



PHOTO: HISHAM KHAN

# What official recognition means for the esports scene in Bangladesh

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AYAAAN SHAMS SIDDIQUEE

On July 13, the Ministry of Youth and Sports announced that esports would now be recognised as an official sport in Bangladesh. In accordance with the National Sports Council Act, 2018, esports, as a sport, would refer to any type of game that enhances mental, physical, and intellectual excellence and is disciplined, open, voluntary, professional, and competitive in nature.

This recognition marks a massive turning point for the ever-growing gaming and esports scene in Bangladesh. As such, it shouldn't come as a surprise that the local gaming community erupted in joy following the ministry's confirmation of the matter.

Tanvin 'TripleNinja' Rahaman, a professional *Valorant* player, says, "It felt like a win, not just for current players, but for the entire community, including fans, casters, organisers, and content creators. For so long,

we've worked in the shadows with little recognition or support. Now, we finally have a shot at building something sustainable and respectable in the public sphere."

The announcement was also met with a series of expectations. Most notably, gamers hoped that this recognition would help dismantle a lot of misconceptions that the older generation bears about esports and gaming in general.

"Loads of parents think that esports is just a form of gambling or addiction," says Zahira 'kiwi' Aziz, a professional esports athlete for Team Celestials. "Bringing this industry within legal bounds will hopefully help esports overcome stigmas from parents who think that gaming is merely child's play and a waste of time."

Meanwhile, there are many who hope that the esports scene might get a similar degree of funding and infrastructural support that other established sports in Bangladesh have. Aslam Ahammed Apon,

co-founder of RedHawks, the team that recently represented Bangladesh in the Esports World Cup, hopes that the newfound legality of esports as a sport will empower his team to greater heights.

"Right now, the teams we're playing against on the international stage are much more advanced than us," he shares. "Many of them have access to bootcamps and specialised training facilities prior to major tournaments that we don't. Even in terms of branding, these teams are often backed by big sponsors who arrange for their travel, accommodation, gaming peripherals, etc. Following the official recognition, we're optimistic that we'll finally get access to external facilities and benefits that might help us grow further as esports athletes."

And it isn't just players and esports athletes who have high hopes from this update. Regardless of what role they hold, members of the community have been steadily

voicing their excitement about what the future might hold. Sanjida "Littolpotat" Afrin, a professional esports commentator, streamer, and content creator, shared her own aspirations that were born from Bangladesh recognising esports as an official sport.

Sanjida is hopeful that the recognition will also help elevate the standard of the broadcasts of gaming tournaments in the country to the point where commentators like her might get the opportunity to go live on television channels on a big scale, as seen in sports like cricket. "If my commentating skills are appreciated on a national level, I would like to transition into being an esports show host as well someday," she says.

Sanjida also emphasises the impact this recognition will have on putting Bangladesh on the map when it comes to esports. "A lot of gaming companies assume that the South Asian region is just made up of India. So, esports stepping into official territories and receiving government support is the first step for us to be recognised globally," she says.

Speaking on further expectations from the government, Md Rashid Uz Zaman, Chief Operating Officer of Zenetic Esports, shares the importance of building an entire esports ecosystem, and not just a tournament-oriented competitive scene.

"By recognising esports as a sport, Bangladesh has opened doors to pivotal opportunities like esports education, job opportunities within esports, youth empowerment, and more, all of which are elements required for the base of an esports ecosystem," he shares. "With support from ministry authorities, I think this process to make esports accessible to everyone – not just esports athletes – gets sped up further."

As a long-time fan of everything associated with gaming, all of the recent strides in esports development excite me. Watching pros battle it out in titles like *Valorant*, *EaFC*, and *PUBG* on national television might not be such a far-off dream anymore. But beyond the hype, this move also gives Bangladesh a real shot at building an esports culture from the ground up, and I am all in for that.

*Ayaan immerses himself in dinosaur comics and poorly-written manga. Recommend your least favourite reads at ayaan.shams@gmail.com*

## Boys don't cry but here's why they should

MAHPARA FAATIN

How many times have you told someone, "I'm okay," despite not being okay at all? There's this strange, ever-present societal pressure to always appear fine and to rarely show emotional vulnerability. When someone checks up on us, we're likely to say "I'm good" mostly out of reflex, and also because we're afraid of opening up.

We pretend. We bottle it up. And we move on as if nothing's wrong.

This expectation weighs heavily on men. Women, despite being unfairly labelled as "emotional", can still find refuge in their close female circles. Men, however, get shunned by that same circle along with the rest of the world. The act of shedding a few tears is perceived as shedding off your entire masculinity. It's seen as shameful and as a sign of weakness. Men are forced to always appear calm, collected and strong – even when they're falling apart inside.

At the heart of this stigma lies the same patriarchy that hurts everyone it touches. It forces men to be the head of the family – a pillar that can never be knocked down no matter how many storms come its way. From a young age, we tell boys to "be a man" and that "boys don't cry". They're subtle, sometimes unintentional, but they plant deep roots – teaching boys to associate vulnerability with weakness and silence with strength. Over time, this becomes the unspoken rulebook of masculinity. And somewhere in the process, boys learn not to cry.

They refuse to acknowledge their emotional needs and therefore are much less likely to seek therapy or talk it out with their close ones. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), men are twice as likely to take their own lives compared to women. In the United States, nearly eighty percent of all suicide deaths are male.

On the other hand, research consistently shows that men are far less likely than women to seek help for mental health issues. A 2022 survey by the American Psychological Association found that only thirty percent of men said they would openly talk to someone if they were feeling depressed, compared to over 60 percent of women. These aren't just statistics – they're a reflection of the patriarchy's failure of men.

The idea that masculinity is defined by emotional control isn't just outdated; it's dangerous. Men who bottle up their emotions are more likely to experience higher levels of anger, frustration, and develop dependence on alcohol. This often leads to them having poor relations with their families. In the worst cases, this pain spills out as abuse, violence, or total emotional detachment. This negatively impacts the upbringing of a child who carries that trauma into adulthood, impacting their own future relations.

In a world where emotional expression is increasingly encouraged, where we urge people to speak up, seek help, and prioritise mental health, many men are still trapped behind the mask of stoicism. I think it's time that we as a society stop being averse to the very thing that makes any of us human – emotions.

Recognising that this is a patriarchal issue is the first step in fighting it. We must stop raising boys to associate emotions and seeking help with a sense of inferiority. We need to stop teaching boys to hide their emotions and start teaching them how to validate and acknowledge them at the very least.

Masculinity, thus, needs to be redefined across cultures. We must tell boys that strength can look like self-awareness and tears are not a failure of character but a natural response to pain.

To get there, we need to build environments where men can speak without judgement. This means classrooms, workplaces, and homes where emotional honesty is welcomed – not mocked. It means fathers fostering emotional openness for their sons. It means friends checking in on each other and creating a safe space where men can feel comfortable opening up. Men deserve empathy, and their emotional struggles are just as valid as anyone else's.

When it comes to your emotions, "man up" is not the answer. Because boys do cry. And they absolutely should.

*Mahpara thinks the real sigma move is going to therapy. Tell her she needs some herself at mahparafaatin@gmail.com*



# Does the new Superman movie signal a cultural shift?

Analysing the 2025 film's allegories

SABIL SADAT ZAHIR

A central plot point of 2025's *Superman* movie features the titular hero trying to prevent a war between the fictional countries of Jarhanpur and Boravia, wherein the latter – a US ally – attempts to invade the former nation and occupy a portion of its land. The Boravian military is shown to have advanced weaponry and tanks (supplied by the film's villain, billionaire industrialist Lex Luthor), brutally attacking defenceless villagers in Jarhanpur, including children.

People around the world were quick to compare this conflict with the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Despite writer and director James Gunn's claims that this wasn't a direct analogy of Israel's attack on Palestine, the similarities are undeniable. The writer-director told *The Times* of London, "It's an invasion by a much more powerful country run by a despot into a country that's problematic in terms of its political history, but has totally no defence against the other country. It really is fictional." The statement itself didn't help sway people from this comparison either. Rather, it added fuel to the pro-Palestinian interpretation.

The references scattered throughout the movie – be it the parallels between the fictional Boravian president Vasil Ghurkos and Benjamin Netanyahu, the fact that the US supplied weapons to Boravia, or that the Boravian invasion is an attempt to free Jarhanpur from an "evil regime" – are all too on-the-nose not to be a reference to the Israeli genocide. The film's climax, showing Jarhanpur villagers raising a Superman flag and pleading for his help during the attack by Boravian soldiers, has also been noted by many viewers as visually similar to footage from the 2018 Gaza border protests.

Even Zionists and pro-Israelis have pointed out the similarities between Israel and Boravia, calling it "anti-Semitic" and accusing it of "spreading anti-Israel propaganda", despite no direct mention of Israel in the film itself.



The official Israeli consulate in Los Angeles responded with a Facebook post on July 11th, which featured an AI-generated parody of the film's poster, featuring Israel Defence Forces (IDF) soldiers and the caption "The Real Superheroes." Right-wing Zionist political commentator Ben Shapiro also gave a negative review of the film, where he unironically defended the fictional Boravia as he would Israel.

Even before the movie's release, its pro-immigration themes sparked controversy among the right-wing media in the United States, with Fox News journalists heavily mocking the film as being "Supervoke", including making fun of Superman actor David Corenswet's last name (which is of Jewish origins).

In 1940, *Das Schwarze Korps*, the official newspaper of the SS (Schutzstaffel, or Protection Squads) in Germany, published a similar piece criticising the Superman comic strip by creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, claiming it "poisoned the American youth" and made fun of Jerry Siegel's last name as well.

*Superman* stories have always referenced and challenged real-life geopolitics since the character's inception. In 1946, *The Adventures of Superman* radio show featured a storyline called "Clan of the Fiery Cross", where Superman fought a fictionalised version of the Ku Klux Klan

(KKK). Prior to his work as a consultant on the show, human-rights activist Stetson Kennedy had already infiltrated the KKK. Through his contributions, he was able to expose the group's real practices by incorporating them directly into the show's storyline. This storyline had real ramifications for the hate group, causing a decline in their recruitment and membership numbers.

In fact, Superman has always been an allegory for immigration. After all, he is a refugee from a distant planet. On his very first appearance, he was labelled as a "champion of the oppressed" and fought against abusers and corrupt politicians. Whether by being called "poison for the youth" or "voke", the character has always offended the same particular kind of people.

The pro-immigration and pro-Palestinian themes of the 2025 film are just extensions of the central theme: kindness. It's a story that preaches that all life is sacred and worth preserving, and that anyone can choose to be good. This has always been the theme of *Superman*. To portray this theme in the past, the character had to fight allegories of Nazism and White Supremacy. Now, he is fighting allegories of anti-immigration and Zionism.

Intentional or not, the fact that most

people have thought that the film is pro-Palestinian is a sign of a massive culture shift. This speaks to how culture and the stories we tell can be used as tools for morality when politics and laws are clearly in the wrong. A major Hollywood movie featuring an allegory that people infer to be pro-Palestinian is a hopeful sign of a shift in the way mainstream media portrays this issue.

In fact, previous iterations of *Superman* stories have influenced real-life events. Before the US officially entered World War II, opinions on Nazis in the US and other parts of the world were either positive or neutral. Both before and during the war, comic book characters like Superman and Captain America, as well as films such as *The Great Dictator*, were used as tools against the Nazis. Eventually, the collective public perception of Nazism became synonymous with systematic racial genocide. Similarly, people's responses to the new *Superman* story attest to the influence such storytelling mediums have.

If a message of kindness, one that speaks out against the horrific crimes committed in the real world, can be spread through the media we consume, then there is reason to be hopeful. Superman may not be real. But kindness is.

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