

# How youth-led startups are solving real-world problems

MAHMUDUL HASAN

From revolutionising education to transforming underwater inspections, youth-led startups in Bangladesh are making waves with bold innovations and creative solutions.

The potential and passion of these entrepreneurs were on full display at the Youth Entrepreneurship Expo 2025, organised as part of the Bangladesh Investment Summit.

These startups, founded and led by young entrepreneurs, are already creating real-world impact and promising to shape a smarter, more efficient future.

From ed-tech and affiliate marketing to smart infrastructure and robotics, the ventures featured at the expo demonstrated not only business acumen but also a deep commitment to solving real-world problems.

Technowren, founded by Saiam Bin Islam Meshkat in Rajshahi, blends hardware innovation with creative customisation. The company offers 3D printing, laser cutting, and circuit manufacturing services.

"We want to empower local industries and individuals with precise, affordable and tech-based solutions," said Meshkat, who now

leads a team of six.

Technowren reflects a growing trend among the youth in Bangladesh to explore hands-on engineering and manufacturing.

Faiza Zahin, founder of Ayykori, believes affiliate marketing is a tool for financial independence. The company, launched in 2023, has already partnered with over 350 brands to offer extra cashback opportunities to its 1.5 lakh users.

"We want to make 5 million people self-sufficient in the next three years," she said.

It's more than a business — it's a digital movement to redistribute value among everyday consumers, she said.

"For example, if you purchase anything online, you'll receive cashback on every purchase in addition to any discounts offered by the platform. If you promote the product or website to people you know, you can also earn money."

Artificial Intelligence Bangladesh, founded by Shahida Afrin in 2020, is another remarkable venture using technology for impact. The company's model is designed to increase children's digital skills while keeping their real-world curiosity alive.

With a focus on reducing children's screen time through after-school



An employee of a tech startup highlights the features of their product yesterday at the Youth Entrepreneurship Expo 2025, which was organised as part of the ongoing Bangladesh Investment Summit at the InterContinental Dhaka.

PHOTO: MAHMUDUL HASAN

coding and robotics programmes, the company has already taught more than 2,000 students.

"We're not just teaching programming," Afrin said. "We're nurturing creativity, problem-solving, logical thinking, and mathematical ability — all through engaging, tech-based learning."

Meanwhile, Smart Build has taken a leap into smart urban development.

They integrate AI and IoT to help

clients design and monitor building construction remotely, offering cost estimation, security design, and smart IT infrastructure.

"Our clients can inspect construction progress without physically visiting the site — even from abroad," said Shahab Uddin Riad, co-founder and CEO of the company.

Founded in 2023, Smart Build already employs 40 engineers and has completed projects with energy

companies, achieving a 30 percent reduction in energy consumption through smart integration.

Another standout is Dubotech, co-founded by Sayantan Roy Arko. Emerging from BRAC University's award-winning underwater robotics team, Bracu Duburi, the startup focuses on developing indigenous ROVs (remotely operated vehicles) for underwater inspections.

"Our mission is to transform underwater inspections by developing indigenous ROV technology tailored to local needs while harnessing international standards," Arko said.

Their goal is to lead the underwater robotics industry in Bangladesh and provide cost-effective, safe, and efficient solutions for underwater environments.

Banglar Math is tackling one of the country's oldest education problems: the fear of math. Founded in 2021, the startup offers a gamified, personalised math learning platform.

"Around 14 million students in Bangladesh struggle with math due to fear and outdated teaching methods," said Shahriar. "We transform this fear into fun through engaging content, personalised assessments and interactive kits," said co-founder Ahmed Shahriar.

## Stocks snap losing streak

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The prime bourse of Bangladesh returned to the positive yesterday after a three-day losing streak, as optimistic investors cautiously channelled funds into select stocks to secure short-term gains amid concerns over US tariff hikes.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), edged up by 10.21 points, or 0.20 percent, from that on the preceding day before closing at 5,196.

The other two indices of the country's premier bourse posted a mixed performance.

The Shariah-compliant DSES index rose by 2.58 points, or 0.22 percent, to 1,169.

The DS30 index, which tracks blue-chip stocks, dipped by 2.89 points, or 0.15 percent, before ending at 1,921.

At the Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE), the Broad Share Price Index (CASPI), the broad index of the port city bourse, declined slightly for the first time since trading resumed on Sunday following a nine-day Eid holiday.

It shed 3.05 points, or 0.02 percent, to settle at 14,530.

Of the issues that were traded on the DSE trading floor, prices of 144 advanced, 193 declined, and 58 remained unchanged.

The day's turnover, meaning the total value of shares exchanged during the session, stood at Tk 527 crore, marking a 9.01 percent increase and suggesting an uptick in investor engagement.

## Foreign investors reaffirm

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Yunus also invited UK collaboration in pharmaceuticals, especially in advocating the removal of vaccine patent protections to enable local production under a social business model.

The chief adviser further highlighted opportunities in education, textile modernisation, defence, and aviation, reaffirming the country's commitment to women's empowerment across sectors.

Speaking earlier at the summit's opening, Baroness Winterton said British businesses were eager to expand in Bangladesh. However, regulatory issues and hurdles remain a concern.

"We also hear concerns from businesses about regulations and red tape," she said. "We welcome Bida's efforts to implement reforms quickly — this is restoring investor confidence and sending a clear message that Bangladesh is open for business."

**HOLCIM BACKS LONG-TERM PRESENCE**

Martin Krieger, executive committee member and Asia, Middle East and Africa head of Holcim Group, also met with the chief adviser at State Guest House Jamuna. Discussions centred on cement consumption,

environmental sustainability, and Holcim's future plans in the country. Holcim, parent company of LafargeHolcim Bangladesh, is exploring innovations to reduce its carbon footprint.

Krieger said the company is using non-recyclable plastics as fuel at

its Chhatak plant, claiming zero environmental impact.

He also mentioned Holcim's carbon capture projects abroad, which could be replicated in Bangladesh.

Iqbal Chowdhury, CEO of LafargeHolcim Bangladesh, expressed optimism for improvement in business in the coming months. He said the company's introduction of construction aggregates in Bangladesh could save significant foreign currency.

Prof Yunus welcomed Holcim's continued investment and reiterated the government's pro-business stance.

"We are grateful to the government for their ongoing support, which enables us to produce world-class products in Bangladesh," said Krieger. He reaffirmed Holcim's commitment to being a long-term player in the market.

**MATARBARI FREE TRADE ZONE IN THE PIPELINE**

Bangladesh is considering setting up a free trade zone near the ongoing Matarbari deep-sea port on the shores of the Bay of Bengal. The authorities believe this would help bolster exports and attract foreign investments.

"We have a long-term plan with DP World, and we are considering the establishment of a free trade zone," said Bida Chairman Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun at a press briefing on the third day of the summit.

A free trade zone allows goods to be imported, processed, and

re-exported without the time-consuming customs clearances, helping speed up logistics and reduce tariffs.

"There is a port called Jebel Ali, which contributes around 35 percent to the UAE's economy. That's our inspiration," he added.

The proposed zone is part of broader collaboration talks with DP World. Its Group Chairman and CEO Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem met with Professor Yunus yesterday to explore investment opportunities in ports and logistics infrastructure.

This follows a previous discussion between the two at Davos, where bin Sulayem showed interest in the New Mooring Container Terminal in Chattogram.

"We are looking forward to this partnership. Your prosperity is our prosperity. From Chattogram to Dubai to Africa, this is our shared dream," said bin Sulayem.

Ashik Chowdhury said a Bangladesh delegation may soon visit the UAE to learn about the operational frameworks of its free trade zones.

Responding to questions on defence investment, he pointed to the capabilities of the Bangladesh Ordnance Factories. "Based on this foundation, an industry for military equipment could be developed, as there is a huge demand," he said.

The Bida chief also shared plans about a military economic zone, modelled on regular economic zones, to facilitate foreign investment and technology transfer in defence manufacturing.

## Islamic banks

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"We know there has been a lot of interference and dual governance in the banking sector, and this needs to end," he said. "We need a unified regulatory framework for the entire banking system, and we are working towards that."

Mansur also said the Bangladesh Bank is also working to strengthen its supervisory capacity and regulatory framework in a bid to significantly improve its functions. "By doing so, we can detect irregularities without interfering in banks' day-to-day operations."

While elaborating on other reform initiatives for the banking sector, Mansur said the central bank has the right to intervene in the interest of protecting depositors if a bank's operations go awry.

"We reconstituted the boards of 11 banks in the first round. Besides, the boards of two others were reconstituted over the past couple of weeks," he said.

"So, the message is loud and clear. We will intervene further. This is an ongoing process," Mansur added.

The central bank is also revising and implementing significant changes to the Bank Company Act as it looks to address issues such as poor governance,

particularly by board members.

Mansur further informed that they are working to empower the central bank with a view to achieving its objectives as per the Bangladesh Bank Order.

"The central bank was also part of the problem, and we want to address this."

The central bank governor said most of the troubled banks are operating with capital deficits and it will take several years to fix their condition.

"Political consensus will be needed for such reforms," he added.

Abdul Hannan Chowdhury, vice-chancellor of North South University, presented the keynote paper while Md Akhtaruzzaman, director general of the BIBM, presided over the event.

In his keynote address, Chowdhury said that a sound banking system is built on trust, which is rooted in strong corporate governance and ethical practices.

He pointed out that challenges to good governance, such as political interference, inadequate accountability, and the appointment of "dummy" directors, have compromised the banks' integrity.

## UK firms

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Citing the Al Jazeera report, the statement said just one of the families under investigation is suspected of transferring \$15 billion out of Bangladesh.

In one case, nearly 90 percent of a single bank's deposits were allegedly withdrawn, pushing the institution to the brink of collapse.

Mansur said the UK is the starting point to trace and recover around \$25 billion believed to have been laundered from Bangladesh, according to the report.

A Terms of Reference outlining the engagement process for private firms will be issued by the end of April this year, Mansur announced at a seminar in London on March 19, which was attended by nearly 30 firms and around 100 participants, including legal experts, forensic investigators, and litigation funders.

The initiative will receive

technical assistance from the World Bank's Stolen Asset Recovery programme and the International Centre for Asset Recovery (ICAR).

Three of the world's largest litigation funders held separate meetings with the Bangladesh Bank governor during the visit, expressing strong interest in supporting the country's asset recovery efforts.

These firms collectively proposed investing up to \$50 million, subject to the availability of sufficient evidence to pursue viable legal cases, the statement added.

The firms will receive a certain percentage of the recovered funds as compensation for their services. The process will not require financial involvement from the Bangladesh Bank or any other bank, according to documents.

Mansur invited the firms to visit Bangladesh soon to review potential cases for litigation funding.

## Tk 2,000cr sukuk

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upazilas in 8 districts of the Rajshahi Division. Once implemented, the project is expected to enhance the capacity and safety of rural roads in the project area.

"It will also help ensure fair pricing for agricultural and non-agricultural products, expand

agricultural production and marketing facilities, and create both short- and long-term employment opportunities," a central bank statement read.

It added that the sukuk has been named the "RDIRWSP Socio-Economic Development Sukuk."

## Stop sending investors

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With the country set to graduate from the United Nations' list of least developed countries (LDCs) in November 2026, the ADB mapped out six key recommendations to improve the investment climate. Chief among them is simplifying the licensing process.

Other suggestions include streamlining reforms to attract FDI, reducing bureaucratic red tape, encouraging responsible business practices aligned with international standards, joining the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Investment Facilitation for Development initiative, and empowering the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (Bida) to lead policy coherence and investment readiness.

"Since graduation typically entails the loss of preferential market access, it is imperative that a predictable and business-friendly environment

be established to attract investment, boost competitiveness, and ensure a smooth and sustainable transition," the ADB said.

Chandan Sapkota, ADB's country economist, added that FDI inflows to Bangladesh have remained modest for years, often comprising retained or reinvested earnings rather than fresh equity capital.

Between 2013 and 2023, FDI in Bangladesh averaged just 0.8 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). In contrast, the figure stood at 9.4 percent in Cambodia, 4.6 percent in Vietnam and 1.9 percent in Indonesia.

Quoting a World Bank survey, Sapkota said lengthy and burdensome licensing and permit procedures create uncertainty and increase the cost of doing business in Bangladesh.

He also noted that strict reporting requirements and the need for prior approval from the Bangladesh Bank for

capital repatriation often deter potential investors from entering the market.

The ADB report, referencing the White Paper on the State of the Bangladesh Economy, which was prepared after the formation of the interim government, also identified additional obstacles to FDI.

These include a political economy that favours specific business groups, complex and inconsistent tax policies, and inadequate trade facilitation.

"Efforts to raise FDI are frustrated by a highly protective trade environment and policy inconsistency affecting trade, investment, and incentives," the report added.

In response, Bida has rolled out the Bangladesh Investment Climate Improvement Programme (BICIP), aimed at overhauling business regulations across seven critical areas.

### CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS DEVELOPMENT BOARD UNIT OFFICE BANDARBAN [www.chtdb.gov.bd](http://www.chtdb.gov.bd)

Memo No.29.31.0000.013.07.113.20-192

Date:08/04/2025

#### e-Tender Notice

This is to notify all concerned that the following tenders have published through e-GP portal.

Tender ID & Reference No.	Name of works	Type Method	Publishing Date/ Closing Date
ID No: 1094651, 29.31.0000.013.14.056.25/2024-2025/221001100-001,	Vertical Extension of Staff Quarter Building (2nd Floor ) of CHTDB for CHTDB Staff.	NCT, LTM	07-Apr-2025 09:00:00 , 21-Apr-2025 16:00:00
ID No: 1094654, 29.31.0000.013.14.051.25/2024-2025/221001100-002,	Renovation of Junior Officers Quarter of Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board.	NCT, LTM	07-Apr-2025 09:00:00 , 21-Apr-2025 16:00:00
ID No: 1094678, 29.31.0000.013.14.049.25/2024-2025/221001100-003,	Supply of Water to Prabhat Tripura Para of Sadar Union in Alikadam Upazila	NCT, LTM	07-Apr-2025 09:00:00 , 21-Apr-2025 16:00:00
ID No: 1094680, 29.31.0000.013.14.052.25/2024-2025/221001100-004,	Accessories including Ground floor casting of Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board Office at Bandarban.	NCT, LTM	07-Apr-2025 09:00:00 , 21-Apr-2025 16:00:00
ID No: 1094682, 29.31.0000.013.14.050.25/2024-2025/221001100-005,	Construction of Signoam Para Road in Taracha Union of Rawangchari Upazila	NCT, LTM	07-Apr-2025 09:00:00 , 21-Apr-2025 16:00:00
ID No: 1094699, 29.31.0000.013.14.048.25/2024-2025/221001100-006,	Vertical Extension of Building Session Judge Court and Renovation of Guest Room and Supply of sound system in conference Room of Bandarban District .	NCT, LTM	07-Apr-2025 09:00:00 , 21-Apr-2025 16:00:00
ID No: 1094705, 29.31.0000.013.14.047.25/2024-2025/221001100-007,	Construction of a Bridge adjacent to Baraitali Para of Rowangchari Upazila	NCT, LTM	07-Apr-2025 09:00:00 , 21-Apr-2025 16:00:00

The interested Firms/person may visit the web site: (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) to get the details of the Tender. This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd))

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**বাংলাদেশ পানি উন্নয়ন বোর্ড**  
BANGLADESH WATER DEVELOPMENT BOARD

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Memo No. 42.01.0000.014.07.022.19-979 Dated: 08/04/2025

**Name & Address of the Procuring Entity**  
Invitation for e-Tender

Invitation Reference No-	42.01.0000.014.07.022.19-978
Tender ID (from e-GP portal)	Tender ID No.- 1096625
Name of Work	Procurement of 12V 9Ah for 80KVA UPS, 26Ah for 20KVA & 30KVA UPS , 65Ah for 6KVA UPS battery for existing UPS and Annual Maintenance of 80KVA TRIMOD SE UPS , 40KVA TRIMOD SE UPS , 30 & 20 KVA KEOR T EVO UPS of BWDB FY 2024-2025
Invitation Reference No-	42.01.0000.014.07.022.19-977
Tender ID (from e-GP portal)	Tender ID No.- 1096616
Name of Work	Supply Installation and Commissioning of 6 core Multimode Fiber Optic Cable, SmartZone Controller, 64 Channel NVR, Indoor Embedded IoT Access Point Access Point, 4MP Outdoor PTZ 36x Camera, Fiver Patch Cord & 2 port 10G Network Card in FY 2024-2025
Invitation Reference No-	42.01.0000.014.07.022.19-976
Tender ID (from e-GP portal)	Tender ID No.- 1096592
Name of Work	Supply Installation and Commissioning of 190 set PoE, Embedded IoT Access Point & SmartZone Controller for Pani Bhaban in FY 2024-2025

This is an online tender where only e-tenders will be accepted in e-GP portal and no offline and hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-tender please register on e-GP system (<http://eprocure.gov.bd/>).

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