Where Dhaka's waste finds new life

RBR

Caramelised peanuts for broken glass, new pots and pans for old clothes, or half-dead electronics -- those were my previews of Dhaka's scrap market. Back then, I didn't see an industry; I only saw the joy of biting into that crunchy bar of nokul dana, the caramelised peanuts that sweetened the deal.

I had no inkling of the modus operandi, no sense of how vast this scrap economy was or how vital it was as a livelihood for the collectors. To me, it was barter wrapped in childhood delight.

I met Masum Miah in Naya Bazar and Babul Mirza in Kaatpoti, right in the heart of Old Dhaka's labyrinth while looking for coloured second-hand glass and old doors.

Particularly those sought-after amber-frosted antique glass with etched



AI-ASSISTED ILLUSTRATION

MY DHAKA

designs; mind you, not the contemporary designs but those finite pieces from history. In Old Dhaka, it lies abandoned, stacked like debris along the roadside.

To find such treasures, you must brave these two areas of the city's historic commercial quarters -- dense and chaotic, still pulsing with their mercantile past. Here, scraps from demolished buildings or discarded household stock are sold as-is; the thrill is in spotting an intact piece among the rubble, a shard of beauty hidden in the piles.

Nothing really goes to waste. You've no idea what sells and what doesn't -- because here, almost everything does. That's what I love about this city.

Take a rickshaw ride or walk through the narrow alleys of Old Town and you'll see this fantastic cycle in motion: glass panes stacked from torn-down offices, doors leaning against shopfronts, bricks piled high, rods bundled for resale. Furniture stripped from old houses sits beside new pieces made to mimic the old. Plastic, paper, metal -- every fragment has a buyer.

I once stumbled upon a vintage but salvaged motorcycle front face, complete with a rubber tire, front forks, handle grips, and an operational headlight, detached from the body and waiting for a new owner. It could be a retro decor piece in my son's man cave.

It felt surreal, almost comic, yet it revealed the remarkable resourcefulness of Dhaka's scrap traders. What truly astonishes me is their ingenuity.

Every discarded broken part of this city is reborn as a trade piece and finds its way back into the cycle, rolling into trade all over again, proving the sheer scale of an industry built entirely on leftovers.

That's Dhaka's genius: an economy stitched together by grit, scraps, and the hands of those who make a living from what others throw away. Here, scavenging isn't metaphor -- it's survival. In Dhaka, the city's waste doesn't vanish -- it's scavenged.

Dhaka's own band of improvised children are the scrap pickers etched forever in our collective memory as Tokai. Ronobi's cartoon figure, whose very name means "one who gathers leftovers," remains as Dhaka's strange souvenir.

Sacks slung over their shoulders, they move through bins, drains, and dump sites, sifting for anything with resale value -- plastic bottles, iron rods, scraps of paper that can be traded at bhangari shops and scrapyards. But what they barter for is not caramelised peanuts, not childhood treats, but survival itself: a brutal living carved out amid sharp cuts, toxic fumes, no security, and no schooling.

Their finds don't end with them. Bought, sorted, and sold, the scraps flow onward -- to larger recycling factories or to small-time dealers like my new friends -- feeding an industry that thrives on what the city discards.

And now that repurposing antiques as a statement of slow lifestyle is trending in Dhaka, scrap finds will take centre stage.

Police impose overnight curfew in parts of Paris

Macron vows no repeat of riots

REUTERS, *Paris*

French President Emmanuel Macron pledged to prevent a repeat of last weekend's riots and looting, as the Yellow Vest movement filed plans for a major Paris march on Saturday that will present the government with its next big test.

Macron said yesterday that those seeking to cause disorder at the next protests would be stopped, while Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu met union leaders in an effort to defuse one of the worst crises France has faced in recent years.

Macron also accused some foreign leaders of spreading misinformation about what had happened. US President Donald Trump in particular has blamed the turbulence on mass migration, saying it was a warning for Americans.



Meanwhile, Paris police announced a new curfew in certain areas of the city from last night to this morning.

France's neighbours Italy and Belgium have also started to experience similar unrest, on a smaller scale. Italy's government has ordered 500 troops to Milan to stem street violence there.

A representative of France's "Gilets Jaunes" (Yellow Vests) movement, a grassroots group not tied to the unions, presented plans for a march across the heart of Paris, including areas that were ransacked just days ago.

Student groups have also called for protests the same day to push demands for greater investment in education. Yellow Vest activists are seeking to revive their campaign, which emerged in 2018, against rising living costs and declining public services.

Last weekend's demonstrations rapidly degenerated into rampant violence, especially in Paris, Marseille, Lyon and Limoges, which the overwhelmed police took hours to contain.

In a letter to unions ahead of yesterday's meeting, French Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu said their talks should focus on ensuring "the indispensable freedom to demonstrate", which he said some were trying to curtail by associating it with "unacceptable acts".

Ctg building itself into climate danger

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coastal developing member countries, draws on satellite records, flood modelling and household surveys.

It tracks settlement growth in five Asia-Pacific coastal cities: Shanghai, Manila, Chattogram, Hai Phong and Nuku'alofa in Tonga.

In Manila, the most exposed areas grew the slowest, while in Hai Phong the fastest growth occurred outside the flood zone.

With much of Chattogram still undeveloped, the report says, planning decisions will substantially determine how exposed the city becomes, and the losses that follow.

Urban planner Delwar Hossain Mazumder, former chairman of the Chattogram centre of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB), said the findings reflected what was happening on the ground.

Safer areas were built up long ago, while port-related businesses and an influx of workers were driving construction onto cheaper, low-lying land that was once covered by water, he said.

"The Chattogram Development Authority (CDA) makes plans and considers its job done, without properly monitoring what is being built where," he said.

With a new master plan nearing completion, he urged the authorities to strengthen the CDA, incorporate independent planners' input and strictly enforce planning rules, allowing "not even a hair's breadth of deviation".

Otherwise, he warned, "the city will quickly become unliveable".

He cited Kolkata, which he said had been heading towards becoming unliveable in the last century before authorities tightened planning controls and expanded the city into a new, planned area.

Asked whether flood risks were considered when approving buildings, CDA Deputy Chief Town Planner Abu Isa Ansari said the authority's plan did not designate any part of Chattogram as flood-prone.

However, he said, the master plan prohibits construction in designated water-retention areas to help tackle waterlogging.

He attributed rapid construction in areas such as Bakalia and Chandgaon, which lie along natural drainage slopes between the city's hills and the river, to the daily influx of people from surrounding upazilas.

"Had satellite towns been built in those upazilas, people would not have come. But Chattogram could not do that," he said.

PORTS, POVERTY AT RISK

Beyond the city's immediate flood threat, nearly all of Bangladesh's ocean-related climate losses could stem from disruption at its ports, including the wider costs to trade, according to ADB research accompanying the report.

Chattogram port handles about 92 percent of the country's import-export trade.

Under a high-emissions scenario, the value at risk could reach about $1.4 billion a year by 2050 and $13.6 billion by 2100, at 2020 prices.

Under the same scenario, around 1.75 crore Bangladeshis could be affected by coastal flooding annually by 2100, the third-highest figure among the 30 countries, after China and India.

Annual damage could reach about 15 percent of 2020 GDP by the end of the century.

Bangladesh also has the region's sharpest overlap of poverty and flood risk, the report said.

The country's poorest coastal communities are concentrated in the most flood-prone areas, leaving those with the greatest need for adaptation least able to afford it.

One study cited in the report found that Bangladeshi households spent 17.25 percent of their annual income on flood protection.

Meanwhile, dry-season groundwater in coastal areas routinely exceeds World Health Organization salinity limits. Saltier drinking water has also been linked to dangerously high blood pressure in pregnant women.

Citing a 2018 World Bank estimate, the report said sea-level rise, water scarcity and agricultural decline could force up to 13.3 million Bangladeshis, about 7.5 percent of the population, to move within the country by 2050.

The report praised the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 as one of the region's most advanced but warned that financing it would be difficult.

The plan envisages $52 billion in investment through 2040, requiring delta-related spending of about 2.5 percent of GDP annually, against existing adaptation spending of around 0.8 percent. Some 99 percent of the funding must come from public sources.

Bangladesh's cyclone shelter network, now numbering around 5,000, was cited as a success. Deaths fell from 1,38,866 in the 1991 cyclone to 111 in a comparable storm in 1997, the report noted.

[Chattogram Staff Correspondent Sifayet Ullah contributed to this report]

Subsidy cut deals blow to theatre troupes

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high rent?'" he said.

Following the discussions, the then cultural ministry agreed to subsidise the rent by Tk 6,500 per shift, reducing the amount payable by theatre troupes to Tk 5,000, he said.

"However, the interim government discontinued the subsidy after taking office. Without the funding, we were left in a difficult position. The rent is simply too high for many theatre groups. The current government has not restored the subsidy either. We want the government to restore it," Majumdar said.

The number of plays staged at the auditorium has since declined significantly, with many theatre troupes reluctant to use the venue because of the high rent, according to artistes and Mahila Samity sources.

Speaking to The Daily Star, theatre activist and Dhaka University sociology professor Dr Samina Luthfa said, "It is almost impossible for theatre troupes to afford such high rent. The government must take action, as Mahila Samity holds a significant place in the country's theatre scene.

"I know that the cultural ministry and representatives of the theatre community are currently in talks, so we can only hope the subsidy will be restored."

A source at Bangladesh Mahila Samity, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed that a special rental arrangement for theatre troupes had long been in place with financial assistance from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

The Daily Star has obtained an official letter, dated August 12, 2026, from Mahila Samity General Secretary Tamanna Rahman to Cultural Affairs Minister Nitai Roy Chowdhury.

The letter seeks financial assistance for the 2026-27 fiscal year to support theatre performances at the auditorium.

It says previous government subsidies kept the venue affordable, allowing an average of 20 performances a month.

The organisation has requested Tk 14.3 lakh from the ministry's special fund, calculated at Tk 6,500 per performance for 20 shows a month over 11 months, as the auditorium remains closed for one month each year.

The grant is intended to sustain regular theatrical performances and preserve the venue's legacy.

Contacted, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Ali Newaz Mahmud Khaiyam said the ministry was willing to discuss the issue and take necessary steps to support theatre workers.

"We will definitely look into the matter, as we take the well-being of the theatre sector very seriously. We will address the letter and hope to reach a resolution acceptable to everyone involved," he said.

Nowhere to play

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Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, which said playgrounds support children's physical activity, emotional well-being, social interaction and cognitive development.

The researchers argued that playgrounds should be treated as essential public infrastructure because they help children build confidence, creativity, teamwork and communication skills.

The situation in Dhaka city suggests such considerations receive little priority. The recent Detailed Area Plan (DAP) of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (RAJUK) shows that of the 129 wards in the city, at least 41 -- 10 under Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and 31 under Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) -- do not have any playgrounds or parks.

According to DAP and the latest city corporation data, more than 950 playgrounds and parks are required for around 60 lakh residents in DNCC while the number is around 700 for over 43 lakh residents in DSCC.

While replying to a question from a lawmaker in parliament on July 15, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman said that DNCC oversees 189 parks, playgrounds and open spaces. Of those, 38 are currently free from encroachment and being managed in a planned manner.

Besides, development work has already been completed at 20 parks, four playgrounds, two children's parks and two Eidgah grounds, the PM pointed out.

He also said illegal encroachers had been removed from 256 parks and playgrounds under the jurisdiction of DSCC and other agencies. Development and maintenance work was underway at these facilities.

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Parents say they are increasingly concerned about the impact of inadequate recreational spaces on their children's development.

"My kids have no opportunity for outdoor recreation. It's just school, coaching and screen time," said Rehana Begum, a mother of two from Shewrapara.

She said both her children spend too much time on mobile phone or computer screens and too little time with other children.

"By trapping them in these concrete cages, we are making them sick. I feel entirely helpless," she said, adding that her older child had poor eyesight and weak muscles.

Explaining the impact of limited outdoor activity on children, Helal Uddin Ahmed of the National Institute of Mental Health said, "In the absence of safe playgrounds or open spaces, many children have little choice but to spend their free time on digital devices."

Over time, he said, excessive screen use can disrupt sleep, increase irritability and gradually reduce children's social skills and emotional development.

The effects extend to children's physical health as well.

Mahbubul Haque, a professor of neonatal and paediatric medicine at Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute, said many of the children he treats suffer from vitamin D deficiency, obesity and poor physical fitness because they spend so little time outdoors.

"If we want to protect Bangladesh's future, we must protect our children. They need at least an hour every day to play outdoors, mix with other children and spend less time on mobile phones."

WHAT OFFICIALS, EXPERTS SAY

When contacted, Md Ashraful Islam, chief town planner of Rajuk, said DAP has identified 55 government-owned plots for future recreational spaces, and work on two new parks has already begun.

He further said schools are required to keep 60 percent of their premises as open space, but many continue to operate without playgrounds.

Ashraful also acknowledged that many parks have been commercialised, with 20 to 40 percent of their areas covered by concrete despite the 5 percent limit set by the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC).

"According to the World Health Organization, every person should have at least nine square metres of public open space, but Dhaka has only about 0.6 square metres. We need to protect existing parks, remove commercial structures, create new playgrounds and strengthen enforcement," he said.

Welcoming the government's recent initiatives, experts have called for reclaiming all playgrounds that have been encroached upon or illegally occupied.

They also suggested that the authorities put in place a "field-sharing model" that would allow school playgrounds to remain open for children in the neighbourhood after school hours.

REPTILE AWARENESS DAY

Over 9,000 turtles rescued in six years

Trafficking networks stretch across borders

KHENGSAPRUE MARMA

At least 9,046 turtles have been rescued by the Forest Department's Wildlife Crime Control Unit (WCCU) in six years since 2021, as illegal wildlife trafficking continues despite repeated enforcement drives.

According to WCCU records, 7,685 turtles, nearly 85 percent of the total, were rescued between 2024 and September this year.The figures underscore the threats facing freshwater turtles and tortoises from illegal trade and habitat destruction, as Reptile Awareness Day was observed yesterday.



Rescued turtles being released into a waterbody.

PHOTO: **WILDLIFE CRIME CONTROL UNIT**



The rescued turtles.

The records show that 557 turtles were rescued in 2021, 225 in 2022, 579 in 2023, 1,678 in 2024, 3,220 in 2025, and 2,787 this year till September.

Among the identified species, at least 2,316 Indian roofed turtles and 1,237 Indian flapshell turtles were rescued. Both are classified as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

Freshwater turtles are essential keystone species that keep rivers, lakes, and wetlands healthy. They cycle nutrients, clean up dead matter, spread plant seeds, and act as biological indicators of water quality.

On September 27, authorities seized 1,163 Indian roofed turtles from the luggage of Malaysia-bound passenger Md Shahidul Islam at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. A case was filed against him under the Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act, 2026.

However, rising seizures do not necessarily indicate increased trafficking, as they may also reflect intensified enforcement and improved detection, said officials.

Abdullah AS Sadique, wildlife inspector at the WCCU, said trafficking networks begin with local collectors, often fishermen and marginalised communities, before passing through middlemen to international operators.

Turtles collected from wetlands and other habitats are smuggled to China, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and Myanmar, driven largely by demand for meat and exotic pets, he said.

While carriers are frequently arrested, organisers coordinate transactions through mobile phones and online platforms, sometimes from abroad, he added.

WCCU Director Mohammad Mizanur Rahman called for greater public awareness and stronger inter-agency coordination.

He said four frequently trafficked freshwater turtle species are protected under the Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act, 2026.

M Abdul Aziz, professor of zoology at Jahangirnagar University, called for better technology and specialised training for customs officials to combat increasingly sophisticated trafficking networks.