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The Next WAVE

PHOTO: SHEIKH SURAIYA REHNUMA
IN FRAME: RAKIN ABSAR, LORA KHAN, SHAHIR CHOWDHURY, ZAHIA KHONDOKER ARONI
SPECIAL THANKS TO RAYANA HOSSAIN, FOUNDER ISHO
SET DESIGN: ISHO FURNITURE

#HEALTH

Why more children are becoming myopic and WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

A growing number of children are struggling to see the whiteboard clearly, even if they can read a book just fine. This isn't a coincidence.

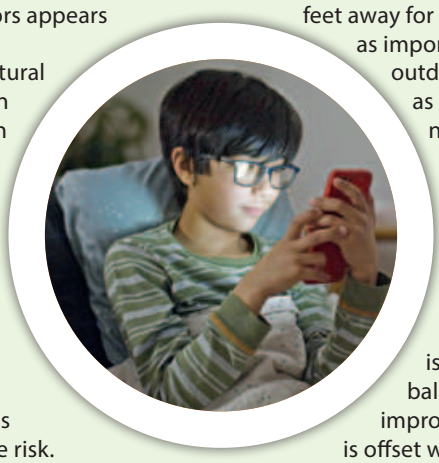
Doctors across the world are reporting a sharp rise in childhood myopia, commonly known as near-sightedness, and recent studies suggest this shift is happening faster than expected.

Myopia usually begins in childhood, often between the ages of six and fourteen. A child with myopia can see nearby objects clearly, but distant ones appear blurry. What concerns experts today isn't just how common the condition has become, but how early it is starting and how quickly it is progressing.

For decades, genetics was considered the primary cause. Children with one or both parents who are near-sighted are indeed at higher risk. But genes alone cannot explain the sudden surge. Researchers now point to environmental changes — particularly how children spend their time — as the main driver.

One of the strongest links is prolonged close-up work. Reading, writing, and especially screen use requires the eyes to focus at a short distance for long periods. A recent study found that each additional hour of daily screen time increases a child's risk of developing myopia. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this problem intensified as children spent months indoors attending online classes, often with little outdoor activity.

Time spent outdoors appears to be one of the most protective factors. Natural daylight plays a role in regulating eye growth during childhood. When children spend more time outside, their eyes are less likely to elongate — the structural change that causes myopia. Even an extra hour outdoors each day has been shown to reduce risk.



This is why myopia is now being described as a lifestyle-related condition, not just a vision problem. Modern childhood has shifted indoors. Homework, entertainment, and socialising increasingly happen on screens. Outdoor play, once a default part of daily life, has become optional.

The concern doesn't stop at needing glasses. High or progressive myopia can increase the risk of serious eye diseases later in life, including retinal detachment, glaucoma, and early-onset cataracts. This makes early detection especially important.

At home, small changes can make a meaningful difference. Encouraging children to take breaks during close-up tasks reduces strain. Many doctors suggest the "20-20-20" rule: every 20 minutes, look at something at least 20 feet away for 20 seconds. Just as important is prioritising outdoor time — not as a reward, but as a necessity for healthy development.

Parents often worry that limiting screen time means limiting learning. Experts argue otherwise. The issue isn't screens alone, but balance. Vision health improves when near work is offset with distance viewing and exposure to daylight.

The rise in childhood myopia is not about blame but about awareness. Children's eyes are still growing, and their environments shape how that growth happens. By recognising the risks early and adjusting daily habits, parents can help protect something their children will rely on for the rest of their lives: clear, healthy vision.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Collected

#DECOR

Inside Bangladesh's changing FURNITURE CULTURE

In many Bangladeshi homes, furniture used to be something you bought once and forgot about. It was expected to last, endure, and quietly fade into the background of daily life. However, that logic is no longer holding. Today, furniture is expected to do more than occupy space. It has to respond to smaller homes, hybrid lifestyles, aesthetic awareness, and a generation that treats interiors as an extension of identity rather than status alone.

This shift, as Shafiqur Rahman, Director at HATIL explains, is reshaping Bangladesh's décor and furniture market from the inside out.

A growing market with sharper intent

The furniture industry in Bangladesh is no longer moving slowly. Rahman sees this expansion as a direct result of rising middle-class incomes and changing lifestyle preferences.

"The mid-to-high-end segment is expanding as customers increasingly value quality, design, and durability," he explains. This is an important distinction. Growth is not being driven by volume alone, but by value. Consumers are spending more time evaluating what they buy and why they buy it.

Apartment living changes everything

One of the most influential forces behind current décor trends is urban living. Apartments are smaller, layouts are tighter, and rooms often serve multiple purposes. This reality has changed how people think about furniture.

"Over the past three to five years, customers have become far more design and quality conscious," Rahman notes. At the same time, there has been a clear rise in demand for modern, space-saving, and multifunctional designs. Furniture now has to work harder.

A bed might also need storage. A sofa might need to turn into a sleeping surface. A table might have to serve as both a workspace and a dining area. These demands are not driven by the trend alone. They are responses to how urban families actually live.

Digital discovery before physical purchase

Another major shift is how people discover furniture. The buying journey often begins online. Social media, brand websites, and digital catalogues shape first impressions long before customers step into showrooms.

Rahman points out that online browsing and social media now play a major role in purchase decisions. Visual storytelling, clear specifications, and transparent pricing matter more than ever. Brands are expected to communicate design philosophy, functionality, and value quickly and convincingly in digital spaces.

This has pushed furniture companies to rethink not only what they sell, but how they present it.

How brands are adapting behind the scenes

To keep pace with these changes, furniture brands are adjusting both design strategy and operations. Rahman explains that HATIL has expanded its product portfolio with modern, space-efficient, and multifunctional designs tailored to contemporary lifestyles.

Behind the scenes, the company has also invested in technology-driven manufacturing to ensure consistency, durability, and superior finishing. This matters because today's consumers notice details. Edges, joints, finishes, and material quality all influence trust.

At the same time, access has become part of the product experience. Digital platforms, flexible payment options, and improved after-sales service are now essential, not optional. Furniture is a long-term relationship, and consumers expect brands to support that relationship well beyond the point of sale.

Minimalism with a practical spine

Minimalism continues to dominate décor conversations, but in Bangladesh, it is rarely about empty rooms or visual austerity. It is about clarity and usefulness. People want furniture that looks calm but works hard.

"HATIL has actively expanded its range of minimalist, contemporary designs, with a strong focus on multifunctional furniture such as sofa-cum-beds, divan-cum-beds, and reading table-cum-bed units," says Rahman.

These designs are not novelty items. They are solutions to spatial pressure. The appeal lies in balance. Customers want maximum utility without sacrificing comfort or aesthetics.

What younger buyers really want

Millennials and Gen Z are not simply following trends. They are redefining expectations. Rahman observes that these younger consumers prefer modern, minimalist designs that reflect personal style and suit compact urban homes.

They also expect a seamless digital experience, from discovery to customisation and after-sales support. For them, furniture brands are not just manufacturers. They are service providers, design partners, and lifestyle collaborators.

This generation is also more willing to ask questions about materials, longevity, and maintenance, even if price still matters.

Where the market is headed

Bangladesh's décor and furniture market is not just growing. It is maturing. Consumers are becoming more intentional. Brands are responding with better design, better service, and better communication.

Furniture is no longer something people buy and forget. It is something they live with, adapt around, and sometimes even build their routines upon. In that sense, the future of décor in Bangladesh is not about filling rooms. It is about shaping everyday life.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Courtesy

#FASHION & BEAUTY

Designer who thinks beyond categories: Inside Lora Khan's world

The story of 6 Yards Story did not begin with a trend forecast or a business blueprint. It began with the rhythmic clatter of handlooms in Sirajganj, heard the moment one steps into the village.

For Lora Khan, owner of 6 Yards Story, that sound was familiar. "For us, that sound means we have reached home," she says. But when she brought her architecture classmates there during a wedding, she realised how differently others perceived it.

"My friends were fascinated," she recalls. "They kept asking what that sound was, how weaving worked, where the sarees came from." What felt ordinary to her carried novelty and value for them.

From village wedding to digital storefront

The turning point came unexpectedly. After the trip, friends who had not gone began asking her to bring sarees for them. "I realised that if five or six people were asking, others might too," Khan says.

She spoke to her mother, who gave her Tk 30,000 as seed money. "She told me to return the capital after selling the sarees."

In late 2013, when online commerce was still uncertain, Khan opened a Facebook page. "A saree is six yards long," she explains. "That's how the name '6 Yards Story' came."

The page began with sarees, photographed casually, modelled by friends. But something else caught people's attention.

When jewellery took over the narrative

"I felt the sarees looked incomplete without jewellery," Khan says. She styled her friends using pieces from her personal collection. The response surprised her. While saree orders came in, most questions were about the jewellery.

Where did it come from? How much did it cost? Could people buy it?

"I've always been very picky," she admits. "I didn't like just any jewellery." Her habit of DIY making came from that dissatisfaction. "If I liked a keyring, I would take it apart and turn it into a necklace locket."

Her architecture education gave her the confidence to design. "Design is design," she says simply. She started with three or four earring designs. "I just made them and posted photos," she recalls. The response was immediate. Jewellery quickly became the core of Six Yards Story. Sarees still exist, but they are no longer the focus. "The pressure of the jewellery business is so high now that we do not even publicise sarees much," she says.

Designing for a global stage

That architectural thinking became widely visible when Khan designed the jewellery worn by Tangia Zaman Methila at Miss Universe 2025.

"Honestly, it was a huge deal for me," Khan says. "I knew it was for a big stage, so I worked very hard on it."

What surprised her was the response. Two years earlier, she had designed jewellery for Methila at Cannes. "This time, I didn't expect a blockbuster response," she says. When one of the breastplate-style pieces went viral, it exceeded all expectations. "Those pieces went viral in a way I never imagined."

A designer without compartments

Lora Khan does not separate jewellery from architecture, or décor from emotion. For her, design is one continuous language. 6 Yards Story is not just a brand built on products, but on perception. It asks how objects sit in space, how they touch the body, and how they shape feeling. That coherence, rather than category, is what defines her work.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Sheikh Suraiya Rehnuma

#PROFILE

More Than a Punchline: Rakin Absar Beyond the Reels

He never planned on becoming an influencer, and that, perhaps, explains why his journey feels so organic in a space obsessed with algorithms, strategy decks, and five-year plans.

"I get anxiety when I plan," Rakin Absar says honestly. "So, I never plan."

For Absar, his lack of rigid planning was not recklessness; it was self-awareness. He knew structure dulled his creativity, while freedom sharpened it. Even when life felt overwhelming, humour remained his anchor. "No matter what stage of life I was in," he says, "I kept going."

That instinct — knowing when to speak, when to pause, when to move — would later become one of his strongest tools. It allowed him to build a body of work that feels lived-in, not manufactured.

The start

Before YouTube and Facebook became the default stages, Absar was already creating content on Vine, experimenting with timing, delivery, and observation. From the beginning, it was about expression; bringing perception with subtlety.

And during difficult personal phases, humour became something deeper than entertainment. "Using my humour, making people laugh online — or even making myself laugh — was a good distraction," he reflects.

Regardless of where life placed him, one belief stayed steady. "I knew in my heart I wasn't meant for the usual," he says. "I was meant to do something different. Good, great, and different."

Finding his people

From the beginning, Absar was clear about one thing: his content wasn't for everyone — and that was intentional. "I always wanted to target people with the same mindset as mine," he points out, "That is, after all, the whole idea of having a target audience."

This clarity wavered briefly during his collaboration phase with Bhai Brothers. Working in a team came with the immense pressure to appeal to the masses, pushing him toward content that did not feel entirely his. It worked, in theory, but not in spirit.

"I realised that this was not my niche," he admits. What followed was a bold decision in an industry that thrives on constant visibility: he stopped. For four years.

During that time, Rakin finished his undergraduate degree and stepped away from the noise. No pressure. No performance. When he returned, he did not rebrand; he realigned.

"I went back to my roots," he says. "The Vine days. The reason I started in the first place."

The making of Gulshan Bhabi

Gulshan Bhabi. We know her, we love her, and we had to know how she came to be!

One of the strongest outcomes of that return was Gulshan Bhabi, a character who now feels inseparable from Rakin's identity online. Inspired by the many women in his life, with "a dash of sass," Gulshan Bhabi also carries the unmistakable "Gulshan effect," a playful nod to the neighbourhood that partially shaped him.

Far from being a random skit, the character was introduced deliberately and slowly. "These are not cameos," Rakin says with conviction. "Each of my characters is here to stay."

And yes, he absolutely expected Gulshan Bhabi to blow up. He understands his audience well — perhaps better than most. Every character arrives with intention, spaced out over years, not rushed for quick applause.

Trolls, fame and perspective

With visibility comes criticism, and Rakin Absar has learned to reframe it. "I used to think trolls bring us down," he admits. "Now I see it differently."

For him, negativity is a marker of relevance. "You have to have haters to know you're famous," he says. "If you walk into a room with only compliments, you wouldn't even notice them. So yes, I would say the trolls and bullies keep us going"

From skits to cinema

Acting was never a surprise detour; it was the destination.

"I always wanted to be an actor," Rakin adds, "and it's a known fact that comedians tap into people's psyche like no other. That's scientifically proven."

Although there had been offers, there were not many that were challenging Rakin in the right way. "I think people expected me to keep doing my thing in movies as well. But that doesn't extend my range," he explains.

Was it a risk to reject scripts? Yes. Did it pay off? Absolutely. This year alone, Rakin has completed two back-to-back projects.

Is the content space too crowded?

When it comes to the influencer landscape in Bangladesh, Rakin is candid and concerned. While he sees massive, unexplored potential for dancers and quality musicians, other sectors feel heavily saturated.

The pressure to monetise through brand collaborations often comes at a cost. "Our craft loses its essence when we compromise our style too much for scripts," he says. Worse, some creators chase controversy, rage, and hate purely for clicks, eroding trust and respect for the community as a whole.

For anyone starting today, his advice is unwavering: originality first, consistency second, and money last.

"You have to have a deep connection to your craft," he says. "Originality comes from creating your own ground. Consistency is not giving up on yourself too fast. Money will follow.

Thoughts on entrepreneurship?

Do we get to see a Gulshan Bhabi merch soon? Or perhaps Rekina's skincare line?

Absar says thinking about it and not thinking about it at the same time. Business, he knows, requires careful weighing of risks and rewards. For now, the focus remains on the craft itself.

Rakin Absar's journey is not loud. He trusted instinct when planning felt like too much, humour when words felt heavy, and silence when noise became overwhelming.

In an ecosystem obsessed with immediacy, Rakin Absar has chosen the long game. And it has kept him visible for the past 16 years. Not because he tried to be everything, but because he knew exactly who he was all along.

By Nusrath Jahan

Photo: Sheikh Suraiya Rehnuma

#COVERSTORY: DECOR

When furniture becomes a language of living

They do not design furniture for a living. Yet, each speaks about furniture and space with the intimacy of someone who understands that how we arrange our surroundings quietly shapes how we think and live. Across professions a shared idea emerges that furniture is not decoration. It is also behaviour, psychology, and intent made physical. Across these stories, furniture emerges not as a product category but as emotional infrastructure. Whether it is a corner that evolves slowly, a studio designed for touch, a serene home that reflects identity, or a workspace built for clarity, furniture becomes a quiet collaborator in daily life. Perhaps, that is its true role. Not to impress, but to serve. Not to dominate, but to hold space for who we are, and who we are trying to become.

LS Desk
Photo: Sheikh Suraiya Rehnuma
Model: Rakin Absar, Lora Khan, Shahir Chowdhury, Zahia Khondoker Aroni
Set Design: ISHO Furniture

Star LIFE Style

Growing into space, not perfecting it

RAKIN ABSAR

Away from the noise of work, Rakin Absar seeks quiet not just emotionally, but spatially. His idea of home is neither finished nor fixed. It leans retro but more importantly, it evolves. Furniture, for him, is something that grows alongside life. Pieces change every few years. Space expands as age, affordability, and priorities shift. There is no urgency to "complete" a home.

What matters instead is progress, the sense that a space reflects who you are becoming rather than who you think you should be. In a city defined by density and chaos, his relationship with furniture is about carving out calm, one thoughtful corner at a time.

Designing for touch, not display

LORA KHAN

For jewellery designer Lora Khan, furniture is inseparable from experience. Her office rejects the conventional idea of a polished corporate space. Brides walk in with their lehengas. They sit, move, touch, and try on jewellery. The furniture is minimalist, restrained, and within reach. Nothing is over-designed. Lighting is natural, because jewellery should look the same inside as it does outside.

At home, her relationship with space shifts entirely. White, lightweight curtains soften the sunlight. If the space where she rests is unsettled, life becomes harder.

Her advice on making a home intimate is not about spending more. It's about understanding light, colour, and emotional response. Furniture supports that psychology and does not overpower it. A room, she believes, should feel like a sanctuary, a place where stress dissolves upon entry.

Décor as self-portrait

ZAHIA KHONDOKER ARONI

Zahia Khondoker Aroni sees no separation between fashion and home décor. Both, she believes, define who you are.

Her preference for contemporary, minimalist interiors mirrors her personal aesthetic. To some, it may appear understated, even boring. To her, it is honest. Furniture here becomes a form of self-portraiture. It empowers by reflecting personality rather than chasing trends. The restraint is intentional. The calm is chosen.

Clarity in structure

SHAHIR CHOWDHURY

Shahir Chowdhury thinks in systems and his relationship with furniture reflects that mindset. He dislikes noise and his workspace is deliberately calm.

He calls it minimalism with warmth. Clean lines, neutral tones, but never sterile. Furniture, like technology, should be present but almost invisible. When it becomes the focus, it usually means the fundamentals are weak.

In the same way he builds educational systems, removing what is unnecessary and strengthening what compounds, he builds his space to support clarity, fairness, and sustained thinking.

#PERSPECTIVE

Democratising learning: Shahir Chowdhury's vision for Bangladeshi education

Bangladesh may not suffer from a lack of ambition, but when it comes to education, it certainly suffers from a lack of arithmetic. Too many students, too few teachers, too little money, and a system stretched thin long before the pandemic exposed its fault lines. Shahir Chowdhury, Founder and CEO of Shikho, doesn't romanticise this reality. He quantifies it.

"We have many young and promising people," he says, "However, nowhere near enough high-quality teachers, classrooms, or learning resources to serve them properly." That gap, predictably, is filled by private tuition. And that is where inequality hardens. Access becomes dependent on income, and outcomes are shaped by geography.

Shikho was not founded to be an app in this ecosystem. It was founded to challenge the equation itself.

"Our mission is to democratise access to high-quality learning, using technology to scale great teaching and ensure that where a child is born does not determine the quality of education they receive," Chowdhury states.

Beyond emergency Zoom classes

If you zoom out from the app and into the ecosystem, you see why Chowdhury's work matters.

Before COVID-19, online education in Bangladesh existed on the margins — supplementary at best, experimental at worst. The pandemic forced a national trial run. Schools closed, and screens replaced classrooms. Sceptical parents had no choice but to observe.

"What many families discovered was that online learning can work, and in some cases work better when it's designed properly," Chowdhury shares.

The caveat matters. He is clear-eyed about the limits of bad digital education. "If online education is reduced to recorded videos or emergency Zoom classes, trust will fade." Sustainability, he argues, depends on whether the country treats digital learning as infrastructure rather than a stopgap.

AI as a companion, not a crutch

Chowdhury's excitement around technology is notably restrained. He is interested in AI, but not as a shortcut or a replacement for teaching.

"What excites me most," he says, "is AI as a learning companion." Specifically, Bengali-first, curriculum-aligned systems that help students understand concepts, identify gaps, and learn from mistakes, especially in classrooms where teachers are overstretched.

"Done responsibly, AI doesn't replace teachers," he adds. "It gives every student personalised support at scale."

In a country where one good teacher often carries the weight of hundreds of students, that distinction matters. For Chowdhury, AI is not about efficiency alone. It is about fairness. About making high-quality feedback, once a privilege, it's now a routine.

How he thinks is how he builds

Spend time with Chowdhury, and a pattern emerges. He dislikes noise, intellectual or visual. His workspace reflects this. "It's deliberately calm and structured," he says. "Clear thinking requires clarity in the environment."

Natural light, few distractions and space for long-form thinking. The design is not aesthetic theatre. It's functional. He moves constantly between strategy and execution, and the room is built to accommodate that oscillation.

Ask him what objects matter most, and the answers are telling. A whiteboard "that's almost always full," where half-formed ideas are allowed to exist without pressure. Books on education, systems, and design — heavily marked up, not displayed. And drawings from his children.

"They're a quiet but constant reminder," he shares, "Of why the work matters beyond growth metrics or scale."

Minimalism with warmth

Chowdhury describes his design philosophy as minimalism with warmth. Clean lines. Neutral tones. Never sterile. It mirrors how he thinks about systems: remove what is unnecessary; strengthen what compounds over time.

"Technology should be present but almost invisible," he asserts. "When tech becomes the focus, it usually means the fundamentals aren't strong enough."

This belief shapes Shikho's evolution. The platform is layered, but not cluttered. Complex, but not confusing. It respects the cognitive load of learners who are already navigating exam pressure, unstable internet, and family expectations.

The quiet stakes

Shikho's ambition is not to replace schools. It is to stabilise learning where schools struggle. To offer consistency where systems fracture.

Chowdhury frames it as a necessity. Bangladesh, he understands, will not fix its education challenges overnight. But it can redesign how knowledge travels, from the city to the village, from privilege to possibility.

And if that sounds understated, it's because he prefers it that way. In a sector crowded with slogans about disruption, Shahir Chowdhury is doing something rarer: building slowly, thinking structurally, and treating education not as content to be delivered, but as a system that must finally work for everyone.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Sheikh Suraiya Rehnuma

#FASHION & BEAUTY

How Zahia Aroni is shaping a smarter fashion retail culture

She grew up around her father and uncles, who owned a garments manufacturing business that produced high-quality international brands of clothing. Through the years, Zahia Khondoker Aroni developed a keen understanding of fashion, quality control, and consumer needs. This background would later serve as a strong foundation for her insightful approach to the fashion landscape, pushing her to create one of the most compelling brands of her time.

Aroni completed her higher education in London, where she further honed her insights into global fashion trends. Later, she returned to Bangladesh with her brother, and was quick to recognise a significant gap in the local market: while Bangladesh was a powerhouse in garment production, its retail scene felt stagnant and disconnected from global influences.

"We have such a vibrant manufacturing sector, but in comparison, the retail was limited, outdated, and generic," Aroni noted. "Local customers were unable to find any of the styles that were being shipped to international brands with so much gusto, and this was disappointing to see."

This disparity between local production capabilities and consumer desires was the fuel behind the start of her own contemporary clothing brand, Strides Co.

What sets Aroni apart is her astute understanding of the global fashion landscape and how it can be integrated into local preferences.

"I firmly believe that consumers in Bangladesh possess a keen sense of style, often seeking out garments that they see global influencers wearing. They are a very aware and style-conscious bunch," she emphasises. "It is sad that such glaring demand from customers was overlooked or deprioritised for so long, whereas Bangladesh has the spending power — the market itself is a multi-billion-dollar industry!"

A new age philosophy

Aroni's vision for the future of fashion in Bangladesh goes beyond solely aesthetics; she envisions an industry where local brands appreciate the tastes and expectations of their clients, and where customers are empowered to not only dictate but shape the retail culture as one that celebrates their dynamic choices.

"We have the potential to create a market that embraces global styles while remaining true to our roots," she asserts.

From the time Aroni first started her venture, she remembers respecting all body shapes and sizes and being thoroughly diligent about it.

"I had a policy," she shares. "I would send three sizes to my online buyers. They could try on the clothes at delivery and choose what fits them best. The delivery man would happily take the two that did not fit as well."

Aroni also prides herself on introducing sizes such as extra small to triple XL to the market. According to her, fashion should inspire, not exclude.

Her acute understanding of the needs of her target market has encouraged Aroni to incorporate into her online store, technology such as the image reverser that allows customers to see clothes on the international fashion landscape that are similar to what is being offered to them here. "My target customers are between 20 and 45 years of age.

Aroni's approach to doing business in contemporary times involves a high commitment to sustainability. Acknowledging the heavy environmental impact of the fashion industry in existing times, she intentionally employs the use of long-lasting fabrics that are both kind to the skin and the environment. Her philosophy revolves around continuous improvement in her packaging, and a dedicated consistency to minimising waste in the form of single-use plastics.

"Sustainability is a journey, not a destination," she remarks, inspiring other entrepreneurs to adopt similar practices in their own ventures.

The young entrepreneur is also passionate about nurturing fresh talent in the fashion industry. By advocating for greater inclusion of aspiring designers, particularly those newly graduating from universities, she seeks to empower a new generation of creatives.

"Collaboration with fresh minds enriches the industry," she states. "As demand for new age products grows, consumers begin expecting fresher designs and top quality. When every business is forced to provide such elevated quality, the entire market benefits."

On the horizon

As she looks towards the future, Aroni aims to create a broader platform that incorporates a variety of timeless essentials, ensuring that consumers have access to versatile and stylish options, including ethnic wear, and perhaps, at some point, even shoes!

"At first, I was convinced that I would create an all-encompassing e-commerce store which would have all types of basic clothing available under one virtual 'roof'," shares Aroni. "As my customer base grew bigger, I began to realise that there was an abject need for a brick-and-mortar presence."

Aroni shared that her first store is due to open next month. As per her unique vision, her store would be a one-of-a-kind collaboration with a café. "I don't want fashion to be rushed," she mentioned. "I want my store to be a calm space, where people can try on their clothes, enjoy the retail process over coffee and companionship.

Her insights provide a roadmap for aspiring entrepreneurs. Aroni encourages newcomers to take risks and embrace the learning process, reminding them that no one is ever fully prepared. "Start small and progress organically. The lessons come from doing and being relentless in your efforts," she advises.

By Munira Fidai
Photo: Sheikh Suraiya Rehnuma

#DECOR

Detailed view on Bangladesh's evolving furniture industry

Rayana Hossain on Market Growth, Global Ambitions, and Cultural Craft.

As Bangladesh's furniture industry rapidly evolves into a design-driven, export-ready sector, few voices capture this transformation as clearly as Rayana Hossain, Founder of ISHO.

In this wide-ranging interview, she reflects on the industry's robust growth, shifting consumer preferences, and the rising importance of sustainability, technology, and cultural storytelling in design.

From export potential and policy challenges to the influence of heritage and the future of modular living, Hossain offers a candid and forward-looking perspective on how Bangladeshi furniture can carve out a confident place on the global stage.

How would you describe the current market for furniture in Bangladesh? What trends are you observing among consumers?
Bangladesh's furniture market is now a USD 2.5–3 billion industry growing at roughly 10–12 per cent annually, with a clear shift from import dependence to strong dominance of local brands.

Consumer behaviour has diversified, with older buyers preferring heavier, traditional styles, while younger urban audiences actively seek minimalist, design-led products influenced by global aesthetics.

People increasingly value ergonomics, finishing, and thoughtful design over price alone. The customer journey is omnichannel; digital discovery leads to showroom visits for tactile confirmation, making online presence crucial. There is also rising interest in sustainability and context-driven design that feels rooted in local culture rather than generic international trends.

Overall, the market is maturing fast, driven by aesthetics, lifestyle aspirations, and evolving digital habits.

What do you see as the potential for exporting Bangladeshi furniture? Are there specific markets that you believe would be receptive to our products?
Furniture exports from Bangladesh have grown nearly tenfold in the last decade, about 30 per cent growth. With the right policy support, I believe Bangladesh could follow Vietnam's trajectory in becoming a global furniture hub.

Our competitive manufacturing costs, strong craftsmanship, and growing design maturity give us an edge. One example is our brand Fico, which recently entered the European market and showcased at Milan Design Week, where its finishing quality and design refinement were met with real appreciation and surprise.

In terms of markets, I cannot comment on other companies, but for us, I see strong potential in Europe and also in the USA for minimalist design-led wooden collections.

In your experience, how has the government supported the furniture industry in terms of policies and initiatives? Are there specific programmes that you find beneficial?
High import duties on finished furniture have unintentionally benefited local brands as Chinese imports became less viable; consumers naturally shifted toward Bangladeshi options. However, high import duties on raw materials created a parallel challenge for local manufacturers. This is now being addressed, which is encouraging and shows intent from the government.

The government has been supportive in policy facilitation and engagement, and we value that. But when it comes specifically to exports, the sector still lacks targeted policies and streamlined processes.

For instance, even sending products to a government-funded fair took almost 10

days just to clear the border. If Bangladesh is serious about scaling furniture globally, the next push must be export-centric with testing facilities, easier logistics, and stronger country-level visibility at major international fairs.

The potential is obvious. Now the infrastructure and support mechanisms need to move in step with the ambition.

What additional measures or policy changes would you like to see from the government to facilitate easier exporting of furniture?
To unlock Bangladesh's export potential in furniture, we need export-focused policies modelled on successful examples like Vietnam. This includes bonded warehouses and duty-free raw material imports, similar to incentives available to the RMG sector.

Customs processes must be streamlined through a single-window system with time-bound clearances, supported by simplified HS codes for modular products. We also need local FSC/PEFC-aligned certification

and testing labs to meet EU/US compliance requirements without relying on foreign facilities.

Finally, national branding and presence at major global fairs like Milan, High Point (USA), and Cologne will be key to positioning Bangladesh as a design-forward furniture exporter.

How is your company addressing sustainability in furniture production, and how important do you think this is for the future of the industry?
For us, sustainability is integrated into the way we work. We prioritise circular production, reducing waste through material optimisation and reuse of off-cuts.

Responsible sourcing is central to our process, and as an FSC-certified manufacturer, we work with forestry partners who focus on regeneration and responsible timber practices. We also invest in low-impact materials and finishes such as engineered boards and water-based lacquers, and have introduced solar energy at our factory to reduce our carbon footprint and support cleaner manufacturing.

Sustainability is not optional anymore; global buyers increasingly evaluate suppliers on ESG, and without credible practices, Bangladesh will struggle to participate in higher-value export segments.

Do you believe that the IKEA model of affordable, modular furniture could be successfully adapted to the Bangladeshi market? What challenges would need to be overcome?
The IKEA model will work in Bangladesh, but only with adaptation. It can succeed only if it is rethought for local living habits and cultural preferences. A growing, design-aware middle class and smaller urban apartments make modular, space-saving furniture increasingly relevant. However, challenges remain in DIY acceptance, supply-chain standardisation, import-dependent hardware, and the need for strong delivery and installation support. With contextual design, better logistics, and a service-led approach, a Bangladesh-specific modular model is achievable, and one we are already actively building towards at ISHO.

What are your thoughts on high-profile collaborations, like Gucci partnering with furniture brands? Do you see potential for similar collaborations in Bangladesh, and what could that look like?
There is strong potential for collaborations between furniture and fashion/lifestyle brands in Bangladesh, but it must be contextually priced; ultra high-end luxury collaborations like Gucci may not translate commercially here yet. What willwork are cross-industry partnerships with local fashion, Jamdani, ceramics, and tableware brands to create capsule collections rooted in culture and craft.

There is room for global-local collaborations with international beauty or lifestyle brands operating in the region. These partnerships allow Bangladeshi furniture to become a storytelling medium where design, heritage, and lifestyle meet.

How are local consumers' preferences changing when it comes to design, quality, and functionality in furniture?
Bangladeshi consumers are becoming more design-literate, referencing global aesthetics and expecting cleaner lines, better finishing, and thoughtful detailing.

Preferences are now segmented; older customers lean traditional, while younger buyers prefer modern, compact, modular pieces that suit smaller urban homes. Quality expectations have risen, with customers comparing brands to international standards rather than local carpenters. There's also a growing appreciation for sustainability and storytelling in design, especially when collections reflect culture, craft, and place.

What role do you think technology plays in furniture manufacturing today? Are there any advancements in tools or materials that you find particularly exciting?
Technology is now central to furniture manufacturing, from 3D modelling for rapid prototyping to automation and CNC machining for precision and consistency.

Engineered boards and smart materials reduce waste and improve durability, while AI and robotic arms for spraying and finishing are creating new benchmarks for quality and efficiency.

Digital systems enable vertically integrated, data-driven operations across inventory, production, and routing. We are exploring smart integrations like wireless charging, solar elements and low-energy components that sit discreetly within minimal forms.

New sustainable materials and finishes that combine performance with aesthetics are particularly exciting for the future.

How do cultural aspects of Bangladesh influence your designs and production processes? Are there specific traditional elements that you incorporate into modern furniture?

Culture is a foundation of how we design at ISHO. I have always believed in drawing from the past to create continuity and nostalgia, while pushing forward with modernity and innovation. This thinking shapes our culturally rooted collections: *Sonargaon* reinterprets heritage arches and motifs into contemporary forms using local woods, *Ratargul* reflects Sylhet's swamp forests through rattan and organic textures, and Jamdani-inspired patterns appear subtly in surfaces, weaves, and detailing in our latest lamp collection.

While not every collection is traditional, the ones that are draw meaningfully from history, craft, material memory, and place. We prioritise locally sourced materials finished to global standards, ensuring tradition meets refinement rather than feeling antique or heavy. When culture informs our work, it is intentional and interpreted in a modern way, honouring heritage without being restricted by it.

What are the biggest challenges you face as a furniture maker in Bangladesh, especially in terms of competition and market accessibility?

The challenges are layered. Raw material and component dependence remains a major hurdle, as we still import hardware, metal parts, and certain boards; local alternatives exist, but they are not always cost-competitive.

The policy and export environment also needs strengthening: bonded warehouses, export incentives, testing facilities and faster customs processes are crucial if Bangladesh is to become a furniture-exporting nation.

On the talent side, the skills pipeline is not where it needs to be. With automation and design innovation growing, we need more trained designers, engineers, technicians and operators, which is why we invest heavily in internal training.

Competition is intense because most brands target the same urban audience, and with limited IP protection, designs are often replicated, and talent is frequently poached, leading to a race to the bottom rather than innovation. All these are solvable problems, but they require collective effort; stronger policy alignment, investment in people, and a shared commitment to originality and quality if we want to elevate the industry globally.

What is your vision for the future of your company and the furniture industry in Bangladesh over the next five to ten years?

Over the next decade, I want to see Bangladeshi furniture companies and brands — including ours — compete confidently on the global stage, proving that design and quality from Bangladesh can stand beside international names. With stronger policy support, better infrastructure, and a continued focus on design, sustainability, and technology, we have the potential to transform the industry from a low-cost manufacturing perception to a recognised global design voice.

— LS Desk
Photo: Courtesy

HOROSCOPE

ARIES
(MAR. 21-APR. 20)

You should be able to get things done. You may have difficulties while travelling. Keep an eye on your weight. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

TAURUS
(APR. 21-MAY 21)

Your charm will attract someone special. Spend time getting to know each other. Strengthen your position among your peers. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.

GEMINI
(MAY 22-JUN. 21)

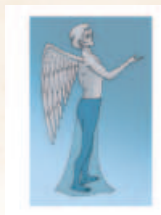
Take care of any pending paperwork. Keep your opinions to yourself. Your unique way of doing things will be noticed at work. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

CANCER
(JUN. 22-JUL. 22)

Get into self-awareness groups. Home improvement projects will go well if you delegate the work. Keep your own family in consideration. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

LEO
(JUL. 23-AUG. 22)

Get involved in jobs that require creative input. You can win points with both peers and superiors. Take time to find out if anyone has a better suggestion before you make arrangements for the whole family. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.



VIRGO
(AUG. 23-SEP. 23)

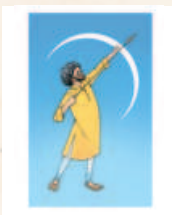
Do not lend money to friends. Chances to express your ideas and beliefs can bring popularity. Be careful while travelling. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.

LIBRA
(SEP. 24-OCT. 23)

You will get into shape at the same time. Say what you feel. Opportunities to meet new lovers will come through social events. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.

SCORPIO
(OCT. 24-NOV. 21)

Your changing philosophies can lead you into new circles. Get help to finish a project. Opportunities to get ahead will be evident. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.



SAGITTARIUS
(NOV. 22-DEC. 21)

Friends from your past may come back into your life. Don't spend too much on luxuries. Avoid letting your personal dilemmas interfere with your goals. Your lucky day this week will be Friday.

CAPRICORN
(DEC. 22-JAN. 20)

Get on with business. Social evenings will be highly successful. Your sensitive nature will capture the heart of anyone you are attracted to. Your lucky day this week will be Thursday.

AQUARIUS
(JAN. 21-FEB. 19)

Don't get involved in petty arguments. Travel should be on your agenda. Children may not be as accepting. Your lucky day this week will be Saturday.

PISCES
(FEB. 20-MAR. 20)

Your problem-solving abilities will be appreciated. Be ready to take action. Stay away from situations that could jeopardise your reputation. Your lucky day this week will be Sunday.

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#LIFEHACKS

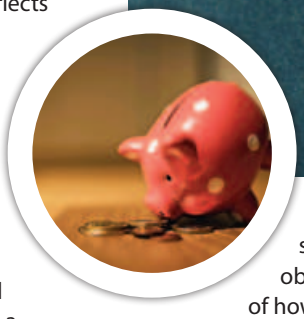
Save smarter in 2026 with these simple money management rules

In the era of aesthetic café hopping, impulsive purchases, picking up new hobbies, and one-tap checkouts, financial discipline has become a lost art. As we step into 2026, this year's resolution should not be about earning more but spending smarter in better ways. Being in control and well-informed about money management is an essential part of our lives.

Create a monthly budget for every single month

Financial discipline always starts with a realistic monthly budget. Dividing income with intention instead of meaningless promises about "saving more". Start a month with a practical plan that reflects your lifestyle and goals perfectly.

Allocate specific categories like food, transportation, utilities, and hobbies. Set a clear expense for home-cooked food, set a limit on food delivery, and be aware of how much you are spending on dining out at weekends with your friends and family.



To make these plans work in real life, awareness is also crucial. Install a reliable tracking app such as TakaTracker, Money Manager, or Daily Expense Manager to monitor the daily and monthly expenses.

Ultimately, the goal should not be to be obsessed but to stay aware of how much money you are spending daily.

Open a dedicated savings account

A dedicated savings account should not be an afterthought. Opening a savings account only for savings, and it should be treated as a sacred thing to do every month. DPS (Deposit Pension Scheme) is one of the safest discipline-building tools. Once opened, a fixed amount is automatically deposited every month.

There are no excuses or "next month I will save more" promises. It is ideal for people who always struggle with consistency in saving money. Even the modest account with a DPS shapes a habit and slowly creates financial confidence for future goals like higher education, starting a business, travel goals, or emergencies.

Gold and stocks

Modern finance has evolved, but gold remains the ultimate hedge, offering protection against inflation.

You may start small, perhaps by purchasing a piece of gold jewellery from your income. It remains a reliable investment, as gold prices have shown long-term growth, while keeping it as an asset.

Investing in the stock exchange should always start with proper research on market trends and a clear understanding of risks. In fact, observing or learning about the market first can be just as valuable as actual investing.

Let's step into 2026, being more responsible and redefining what it means to live in peace, not just in sunny ones but also prepared for rainy days.

By Faria Nowshin Tazin
Photo: Collected

#FOOD & RECIPES

Simple barbecue tips for cosy winter evenings

As the wintry chill gradually seeps through the cracks of doors and windows, and the temperature drops to almost single digits, it is time to turn on the heat with barbecue on rooftops. However, not everyone has the right keys to unlock real barbecue flavours. Hence, we bring about some time-tested tips and tricks to make your winter evenings full of warmth, fun, and memories. We delve deeper into the lesser-known facts to make our barbecues more effective and mouth-watering.

Temperature regulation

One of the most crucial techniques, but mostly neglected, is the temperature management of raw ingredients before grilling. When meat, chicken or beef is stored in refrigerators, especially in winter months, it gets colder than the grill surface, and hence placing the cold meat directly on the grill can result in uneven cooking; the exterior may burn while the interior remains undercooked.

The host should allow meat to rest at room temperature for at least half an hour before grilling, which will help to achieve uniform doneness and reduce moisture loss during cooking.

To prevent this situation from arising, charcoal must be stored in airtight containers and preheated thoroughly until it develops a grey ash coating. This will provide stable heat and prevent bitter flavours from smoke caused by incomplete combustion.

Marination techniques

Many of us use citric acid from lemon juice or even vinegar for extended marination, unaware that it can damage meat fibres. Hence, a more effective method used by many professional chefs is "two-stage marination."

First, they apply salt to the meat and allow it to rest briefly so that the salt absorbs the moisture evenly. Acidic components should be added when the meat is about to be placed on the grill, as this prevents texture while ensuring flavour is well-penetrated.

Preparing the grill

Treating the grill surface with the right treatment is also important. Many people fail to oil the grill appropriately, leading to adding flames beneath. Instead of oiling up the grill, the meat should be cooked properly. A light brush-over the meat or the vegetables with oil ensures even contact and prevents sticking without causing unnecessary flames, which are then harder to control in winter winds.

Many people who make barbecue at home often have an open-lid stove, which can be another barrier to making juicy barbecue. If the lid is open for too long, there will be rapid heat loss in cold air, leading to longer than usual cooking time and also producing drier food.

BBQ mistakes

Wood smoke is often misused in home barbecuing. Adding dry wood chips directly to the fire produces sharp, unpleasant smoke. A better technique is controlled smoking, where wood chips are lightly soaked and added sparingly once the fire stabilises. This produces clean smoke that enhances flavour without overpowering the food. In winter, excessive smoke can cling to food more easily due to slower airflow, making moderation essential.

By Sana Nawab
Photo: Collected