. For example, we've already improved the livelihoods of 3,000 waste workers. If five more companies join, we could reach 15,000 workers and ensure job dignity at scale. We are working closely with the Department of Environment and other ministries to help implement EPR, which we see as a crucial step forward.

Second, globally, 60% of plastic waste is managed by the informal sector—this may be as high as 90% in Bangladesh. That's why we promote the idea of "socially just circularity." Recycling systems must also ensure the well-being of waste workers. We've introduced life insurance for them and are scaling efforts to improve their livelihoods further in 2024 and beyond.

Another focus is our "No Plastic" refill machine initiative. For the past two years, we've been working with refill technology and are now looking to scale it across Bangladesh. Lastly, we're ramping up consumer awareness campaigns. Source aggregation is essential for better recycling—but it requires both awareness and infrastructure. That's where government-corporate collaboration becomes vital.




## REVOLUTIONARY SUCCESS IN PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT IN CHATTOGRAM

**GROUP HEALTH INSURANCE INTRODUCED**
*For the first time, group health insurance has been launched for 1,827 waste collectors—a milestone in social protection.*

**PLASTIC WASTE COLLECTION**
*24,000 tons of plastic have been collected, with 70% being single-use (flexible plastic)—transforming from mismanagement to a successful model*

**INCREASE IN TRADE LICENSES**
*The rate of trade licenses among waste collectors has increased from 15% to 30%, ensuring business recognition and rights.*

**INTEGRATION OF RECYCLING INDUSTRY**
*More than 140 recyclers have united to build a sustainable plastic circular economy.*

**STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**
*7,000 students from 71 educational institutions have been made aware; in 47 schools, 100% waste separation is practiced using three-color bins.*

**SKILLS DEVELOPMENT TRAINING**
*Over 3,000 waste collectors have been trained, becoming skilled environmental workers.*

**DISTRIBUTION OF SAFETY EQUIPMENT**
*More than 2,000 collectors have received protective gear, ensuring a safe working environment.*

**AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS**
*Campaigns reached over 15,000 households; 20% of families now separate plastic waste at the source.*

**100% REGISTRATION**
*Previously only 5%, now 100% of CSOs/waste collectors are officially registered with the government.*

**YOUTH PARTICIPATION**
*Volunteer youth groups are active in 41 wards working to prevent plastic pollution*