

A GUIDE FOR GEN Z FOUNDERS

Navigating Bangladesh's unfriendly, orthodox startup ecosystem

NOMROTA SARKER

Gen Z founders are building companies in an age of abundance - information at their fingertips, communities a click away, and a 'second brain' in their pockets. Rejection rarely paralyses this generation. They process it quickly and move on, drawing perspectives from Reddit threads, ChatGPT exchanges, and peer networks that stretch across borders.

In Bangladesh, though, promise collides with a different set of frictions. Many Gen Z founders carry more self-awareness than spatial awareness; they can read a room emotionally but still misread how power, process, and patience work in this market. Young founders report the same recurring hurdles: difficulty communicating with investors and partners, ideas dismissed as naive, and the reality of operating at seed or early stage, where patience is not a virtue but a requirement.

Bangladesh's startup reality check

By 2025, Bangladesh counts more than 2,500 active startups, a steep rise from roughly a hundred a decade ago. Cumulative funding has crossed US\$1bn, but a disproportionate share has flowed to a handful of large players such as ShopUp and Pathao. The first half of 2025 illustrates the imbalance starkly: startups raised US\$119.9m, a twelvefold jump on the same period in 2024, yet about 92% of that total came from a single merger transaction involving ShopUp and Sary. Early-stage rounds from seed to Series A together amounted to less than US\$10m, underlining how hard it still is for young teams to secure meaningful capital.

Domestic investment has begun to thicken. Bangladeshi investors deployed about Tk190bn in 2024, up from Tk80bn in 2018, reducing (but not closing) the dependence on foreign capital. And there are signals of what is possible for Gen Z-led firms. Consider Sakib Hossain of Fashol, named to Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia 2025, which raised US\$2.2m while working directly with more than 10,000 farmers. The numbers point to an ecosystem growing in breadth, but they also reveal its faultlines: early money remains scarce, mentorship is inconsistent, and governance lapses still derail promising companies.

The Gen Z difference

For decades, Bangladeshi entrepreneurship normalised survival by attrition: stumbling forward, tolerating



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

red tape, adapting to corruption, and absorbing the bruises. Gen Z breaks that trajectory. They are less willing to accept opaque processes or casual corner-cutting as the price of progress, and more inclined to seek clarity, community, and code - whether through public playbooks, open-source tools, or AI copilots. The ecosystem will need to adapt to their energy and standards rather than asking them to conform to an outdated Bangladesh 1.0 playbook.

Housekeeping rules for navigating a changing landscape

Start with documentation. What is not documented cannot be defended if your integrity is questioned. Use AI notetakers such as Fireflies, Read AI, Fathom, or Tactiq to capture virtual meetings faithfully, and for high-stakes, in-person conversations, bring a co-founder or trusted colleague to observe, take notes, and confirm agreements. Protect your integrity in every setting by creating a clear record of what was discussed and decided.

Match your channel to your message. For introductions and professional updates to mentors, partners, and investors, lead with email. It signals professionalism, creates an audit trail,

and makes it easy to forward or file. As relationships progress, polite, occasional follow-ups on WhatsApp are appropriate but keep anything formal on email so that key decisions, obligations, and timelines are captured in one place.

Treat compliance as a shield, not a chore. If you intend to raise investment, register as a private limited company in Bangladesh and keep the basics current: trade licence, certificate of incorporation, memorandum of association, and Form 12. If your company is more than a year old, prepare audited financial statements. These artefacts are not box-ticking for investors; they are armour against future disputes, delays, and doubts about your governance.

Ask questions, even if it feels uncomfortable. Confusion at an early stage is normal. Make a habit of asking direct, respectful questions when you see misalignment - whether with a mentor, an institution, or an investor. Challenge assumptions, request clarifications, and repeat back what you have heard. Growth lives in curiosity; obedience without understanding is how young companies drift into trouble.

For female founders, be precise about what you want and how you want it delivered, and learn to say "no" more

often than "yes". A clear, polite refusal beats a reluctant compromise every time. Build or join a female founder collective so that shared experiences, referrals, and pattern-spotting shorten your path through the maze. The stories, warnings, and playbooks of women who have navigated similar rooms will become your strongest support system. Your voice is the clearest proof of your intent and effort - use it calmly, consistently, and on your terms.

The path ahead

Bangladesh's startup scene is expanding in number but not yet in depth. The capital stack is top-heavy, the mentorship layer is patchy, and the rules of the game are still being contested. Yet Gen Z founders arrive with exactly the instincts the ecosystem needs: transparency, tempo, intolerance for the opaque, and a willingness to learn in public. If enablers and investors adjust to those instincts - and if young teams adopt rigorous documentation, disciplined communication, simple compliance, curious questioning, and principled negotiation - the next decade can look very different from the last. The task is not to quieten the toddler; it is to channel the questions into better companies.

Why soft skills could be your strongest career asset

SHAMS RASHID TONMOY

When we talk about preparing for the world of work, it's easy to picture a checklist of technical abilities. Coding languages, accounting standards, engineering expertise - the kinds of things you can write on a CV and neatly demonstrate in a test. But new research suggests that what really matters for long-term success may not be these job-specific skills at all. Instead, it's the more flexible, often overlooked abilities - the so-called 'soft skills' that help people adapt, grow, and thrive in a rapidly changing workplace.

A recent article in Harvard Business Review aptly titled 'Soft skills matter now more than ever' argues that skills like collaboration, adaptability, problem-solving, and even basic mathematical reasoning are more predictive of career success than the highly specialised expertise people often chase. The article, based on a recent study published in Nature, titled 'Skill dependencies uncover nested human capital', takes an even closer look at the structure of skills themselves. Analysing a vast dataset of over 1,000 occupations and hundreds of skills, including 70 million career moves, the researchers found that most advanced technical skills actually rest on a bedrock of broader, more general abilities. In other words, the more solid your foundations are, the higher you can build.

This 'nested skill structure', as the study calls it, explains a lot about how careers unfold. People who focus too narrowly on niche skills may find themselves stuck when industries evolve, technologies shift, or entire jobs disappear. On the other hand, those who invest in developing adaptable, general strengths - such as communication, teamwork, or analytical thinking - can more easily pick up new expertise and move into fresh opportunities.

Think about it like learning a language. If you have a strong grounding in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence

structure, it becomes much easier to pick up new expressions or even another language altogether. Without that foundation, every new phrase is a struggle. Work is similar. Someone who knows how to collaborate effectively, ask good questions, or think critically can plug those abilities into different industries, tools, and contexts.

The shift matters because workplaces are changing faster than ever. Generative AI, for example, is already reshaping whole industries, taking over routine tasks while creating new opportunities

in the HBR article notes, when Google looked into what made its best managers effective, technical brilliance wasn't at the top of the list - it was skills like coaching, listening, and supporting team development.

Of course, technical skills still matter. Nobody would want to board a plane flown by a pilot who only knows how to "collaborate well" but has never mastered flight controls. The point isn't that expertise is irrelevant, but that it's fragile without a solid foundation underneath. Specialised knowledge is what gets you

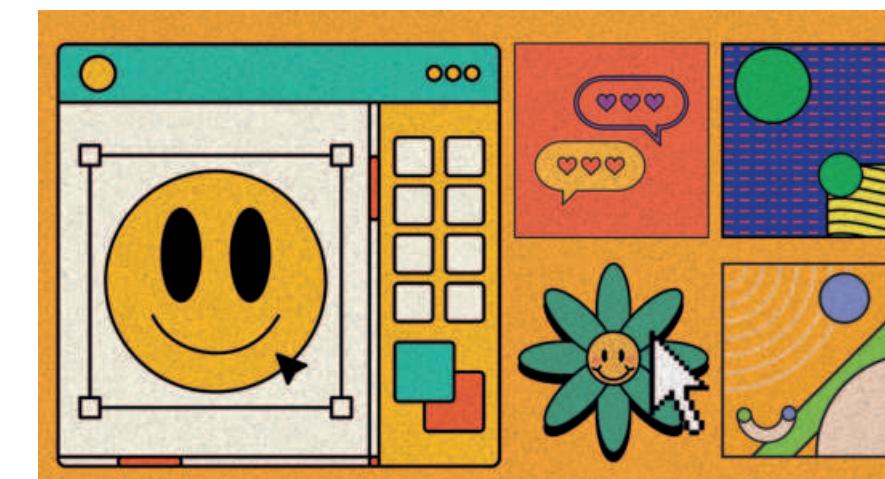


ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

that didn't exist a few years ago. Jobs that once seemed safe can suddenly vanish, and careers are no longer the steady, linear journeys they were for earlier generations.

Employers increasingly value people who can adapt and learn on the go - qualities rooted in soft skills rather than a single hard-earned certificate.

It's not just individuals who benefit. Companies, too, are recognising that their long-term success depends on building teams with strong foundational strengths. A workforce that can communicate, share knowledge, and adapt together is better positioned to weather technological change or shifts in the market. As one of the examples

started in a role; foundational skills are what carry you forward when the role itself changes.

Another important insight from the Nature study is how inequalities can play out in the labour market. Because general and foundational skills open the door to so many opportunities, people without strong access to them often end up trapped in narrower roles with fewer prospects for growth. Over time, this contributes to wage gaps and stalled careers, especially for underrepresented groups. For young professionals, this is a reminder that building flexible strengths isn't just smart for career growth - it's also part of what levels the playing field in a competitive job market.

NEXT STEP

JOBS SPOTLIGHT

SAJIDA Foundation

Coordinator, Data Specialist/ Data Analytics

Deadline: September 7



Eligibility:

• B.Sc.in Computer Science & Engineering (CSE) or Graduation in MIS.

Minimum experience: 3 years

Radiant Pharmaceuticals Limited

Brand Manager

Deadline: September 6



Eligibility:

• M. Pharm degree from a recognised university, with prior experience in similar marketing roles within a reputable pharmaceutical manufacturing company.

Minimum experience: 3 years

United Commercial Bank PLC

Audit Officer

Deadline: September 10



Eligibility:

• Master's/Bachelor's degree in Accounting, Finance, Business Administration, or a related field, with experience in Risk Management, Operations, Compliance, or other related business functions.

Minimum experience: 2 years

Damien Foundation

damien foundation

Programme Specialist

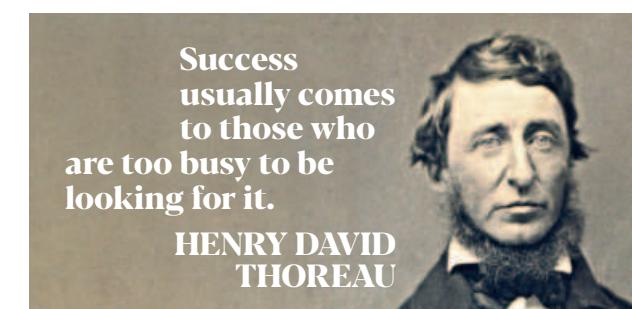
Deadline: September 13

Eligibility:

• MBBS with Master of Public Health (MPH), with prior experience in the Public Health Sector.

Minimum experience: 4 years

FOR MORE DETAILS AND THE APPLICATION LINKS, SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW.



Cisco and Oracle to cut hundreds of jobs

NEXT STEP DESK

US tech companies Cisco and Oracle are set to eliminate hundreds of jobs in the San Francisco Bay Area, according to a San Francisco Chronicle report based on recent state filings.

Cisco will cut 221 positions across its Milpitas and San Francisco offices, including 157 in Santa Clara County and 64 in San Francisco, with layoffs effective October 13. Oracle plans to lay off 101 employees at its Santa Clara location on the same date, says the report.

The job reductions come despite strong financial results for both companies. Cisco reported \$14.7 billion in revenue for the fourth quarter, up 8% from a year earlier, and \$56.7 billion for the full year, while Oracle posted more than \$12 billion in profit in its last fiscal year, further adds the report.

The Chronicle notes that these layoffs follow previous workforce reductions. Cisco cut over 9,000 jobs in two rounds last year, while Oracle recently laid off nearly 200 workers in the Bay Area and more than 160 in Seattle. The latest cuts come as Cisco expands its push into AI infrastructure, which has generated over \$2 billion in orders this year.



PHOTO: REUTERS