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RISE OF ESPORTS IN BANGLADESH

From fringe hobby to

NATIONAL PRIDE



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ZARIF FAIAZ and SHAMS RASHID TONMOY

For years, gaming in Bangladesh was seen as a waste of time -- often dismissed as a frivolous activity or a distraction from more "serious" pursuits. Traditional societal norms placed little value on gaming, perceiving it as an endeavour devoid of any real-world benefits.

However, this narrative is rapidly changing as esports gains momentum around the world, pushing the boundaries of how gaming is perceived and valued in the country.

The global esports industry has grown exponentially over the past decade. In 2023, the market was valued at over US \$1.1 billion, with projections suggesting it will surpass US \$1.6 billion by 2025.

Major esports tournaments attract millions of viewers worldwide, and professional players earn lucrative incomes through sponsorships, streaming, and competition winnings.

Even traditionally conservative countries have recognised the economic potential of esports and are investing heavily in the industry. For instance, the Saudi Arabian government has pledged to invest US \$38 billion in the gaming industry, including US \$13 billion earmarked for acquiring a leading game publisher. The country also hosted the Gamers8 festival, which featured a US \$45 million prize pool, one of the largest in esports history.

Emerging talent and recognition

Banladesh's journey into the world of esports has been marked by significant milestones and

mechanics for competitive play."

Anik's success in the South Asian regional finals against competitors from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and India earned him a spot to represent Bangladesh on the global platform. Anik initially started playing video games in local arcades in 2013 and has since become an avid fan of fighting games such as Street Fighter and The King of Fighters.

In the same vein, Farid Islam has made headlines by securing a position in the Global Esports Games Riyadh 2023 for the Street Fighter V tournament.

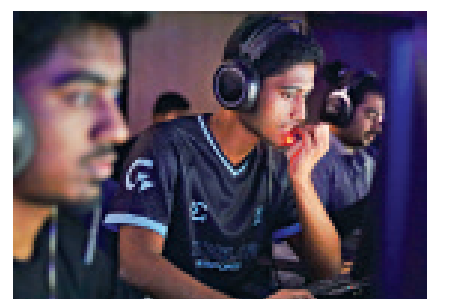
Moreover, all-female teams such as Team Hexagon and Team Celestials have qualified for the South Asian round of the VCT Game Changers tournament, an official Valorant competition hosted by Riot Games -- the game's developer. Their exceptional performance against teams from Pakistan, Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka is a testament to their hard work and determination. Team Hexagon, led by Noxiana, showcased impressive coordination and tactical prowess, while Team Celestials, captained by Rimsha Iqbal, displayed remarkable

rise of female gamers. In 2022, for the first time in the country's history, an all-female team represented Bangladesh in an official, international esports competition: the Global Esports Games 2022, competing at Dota 2. "Team Mayhem", consisting of A-level completing students to university graduates, had to win an audition to receive this unique opportunity, in an event held jointly by the Global Esports Federation and the BYDESA.

In an earlier conversation with The Daily Star, the gamers of Team Mayhem pointed out how, despite making names

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Bangladeshi teams are also making strides in international esports competitions.

teams needed to reach the finals of the MCB S3 tournament, which ran from April 18 to May 11 this year, with Crisis Requitul ending up as the champion of the official Bangladeshi tournament.

Similarly, teams like Hellbent OPx and MLT CR went for the Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) M5 Wildcard Qualifier in Nepal last year, to secure a spot in the previous MLBB M5 World Championship. Hellbent OPx, the reigning champion of Bangladesh, is known for its exceptional coordination and strategic gameplay, while Team MLT CR demonstrated consistent performance throughout the regular season. These teams represent the growing competitive spirit and skill level within the Bangladeshi esports community.

Breaking stereotypes, embracing the future

The success of Bangladeshi esports players is changing how people view gaming in the country. Gaming is no longer just a hobby -- it's a potential career path. The growing involvement of women in esports is also particularly noteworthy, as it not only breaks gender stereotypes, but also paves the way for greater inclusivity in the gaming community.

The achievements of female gamers are inspiring more young women to pursue their passion for esports, further diversifying the talent pool.

The rise of Bangladeshi esports isn't just about trophies and prize money; it's about changing perceptions. Parents who once saw gaming as a hindrance are now witnessing their children blossom into skilled athletes, capable of competing on the international stage and bringing national recognition. Esports is opening doors to lucrative careers, with sponsorships, streaming revenue, and competition winnings becoming increasingly viable sources of income.

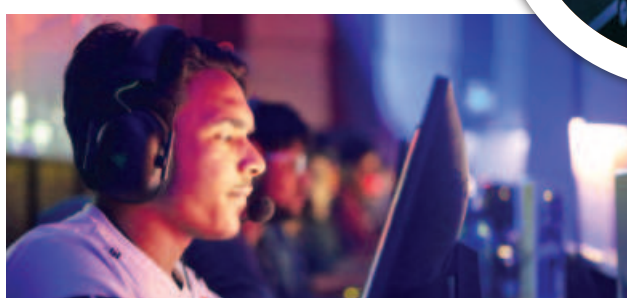
The esports revolution in Bangladesh is just getting started. With each local tournament, and each international victory, the country is etching its name onto the global gaming map. From the dimly lit arcades where dreams were born to the brightly lit stages of international competition, Bangladeshi gamers are proving their mettle.

The future of esports in Bangladesh gleams with promise, and there is no doubt that with the right support and infrastructure, the nation is poised to become a force to be reckoned with in the ever-evolving world of competitive gaming.



Team Celestials emerged victorious in this landmark event in the video game Valorant at an esports competition. The achievements of female gamers are inspiring more young women to pursue their passion for esports, further diversifying the talent pool.

PHOTO: COURTESY



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achievements, showcasing the country's growing prowess on the international stage. One of the notable figures is M Saiful Islam Anik, who qualified for the main stage of the Capcom Cup X, the official Street Fighter tournament hosted by Capcom.

"The potential of fighting games in the local esports scene is quite significant," says Anik, "Unlike some other genres, fighting games can be relatively easy for newcomers to pick up and play, while still offering deep

Farid's journey began with a local qualifier tournament hosted by the Bangladesh Youth Development & Electronic Sports Association (BYDESA), where he triumphed over competitors from India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives to qualify for the global event.

When asked about his thoughts on the local esports scene, Farid says, "I believe the potential of esports in Bangladesh is currently at its highest, with a lot of opportunities coming up. I believe our country can be the hub of esports events for the entire South Asia region."

During our conversation, Farid, a student at Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology studying Electrical and Electronics Engineering, emphasised that despite fighting games like Street Fighter 6 usually not being included in the line-up of big local tournaments, the community of this genre of games, despite being relatively niche, is growing with a lot of young talents on the rise.

More women in esports now

A significant and inspiring development in the Bangladeshi esports scene is the

in the international gaming scene, struggles remained in being recognised as a female esports player in a scene primarily dominated by men.

"Almost all of us have been told at different times and places -- why should women play competitive video games?" stated one of the members, with the team sharing stories of how they faced obstacles due to parents, family members, and society as a whole.

Since then, all-female esports teams have seen a notable rise in Bangladesh. In 2023, the country witnessed its first women-only esports competition, organised by the Bangladesh Association of Software & Information Services (BASIS).

The tournament, held during BASIS's flagship three-day exhibition SoftExpo 2023, featured eight teams with a total of 48 female participants.

Team Celestials emerged victorious in this landmark event in the video game Valorant, with Team Wasabi Sirens and Team Zetsubo securing the second and third positions, respectively. This event not only highlighted the growing interest in esports among women but also provided a platform for female gamers to showcase their skills.

resilience and skill. These achievements are breaking gender stereotypes and inspiring more young women to pursue their passion for esports.

Local tournaments and international aspirations

Local esports tournaments in Bangladesh are gaining popularity, drawing in hundreds of participants and showcasing the country's burgeoning talent. The Discovery One Cup Season 2, for example, featured over 100 teams competing in games like Valorant, Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive.

The event, held at the International Convention City Bashundhara, was supported by sponsors like bKash, Mountain Dew, Paramount Venture Capital, and Savoy.

Teams like MLT Esports, Kral's Council, and Red Viperz emerged as champions in their respective games, securing significant cash prizes and earning recognition.

Bangladeshi teams are also making strides in international competitions.

Recently, two local esports teams -- Crisis Requitul and Kral's Council -- qualified for the MLBB World Cup South Asia tournament. To qualify, both