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ANNIVERSARY
SUPPLEMENTS 2026
SEGMENT 2

DHAKA SUNDAY JANUARY 18, 2026,
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OUR INDOMITABLE SPIRIT

For obvious reasons, “rising from the ashes” is always considered a grand transformation, but in reality, it is rarely as dramatic. However, there is something incredible about it. Something quietly miraculous about the proverbial “morning after a storm”. For it is in ordinary, everyday moments that we are reminded how instinctively we start life over again.

Resilience is a way of life. It is seen in people who face the worst of situations but take on the solemn promise to rearrange their lives after sudden changes. We see it in small businesses, who jumpstarts with the belief that things will be good again. And we observe it in artists who continue to create despite all the uncertainties that befall in life.

It goes without saying that true renewal often begins with hope. And keeping up with that spirit of living, this segment of The Daily Star’s Anniversary Supplement 2026 shares stories of optimism. We explore Nakshi Kantha and Jamdani and how designers and entrepreneurs are reimagining two of Bangladesh’s most iconic textiles. We step into the business of shoemaking and examine how natural dyes are reshaping the way we design and produce.

Our focus then turns to food, honouring traditional cooking practices while also addressing what happens when nutrition goes wrong, and obesity becomes a growing concern. We share inspiring stories of women breaking barriers in banking, and take a closer look at the real estate sector.

As this is an election year, we give space to NRB voices on the changes they hope to see in Bangladesh. We also introduce our readers to emerging talents in unconventional sports and the promising world of student entrepreneurship.

We hope you like our selection of stories.

In every aspect of life, from what we wear to what we consume and how we lead our lives, we are constantly reminded that ashes do not define us. It is what grows from them that does.

Mahfuz Anam,
Editor & Publisher,
The Daily Star

JAMDANI AND NAKSHI KANTHA enter global conversations through design

At first glance, you may feel like looking at a thrifted jacket or a misfit patchwork dress. Once you look closely, you will see the stitches do not repeat. Instead, the embroidery breaks the pattern. Although the threads are uneven and frayed, they all hold together. This is Nakshi Kantha, but reimagined! On the other end of the spectrum, you might find a crisp, translucent kurta made of fabric so light it almost blends into the air. If the motifs look like tiny flowers or water droplets, you are most probably looking at Jamdani, worn as an everyday casual outfit.

These are not merely nostalgic revivals, but active reinterpretations of Bangladesh's textile heritage. They are not only making their way into contemporary wardrobes but also global conversations.

A past that refuses to stay in the past

Traditionally, a form of hand-embroidered quilt made from old sarees and sometimes lungis, Nakshi Kantha was once a quiet craft mindfully employed by rural women. The art of kantha stitching was and is still deeply personal — embellished with birds, vines, boats, and scenes of everyday life.

Samaha Subah, founder of the experimental label SIZ, is bringing the kantha out of the homes and into the wardrobes and for her, Nakshi Kantha functions as a canvas.

"For me, it's like painting. Through this craft, you can explore your own imagination. You can choose what you want to illustrate — florals, patterns, or even something like a dragon," she says.

For generations, Nakshi Kantha has been a domestic, traditional textile, stitched from old clothes, made into a quilt, and embroidered with intricate motifs. However, today, the same stitchwork is being translated into streetwear, handbags, and even jackets. And it is being done by none other than our very own Bangladeshi designers like Samaha Subah.

In slight contrast, Jamdani, woven in and around Dhaka for centuries, has become internationally prized. The weaving of Jamdani is a very laborious job, with supplementary threads added by hand to create motifs that float within the cloth. And for a long time, it has been considered too exquisite for everyday use.

This, however, is no longer the case.

Presently, many young and conscious designers are attempting to redesign it, not for the sake of modernisation but to make it in vogue again. One of them is Farhana Munmun, founder of Bene Bou. Growing up in Demra, the heartland of Jamdani weaving, she remembers looms as a phenomenon that was a part of everyday life.

"While I was working, my colleagues would ask me to bring



Bangladeshi textiles like Nakshi Kantha and Jamdani are being actively reimagined by young designers, transforming traditional embroidery and weaving into contemporary fashion, lifestyle items, and wearable art.

Jamdani for them. That's how it started," she recalls. At first, Munmun worked only with sarees, sourcing directly from weavers she met by visiting haats at dawn. She soon realised that Jamdani's biggest obstacle was not design, but wearability.

Her customers abroad could not wear sarees in cold climates. Many wanted Jamdani clothing that was washable and practical. This is how she started to diversify, and now, Munmun is designing jackets, coatees, kurtis and long vests.

She argues, "If we want to save Jamdani, we must diversify it. People should be able to wear it in their everyday lives."

Due to rapid industrialisation, both crafts are facing decline and mostly remain reserved for festivities. Therefore, reinvention has become a necessity, as it addresses an urgent question: how to survive in a world that has a faster consumption rate and cheaper alternatives.

Reworking the loom

For decades, Nakshi Kantha and Jamdani have been labelled as "heritage," a word that often traps these textiles in museum-like reverence. It is high time they should be pulled firmly back into the present by being reconfigured as contemporary fashion, lifestyle objects, and cultural statements.

Subah is capturing this reconfiguration boldly. Her latest collection features a dragon motif, stitched entirely by hand, that crawls across the back of a jacket — a design familiar yet unexpected and unmistakably contemporary.

SEE PAGE 4



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Jamdani and Nakshi Kantha enter global conversations through design

FROM PAGE 2

"I feel fascinated by Nakshi Kantha's adaptability, you know, not just stylistically but structurally. I like to intentionally keep my designs mismatched because I want my pieces to look like the fabric had been cut directly from old kanthas," she explains.

Subah wants to challenge the mass-market expectation of perfect symmetry. This is why one may find variation in thread tension or the small shifts in motif placement in her collection. This, she explains, is not a flaw, but the signature of authenticity.

"You see, the pieces in my collection are not made by machines. Real artisans make them, so naturally, there will be certain differences. And that's the beauty of it, which I am very proud of," she remarks.

Designers like Samaha Subah use Nakshi Kantha's uneven, hand-stitched patterns to create authentic, mismatched pieces, while Farhana Munmun adapts Jamdani for durability, washability, and everyday wear beyond sarees.

While Nakshi Kantha is being translated through stitch, Munmun is trying to reinterpret Jamdani through structure. "My clients used to complain: 'Jamdani frays, Jamdani can't be washed. If only there was something more practical!' And so, I switched looms and experimented," she shares.

In an attempt to get a more practical output, Munmun worked with slightly thicker thread counts – still handwoven and rooted in tradition, but washable and more durable. And then she broke the rule and moved Jamdani beyond the saree.

Today, her collections are being sought after by Bangladeshi and international customers alike. And perhaps most remarkably, Munmun's most impactful contribution is in upcycling.

She explains, "I collect worn-out Jamdani sarees that people would otherwise throw away. The parts where motifs are intact, I turn them into wall frames, jewellery, hairbands, even shoes."

SEE PAGE 6



Un matched LOCATION

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Hair: Nayon
Location: Zinda Park

Jamdani and Nakshi Kantha enter global conversations through design

FROM PAGE 4
In her hands, Jamdani has now become a resource, turning into a memory bank with infinite second lives.
Both of the designers are aware of these textiles' luxury appeal. However, they are determined not to treat them as something untouchable but as a wearable statement; something that belongs in offices, universities, and social gatherings. In this way, both Jamdani and Nakshi Kantha are not being diluted, but they are being redistributed across the aesthetic spectrum.
Can these crafts reach the world?
The answer is yes, but not passively. Munmun shares details about how

foreigners keep returning to her stall at embassy fairs. "I have had clients who came back two or three times. They find the motifs and other small details very attractive, and this is why they keep recommending Jamdani to others."
She has been selected for an SME Foundation-supported fair in the UK, pending visa confirmation. For her, the one thing missing is not demand but proper infrastructure.
"Now, more than ever, we need a structured channel," she says plainly. "Buyer-seller meetings, international fairs, platforms where we know whom to approach and what global markets need."

According to her, without systematic export channels, especially those areas, artisans living in remote will stay trapped in domestic volatility. Simply put, without cultural positioning, Jamdani and Nakshi Kantha will remain beautiful heritage products, but can never be globally competitive.

Both Subah and Munmun are clear about one fact: the path forward demands a thoughtful collaboration between local designers, weavers, and international platforms.
Nevertheless, on the brighter side, both Jamdani and Nakshi Kantha are transitioning from household objects and ceremonial gifts to evolving design languages that can move fluidly between climates and generations. And this reminds us that heritage survives when it learns to speak the language of the present.
By Ayman Anika

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LEATHER AND FOOTWEAR

The next big export frontier for Bangladesh

When Bangladesh's export story is mentioned, garments usually dominate the headline. Yet beneath that louder narrative, another sector has been steadily gaining international attention. The leather and footwear industry, once known mainly for exporting raw hide, is now quietly positioning itself as one of Bangladesh's most promising export frontiers. Industry insiders say the shift is real, and it is evident in the stories of those who left comfortable lives abroad to return and build something from scratch.

As of 2025, the industry is ranked among the top global players. Bangladesh is the 18th largest exporter in the global footwear market. Last fiscal year (FY2024-25) saw a surge in footwear exports, and earnings rose more than 34 per cent. Numbers rarely lie. They point to a sector that is waking up properly, not by accident, but because the ingredients are finally starting to align.

However, statistics alone do not capture why this sector feels different now. You understand it better when you hear someone like Sara Hossain speak.

Hossain is the Corporate Director of Craftsman Footwear and Accessories, someone who had every reason to stay in Canada after living there for 18 years. A stable

job, a predictable life, a child settled in school — a routine that worked without friction. Yet, none of it felt like it was building anything. When her father floated the idea of a shoe factory, she hesitated. But took the chance.

She arrived knowing nothing about making shoes. She learnt by walking the factory floor with her father and realising how many hands touch one pair before it reaches a shelf.

"We have no idea how many people are involved in making just a pair of shoes. There is so much that goes into making them comfortable and look good," she says.

Her creativity found a home in this repetitive craft. She also noticed almost immediately that Bangladeshis are incredibly trend-sensitive. Yet, the local shelves still look the same. Designing for a market that wants variety but has very few people producing it felt like a chance worth fighting for. As she observed, "People follow global trends, but locally we still see the same designs in stores."

That sense of possibility is one of Bangladesh's biggest advantages. Labour costs remain competitive. Raw materials are available at home. Buyers from Europe and North America are already watching because the pricing and quality have improved.



The government recognises the sector as a priority for investment under the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA) and has created incentives to support it.

Still, the road is anything but smooth. There are deep challenges the country must acknowledge. Many tanneries and leather units operate far below capacity.

SEE PAGE 9



Md Saddam Hossain, Quality Assurance Officer, Craftsman

Beyond garments, Bangladesh's leather and footwear industry is emerging as a strong export sector, ranking 18th globally, with footwear exports rising over 34 per cent in FY2024-25, driven by competitive labour, local raw materials, and growing international interest.

Entrepreneurs are blending creativity with craft, focusing on comfort, quality, and trend-sensitive designs, while balancing manual finishing with partial automation to maintain uniqueness and premium appeal.

Major challenges include low design capacity, skill shortages, reliance on foreign processing, high financing costs, and a credibility gap abroad, as Bangladesh is still associated mainly with raw leather rather than finished luxury products.

Local sourcing covers most needs, but processing and export hurdles—like port delays and buyer expectations for premium quality at low prices—limit scaling, highlighting the need for better infrastructure and supply chain efficiency.

With proper investment, policy support, skill development, and national commitment to value-added production, the sector has the potential to become a major growth driver, leveraging existing labour, resources, and market demand.



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Leather and footwear The next big export frontier for Bangladesh

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The export basket is still too heavy on raw hides and semi-processed products that earn little compared to finished shoes and bags. Countries like China, Vietnam and India capture the markets Bangladesh aims for because they mastered finishing, branding and consistency long ago.

Skill shortages remain a major bottleneck. The number of actual designers is low. Many who claim the title are technicians or hobbyists.

“When I am hiring someone whom I call a designer, he is not actually a designer,” Hossain said. “He is basically a technician or maybe a student out of passion.”

Financing is another hurdle. Entrepreneurs struggle with collateral demands, high interest rates, and banks that treat the sector as high risk. Foreign investment remains far below potential. Buyers abroad still associate Bangladesh with raw leather, not luxury finishing, which creates a credibility gap.

Even when manufacturers want to scale, the supply chain slows them down. Without proper backend finishing capabilities, much of the leather has to be sent to China for processing and then bought back at a higher price. That adds delays and uncertainty.

Local inspection is often impossible when shipments come from abroad, leaving room for inconsistency. “I have to buy my own leather at a higher price after it goes to China and comes back,” Hossain said.

Despite this, people like Sara Hossain

remain in the trade. Their factories employ hundreds. Her reflections on Bangladesh’s chaos are painfully relatable. She does not thrive in it. She developed routines to survive it.

Good shoes, she says, are defined by comfort, quality and proportion. If you forget you are wearing them after a day at the office, then they have done their job. The process is long and meticulous. A single pair takes around two to three hours.

Some things remain proudly manual, such as finishing touches, hand painted areas, and details that machines cannot replicate. Even with machinery, the final eye must be human. In her factory, it is still about 60 per cent manual and 40 per cent automated. “Handmade things have their own finishing, and that’s the uniqueness,” she said.

Hossain believes Bangladesh has not yet formed its own design language but is slowly getting there. She builds collections with trends in mind but adjusts for weather, local habits, and the demographic she is serving. Comfort testing happens in multiple rounds, and she relies on real users to point out issues.

Sourcing remains largely local at around ninety per cent, but limitations in processing force her to rely on other countries for the rest. Exporting is difficult because buyers want premium finishing but do not want to pay a premium price. Logistics issues and port delays add another layer of frustration.



Her vision for the future is simple but ambitious. Sara Hossain wants people to pick up local products and recognise the value without comparing them to foreign brands first. She wants longevity and sustainability to matter.

Under the right conditions with investment, policy support and infrastructure, Bangladesh’s leather and footwear sector can become a major growth driver. It already has the labour, the demand, the raw materials and the ambition. What it needs now is a cleaner system, better financing, improved compliance and a national commitment to value-added production. The foundation is here. The momentum is real. The question now is whether Bangladesh is willing to step fully into a future it has already begun building.

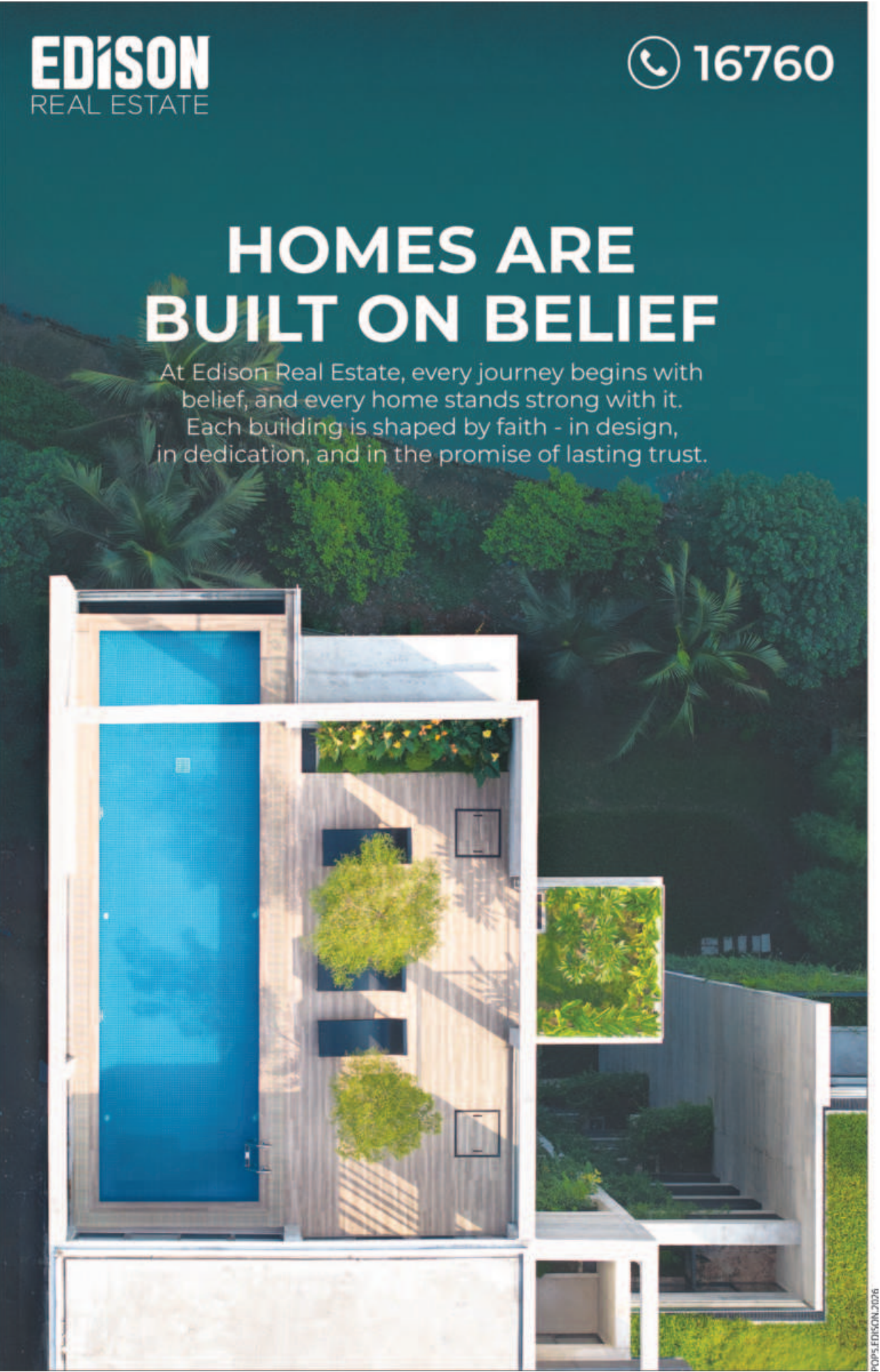
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The lure of natural dyes in sustainable fashion



If there is one buzzword that aptly summarises the initiatives and undertakings of the last few decades, it is sustainability. This is especially important in the textile industry, where water use and the disastrous effects of artificial dyes on water bodies have been perennially criticised. Some manufacturers have turned back full circle, employing the use of natural dyes as an eco-friendly alternative to synthetics.

Why natural dyes are returning to fashion
Derived from plants, fruits, and other natural materials, many of which can be easily found in local markets or even at home, natural dyes do not

involve the use of petrochemicals in their processes and produce far less harmful waste. They do more than just add colours to fabrics; they offer a more sustainable option that significantly reduces the environmental and health impacts associated with chemicals.

In several parts of the world, traditional dyeing practices continue to be a crucial part of cultural heritage, with skilled artisans producing dyes on a small scale, preserving age-old techniques and supporting local economies. The process of creating these dyes is often cost-effective, as many sources, such as marigold, olive, and pomegranate peels, are everyday items that are both affordable and accessible to the community.

"We cultivate our own indigo in environmentally safe areas, such as alongside roads and embankments, to create sustainable dyes," reveals Nazra Sabet, Chief Executive Officer of



Friendship Colours of the Chars. The social purpose organisation also has a strong sourcing team that brings in items such as catechu, pomegranate peels, and olives to make into colourants.

Many of these natural dyes possess additional beneficial properties. For instance, certain dyes, like Acacia catechu (khair/katha) and Rubia cordifolia (madder), are equipped with bacterial and mould-resistant qualities. Others, such as pomegranate peels, are able to inherently repel insects, providing a natural way to enhance the functionality of textile products. Additionally, many natural dyes are effective in deodorising fabrics, thanks to their resistance to odour-causing bacteria.

However, despite their many advantages, natural dyes also present some challenges. Unlike synthetic dyes, which are known for their vibrant and colourfast nature, natural dyes can fade when exposed to sunlight or strong light sources. They often require the use of heat or steam to fix the colour and maintain colourfastness.

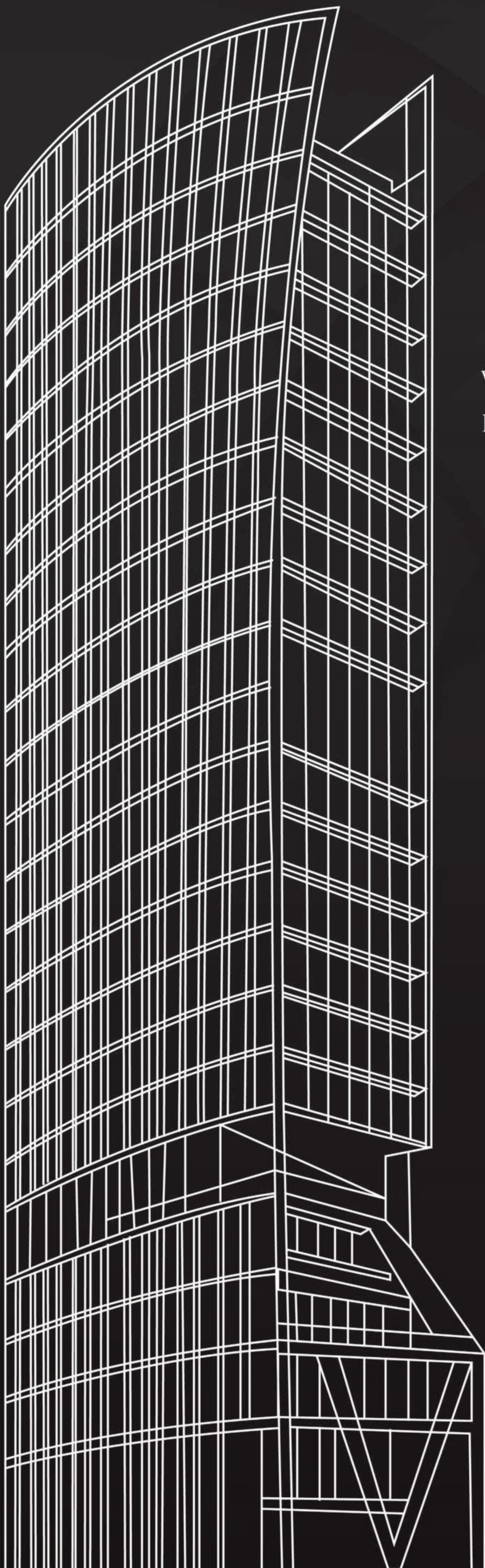
The challenges of colourfastness and consistency
According to Sabet, washing instructions play a big role in holding on to the longevity of these colours. "Proper care, including the use of mild soaps instead of harsh detergents, helps maintain the original colours for a longer period of time," she shares. Achieving certain hues, especially vibrant shades like orange and yellow, may require multiple dyeing sessions.

Natural dyes, derived from plants, fruits, and roots, are re-emerging in the textile industry as eco-friendly alternatives to synthetic dyes. They reduce chemical waste, offer antibacterial and insect-repellent properties, and preserve cultural heritage while supporting local artisans.

Challenges include colour variability, fading under sunlight, and labour-intensive processes, making them less vibrant and harder to scale than synthetic dyes.

Designers and artisans focus on sustainability, slow fashion, and traditional techniques, blending aesthetics with environmentally conscious practices.

Wider adoption requires innovation in extraction, production efficiency, and supply chains, while consumers can support both nature and artisanal livelihoods.



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SHELTECH

The lure of natural dyes in sustainable fashion

FROM PAGE 10

The chemical structure of natural dyes can also lead to variability in colour; this means that the same dye molecule might produce different shades depending on its environment, making it less predictable than synthetic alternatives. Shorder Mohammad Brinto, a designer for Colours of the Char, feels that the weather plays a very important part in the process of sustainable dyes. “In sustainable and natural dyeing, the biggest challenge is nature itself,” he shares. As the designers and dyers work in rural regions, the source of water changes from season to season. “Depending on the time of year, we might dye with river water, pond water, rainwater, or water from deep tubewells.

Naturally, each type of water contains different minerals, and those minerals react differently with natural dyes.” Brinto further shares how weather conditions can affect the process. If the environment is humid or dry, it can change how the colour turns out. “Because we don’t work with computerised, controlled systems, and every step is done by hand, the final result often does not match what we imagined. Whatever the outcome is, every time it brings a new kind of magic.” **Craft, care, and the rise of conscious dyeing** In recent years, the movement toward sustainable fashion has led to renewed interest in natural dyes. Many designers and brands are consciously seeking to incorporate these into their collections,

promoting not only beautiful aesthetics but also ethical production practices. According to Komal Kumar Malakar, a master artisan, the processes for dyeing include crushing raw materials in the machine, boiling them to achieve the desired colour and consistency and then making use of fitkari (alum) or iron to ensure that colours do not bleed. The procedure is simple, uses less water, and does not involve the use of chemicals anywhere. The runoffs, too, are recyclable, supporting the ecosystem overall. Komal Malakar particularly

enjoys working with hortoki, a fruit that produces dark shades of grey and works particularly well on silk sarees, pomegranate peels, manjit (madder, producing a Roman shade of red), shikorae (or shillicorai for purple) and indigo. “All our dyes are derived from fruits, plants, roots and barks found in nature, and these are biodegradable. This is particularly why dyers like me enjoy working with natural products over chemical ones.” He particularly notes the importance

of ingredients such as indigo, which is one of the oldest colourants. Grown by themselves and used extensively in their designs, indigo holds a special significance in producing rich, deep shades of blue, straight from the lap of nature. **Tradition, design, and the limits of scaling sustainably** Industry professionals reveal a growing trend among artisans and designers who are committed to reviving traditional dye techniques while innovating new applications. “When it comes to balancing sustainable dye with aesthetics, we always choose concepts that stay connected to nature or to our heritage

SEE PAGE 13



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The lure of natural dyes in sustainable fashion

FROM PAGE 12
and traditions, like the waves of river water, or Panam City, and translate those details into our designs,” informs Brinto. “We continue to explore concepts where sustainable dye and design aesthetics come together.”
Despite the apparent advantages and visible efforts to increase the reach and acceptance, the harsh reality is that natural dyes are nowhere near as popular as chemical dyes, and with due reason.
“Colours derived from nature are not

always very vibrant,” shares Nazra. “This is why we have a relatively smaller client base, and one that both comes and stays for the ethics behind it.” These colours, according to her, would not attract everyone.
Scalability is another factor affecting the popularity of natural colours. More labour-intensive and costlier than industrial dyes, the process is difficult to produce for the masses and time-consuming too. Many of those, like Nazra Sabet, who work with natural dyes or slow fashion, know that they produce

for a niche market. There are a precious few who would pay a relatively higher price for slow, laborious work, although those who do keep coming back for it.
For natural dyes to become even partially competitive with their more toxic synthetic counterparts, significant innovation is needed, especially in the areas of extraction, processing, and overall production efficiency.
Strengthening the sourcing and supply chain can involve using waste streams from industrial and agricultural sectors, turning what would

otherwise be disposal challenges into valuable raw materials. Regenerative farming practices can further ensure a steady supply of dye plants while improving soil health and avoiding competition with food crops. With these advancements, natural dyes can move closer to becoming a truly scalable and sustainable alternative for the industry.
While it is up to each individual buyer to make informed choices between vibrancy and simplicity, and/or slow handiwork and higher prices versus machine-made strength and

cheaper rates, it is worth knowing that the journey of embracing natural dyes is as much about celebrating nature’s palette as it is about promoting sustainability and the livelihoods of those who keep these traditions alive. By supporting sustainable dyeing practices, consumers can contribute to the preservation of these traditions while also making conscientious and nature-friendly fashion choices.
By Munira Fidai
Photo: Friendship Colours of the Chars



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How the scenarios changed in just one year!

Index	December 2024	December 2025
Net Deposit Growth	4,082 Crore	12,973 Crore
A.D. Ratio	91.30%	83%
New Accounts	4.11 Lakh	6.78 Lakh

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Fusion, identity, and the changing mindset of young designers

To understand the future of Bangladesh's fashion landscape, you need to look beyond the runway first. Why? Because it is in the classrooms, workshops, and cramped studio corners that young designers sit with their threads and needles, fabric scraps, unfinished motifs, and the buzzing uncertainty of ambition. Steadily, the industry is shifting, and a vital driving force behind this shift is the students and fresh graduates who are beginning to think differently about design and heritage.

For these young voices, fashion is not just a decorative pursuit. Fashion, for them, is a medium for the translation of history, personal identity, and modern realities. The real evolution of Bangladeshi fashion can be traced in the stories, frustrations, and small breakthroughs of these young designers.

Motifs as language, not just decoration
“We have shifted our perspective on thematic designs. Previously, we selected a culture or product and built our design around it. Now, we see it as a starting point for a deeper exploration, and dedicate ourselves to researching the motifs within it,” explains Md Imran Hossen, a student at Shanto-Mariam

the motif, understand it, then make it speak. Rather than treating the motif as an add-on, he uses it as the vehicle for meaning.

Umme Jamila, also from SMUCT, approaches motifs similarly, but her focus is more on national symbolism. Her previous themes include 21st February, 16th December, and the water lily.

“National topics interest me more,

or afterthoughts attached at the end of the design process. However, the tide is changing, and young designers like Hossen and Jamila are more focused on researching their origins, studying how it has been used across time, and then reinterpreting it through contemporary methods.

Chowdhury Mysha Mondhon, also

Bangladesh's emerging fashion scene is being shaped by young designers who treat motifs as carriers of history and identity, rather than mere decoration.

Designers are blending heritage with global trends, creating fusion work that respects local culture while appealing internationally.

Sustainability is recognised in principle, but practical implementation remains limited; designers see it as an evolving practice influenced by resources and infrastructure.

Challenges for young designers include financial support, access to materials, and industry guidance, highlighting the need for stronger institutional backing and curriculum adaptation.

The new wave prioritises thoughtful, meaningful design over spectacle, emphasising research, context, and intentional creativity.

University of Creative Technology (SMUCT).

Hossen is part of a generation that has begun to think with a different lens. For him and other young designers, the shift starts at the conceptual stage. While Hossen's design flows between 1940s fashion and village life, at the core, his method stays the same: find

and ultimately, my goal is to present my culture uniquely, perhaps with a digital touch,” she says.

This indicates a departure from earlier trends, where themes used to dominate. A designer would pick a theme, namely “village life,” or “monsoon,” and build a silhouette around that broad category. In many cases, motifs used to be treated as longer ornamental add-ons

a fellow SMUCT graduate, frames her work through cultural signifiers. What interests her are the quieter, less-talked-about expressions, as she points out the almost forgotten art of patachitra.

“I don't see many collections based on it. I want to highlight my culture more, particularly old art forms like

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FOOTWEAR

Fusion, identity, and the changing mindset of young designers

FROM PAGE 14

patachitra that are not talked about often,” she remarks. Therefore, motifs are no longer just a decorative aspect of design; rather, young designers are treating them as a carrier of history and context. Most importantly, by focusing on motifs, designers can engage with design at the micro-level with form, proportion, symbolism, and transformation, rather than relying on motifs as safe and expected cultural markers.

Culture, fusion, and the question of identity



“If you ask me what fusion is, I would say whatever is trending,” answers Jamila, who believes that the next wave in the fashion industry will be dominated by fusion. “It’s very present in our culture now. I think it will be presented even more boldly in the future.” While the distinction between “traditional” and “modern” used to define most fashion conversations, the new generation doesn’t want to stay confined to that argument. For them, it is not just randomly attaching a Western sleeve to a local fabric, but rather, creating work that is legible both locally and globally without losing its roots.

Take, for example, Mondhon, who wants to welcome global trends but not at the expense of local identity. “Above all, I want to uphold my heritage and roots, but I am not afraid to experiment,” she explains.

From the faculty side, Assistant Professor Shohel Anwer Opu at SMUCT sees this negotiation between heritage and global relevance as central to their



teaching. “If our students want to experiment and work internationally, we cannot ignore that. In fact, we welcome them to do so,” he says, adding, “But we cannot distort our heritage.” According to Opu, young designers should be careful so that motifs are placed deliberately, and heritage is not lost. In other words, the task is not to choose between local culture and globality, but to design in a way that makes them coexist.

Sustainability: Buzzword, reality, or something in between?

Ask any of these young designers about sustainability, and they immediately recognise the word. The question is what it means in practice.

Sustainability, for Hossen, can be expressed through temporal recycling. “People are always looking for better fabrics and a certain standard. I aim to design something with thoughtful materials and a strong concept that meets that standard. This, for me, is sustainability because I am creating eye-catching work without mindless excess.”

Mondhon, however, gives a blunter

answer and points out the gap between talk and action.

“Frankly speaking, sustainability is a trendy topic now,” she says. “Everywhere I go, I see people highlighting it. However, I don’t think that when it comes to our country, it is practised that much. In some cases, not at all.”

Jamila encountered sustainability



as an academic topic before she saw it in the market. “We studied it and understood how important it is, not just for fashion but for daily life,” she explains. “Fashion is now re-teaching us about sustainability. It’s a good way to start.”

Her perspective is less cynical. She sees the curriculum as a useful entry point for changing habits over time. Across these viewpoints, sustainability is not completely dismissed. Instead, it is treated as an ongoing negotiation between ideals, budgets, and local infrastructure.

What young designers want from the future

When asked what measures would make the lives of young, aspiring designers easier, Hossen doesn’t want



any shortcuts. Rather, he answers, “I want stronger foundations.”

According to him, the basics at university — clarity on what they are studying, where they are going, and what their goals are must be taught from day one, not at the end.

He argues, “I believe that if our beginning is strong, our ending will certainly be better.” Alongside this, he wants more reliable access to fabric, accessories, and good guidance.

Financial support is the primary concern for both Mondhon and Jamila, who see the fashion industry as a growing and fragmented sector compared to the RMG industry, which is already an established industry. They both suggest that if more institutions back young designers with sponsorships, grants, or infrastructure, the impact will be transformative. Until then, they have to cope with limited resources.

From the institutional side, Shohel Anwer Opu acknowledges that the industry is still relatively young and unevenly structured. His response is to adjust the curriculum, not pretend the problem doesn’t exist.

“I believe that regular revisions,

workshops, and alumni feedback loops are useful for closing gaps between academic training and industry expectations. We are constantly trying to adapt, for example, by the recent inclusion of AI tools,” he elaborates.

What is clear from these viewpoints is that only “wild silhouettes” or “viral collections” alone do not define the new



in the Bangladeshi fashion landscape. It is about the young and inquisitive designers who sit sincerely with difficult questions: How do you honour heritage without distorting it? How do you truly make sustainability a part of your design philosophy? And how do you balance global and local trends?

The answers are not neat yet, but they’re being tested every day, stitched into jute-based national day collections, digitally-inflected water lily motifs, patachitra-inspired garments, and carefully modernised Jamdani.

The new voices of design are still emerging, but their direction is clear: less spectacle, more substance, and intention.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Courtesy

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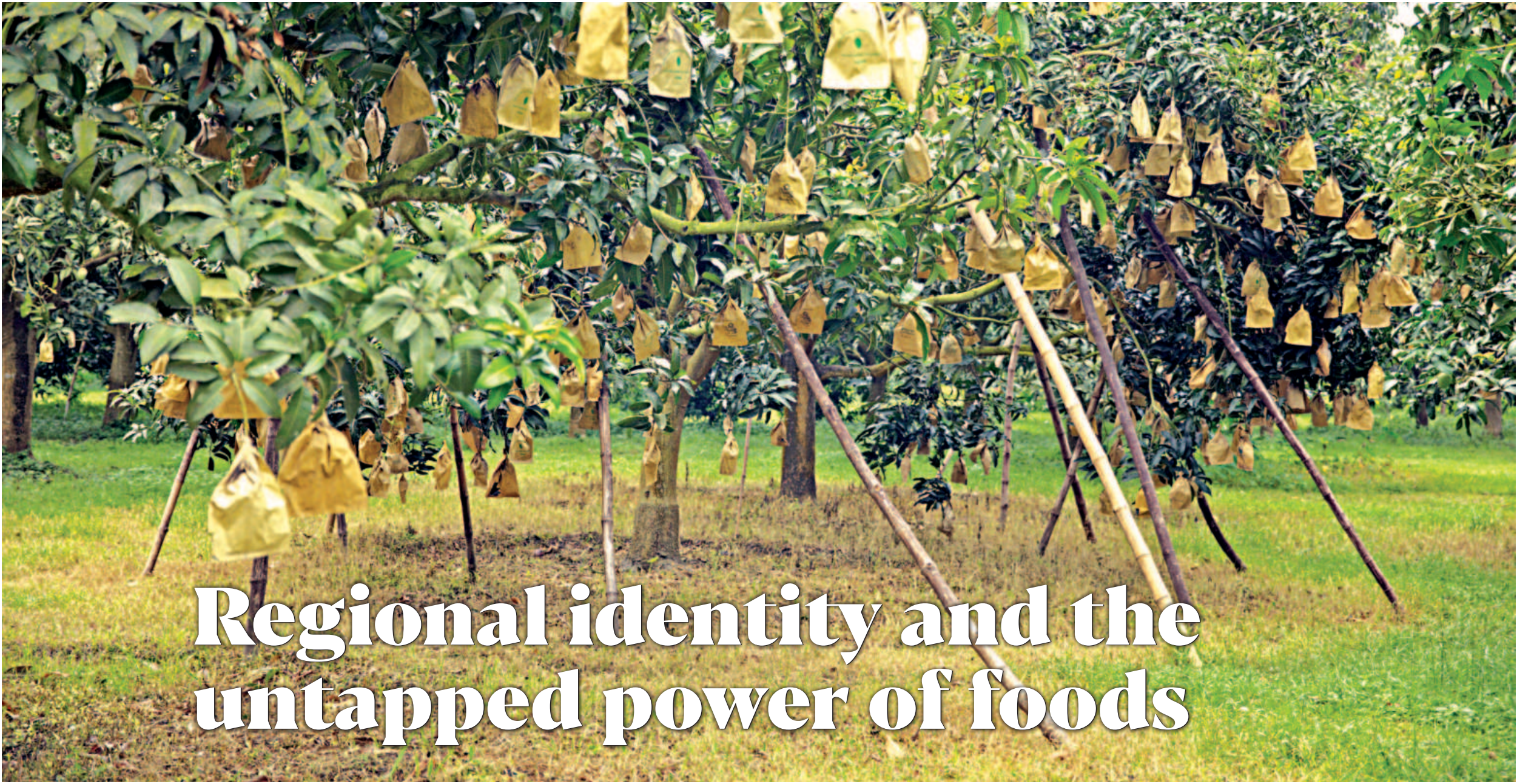
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When food carries the name of the land it comes from, it tells a story of soil, water, people, climate, history, and culture. In Bangladesh, this tale is beginning to take shape through the growing recognition of Geographical Indication (GI) foods, which legally certify the uniqueness of products tied to specific regions or districts. This offers new hope for farmers, fishermen, artisans, moiras (sweet makers), and

local businesses. Yet, the hope is still fragile, slowly shaping itself into a brighter future. Bangladesh's GI products cover a wide range of food traditions, reflecting the cultural pride of each district. From fruits like Chapainawabganj's khirsapat mangoes, Rangpur's haribhanga mangoes or Narsingdi's lotkon, to field treasures such as Dinajpur's kataribhog rice or Sherpur's tulshimala rice, every

item carries the story of local farmers and our seasons. The rivers and coast add their own signature through hilsa and bagda prawn, while sweetmeats such as Bogura's curd, Tangail's Porabari chamcham, or Natore's kachagolla continue to define regional identity. Together, these products show how deeply food is tied to place and our identity.

However, the question arises as to how much of the potential has Bangladesh managed to unlock with these GI tags? What does GI recognition actually mean for the farmers, the fishermen, or the moiras? And how much of that spotlight truly reaches them? Dr Md Salauddin Palash, Professor, Department of Agribusiness and Marketing at Bangladesh Agricultural University, offered perhaps the most

direct assessment: the market has not changed in any noticeable way. "In theory, a GI product should transform a product's economic fate. It should guarantee authenticity, raise value, draw new buyers, and most importantly, open doors to the export market. In practice, the change is slower, quieter, and more complicated," Dr Palash explained.

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Regional identity and the untapped power of foods

FROM PAGE 17

He pointed to the example of Jashore's date molasses, a beloved winter delicacy. Demand for this product is extremely high because of the country's large population, but production cannot keep up. As a result, adulteration sets in. Inferior products reach consumers, harming both public trust and producer reputation. In this chaos, the GI status loses the weight it should carry.

His worry is not about the quality of the real producers, most of whom are still guarding their tradition with responsibility, but about the systems surrounding them.

"Without strong monitoring, quality control, and consumer awareness, the GI products sit beside a market full of impure products, whereas GI status is meant to ensure purity," he shared.

Dr Palash highlighted that good-quality GI products certainly exist, but the people buying them are still a small group, mainly consumers with higher purchasing power who already know what to look for.

"Awareness is too low," he added. "If general shoppers do not understand

online, or carrying it as a gift, its journey expands beyond its regional borders."

According to him, GI products are gradually reaching the middle class, and that alone is a positive sign. Marketing efforts within media are improving slowly, and people from nearby districts are beginning to travel to source regions to taste or buy the products.

For Dr Anwar, the future depends on two practical factors: awareness and availability. Many GI foods, like mangoes, curds, sweets, and fish, are highly perishable. Even if interest grows, buyers from distant districts cannot access the products without reliable cold storage, packaging, and distribution networks. He suggested establishing dedicated GI product chain shops across the country, where every item would come with verified quality and origin: an initiative he believes should be led by the government.

"Imagine walking into a single store where monda from Muktagacha, Sherpur's tulshimala rice or mangoes from Rajshahi division are available under proper branding and authentication. The value would increase instantly," he shared.

He also shared another important



the gaps, particularly in public understanding.

"A large portion of the population still does not know what GI means. Without TV, radio, or social media campaigns at the national level, the concept will remain misunderstood," he explained.

To understand the human side of all this, Babul Chandra Mudok, proprietor of 120-year-old Goyanath Mistanno Bhandar in Netrokona, talked us through the emotions, struggles, and pride tied to their work. His family is the keeper of the district's iconic balish mishuti, which recently received GI recognition.

When asked how he felt the day balish mishuti was granted GI status, Babul's answer was immediate: "Akolponiyo (unimaginable)." The entire district shared the joy. Wherever people from the district live, the news sparked a sense of pride. "It's not just for our shop, it's a recognition for the whole district," he expressed.

Yet, sales have not changed significantly. Babul admitted that customers still buy based on habit, taste, and occasion. He estimates that perhaps only 10 per cent of buyers actually understand GI. Still, he is proud of the legacy and pride of the recognition itself.

According to him, there has been no structured monitoring, no financial support, and no follow-up guidance from authorities. This makes one thing clear: GI brings pride immediately, but economic benefits only come when systems follow.

Stories of experts envisioning systems

and producers holding on to tradition paint a clear picture of what GI foods could become for Bangladesh. The potential is enormous. A GI label creates exclusivity, and exclusivity can elevate price, demand, and export opportunities.

Countries like India, Thailand, or Vietnam have successfully used GI branding as a national economic strategy. Bangladesh can follow a similar path, especially for mangoes, rice varieties, and fish.

Dr Palash mentioned the possibility of canned fruits and fish that would preserve freshness and increase export shelf life, allowing Bangladeshi products to reach global supermarket shelves more effectively.

Beyond economics, GI status safeguards cultural heritage. In a world shifting rapidly toward industrial food production, traditional methods and recipes often fade away. GI provides a protective shield for craftsmanship and regional pride. Without GI recognition, original recipes risk being overshadowed by commercial imitations; with GI recognition, the authenticity of a food becomes legally secured.

GI foods also carry the potential to strengthen rural branding. Every GI product is essentially a story about a district: its people, landscapes, climate, history, and identity. A district known globally for its mangoes, sweets, or rice becomes more than a geographic location; it becomes a brand. This potential can attract tourists, stimulate local business, and deepen community pride.

From discussions with agricultural experts and the sweet shop proprietor, one message was clear: for GI products to progress, awareness, credibility, and access must improve. Public understanding of GI needs to grow through media, campaigns, and education, while strict quality checks are essential to maintain public trust. Improved storage and distribution, along with dedicated GI retail spaces, can ensure verified products reach buyers. International promotion through embassies, trade fairs, and cultural events can open new markets. And, above all, producers require financial and technical support to preserve authenticity while expanding production.

The journey of GI foods in Bangladesh is still in its early chapters. However, something profound has already begun. People are talking about origin, tradition, and authenticity, concepts that were rarely part of mainstream food discussions before. From scholars envisioning structured systems to artisans carrying century-old legacies, every voice signals the same belief: GI foods are not merely products. They embody the taste of the land. The journey is long, but the roots are strong. And in the intersection of land and culture, Bangladesh's GI foods hold a future waiting to be shaped.

By Jawwad Sami Neogi
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

Bangladesh's GI (Geographical Indication) foods protect region-specific products like mangoes, rice, fish, and sweets, preserving cultural identity and offering potential economic benefits for farmers, fishers, and artisans.

Despite GI recognition, real market impact remains limited due to weak monitoring, adulteration, low consumer awareness, and a lack of structured support systems.

Experts stress that branding, awareness, quality control, storage, and distribution are crucial for GI products to gain value, reach wider markets, and enter exports.

Producers feel great pride from GI status, but meaningful income growth will depend on government-led systems, marketing, and international promotion.

what makes a product special, they cannot be expected to value it differently. A GI product does not automatically increase income or reputation. It must be supported by strong systems, effective marketing, and public awareness."

Dr Md Parvez Anwar, Professor, Department of Agronomy at Bangladesh Agricultural University, believes that the core power of GI lies in branding.

"Branding," he explained, "does not generate overnight transformation. But it creates curiosity. And curiosity is what pulls a local speciality into national or even global conversation. Once people start asking about a food, searching for it

perspective about the international market.

"Gaining international popularity is challenging, but far from impossible. Bengali communities live all over the world, creating a natural market for these products if they are promoted properly."

Dr Anwar believes embassies can play a vital role by introducing GI items abroad through cultural events and food festivals that showcase the country's culinary heritage. With the right push, he feels these products can find recognition well beyond Bangladesh's borders.

However, he also acknowledges



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Traditional Bangladeshi food aligns perfectly with modern nutrition science

Even in a world obsessed with fast food and hurried meals, the benefits of the traditional Bangladeshi way of cooking are more relevant than ever. Time and again, we are being reminded that the age-old traditions were more than just a matter of taste. They represent a deeper connection with nature and our Bengali culture.

Selina Parvin, food connoisseur and long-time recipe writer for *Star Lifestyle, The Daily Star*, observes, "Long before 'clean eating' was a global trend, our kitchens were already practising it."

Her words reflect what many of us have felt instinctively: that our inherited food habits carry both emotional and physical nourishment.

Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin, Chief Clinical Dietitian at United Hospital, Dhaka, reinforces this belief: "Traditional Bangladeshi cuisine is not about exotic

While modern diets offer convenience, traditional cooking offers something more comprehensive. It ensures the preservation of nutrients and also encourages consumption in moderation. It promotes food that supports a more mindful relationship with eating.

Bounty of the seasons

Unlike many Western diets, Bangladeshi dishes are rooted in natural ingredients long known for their healing properties.

"Ingredients like mustard oil, turmeric, ginger, and garlic are thought to have powerful medicinal benefits," Selina Parvin explains.

She adds, "Mustard oil is thought to promote cardiac health and digestion. Turmeric strengthens immunity through its anti-inflammatory properties, ginger improves circulation and digestion, while garlic is known for regulating blood pressure and



nutritious food, aligning our diets naturally with what our bodies need most at different times of the year. Winter harvests like pumpkin, leafy greens, and root vegetables provide warmth, and summer ingredients such as *pui shak*, bottle gourd, and green mango cool the body.

"One aspect of cooking in the Bangladeshi style often gets overlooked," Hasin notes. "Our culinary practices are centred around local, seasonal produce. The use of simple techniques in cooking makes these meals both affordable and sustainable. Historically, we have relied on what grows in our fields and backyards; the bounty of the rivers has been sufficient for us."

The power of freshly made

People of the past made pastes and used hand-ground spices; these were central to everyday cooking.

"We used freshly prepared onion, garlic, or mustard pastes, which retained essential nutrients and antioxidants that store-bought versions often lose," Selina Parvin explains.

However, it was never just about nutrition alone. It was more about restoring a personal relationship with food. Balance was neither accidental nor excessive but a culinary system

refined over generations.

She highlights the science behind this tradition. She says that iconic dishes like *shorshe ilish* are also nutritionally thoughtful, mustard and the fish providing healthy fats. Even the humblest of meals, the pairing of *panta bhaat* with green chilli and onions, reflects culinary acumen through an understanding of fermentation and gut health!

Researchers today are speaking about diets that look after gut health and provide anti-inflammatory properties, all of which have been the principles of local diets for ages.

"Far from being outdated, our cooking tradition aligns remarkably well with contemporary dietary science," Hasin continues. "Fermented foods promote gut health and aid in digestion; slow cooking enhances absorption; and specific spice combinations are powerhouse sources of antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties."

Traditional meals also show a clear understanding of dietary balance. Rice, which is our staple, provides energy; lentils and pulses supply plant-based protein and fibre; fish or meat offer essential amino acids and healthy fats; and vegetables add vitamins and minerals. Together, they support digestion, sustained energy, and overall wellness, blending cultural wisdom seamlessly with modern nutritional science.

Where we lost our way

While food culture has evolved, not all changes have been beneficial.

"Our fast-paced urban life has bade farewell to many aspects of traditional cuisine," Hasin cautions. "Packaged sauces, frozen snacks, sugary drinks, and meals eaten in haste are now common in our lives as convenience has overtaken care. In this transformation, flavour may survive, but nourishment often does not. What we have lost is not just tradition, but a slower, more mindful relationship with what we eat."

Selina Parvin also points to unhealthy shifts. "Modern Bangladeshi cooking has adopted habits such as excessive use of oil and sugar along with processed ingredients," she says.

Deep frying has replaced the balanced flavours of home-style meals.

Yet, both experts emphasise a return over restriction.

"Well-being does not have to be elitist or costly," Hasin notes. "At a time when healthy eating is frequently marketed as a luxury, traditional Bangladeshi cuisine offers a model of nourishment that is inclusive. The combination of grains, lentils, vegetables, and smaller portions of protein creates a balanced meal that provides adequate energy without excess."

Parvin echoes this approach. "To return to healthier roots, one must practice portion control. Use mustard oil instead of refined oil and bring back vegetable-based side dishes that once filled every meal," she says.

Preserving the soul

Beyond ingredients and methods, Parvin emphasises the emotional nourishment embedded in tradition.

"Traditional recipes were never learned from manuals. For seasoned cooks, they are like muscle memory. Measurements were intuitive, and balance was guided by experience rather than instruction. For the new generation of home chefs, this knowledge is passed down from generation to generation and becomes a language of continuity and belonging," she said.

For Parvin, authenticity does not mean excess but rather essence. She offers a simple path forward: "Rediscovering this ancient wisdom requires no radical change but a conscious return. Cooking one traditional dish a week, choosing mustard oil over refined alternatives, bringing back vegetable-based sides, or sharing at least one screen-free family meal each day can quietly restore balance. These small acts can reconnect us with nourishment and tradition."

In rediscovering our traditional kitchens, we are not merely preserving heritage. We are reclaiming a way of eating that understands health not as a trend but as a lived, shared, and deeply human experience.

By Mannan Mashhur Zarif
Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

Traditional Bangladeshi cooking emphasises natural ingredients, slow methods, and seasonal produce, supporting better nutrition, moderation, and a mindful relationship with food.

Experts highlight health benefits of staples like mustard oil, turmeric, ginger, garlic, fermented foods, and balanced meals combining rice, lentils, fish or meat, and vegetables.

Freshly ground spices and home preparation preserve flavour and nutrients, aligning age-old practices with modern dietary science and gut health awareness.

Modern fast-paced lifestyles have introduced processed foods, excess oil and sugar, and rushed eating, weakening both nourishment and tradition, while a conscious return to traditional methods can restore balance and well-being.

wellness trends, but the simplest of foods that have nourished people of this soil for generations. The healthy aspects of traditional cuisine are best understood in practice and not in theory."

Parvin adds, "In traditional recipes, natural ingredients and slow cooking methods preserve nutrition. Unlike fast food and processed meals, which are slowly becoming part and parcel of our modern diets, Bangladeshi cuisine focuses on mindful eating, thus making it a healthier option."

cholesterol."

Dietitian Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin adds practical insight: "The simplest of dishes like sautéed vegetables (*shobji bhaji*) in mustard oil preserves both flavour and nutrients. An ordinary bowl of *daal* infused with turmeric and garlic not only offers warmth, but a whole lot of protein, along with aiding digestion."

Traditional cuisine also revolves around seasonal produce. Eating with the seasons ensures fresher, more

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How female leaders are shaping a new era in banking

Across Bangladesh's financial landscape, a decisive revolution is underway where women are shaping the rules, questioning traditional systems, and introducing leadership styles grounded in empathy, resilience, and most importantly, inclusivity. The banking sector is gradually becoming multidimensional, thanks to subtle changes: an inclusive maternity policy here, a shift in customer communication there, and the impact is substantial. At the centre of this evolution are women in roles from branch managers to C-suites, who are bravely navigating a world not designed for them, but they are rebuilding it with more nuance and ambition than ever before.

A childhood of circuits and curiosity
For Nurun Nahar Begum, now the Chief Technology Officer of BRAC Bank PLC, the journey into the banking world began with light bulbs, radios and circuit breakers.

Begum's fascination with technology began when it was far from accessible and computers were rare. She had a personal computer at home

by the early nineties, and the machine changed the direction of her academic life. Although Begum completed her Master's in Finance and Banking, she realised she needed to study more about technology. She went on to complete a year-long programming diploma at a time when few women in Bangladesh even knew what programming meant.

In every respect, her family supported her. "I never heard anyone in my family say you cannot do this or that. They simply told me to study diligently and do something with my life," she shares.

And when Begum joined BRAC Bank, it was already fully digitised.

"I am not great at sales, and when I joined the bank, I had the option to choose a branch role or move into technology. I am a problem solver, and like understanding things end-to-end, so I chose technology, as it allows me to do that," she elaborates.

Begum started her career from the lowest grade, and now, she holds the highest: the Division Head. Her decisions have impacted the bank's digital journey. And her leadership? It



Women are transforming Bangladesh's banking sector with leadership rooted in empathy, resilience, and inclusivity.

Pioneers like Nurun Nahar Begum (CTO of BRAC Bank) are reshaping technology-driven roles, while Sarmin Atik (EVP, Eastern Bank) highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership.

Ummya Rahman (SVP, bKash) is redefining brand strategy in fintech, focusing on behavioural science and consumer insights.

These women are not only leading but actively rewriting the culture of banking, fostering collaboration and inclusivity, proving women can lead in a traditionally male-dominated industry.

has certainly opened doors for women who rarely envisioned themselves in tech.

A path to banking, not by design

In another corner of Bangladesh's banking universe sits Sarmin Atik, Executive Vice President and Head of Liability and Wealth Management at Eastern Bank Limited.

"My father was a banker, so maybe that planted an early seed. But I never planned on becoming a banker," Atik shares. Though she stepped into the industry by chance, here she discovered

purpose.

Atik began her journey 21 years ago, and back then, women in leadership were rare. However, today, she sees the shift clearly. So, what might the changes be?

"If you ask me, I would say that now women in banking are more active, focused, and balanced. We support one another, and that solidarity has transformed our presence," she answers.

Yet, she sincerely acknowledges something often left unsaid.

"Without the support of the men in our lives, our fathers, husbands, and colleagues, many of our journeys would have been more difficult. I honestly believe that real progress is never one-sided. It happens when men and women move forward together," she says.

For Atik, real leadership means not having the loudest voice in the room but creating more voices around her. For her, emotional intelligence carries the utmost importance, not as a soft add-on, but as a core financial tool.

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How female leaders are shaping a new era in banking

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“I think a good leader always uplifts others by giving them space to grow and celebrating their wins wholeheartedly. Numbers matter, but only tell a part of the story. It is the people who always complete the story,” Atik acknowledges.

And her message to the young women entering the banking sector?

“Ups and downs will always be there. Remember why you started. Trust your journey.”

Decoding people, defining brands

In the fast-paced intersections of fintech and brand strategy, Ummyia Rahman, SVP, Brand Strategy and Consumer Insights, Brand Marketing of bKash, is

attempting to reshape the way financial services speak to people.

Not in a marketing classroom, but in engineering labs and telecom offices, Rahman’s fascination with the minds using the machines began. “I kept asking how the solutions we build contribute to shaping behaviour? I believe that strategy comes from not merely knowing what people do, but why they do it in the first place,” she explains.

A shift into advertising exposed her to insights, brand psychology, and the subtle architecture behind habit formation. That foundation shapes Rahman’s work at bKash today.

With time, Bangladesh’s financial landscape has become quite crowded,

and today, most features promoted by companies mimic each other. In this scenario, what differentiates one brand from another is not only technology but also understanding human behaviour.

“If I have to explain brand strategy in my own terms, I would call it a mix of behavioural science, data, and creativity. Because, you see, real brand building starts long before execution,” Rahman elaborates.

When asked about the biggest challenge of her early career, she answered, “It was, I think, keeping pace with an industry transitioning rapidly into digital and data-led decisions. If I had to stay relevant, I needed to continuously learn and unlearn.”

Today, she mentors young marketers who often mistake speed for impact.

Rahman’s reflections on women in leadership echo a promising shift in the financial sector. “More women are shaping strategy and influencing decisions than ever before. But sustaining this progress requires environments where women feel supported to grow,” she says.

Rewriting the culture of banking

The thread that ties the trajectories of these three extraordinary women is not merely gender, but their agency and determination to bring about visible changes. All of them entered an industry that has been mostly male-dominated and tried their best to rewrite the

organisational culture that promotes inclusivity.

There is no denying that Bangladesh’s banking sector is now more technologically ambitious and aligned with global thinking than ever before. Here, women are creating environments where collaboration replaces competition, and these three progressives are shining examples.

Because for the first time, the question is no longer “Can women lead in banking?” They already are. The real question is, what will the next generation build on top of what these women have begun?

By Ayman Anika

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Sharpened focus, unshaken resolve: Women breaking barriers in sports

For decades, girls in Bangladesh have grown up hearing an invisible rulebook: real sports, the ones defined by sweat, muscle, adrenaline, and grit, are spaces for boys. Boys played in the playgrounds. And girls? They used to stay at the margins. However, that scene is beginning to change.

Across the country, female athletes are beginning to enter arenas that once seemed sealed off from them: fencing halls, kabaddi courts, hockey turfs, and archery ranges. Long considered somewhat unconventional for women, these sports have become the unlikely sites for reinvention. And in that shift lies a larger transformation in Bangladesh's sporting culture.

Grace under pressure, courage in motion
"I saw the footwork, and it felt elegant. I'm drawn to elegant things," says

coaches — encouraged me. They are always like: 'Yes, you can do this!' This encouragement matters to me the most," Tusi shares.

Yet, numerous times, Tusi has faced this question: Why fencing? — including from her own family. "My father and mother asked why I was doing this," she admits. "But when they saw how healthy I had become, they stopped questioning."

For a young woman who is standing firmly on a piste, blade in hand, mask on, and body steady, fencing is certainly a steady assertion that she has the right to take up space and compete. And perhaps that is why more girls will follow, because female athletes like Tusi are making it more visible with time.

Precision, patience, and a national stage
Amid persisting constraints, young



Mushfikah Hossain Tusi (Left), fencing



Bonna Akter, archery



Farida Akhter Ratry, hockey

Women in Bangladesh are breaking barriers in sports traditionally dominated by men, such as fencing, kabaddi, hockey, and archery.

Athletes like Mushfikah Hossain Tusi (fencing), Bonna Akter (archery), Farida Akhter Ratry (hockey), and Rupali Akhter (kabaddi) are pushing through physical, financial, and cultural limitations.

Despite limited resources, exposure, and support, these women are excelling in their fields, making strides toward gender equality in sports.

Their stories signal a steady, irreversible revolution in women's sports, offering hope for future generations of female athletes in Bangladesh.

Mushfikah Hossain Tusi, laughing a little. So far, Tusi has participated in four national tournaments, a commendable achievement in a country where fencing was barely part of the public consciousness even a couple of years ago.

One cannot say fencing in Bangladesh is a sport that was inherited from tradition or even built into school culture. Yet, inside Dhaka's sports complexes and private clubs, promising fencers like Tusi are learning how to move with a blade in hand with dexterity.

At Navy College, where Tusi studied, she would see the Navy fencing team training early in the morning.

"I felt inspired by watching them practise in our sports complex, and I thought, why can't I do this too?" she recalls. This is how she joined the Royal Fencing Center. Nevertheless, she gradually discovered that fencing, the sport she considered so elegant, comes with weight, sweat, and hours of discipline.

"You need an immense amount of mental labour, along with physical endurance. It is not easy, as during training, your mind has to be right there, and this is what I love most about this sport. It keeps you focused," she explains.

The sport does not allow an athlete to blend into a team or disappear in a crowd, unlike other team sports. Rather, it forces you to stand alone, masked, wired, and watched. In a country like Bangladesh, where girls are often told to shrink themselves, fencing's insistence on visibility can be a radical experience.

"Discrimination is present everywhere, including sports, but I have never faced this. In fact, everyone — our seniors, the federation, my

female archers are advancing to significant stages and earning attention for more than just participation. Take, for example, the 2025 Asian Archery Championships in Dhaka, where Bonna Akter and Himu Bachhar advanced to the final, defeating strong teams from countries such as Bhutan and South Korea.

Nevertheless, the journey to international tournaments has been anything but easy, as Akter details, "Back in 2014, I went from Faridpur to attend the Bangladesh Ansar trials and started practising archery. At first, I used bamboo bows. Although they allowed

me to learn the basics, I knew I couldn't go far using them. Ultimately, I managed to acquire a compound bow."

That was a turning point for her, and within a year, she rose to the national team.

At its core, archery is a game of mental discipline. And despite being considered somewhat of an unconventional sport, in recent years, it has become one of the fastest-rising sports for Bangladeshi women. It is not because archery is something that is traditionally encouraged, especially to girls, but because it offers a level playing field where gender does not automatically decide ability.

Akter elaborates, "The calmer I keep my mind, the better my game gets. Years of training have conditioned me, and from the moment I shoot

my first arrow, my mind starts to focus on practice. I rarely notice what is happening around me."

But the mental quiet she nurtures on the field is disrupted when she thinks of the sport's place in the country. "Football and cricket get so much publicity. We don't," she says. "If archery got that focus and if the media helped more, the government would notice too."

For Akter, archery is her only source of income now. Her rigorous routine is what keeps her motivated in spite of the meagre honorarium she receives. "I stopped my education because I was so engrossed in sports," she says. She doesn't regret it, but the system around her hasn't risen to match her commitment.

Running hard without a clear path ahead

Farida Akhter Ratry, centre midfielder of the Bangladesh women's hockey team, began playing hockey as most girls discover a certain sport: by accident. "It was during an inter-school tournament in 2016,

when I first played hockey. I was a student in Kishoreganj, and in my school, boys practised hockey regularly."

Ratry was inspired by her district coach and brother. And soon, she started her training on the Sylhet fields, anticipating opportunities that rarely came.

When asked about her biggest frustration, she answered, "It is not lack of talent, but rather the lack of games and exposure. We are training regularly and are more than willing to play. But there are barely any tournaments for us. Many of our seniors have dropped out, gotten married, or quit because there's no chance to play."

She has represented Bangladesh twice internationally, once as a junior and once as a senior. But the five-year gap since her last international match hangs over her career.

Despite the recent success at the AHF Women's Under-18 Asia Cup, where the Bangladesh women's hockey team earned the bronze medal in their maiden appearance, the women's national field hockey team still has far to go.

Ratry suggests, "Every year we need at least one or two domestic tournaments. Along with that, of course, the chance to play regular international tournaments, and then maybe we could bring laurels for the country."

Strength in a sport that barely pays
Kabaddi demands physical contact, strength and audacity, qualities that girls are seldom encouraged to display. However, Rupali Akhter, the captain of the Bangladesh women's kabaddi team, was adamant about defying the norms from the start.

"I was involved in athletics in school, 100 and 200 metres. A coach noticed me and suggested I should give this a shot. I eventually reached the Women's Complex, where I was selected for the national team in 2009."

Her career since then has been full of international matches — World Cups, Asian Games, and regional tournaments. But the rewards do not match the effort. "For international camps, we get Tk 10,500 as pocket money," she says. "Other than that, no salary."

Despite the limitations, Akhter doesn't want to leave kabaddi behind, but rather, wants to contribute so that this sport can flourish. "If I retire from the national team, I'll move into coaching."

Her decision captures the state of kabaddi perfectly. There is passion, talent, and persistence, but an almost complete absence of infrastructure.

The larger picture: A country in transition

Even though these four athletes are from four very different sports, their stories are almost the same. Whether that's fencing, kabaddi, hockey or archery, female athletes are doing incredibly well in their respective fields. However, the limitations they face are not vague in any manner — financial ceilings, lack of tournaments, inadequate training facilities, and a cultural hesitation that still lingers.

But what's new is the wave of girls who are stepping in anyway.

Their stories give testimony to one fact: the revolution in women's sports in Bangladesh is steady and irreversible.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Silvia Mahjabin/Courtesy



Rupali Akhter, kabaddi

Obesity: Here's how to combat the global health endemic

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2022, 1 in 8 people were obese globally. This figure implies that between 1990 and 2022, worldwide adult obesity more than doubled, and adolescent obesity quadrupled. By 2024, 35 million children under the age of 5 were overweight.

Unfortunately, the numbers are not restricted to certain geographical locations. Rather, the effects spill over to various countries, indicating an overwhelming global issue that needs to be addressed now.

According to Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin, Chief Clinical Dietitian at United Hospital, a majority of health-related complications people face in adulthood, such as blockages in the arteries, fat around the liver or a malfunctioning kidney, actually take root in their youth.

"In urban societies such as Dhaka, the lack of physical activity is a big concern, even overshadowing the role of a poor diet in contributing to poor health," she mentions. "The youth of today spend all day sitting and then go to the gym for heavy workouts for an hour."

She goes on to say that one hour of intense exercise is insufficient compared to maintaining a consistently active lifestyle throughout the day.

Parallel to a sedentary lifestyle, poor dietary choices have emerged as a crucial factor in the obesity epidemic.

"Food that does not come from one's own kitchen almost always contains high amounts of monosodium, corn starch and sugar and is usually cooked in oil that has been used more than once," shares Hasin.

We are often quick to blame fast food, but it is not just fast food that is the problem. Any food that uses unhealthy cooking techniques such as reburned oil (trans fat that settles on the liver) and high amounts of sugar and sodium (that cause water retention and bloating) is an equal culprit, that keep young people coming back without realising the dire repercussions.

Health consequences of obesity

The health consequences of obesity in youth are profound. Type 2 diabetes, once primarily seen as a disease occurring in adults, is now increasingly being diagnosed in children and adolescents. Cardiovascular issues are also on the rise among overweight adolescents. High blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and early signs of heart disease are becoming increasingly common in this demographic. Additionally, joint problems and orthopaedic concerns, such as flat feet or discomfort in weight-bearing joints, may arise due to excess weight, leading to decreased mobility.

The psychological impact of obesity cannot be overstated," expresses Hasin. "Adolescents who are overweight or obese often experience low self-esteem, body image issues, and social isolation."

The stigma attached to obesity can result in bullying or discrimination, further intensifying feelings of depression and anxiety. The expert feels that as the mental health implications rise, adolescents may find themselves trapped in a cycle of unhealthy eating behaviours and psychological distress.

The economic burden associated with obesity extends beyond individual families. The healthcare costs incurred from treating obesity-related conditions place a significant financial strain on families and healthcare systems. These costs highlight the urgent need for effective prevention and intervention strategies.

On crash diets, intermittent fasting, and fads

"The youth of today are used to quick results," notes Tasneem Hasin. "To get them, they resort to all kinds of diets and fads such as keto, intermittent

fasting, and slimming teas.”

However, while they deliver short-term results, most of these fads are not sustainable in the long run.

"Completely stopping carbs can make you groggy and lethargic."

The dietitian also shares how local rice contains more than just carbs. It contains Vitamin B complex with biotin, which works to break down carbs. "Without it, whatever other carbs you take in throughout the day will not be broken down correctly into energy, settling instead on your liver as triglycerides."

Intermittent fasting is another trend that is being used without proper research. The weight loss technique may not work for everyone, especially those with diabetes or kidney issues, as it might weaken insulin regulation.

“Yes, we use intermittent fasting for patients who need to reduce a lot of weight in a short amount of time, such as before surgery,” says Hasin, but adds, “This is not sustainable, however, as the weight comes back on as soon as the patient returns to their routine.”

What then?

As no two individuals have the same metabolic rate, even if they are the same age and have the same body structure and height, there is no blanket diet that would work for everyone. However, Hasin suggests common, yet non-negotiable food groups that must remain on your plate in order to maintain a healthy weight.

"Complex carbs such as brown bread or oatmeal can be a good source of energy," she suggests. "A good breakfast of complex carbs and a boiled egg can set you up for the day." As a snack, around 11 AM, she suggests a whole fruit or

vegetable that contains fibre. "This can be any fruit you can eat with the peel, such as apples and guavas."

For lunch, a small cup of rice with a protein of choice, veggies and leafy greens makes for a good plate. She analogises the fibre in leafy greens to a broom.

"Just like a broom, fibre found in leafy greens can clean out toxins and fat from your body and keep it from accumulating in your system."

Those who are overweight or suffer from a fatty liver may think of adding Vitamin C to their plates as well, as it can reduce the absorption of carbs in the body. "As sweeter fruits may not be very good for them, maybe they can reach for an orange instead of a banana."

For an evening snack, sour yoghurt with chia seeds or cucumbers and tomatoes is a good way to get your daily dose of probiotics.

"At night, we advise those suffering from obesity to skip all forms of carbs and just finish dinner with proteins and veggies."

Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin advises the youth to eat as many local sour fruits as possible. "Local produce is good for you and far more sustainable for the diet than anything adapted. Winter veggies such as broccoli, beans, etc. are rich in natural fibres, readily available and pocket-friendly."

According to Hasin, veggies that retain their original colour through the cooking process retain their nutrients. "Therefore, it is imperative that broccoli remains green and does not become olive-brown."

The dietitian also recommends drinking a lot of water throughout the day. "Some people say that 2 litres of water is enough, but this is not true for everyone. Those who are obese need up to 3 litres of water throughout the day to boost their metabolism, and more in summer."

Food should be taken at least 2 hours before bedtime so it can be digested properly.

"Speaking of bedtime, the youth these

days are night owls. The body is designed for rest right after sundown, until sunrise," shares Hasin. "Sleeping a good 8 to 10 hours and waking up at dawn or in the early hours of the morning can do wonders for your metabolism."

Collective efforts to end the endemic

The youth of today lead very busy lives. From school to extracurricular activities, their lives are jam-packed in a way that it never was for their predecessors. If one wishes to see any light at the end of this tunnel, each one of the youth touch points has to be addressed.

Implementing educational programmes in schools that emphasise nutrition and healthy lifestyle choices is crucial in empowering adolescents to make informed dietary decisions. By integrating cooking classes, nutrition education, and awareness campaigns about balanced meals, portion control, physical activity, and the reduction in sugary drinks and fast food consumption, schools can significantly influence students' health more positively.

Healthcare providers can also play an equally important role in addressing youth obesity through routine screenings, starting open conversations about healthy lifestyles, and providing referrals to specialists and nutritionists where necessary.

Collaborative efforts between families and healthcare professionals can lead to personalised plans that respect adolescents' unique circumstances, including cultural and socioeconomic factors that are relevant to this age group.

Adolescents are more aware than those in previous generations and have a lot of resources at their disposal to make informed choices about their lives. A nudge in the right direction through effective modelling by parents, those who have the power to influence them, and readily available expert advice can help them make healthier decisions and break the vicious cycle of obesity.

By Munira Fidai
Photo: Collected



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Movement, mindfulness and community: Inside Dhaka’s growing wellness industry

For years, Dhaka has been associated with rush-hour traffic, relentless noise, and high-stress workdays. However, beneath the chaos that Dhakaites tolerate, a quieter and healthier transition is taking place. Wellness, once considered a fringe interest, is gradually becoming a mainstream urban priority. This is not sporadic dieting or even performative fitness, but a more holistic understanding of wellbeing combining mobility, mental health, and community support.

So, how exactly is this shift taking place? To understand the broader picture, we need to take a look at a layered ecosystem that includes yoga teachers, mobility instructors, nutrition coaches, and large-scale festivals like The Flow Fest (formerly known as Dhaka Flow), which bring countless urban dwellers together to explore new tools for healthier living.

Why the wellness industry is expanding so quickly

Eliza Chowdhury is an internationally certified yoga teacher, and she made some interesting observations.

“When people were suffering from COVID-19 back in 2020, I noticed a surge in meditation and breathing practices. My students came to me for advice, and they shared it with their relatives. It was a wonderful transition. Now, more than ever, I see not only the elderly but the younger generation practising yoga regularly,” shares Chowdhury.

The pandemic might be a turning point, but Dhaka’s wellness boom can be considered a product of multiple intersecting realities — sedentary urban jobs, rising anxiety levels, and social media awareness. These factors have contributed to a growing demand



The city gyms are also embracing different sorts of training programmes, which were once focused mostly on weightlifting exercises.

Sabrina Rahman, founder of Burnout Fitness and a licensed Zumba instructor trained in Melbourne, Australia, reflects the broader shift in mindset.

“I strongly believe fitness is no longer reserved for men. Our centre offers Zumba, High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) and yoga to women. Not everyone can go to a gym, but everyone deserves a chance to be fit. So, we offer at-home workout programmes and online training as well,” she shares.

Rahman’s presence, along with other female trainers and coaches,



more and more towards reflective practices. Hence, a rising interest in meditation and emotional healing.

Meditation coach Faiza Farzana Gunjan, who recently led a meditation session at The Flow Fest 2025, believes these gatherings are essential for awareness. “Given the constant pressure that urban dwellers, especially the people involved in desk jobs, face nowadays, everyone should set aside a certain time and meditate for a while. It is an incredible way to heal ourselves,” says Gunjan.

Her journey started with a Bangladeshi spiritual coach, and later she obtained certification from a US-based training academy, ultimately becoming a meditation coach herself. Today, she holds regular in-person sessions in Gulshan and Banani alongside online coaching. The attendance at her classes, and similar offerings at studios across Dhaka, signals an increasing appetite for

emotional grounding and psychological resilience.

Undoubtedly, gyms can build physical strength, but for healing internal systems, meditation and healing practices have become a must.

Yoga, quite similarly, is increasingly becoming popular among the city’s residents. People are becoming more mindful towards their joint care, longevity, and functional movement. As a result, there is a visible rise in Yin yoga and somatic movement practices.

Namit Kabir, a yoga instructor who taught in Canada for several years before relocating to Dhaka, underscores the importance of mobility.

“Our joints age faster than our muscles. People feel stiffness because their ligaments and fascia are tight. Yin yoga and mobility keep everything functioning properly,” she explains.

Along with teaching the younger population, Kabir holds classes for elderly practitioners as well, focusing

on Yin yoga.

“Elderly people often struggle with basic movement tasks like standing up or sitting down. So, my specialised classes particularly address ageing bodies and long-term movement health,” she shares.

The growing presence of yoga teachers and studios indicates that people are more open to diverse movement philosophies, each offering a different approach: traditional disciplines, modern vinyasa, and meditation-driven flows or joint-focused training.

Dhaka’s new wellness culture

Where Dhaka’s wellness movement truly comes alive is in community gatherings like The Flow Fest 2025. The festival featured strength training, Zumba, meditation, nutrition workshops, mobility classes, and hormone health sessions.

The festival also included wellness coach Akiko, who teaches in Japan, Singapore, and Thailand. Her presence was significant because she works in areas that remain culturally sensitive across Asia, including Bangladesh.

“Topics like menopause, periods, or even vaginal health are still taboo,” she said. “People are curious, but they don’t want to talk about it. Somebody has to open the door.”

Similarly, Michelle Tan, a personal trainer and nutrition coach who competes in bodybuilding competitions, visited from Malaysia. “I came to teach what people need to think about if their journey is to lose weight, gain weight, or get stronger,” she said.

Throughout the event, she held individual consultations and led group workouts. Though her stay was short, her takeaway was clear: “If enough people want me to come here again, I will. This is my first time, and I do enjoy it.”

Their presence clearly demonstrates how Dhaka is now seen as a fertile destination for international wellness educators. That said, the future of Dhaka’s wellness industry largely depends on accessibility, training standards, and community engagement. Dhaka may not be a prominent wellness destination yet compared to Bangkok or Bali, but it certainly has the potential to become one.

With the availability of the right resources, urban residents can continue to redefine wellness, and perhaps soon enough, movement, mindfulness, and nutrition will become a part of their everyday routine rather than crisis responses.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Silvia Mahjabin
Location: The Flow Fest, Dhaka

Dhaka is experiencing a shift towards holistic wellness, moving beyond traditional fitness to include mental health, mobility, and community-based practices.

The pandemic, sedentary lifestyles, and rising stress have fuelled demand for yoga, meditation, diverse gym programmes, and inclusive fitness spaces.

Growing interest in mindfulness, Yin yoga, and mobility reflects concerns about burnout, ageing, and long-term physical function.

Community events like The Flow Fest are central to the movement, bringing together local and international wellness educators.

for structured approaches to physical and mental well-being. As a result, dedicated gyms and wellness studios have emerged. Modelling themselves after global wellness hubs, these spaces offer curated classes ranging from classical yoga to somatic breathwork and high-intensity training.

proves that both the male and female populations are equally and actively joining the city’s ever-growing wellness spaces.

Yoga, meditation, and mental wellness: A growing urban demand
Due to urban burnout, overstimulation, and digital fatigue, people are pushing



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Sleep Clinics: Why They're Becoming Essential

Globally, sleep clinics have expanded rapidly, transforming sleep medicine into a distinct and established field. Bangladesh, though slightly behind, is now catching up fast.

If you ask people in Dhaka how they are sleeping these days, the answer is almost always the same: not well!

Between late-night screens, exhausting commutes, irregular meal times, and the grind of modern life, Bangladeshis are slumbering less and waking up more tired than ever before.

What used to be a rare complaint has become a constant background hum in urban life, with people saying things like, "I don't feel rested," "I keep dozing off during the day," "I wake up gasping," "I snore too loudly," "I feel foggy even after eight hours."

In the last decade, several major hospitals have opened dedicated centres and labs, while private facilities are beginning to offer structured assessments as well. Even so, most people here still do not know what a sleep clinic actually does, who it helps, or what a sleep study even measures.

This uncertainty keeps many Bangladeshis stuck in cycles of exhaustion — avoiding naps, scrolling through home remedies, and assuming their issues stem only from stress.



persistent tiredness that cannot be explained. Many assume that getting seven or eight hours of sleep is enough, but neurologists point out that quality matters far more than duration.

Dr Mohammad Najim Uddin, Senior Neurologist at Evercare Hospital, Chattogram, describes the neurological side of the disruption. "Duration does not guarantee quality. The brain may fail to enter restorative stages or may repeatedly drift between rest and wakefulness unnoticed."

Patients who snore loudly, stop breathing while napping, or feel excessively exhausted during the day are often struggling with obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) or central sleep apnoea (CSA).

Others battle neurological disorders like narcolepsy, idiopathic hypersomnia, or restless legs syndrome. Many clinics also see individuals with chronic insomnia or unexplained fatigue that has lasted for years.

As Dr Sajib Saha, Vertigo and Balance Specialist at Sleep Center, explains, "Most patients come with symptoms such as loud snoring, pauses in breathing, daytime drowsiness, morning headaches, or feeling tired even after a full night's rest."

What services do these clinics provide?

Most offer a set of core services, but the depth and sophistication vary from one centre to another. The most common services include consultations, overnight studies, snoring evaluation, insomnia assessments, and follow-up care.

Urban Bangladeshis face widespread poor sleep due to modern lifestyle pressures, yet awareness of sleep disorders remains low.

Sleep clinics are growing in Bangladesh, offering assessments like polysomnography to diagnose conditions such as sleep apnoea, narcolepsy, insomnia, and restless legs syndrome.

Patients often seek help for persistent fatigue, loud snoring, breathing pauses, or daytime drowsiness; quality of sleep matters more than duration.

Early evaluation is crucial, as untreated disorders can lead to cognitive decline, heart problems, accidents, and emotional burnout.

The expansion of clinics and advanced diagnostics marks a new era in Bangladesh's healthcare focus on sleep.

The truth is far more layered. As specialists repeatedly point out, sleep-related disorders are complex medical conditions, and many are rooted not just in lifestyle but in the brain, airway, or underlying health conditions.

What exactly is a sleep clinic?

It is a dedicated medical facility where trained specialists diagnose and manage disorders using tests like polysomnography, home tests, and consultations. These centres are designed to evaluate how your brain, heart, lungs, and muscles behave while you are asleep. Patients usually spend a night in a quiet room where sensors monitor their breathing, heart rate, oxygen levels, and brain waves.

Dr Fazle Rabbi Mohammed, Consultant of Respiratory and Sleep Medicine at Square Hospital Limited, describes it clearly: "We monitor your brain waves, breathing, heart rate, and movement. Sensors are placed on your body to collect signals during the night. Doctors analyse the data to diagnose issues like sleep apnoea."

Why do people go to sleep clinics?

For most patients, the main trigger is



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Sleep Clinics: Why They're Becoming Essential

FROM PAGE 28

The overnight polysomnography remains the gold standard. Patients arrive in the evening, settle into a private room, and rest naturally while sensors capture vital signals.

Dr Saha reassures patients who may be nervous, “A sleep study is a painless overnight test. Sensors simply record information, and in the morning, the patient goes home. Our specialist analyses the results to understand the cause of the problem.”

Before undergoing a study, most clinics require a consultation,

When should you consider booking a sleep study?

Most people delay seeking evaluation for years, blaming exhaustion on stress or poor routines. Neurologists emphasise that central disorders often stay hidden because they produce no snoring or obvious signs.

"They remain hidden for years because they produce no snoring," Dr Najim Uddin notes.

Patients often assume they are simply tired until more serious consequences like memory issues, mood changes, or sudden sleep episodes in dangerous situations appear.

realise that conditions like sleep apnoea can increase the risk of stroke, heart failure, and cognitive decline. Neurologists warn that untreated disorders take a long-term toll.

“They impair cognitive function, worsen mood and irritability, reduce productivity, weaken immunity, increase accident risk, and cause emotional burnout,” says Dr Najim Uddin. His reminder underscores why sleep care is becoming an essential part of modern healthcare.

As more clinics open and as specialists across neurology,



as Dr Mohammed explains: "It is recommended to visit a specialist doctor. The physician will score the Epworth Sleepiness Scale with standard questionnaires to evaluate if a study is advisable."

Similarly, Dr Saha notes that patients "should be evaluated by a specialist or an ENT/pulmonologist before the test" to determine the correct type of study.

These structured assessments help ensure that patients are not over-tested or misdiagnosed.

Meanwhile, doctors who handle breathing-related disorders see many individuals whose sleep apnoea was ignored until it worsened other health issues. Loud snoring, observed pauses in breathing, waking up choking or gasping, and persistent daytime lethargy are some of the clearest signs that a study could be lifesaving.

The future of sleep health

Clinics in Bangladesh are expanding rapidly, but awareness remains limited. Many people still do not

pulmonology, and ENT fields collaborate, Bangladesh is entering a new era of medicine — one where sleep is finally being treated with the seriousness it deserves.

With hospitals investing in advanced diagnostics, home-testing options expanding, and more people recognising the signs of disorders, the future of health in the country looks stronger than ever.

By Nusrath Jahan
Model: Intisab Shahriyar
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RENTING VS OWNING APARTMENTS

Key considerations for buyers

We humans have achieved some incredible things in our modern society. From launching rockets and robots into space and other celestial bodies, to liking cat videos from Norway instantaneously on our pocket computers, modern advancements sound like a utopia, if that is all you were projecting, of course.

We are also animals, however, by definition. And just like every other animal on the planet, we have certain core needs that must be fulfilled. Food, water, and air have been mostly met, the quality of which may be up for debate, but our shelter situation is a little murkier. For one thing, we are the only ones on the planet who pay to find shelter. But on the plus side, we skip the caves and tree-tops for apartments overlooking, well, other houses, and ponds!

changes this. You get control. You can update the kitchen, add a garden, anything!

Many first-time owners say they feel pure relief and joy when they get the keys. For Joyeeta and Tareq, a newly married couple, their first words after setting foot in their own apartment were “finally settled!”

Money is central to this choice, of course. Rent money is basically money out the window. But a home loan builds equity. The flat can gain value over time, especially since cities keep growing and land is scarce.

Studio apartments are now very popular as a way to start. They used to be for students or temporary living. Now, they are common for single people, young couples, and investors. The prices feel manageable. In good areas of Dhaka, a studio can cost Tk



This is pulling potential owners out of crowded central Dhaka toward cheaper areas that have more open space. The Padma Bridge, for example, caused a housing boom along the Dhaka–Mawa–Bhanga expressway.

The hidden costs behind the dream

The greatest deterrent for people looking to buy is the financial pressure. Realtors confirm that stubborn bank loan rates are crippling purchasing power. These high rates often sit in the double digits. Current home loan interest rates typically range from 10.5 per cent to 13.5 per cent per annum. Some rates have reportedly hit 14 per cent or even 15 per cent.

These rates are exorbitant. They result in high Equated Monthly Instalments, or EMIs. High EMIs actively discourage potential buyers. This is especially true for those buyers sensitive to interest fluctuations. The lowest-end segment of buyers is also affected, as they are the most sensitive to these financial pressures.

The real cost of owning a home goes beyond the flat’s base price. This is what often catches buyers off guard. A successful purchase requires a comprehensive budget. You must account for these hidden costs.

Buyers must also budget for ongoing monthly service charges. These pay for the maintenance of common areas, security, and elevators. You also contribute to an advanced sinking fund for future major repairs.

Ultimately, the decision to be a homeowner comes down to your timing and readiness. Some wait for that perfect moment that, realistically, never arrives. While others take that step when they feel they are in a stable enough situation. Moving from renting to owning is kind of like claiming a piece of your future.

Dhaka is changing fast, and having your own place offers reliable stability. This is where you will make memories, perhaps raise children, and spend your retirement. The size of the space matters less than the feeling that it is permanent. Be it a modern studio downtown, or a big family flat at the city’s edge, those new keys open more than just a door. They open a chapter that finally feels like home.

By Intisab Shahriyar
Illustration: Intisab Shahriyar

Owning an apartment in Dhaka provides long-term security, personal control, and financial benefits over renting, though high prices and interest rates make it challenging for middle-class buyers.

Studio and mid-market flats (Tk 20 lakh–2 crore) are increasingly popular, while premium segments see much lower demand; location, connectivity, and infrastructure heavily influence choices.

Middle-class buyers face challenges due to high interest rates (10–15 per cent) and rising property prices, making loans and family approvals critical considerations.

Employer-supported loans can ease access for some buyers. Hidden costs like EMIs, service charges, and maintenance funds must be factored in, making home ownership a careful financial and personal decision.

Infrastructure projects like the metro rail, expressways, and Padma Bridge are expanding viable housing options in the suburbs, offering more space and affordability.

Securing an apartment in Dhaka is a big step. It is much more than a simple financial transaction. For people navigating the busy life of the city, it is a key life milestone. This commitment is emotional. It is a long-term goal. It represents personal security, especially when you consider the fact that almost 80 per cent of Dhaka’s population still rent their homes.

From temporary spaces to a place that finally feels yours

Renting feels flexible, but you also get uncertainty. Your landlord can suddenly raise the rent or even sell the place. You do not fix big problems because the place is not yours. Owning

30–80 lakh. If you look in Mirpur or Uttara, the price starts closer to Tk 20 lakh. Renting the same studio costs Tk 10,000 to Tk 40,000 each month. Do the maths, and owning suddenly starts to make sense.

“I have always dreamed of owning my own place. A place where I could live with my family,” states Moumita Ahmed, a Senior Officer at Sonali Bank PLC. “There was always a deep-seated desire in me to give my family the same sense of security and comfort in their old age that I was provided when I was growing up.”

However, reality hits different, and for a middle-class family, especially

with the interest rates from 10 to 15 per cent per annum, and the kinds of prices for apartments, this kind of jump is difficult, if not impossible.

“Fortunately, my workplace provides its employees with the option of much lower interest, which has reignited my desire to go for my own home,” affirmed Moumita.

For those like Entekhab Hasan, owning a home is all about security. “With things like inflation, wage stagnation in many workplaces, and the ever-present concern of aiding ailing parents, money is always a dire concern. And on top of that, paying rent genuinely feels like throwing money away, because there is no return on this. If we were paying off a home loan, at least I knew that at the end of it all, we would get ownership. However, getting parents to agree is a tricky obstacle,” confessed Hasan.

Where the market is still moving

The overall pace of apartment sales has slowed sharply. Despite the drop, the property market has found an unlikely saviour in the middle tier. Developers now recognise that the mid-market segment is the sector’s main source of cash flow. It is the real lifeline for the entire industry.

Upper-middle-income families sustain this segment. They are professionals. They typically look for flats priced between Tk 1 crore and Tk 2 crore. These buyers remain active in the market. Demand in the premium segment has plunged by more than 60 per cent. That premium segment covers

flats over 2,000 square feet and priced over Tk 2.5 crore.

Location is a key point to consider, and it also almost always shapes the choice.

Top areas like Gulshan, Banani, and Baridhara cost much more money. They also keep their value even when the market slumps. Areas further out, like Uttara, Bashundhara, and Purbachal, bring in buyers who swap high status for more space and newer infrastructures.

“Places like Dhanmondi, Gulshan, and Banani are simply out of reach for me, and maybe a lot of other people. So, I am looking at mostly places like Motijheel, Khilgaon, Malibagh, and especially Aftabnagar, as it has the potential to be the next big neighbourhood,” states Moumita Ahmed.

“My range is between Tk 1 crore, so I am looking mostly in the 1,200 sq ft range. However, the issue I am facing is that these areas have become pricey, somewhere around Tk 7,000–Tk 11,000 per sq ft,” observed Ahmed.

The metro rail, as well as the expressway, has made Uttara very attractive. Apartments there sell for about Tk 12,000 per square foot. Bashundhara has planned communities, with prices from Tk 7,000 to 8,500 per square foot. Basila is even lower at Tk 5,000 to 6,000 per square foot. Good connections turn a distant suburb into a practical option.

New roads and bridges are opening up southern and northern routes.





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Ergonomic furniture: Why it is no longer a luxury but a necessity

From crowded offices to long commutes, our physical movement has been reduced to a bare minimum. Long hours spent sitting and looking at screens have become the norm for this generation. It has come to a point where the appeal of ergonomic furniture has shifted from a sheer trend to a must-have need.

In an interview with The Daily Star, Dr Nazmee Kabir, an orthopaedic specialist, shared that back pain, neck pain and tailbone pain are now some of the most common issues among office workers and students. “These are the most common issues office workers and students come to us for. They usually sit for prolonged durations at a stretch, resulting in mechanical back and neck pain.”

computer screens for extended periods."

According to Dr Kabir, ergonomic design helps maintain the spine's natural alignment. She said in this regard, "Ergonomic furniture keeps the posture of a person neutral and flexible. But to deal with back pain, one still needs to avoid prolonged sitting. The most important features of an ergonomic chair are a back rest designed in a way that would support the natural curve of the spine, adjustable height, and adjustable headrest for neck support."

Dr Kabir also elaborated on the importance of protecting knee health by keeping a small gap between your knees and the seat, to avoid pressure on blood vessels for long periods. She further advised keeping the computer screen

needs to be kept in mind that regular exercises and taking short breaks every 30 minutes are crucial."

While awareness of the importance of ergonomics is growing, Bangladesh's furniture industry still faces structural challenges, as described by Shafiqur Rahman, director of production and digital marketing at HATIL, in an interview with The Daily Star.

Rahman pointed out the limitations of the industry, saying, "When we talk about ergonomic features, certain tests are required to evaluate ergonomics or orthopaedic suitability, which are not available in our country."

He emphasised that Bangladesh still lacks institutional support, saying, "The country still has no ministry or facility

the Bangladeshi people's height, body structure, posture, and lifestyle. These chairs have been produced for a long time, and now they are in high demand."

Affirming HATIL's R&D department's focus on comfort and long-term durability, Rahman said, "When designing, we ensure proper spinal alignment, correct seat banding, and lasting comfort."

At the design end of the process, architects and designers often play a key role in shaping the ergonomic experience of the user.

Pinak Pani Saha, lead architect at ISHO, a design-driven Bangladeshi modern furniture brand, shared that when designing ergonomic furniture pieces, they mainly have to find a balance between two things: comfort and aesthetics.

He also expressed how maintaining both aesthetics and durability often becomes a challenge when prioritising ergonomic features, saying, "The challenge is designing furniture that is user-friendly, comfortable, durable, and at the same time, looks good. Sometimes it's difficult, but in every design, we try to merge proper ergonomics with aesthetic appeal," he remarked.

Saha noted that awareness among younger generations is rising: "There is a young customer group that is becoming increasingly aware. Many doctors recommend ergonomic furniture, especially study chairs and office chairs, and those customers visit our stores looking for such features."

Designers often face a dilemma when designing chairs with ergonomic features. Take the example of the Aeron mesh chair.

Back in 1994, an American furniture company named Herman Miller launched its uniquely designed Aeron mesh chair. The mesh design and material looked unconventional because they did not have the usual plush padding seen in traditional office chairs. At first glance, assuming

it would be disliked by the customers, many insiders rated it poorly. But as consumers actually began using it, they realised the mesh feature actually offered better support, improved posture, and kept them cooler during long hours. Soon, the perception shifted entirely – the Aeron chair went from being doubted to becoming a symbol of modern ergonomics, eventually turning into a must-have chair in most offices.

In retrospect, ergonomic chairs used to be an acquired taste, and designers often struggled to simultaneously maintain multiple priorities, i.e., aesthetics, comfort, and durability, into one piece.

Nowadays, several ergonomic features are offered in swivel chairs, tables, and even sofas, which help users maintain a proper posture, healthy movement, and better blood circulation, especially for people who spend long hours sitting.

The rule for purchasing furniture is simple: you must be able to move your feet, thighs, legs, neck, arms, and torso – and the furniture you are getting must support that movement.

For businesses and employers, prioritising ergonomic features in the office furniture can lead to increased job satisfaction and improved overall performance. As the working environment of most offices now demands more commitment from their employees, ergonomics is becoming more important than ever.

The cost of ergonomic furniture is justified, given that the cost of neglecting ergonomic features in furniture is far higher, due to chronic discomfort, reduced productivity, and health complications. Ultimately, it is not just about luxury, but about valuing your physical health now, before it becomes too late.

By Minhazur Rahman Alvee
Photo: Hatil



Modern lifestyles, dominated by long hours of sitting at offices or studying, have made back, neck, and tailbone pain common, creating a strong demand for ergonomic furniture designed to support posture and spinal alignment.

Ergonomic features such as adjustable seats, lumbar support, headrests, and convertible standing desks help reduce strain, improve comfort, and protect overall musculoskeletal health, but must be complemented by regular movement and stretching.

Bangladesh's furniture industry faces challenges like a lack of local certification and testing facilities, making global standards costly, yet companies like HATIL are producing locally adapted ergonomic furniture that fits the body and lifestyle of Bangladeshi users.

Investing in ergonomic furniture is crucial for both individuals and workplaces, improving health, productivity, and long-term well-being, making it a preventative measure rather than a luxury expense.

That's where ergonomic furniture comes to save us. Dr Kabir highlighted that the root causes of our problems are mostly lifestyle related, pointing out issues such as "bad posture, slouching, sitting for long hours without breaks, spending long hours without proper back or neck support, sitting on hard chairs, looking down at books or gadgets for too long, and even looking up at

straight at eye level to ensure you have a proper posture and reduced muscle fatigue.

She also warned that ergonomic workstations alone cannot prevent postural musculoskeletal problems if basic healthy habits are not followed, saying, "I would recommend ergonomic furniture to anyone who needs to sit for prolonged durations, but it also

that certifies chairs or furniture. If such a testing body existed, our industry would benefit greatly."

Because of the lack of such standard facilities, global certification becomes too costly for local furniture brands.

Despite these gaps, Rahman assured that HATIL has developed strong local alternatives. "We produce many ergonomic chairs locally, based on



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Expectations of non-resident Bangladeshis from the 2026 democratic government

Bangladesh witnessed some extraordinary times just over a year ago. Nineteen months after the mass uprising of July 2024, the national election is expected to be held in February 2026. The Bangladeshi diaspora, residing across the globe, not only witnessed the historic mass uprising but also expressed their solidarity with the anti-discrimination student movement.

For our anniversary issue, we spoke to some of our non-resident Bangladeshi (NRB) men and women and asked them about their hopes and expectations from the new democratically elected government.

A clean, efficient, and welcoming airport

Every time Sabrina Nawrin Rahman, a marketing professional at Volkswagen in Sydney, Australia, lands in Dhaka, she experiences a mix of emotions: it is the joy of coming home, accompanied by the comfort of hearing Bangla all around her and a sense of belonging that no other place in the world offers. However, Rahman's excitement begins to fade as soon as she steps into the airport.

With mosquitoes buzzing everywhere, toilets unhygienic, baggage trolleys grimy and poorly maintained, bags tossed and turned carelessly, conveyor belts moving at a snail's pace, air conditioners not blowing cool air, and chaotic scenes unfolding every minute, Rahman thinks that an NRB's, as well as anyone else's, first impression of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport is far from pleasant. She thinks that airports are not neutral infrastructure; they project a country's self-image.

"Hospitality is the new standard. A clean, efficient, and welcoming airport, staffed by professional people, will ensure a pleasant experience for every guest and traveller and at the same time, reflect the true essence of Bangladeshi hospitality," she said.



Ahead of the expected February 2026 election, non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) share hopes shaped by the 2024 mass uprising and calls for accountability.

Key demands include cleaner, more efficient airports, modern and affordable healthcare, and strict enforcement of fire safety regulations.

NRBs urge urgent reforms in banking, road safety, and traffic management to reduce accidents, corruption, and economic losses.

Environmental concerns feature strongly, with calls for clean water, improved air quality, green energy expansion, and protection of rivers and lakes.

Education reform, anti-corruption measures, and safeguarding citizens' rights are seen as essential for building an inclusive and humane Bangladesh.

Rahman believes that cleanliness across the airport, efficiency at all levels, helpful immigration officers, reliable luggage handling, clear signage, upgraded luggage carts, and perhaps touches of local art and music can transform the entire Dhaka airport experience into something we all can take pride in.

She hopes that the new democratically elected government will seriously address the problems that local and foreign travellers face at the country's airports.

Enforcement of fire safety regulations and modern, affordable healthcare

In 2021, Afsheen Mozammel, an engineering manager at Cox Communications in Atlanta, USA, and her mother were tragically injured in a fire incident near the Gulshan Pink City Shopping Complex. She was vacationing in Bangladesh at the time.

"My mother and I were on a rickshaw when we heard a loud explosion. A scorching heatwave hit my face, and the next second, I was covered in shards of broken glass. The rickshaw-puller covered his face, abandoned the rickshaw, and ran away, screaming," she said.

Afsheen and her mother were left in a state of panic and confusion. "We got off the rickshaw and started running. We were barefoot. We somehow lost our shoes in the chaos," she said.

Fortunately, a kind man helped the mother and daughter onto another vehicle and requested the rickshaw-puller to take them to the nearest hospital. Both of them were bleeding from head to toe.

Mozammel shared that they were taken to a renowned private hospital located in Gulshan 2, where she learned to her dismay that the emergency room did not even have patient gowns that they could change into. On top of that, the attending doctor administered a medication that had adverse effects on her and left her body swollen.

"The hospital overcharged us for the service, but we were not in a state to argue with them over the price. We

also paid for the treatment of the first rickshaw-puller, who was taken to the same hospital," she added.

Mozammel said that the incident revealed to her the stark reality of the risk of fire hazards and inadequate healthcare in Bangladesh. "We were at a renowned private hospital in Gulshan, and yet the emergency room was ill-equipped. They did not even have the basic supplies to provide proper care to their patients," she said.

"I can only imagine the dire state of our public hospitals," she added.

The fire incident was covered by the national media, but Mozammel does not know if anyone was held accountable for the incident. All she knows is that the party at fault did not come to the assistance of the injured or pay for their medical bills.

"This is what happens when zero accountability is commonplace," she said.

On her subsequent trips to Dhaka, she avoided that particular area of Gulshan, as she still carried the trauma within her. She still bears scars from that day on her face, arms, and legs, a constant reminder of what she endured.

She strongly hopes that the new democratically elected government will work towards modernising the country's healthcare sector and strictly enforcing the fire safety regulations.

"Without healthy citizens, no country can progress. And true national progress is not measured by GDP but by the quality of life of its citizens," she said.

Overhaul of the banking sector

Iftakhar Ahmed (not his real name) believes that the country's banking sector urgently needs reform for future economic progress. He left Bangladesh in 2018 and settled in a European country. Once the owner of several thriving ready-made garments factories that employed more than 4,000 people, his business fell into a financial crisis in 2015.

Ahmed believes that accountability and strict monitoring can save Bangladesh's banking sector as well as the business community. Unless a political government overhauls or reforms Bangladesh's financial sector,

banks and businesses will continue to collapse.

"The dream of a prosperous Bangladesh will remain elusive if financial institutions are allowed to operate unchecked," he said.

Ahmed misses running his own RMG factories and dreams of returning to Bangladesh someday to resume the business that his late father built five decades ago.

Immediate attention to the road traffic situation

As a patriotic Bangladeshi, Dr Haseen Mahbub Cherry, a senior scientist at Bio-Rad Laboratories in Oxford, England, holds many aspirations for her home country. One issue that she believes requires immediate attention

will achieve the same level of road traffic safety as a first-world country, where roads are safe for everyone — pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, and car users alike," she said.

Clean water, air, and energy

"Access to clean water is a basic human right," said Sabriya Fatema Zahra, a resident of Minnesota, USA, and mother to three children. "I want the future democratically elected government to ensure citizens' access to clean water and penalise people and parties who are killing our lakes and rivers by dumping toxic waste into them."

Zahra shared with us the story of Rahima khala, one of the domestic helps in their home in Dhaka.

"Rahima khala left her previous

more trees, create green spaces, update traditional brick kilns, and penalise those who cut down trees and drive unfit vehicles," she said.

Education is the backbone of a nation

Neaz Hyder, who is a UK-based marine surveyor and examiner of engineers, settled abroad more than four decades ago. Although he left the country more than 40 years ago, his ties with Bangladesh and his love for his homeland have remained unshaken.

Hyder laments that the nation failed to improve its education system, resulting in the subsequent importation of, and reliance on, foreign education. As a marine engineer, he shared his insights on the state of marine education in Bangladesh. "There was a time when foreign cadets used to come to Bangladesh to attend the Bangladesh Marine Academy in Chattogram. Our sea education and training had high standards. However, this is not the reality anymore," he said.

Even though the last government allowed private marine academies to open, they failed to address the issue of how cadets would complete the mandatory sea training. "Without sea training, graduates from marine academies are ineligible to become captains or chief engineers of ships," Hyder said.

"I was lucky that during my time, that is in the late '70s, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation had many ships, and I got my placement quite conveniently. However, at present, not many seagoing Bangladesh-flag vessels are available for the cadets to gain sea time," he added.

Hyder strongly believes that education is the backbone of a nation and hopes that the democratically elected government will seriously work towards improving the quality of education in the country. "Without a modern education system that serves every young citizen, no country can make progress," he said.

The NRB men and women we spoke to envision a kind and empathetic society, where people respect and care for each other's lives and well-being. They identify rampant corruption as the nation's primary enemy and urge the future democratically elected government to finally hold individuals and institutions accountable for their actions.

They hope that the new government will prioritise protecting labour and consumer rights, implementing measures to safeguard the country's air, land, and water bodies, modernising healthcare and education, increasing road safety, enforcing fire safety regulations, and increasing green energy production. They envision a strong, inclusive society that ensures safety and equal opportunities for all, and where women's and children's rights are strictly upheld.

By Wara Karim
Illustration: Jawwad Sami Neogi



is the country's road traffic situation.

Dr Cherry stated that in 2024 alone, more than 6,900 road accidents took place, resulting in more than 7,200 deaths and over 12,000 injuries — the numbers are mind-boggling.

"Despite huge investments made in building roads, highways, and flyovers over the years, Bangladesh has been unable to establish a proper traffic management system due to rampant corruption and weak enforcement of laws," Dr Cherry said.

Dr Cherry thinks that road accidents are not the only sad outcome of the poor road traffic situation in the country; traffic congestion also causes people to lose significant work hours, resulting in staggering economic losses. Additionally, potholes and open manholes cause injuries and even deaths. She says that the recent tragic incident in which a bearing pad from a Metro Rail pillar became loose, fell on a citizen, and killed him is unimaginable in a first-world country.

She hopes that the future government will prioritise road safety as a national agenda, enforce strict traffic laws, invest in better infrastructure, implement efficient public transport, ensure proper driver education, and raise public awareness.

"My dream is that one day Bangladesh

residence and moved to a new place in Mirpur recently, as the water in her old neighbourhood became so toxic that it smelled foul, carried debris, and became undrinkable. She and her family suffered from persistent skin, eyes, and stomach diseases caused by the contaminated water," Zahra said.

In addition to ensuring all citizens' access to clean water, Zahra expects the next government to work towards increasing green energy production. The elevator of the six-storey residential building in Mirpur DOHS, where Zahra's parents live, runs on solar energy 24/7. "However, not all solar energy panels that we see on the roofs of Dhaka's buildings are actually operational. And there is no one to monitor these panels."

"The next government can enact laws to ensure that more and more buildings in Dhaka and other major cities install solar panels as a means to reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions," Zahra said.

Dhaka's air quality is one of the worst in the world. The air in major cities like Dhaka and Chattogram is hazardous to health. Zahra wants the new democratically elected government to address the air pollution crisis in major cities.

"I want the new government to plant

বিসমিল্লাহির রাহমানির রাহিম



আশুলিয়া মডেল টাউন

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আমিন মোহাম্মদ ল্যান্ডস্ ডেভেলপমেন্ট লিমিটেড

(আমিন মোহাম্মদ গ্রুপ-এর একটি অঙ্গ প্রতিষ্ঠান)

কর্পোরেট অফিস: ৭৫২, সাতসমজিদ রোড, ধানমন্ডি, ঢাকা-১২০৫।

বিস্তারিত জানতে:

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Student entrepreneurs balance studies and business, INSPIRE YOUNG GENERATION



Md Tahsan Farzeen, Moments of Memories.



Lutfun Nahar Rodela, Riri Charms.

While traditionally working part-time as a teaching assistant, intern, magazine writer, or home tutor has been quite common, the era of student entrepreneurs has begun. From baking cakes to running jewellery stalls and owning software companies, they have opened a new world of opportunities for themselves. We have gathered stories from three inspirational student entrepreneurs, who are the torchbearers of future entrepreneurship.

Prioritising business over academics

During the university admission phase, Md Tahsan Farzeen, a student from the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, decided to start selling photographs on his Instagram page, "Moments of Memories."

What started with an initial investment of Tk 700 has now generated revenue of Tk 35 lakh in almost three years.

Tahsan recalls, "I did not take much pressure during university admissions, so I decided to start something on an experimental basis with my savings."

Before switching his academic route to BBA, he initially enrolled in the CSE department. However, handling the business alongside studying a subject with such rigorous coursework was tough, especially due to the limitations in time management.

Tahsan adds, "It was an advantage to study BBA alongside doing business. I have already experienced practically much of what is taught during the lectures."

Besides, the BBA course helped him acquire theoretical knowledge, which he thinks is essential to manage his business when it expands in the future.

"Given that I belong to a middle-class family, without this business, I might have had to drop out of university, as private university tuition fees are quite high," he says.

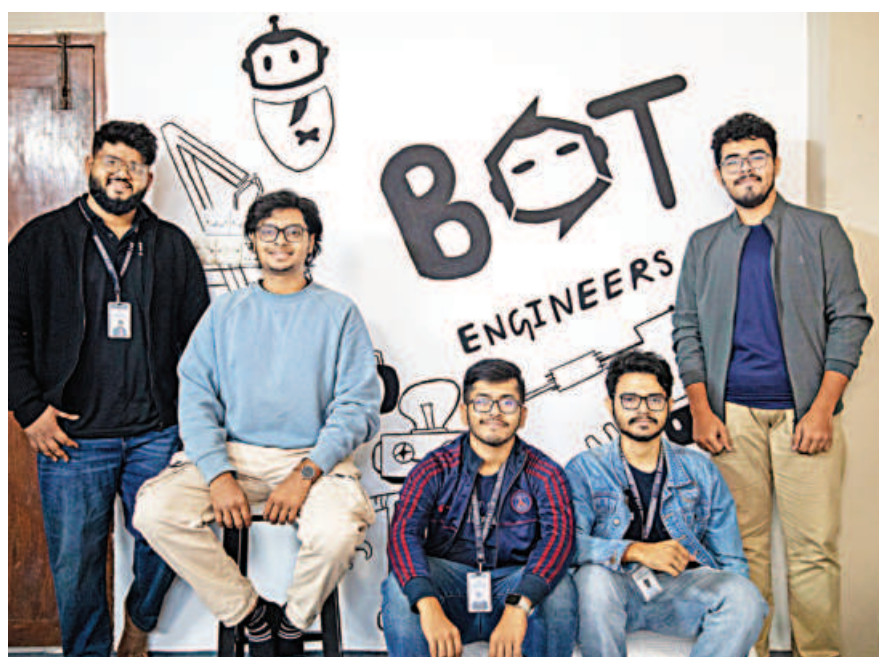
Tahsan proudly mentions, "Since the very first day I got into university, I had not taken a single

Student entrepreneurship in Bangladesh is rising, with young people turning hobbies and ideas into profitable businesses while balancing studies.

Md Tahsan Farzeen built a photography business from Tk 700 to Tk 35 lakh in three years, managing academics alongside full-time business operations.

Md Ali Razin co-founded Bot Engineers to promote robotics and innovation, driven by curiosity and the freedom to fail as a student.

Lutfun Nahar Rodela started Riri Charms, a jewellery business, during the pandemic, leveraging her age and creativity to understand customer needs.



Md Ali Razin (extreme left) with colleagues at Bot Engineers.



penny from my parents. Starting from the tuition fee to any miscellaneous spending, everything has been covered by me."

When inquired about his incentive to keep going, he shared his story of falling into a loophole, "As I was spending more time in business, my CGPA fell, which reduced the waiver I used to get, and that made me work even harder in my business to cover up for the extra finances."

Now, the real question is how he manages his studies despite working an average of 8 hours daily. He replies, "I try to make the most out of my classes in university and make sure to revise well before the exams."

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BHAIYA HOTELS

SALT BAY

নিশ্চিত করুন আপনার
সুরক্ষিত ভবিষ্যৎ !




০১৯৩৮৮৮৬৩৩৩



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HARNESSING THE WIND

Clean energy, clear progress

In a coastal village in Cox's Bazar, steel towers now rise where fishermen once cast their nets. The wind that used to whip across the salt-stung plains without notice is now captured, spinning giant blades that generate electricity and promise a cleaner future. Bangladesh, long reliant on fossil fuels and foreign energy imports, is finally beginning to turn the tide.

The 60-megawatt wind farm at Khurushkul, right beside the Chaufaldandi Union in Cox's Bazar, stands as a symbol of that change. Built with a Chinese partnership and using 22 turbines towering 90 metres high, this is the country's first large-scale attempt to harness the power of the wind. For a nation often thought to lack the wind speeds needed for

utility-scale generation, the project is both a technical and psychological breakthrough.

Md Shahrar Ahmed Chowdhury, Director of the Centre for Energy Research at United International University, has followed this transition closely.

"If we consider wind power potential, from Bangladesh's perspective, it's lower than moderate. Not even moderate," he said. While the numbers may not equal those of Europe's giants, they are definitely worth considering.

The research carried out by the Asian Development Bank, with the help of some German, Italian and Dutch experts, has shown that certain coastal areas and offshore zones in Bangladesh can get pretty windy with speeds of 6

to 7 metres per second. However, when storms come through, the wind speed can shoot up to a staggering 80 metres per second, a terrifying prospect for any turbine.

"We generally design our turbines to take on winds of 60 metres per second, so at extreme wind speeds the turbines are at risk, which increases the insurance premium," Shahrar says.

This is the catch that Bangladesh finds itself in about wind power: harnessing the energy whilst withstanding the full force of the storms.

Despite this, the Cox's Bazar project is up and running, pumping out just shy of 110 million kilowatt-hours every year. At about 20 per cent of its total

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Harnessing the wind: Clean energy, clear progress

FROM PAGE 38

capacity, it may not be on a par with the best in the world, but, given the adversity, it's considered a real success.

Several more projects are in the pipeline, including a 55-megawatt wind farm in Mongla that's currently under construction.

Khulna, Feni, and Inani are also being looked at as potential sites, and there's a lot of interest in offshore wind potential with plans for a proposed 500-megawatt project.

Energy transmission remains one of the biggest engineering bottlenecks. Power generated in remote coastal areas must reach major consumption hubs like Dhaka and Chattogram. "If we want to transfer 1,000 megawatts of power, it's not actually possible right now," Shahriar noted. "We need to strengthen our transmission infrastructure first."

Bangladesh's grid, historically designed for predictable power from fossil fuel plants, is ill-equipped to handle the variable nature of wind. Without proper measures or the introduction of storage, fluctuations in wind output can destabilize the grid. But here too, there are signs of progress.

"Previously, energy storage technology was expensive, but now the

price is comparatively lower. Two years ago, the cost per megawatt-hour (MWh) was 300 thousand US dollars. Now it is less than 200 thousand," Shahriar said. Better storage reduces the risk of a blackout and allows wind energy to be used when the wind dies down.

Still, not all renewables are made equal. Compared to wind, solar is seen as a safer bet for investors and policymakers. It's easier to plan, can be deployed virtually anywhere, and its performance is easier to predict.

"Solar is comparatively easier to develop and estimate the yield, and you can plant it anywhere," Shahriar says. "On the other hand, wind plants cannot be planted anywhere; they need site-specific measurements. You have to measure at least two years of wind at the design hub height."

Policy has been both an enabler and a barrier. In the past, projects were awarded on an unsolicited basis, often resulting in delays or dead ends. That model is slowly being replaced by open tenders. But investors still find the landscape risky.

Despite hurdles, wind power's appeal is clear. It does not emit carbon, consumes no fuel once installed, and uses very little land. The Cox's Bazar wind farm takes up a mere 7.5 acres of land, a drop in the bucket compared to what a solar farm of comparable size would require. And while solar power is mostly limited to daylight hours, wind turbines keep revolving away 24/7, especially during the monsoon season, when they operate at their most productive.

However, getting to a greener grid is not just about wanting to go green; it takes a whole lot of strategic planning, deep pockets, and unwavering decisiveness from the people in charge.

"Countries that are getting into renewable energy and doing big projects get real support from their government," Shahriar notes. "It's all about having the right transmission infrastructure, getting the land sorted and getting that all-important go-ahead from the government."

With Bangladesh going offshore, the potential is huge. Turbines out at sea do not have to worry about troublesome



land disputes and can tap into the stronger, steadier winds that come with it.

Onshore wind turbines typically do not go much above 5 megawatts, but offshore machines can crank out up to 20 megawatts. Still, getting the tech and expertise sorted out for these kinds of installations is a whole different ball game, and we are still in short supply of that right now.

Asked what breakthrough technology excites him, Shahriar was pragmatic.

"Vertical wind turbines do not have that much potential worldwide, but horizontal turbines or three-wheeler wind turbines have more potential. Offshore and nearshore areas have potential, so they can be a big sector."

If Bangladesh were to invest aggressively in wind today, what would citizens gain? Not necessarily cheaper electricity in the short term. But the long-term benefits are undeniable: reduced dependence on imported fuels, a lower carbon footprint, and improved energy security.

but wind can still play a meaningful role. According to Shahriar, "We can achieve 50 per cent if there's support from the government, good policies, and material support."

The future is not just about numbers. It's about mindset. It's about whether the country is ready to back long term gains over short-term convenience. It's about whether policymakers can align investor incentives with national priorities. And it's about whether the people of Bangladesh will accept the changes, from turbines altering skylines to new grid infrastructure slicing through fields.

In a country where every degree of temperature rise and every litre of imported fuel matters, it may be one of the best arrows in our quiver. From the shores of Kutubdia to the breezy coasts of Cox's Bazar, the wind is already here. The question now is whether we will let it blow past us or capture it and let it power our future.

By K Tanzeel Zaman
Photo: K Tanzeel Zaman

Bangladesh has launched its first large-scale wind project: a 60MW wind farm in Cox's Bazar, marking a shift from fossil-fuel dependence despite modest wind potential.

Studies show usable wind speeds in coastal and offshore areas, but extreme storms, grid limitations, and high insurance and transmission costs pose major challenges.

Wind power offers advantages over solar, including smaller land use and year-round generation, especially during monsoons, though it is riskier and more site-specific.

With stronger policies, grid upgrades, storage, and government support, wind could complement solar and help renewables reach up to 50 per cent of Bangladesh's power mix by 2040.

Bronze Award
The South Asian Federation of Accountants (SAFA)



First Prize (Gold Award)
The Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Bangladesh (ICMAB)



First Prize (Gold Award)
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