

#HOBBIES

# Reliving the golden age of arcade games: A nostalgic journey through Dhaka



Right in the middle of Dhaka, where the busy streets blend into a symphony of activity, are the once-glorious arcade lanes, a hidden treasure trove of memories. These havens of pixelated magic served as the furnaces for creating childhood fantasies for many, including Ollyo's creative founder and CEO, Kawshar Ahmed. For him, these places preserve his inner child.

The 1990s in Dhaka were a simpler era. The faces of the city's young people were frequently seen crowded around arcade machines, their displays flickering. Video games such as "Super Mario," "Cadillacs and Dinosaurs," and "Roadrash" served as more than simply entertainment; they were portals to otherworldly realms.

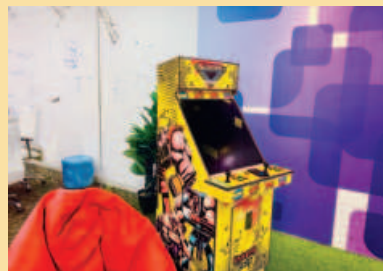
Having spent his early life in Cumilla, Kawshar Ahmed remembers playing video games for the first time at his cousin's house. His eyes brighten at the memories, "I fell in love with them immediately.

The characters' movements, the engaging gameplay, and the vibrant graphics were mesmerising and addictive," he said.

Kawshar's love of gaming was more than simply a hobby; it was a path marked by tenacity and fortitude. Buying a used game console for TK 700 — a significant amount for him at the time — was one noteworthy event.

"Unfortunately, the shop owner lied and sold me a broken machine," Kawshar recounts. His relentless visits to the shop until he reclaimed his money exemplify his undying love for gaming, a love that would fuel his future endeavours and inspire others to never give up on their passions.

Fast-forward to 2016, when Kawshar founded JoomShaper and saw an opportunity to weave his childhood



passion into his professional life. The idea of building an arcade machine was born.

"The project faced challenges," he admits candidly. The structure, sourced from a local vendor, needed to be revised. But determined to make it work, I imported high-quality arcade joysticks from Amazon," Kawshar said.

The resulting machine, powered by a Raspberry Pi running RetroPie, became a source of immense joy and camaraderie among his team, fostering a sense of unity and belonging.

As Kawshar began constructing Ollyo's HQ, he envisioned an even grander gaming setup. "We built two new arcades,

enhancing the experience further," he shares with a smile. The original JoomShaper machine found a new home at his residence, ensuring the magic of arcade gaming was always within reach. Now, I enjoy playing these games, not just at work but also at home."

He adds, "It's a wonderful way to keep my inner child alive."

Arcade games appeal to many people because they take us back to our early

"Together, we relish the adventures of Mario, the battles of Street Fighter, and many other classic games," Kawshar says about his girls and his childhood. "These moments are more than just play—they are a bridge between the past and present, a way to share the joy of my childhood with my family."

At Ollyo and JoomShaper, the presence of arcade games has shaped a unique office culture.

"While we have modern sports equipment like the PS5, foosball, air hockey, ping pong, and basketball, the arcade games truly stand out," Kawshar explains. These vintage machines provide fun and relaxation and evoke a shared nostalgia that strengthens team bonds.

For those looking to recreate this magic, Kawshar offers practical advice —

"You can use a Raspberry Pi or purchase ready-made gaming consoles with pre-installed games. However, building your arcade is a must if you want to relive your childhood. There are plenty of tutorials on YouTube that guide you through the process. Pay attention to the quality of the components and customise the setup to reflect your style and preferences."

In a city like Dhaka, where the future is ever-looming, the past remains a cherished sanctuary. The yesteryears of arcade games remind us of simpler times and the timeless joy of pixelated adventures. Through the eyes of individuals like Kawshar Ahmed, we see how these digital relics continue to nurture the inner child within us, bridging the gap between generations and keeping the spirit of the '90s alive and kicking.



years. The legendary tunes, the competitive attitude, and the straightforward yet challenging gameplay evoke an exciting and comfortable nostalgia.

**By K Tanzeel Zaman**  
**Photo: Courtesy/Collected**