

# Ways to Combat Plastic Pollution in Bangladesh



Plastic pollution has become one of the most pressing challenges for Bangladesh. Although Bangladesh produces less plastic waste than many other developed nations, it has been ranked 10th most plastic-polluting country in the world due to mismanagement of plastic waste. However, plastic pollution received little attention in the last many years and plastic management strategies couldn't keep pace with the development of plastic industries. The threat posed by plastic pollution is no longer confined to the environment; synthetic materials are now entering ecosystems in the form of micro and nano-plastics, making their way into the food chain and ultimately reaching the human body. This poses serious health risks, including the potential for cancer and other severe diseases.

Recently, the adviser for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Syeda Rizwana Hasan declared that from 1st October, supermarkets will no longer be allowed to use or provide plastic shopping bags or polypropylene bags to customers. As an alternative, jute and cloth bags will be available for purchase in supermarkets or at their entrances. The initiative is really highly commendable and a dream come true event for me as a young researcher.

This news makes us optimistic for a pollution-free healthy Bangladesh. Some other little changes and initiatives from all walks of life can bring a huge difference in the scenario of plastic pollution in Bangladesh. Undoubtedly, a pollution-free, clean, and healthy Bangladesh is the dream of all of us. Therefore, want to share some ideas.

The first one is School Campaign. We can begin the fight against plastic pollution with gen-alpha, it is easy to make children habituated with the new concepts. We can show them

how plastics harm our environment, how a turtle gets entangled in plastic packets they once had thrown randomly, how plastics reach our food, how we can avoid these troubles from plastics, how we can reduce the use of plastics, and what are the alternatives of plastics. These things needn't be part of their syllabus but part of their games and recreation like cartoons. The young researchers from the different organizations can conduct the campaigns or the teachers themselves can take similar initiatives and monitor the moral upgradation of the children.

The second one is the Ban on One-time Plastic Utensils. Even five years ago one-time plastic utensils were constrained only in the urban areas but today plastic trashes of single-use plastic materials are found randomly over every fallow land and jungles of rural areas. Most of the takeaway plastic containers and plates are made of Styrofoam which can't be recycled. So, it is also important to make people conscious of different types of plastics and their possible effects on the environment. Awareness should be raised among people so that they can make environment-friendly decisions in any kind of celebration. It is the responsibility of the Government and Non-government organizations to conduct physical or online campaigns, publicity, and advertisements to make people aware of plastic pollution. It's high time that single-use plastic producers transform their business to produce an environment-friendly, biodegradable product. They can invest in Sonali Bag which has a huge demand at home and abroad.

Thirdly, a legal Policy to Reduce Transboundary Plastic Pollution should be adopted. A large proportion of plastic pollution in our rivers come from the higher riparian countries. In total, 57 transboundary rivers fall into the Bay of Bengal passing through Bangladesh. Scientific studies claim that out of the 10 most plastic-carrying rivers 8 are in Asia. The Ganges, Meghna, and Brahmaputra are included among them. Bangladesh lacks control over the massive transboundary flows of plastic garbage across the major Himalayan rivers since it is the lowest riparian territory of these waterways and there is no international treaty addressing this issue. However, by ratifying the Basel Convention Ban Amendment, Bangladesh would be able to negotiate the matter of transboundary plastic pollution, as it prohibits the transboundary movement of plastic garbage.

Besides, the United Nations Global Plastic Treaty is about to be finalized by the fifth and final Intragovernmental Negotiation Meeting, INC-5, which will take place in Busan, South Korea in November 2024. In the UNEP Resolution Portal, a document is found where Bangladesh tried to draw special attention to the downstream and underdeveloped countries to manage cumulative plastic load and protect the adjacent marine environment in the Global Plastic Treaty. However, the outcome is not known if the recommendation has been incorporated or not. The Interim Government can reconsider this fact in INC-5 to beat transboundary plastic pollution.

Fourthly, Throwing waste from water vessels should be strictly prohibited. Rivers of Bangladesh are choking in plastics. The Karnaphuli Capital Dredging Project was stopped due to piling up of polythene and plastic waste on the river bed in 2020. Later on, it required Grab Cutters to remove the plastic layers. This scenario is enough to represent the worst situation of plastic pollution and ecosystem destruction of the major rivers.

Passengers on the ships and launches should be made aware so that they don't throw plastics in the water. It is the responsibility of the Launch companies to provide available trash containers for the passengers.

Accountability of each vessel should be ensured from the government's side that not a single waste is being discharged into the water.

Last but not least, Publicity of 3R principles to beat plastic pollution is required. The 3R principle-Reduce, Reuse, Recycle-offers an effective strategy to tackle plastic pollution. By focusing on "Reduce," we can minimize plastic waste by avoiding single-use plastics, and choosing alternatives like reusable jute bags or containers during shopping. This cuts down the demand for plastic production. In the "Reuse" phase, extending the life of plastic products through creative repurposing, such as using plastic containers for storage or old bottles as planters, helps to reduce the amount of waste generated. Finally, "Recycle" ensures that plastics are processed and turned into new products, keeping them out of landfills and oceans. But facilitating these processes, educating people about these principles, and making people concerned about the necessity of reducing plastic pollution is the task of government, NGOs, and the conscious young generations.

At present, we have an excellent alternative to polythene bags named "Sonali Bag" which is a biodegradable and eco-friendly product from jute cellulose invented by Bangladeshi scientist Dr. Mubarak Ahmad Khan. This invention gives our Golden Fiber a new recognition to the world. Besides, plastic bottles in offices or meetings could be replaced by Jug and Glass or we can carry personal water bottles. Street food can be served on aluminum or steel plates. Natural leaves can also be considered for serving and packaging foods. Currently, many restaurants use paper and aluminum boxes for food delivery which is commendable. Environment-friendly businesses should be promoted.

Beating plastic pollution is a war for the sake of our future generation to help them live on a healthy and wealthy planet. Participation of people from every walk of life is important here. It's high time that everybody reshapes their activities and businesses in a plastic-free and environment-friendly way. Let's begin with our homes, offices, and businesses. Simple changes can bring a huge difference.

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***The article was published in [The Daily Observer](#) newspaper on 25 September 2024***