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Keeping up with the world

A new world is arriving at speed. Artificial intelligence and related technologies are no longer niche tools. They are becoming part of everyday work, shaping how we learn, how we earn, how businesses compete, and how countries position themselves in global supply chains. The pace of change can feel dizzying. For Bangladesh, it is also a moment of possibility.

Bangladesh has long been defined by the energy of its people and the determination of its entrepreneurs. With millions entering the workforce each year, the country's youth dividend can be an advantage only if opportunity keeps pace with ambition. In an economy where skills can date quickly, the biggest risk is not change itself but exclusion from it.

Over the past year, the future of work has shifted from theory to lived experience. Roles are being redesigned. Tasks once considered secure are being automated, assisted, or assessed in new ways. At the same time, fresh avenues are opening for those who can adapt fast, learn continuously, and work with emerging tools rather than against them. For students, freelancers, and early career professionals, the challenge is clear: how to turn disruption into advantage.

This supplement examines what it will take for Bangladesh to stay competitive in a transforming global economy. We look at youth as both the most exposed to change and the best placed to harness it. Our goal is to equip the next generation with clarity and confidence. Not with easy predictions, because the future will refuse them, but with the tools to navigate uncertainty.

Technology, however, is not only an economic story. It is also a governance story. The systems that power innovation rely on data, raising hard questions about privacy, security, consent, and accountability. A fast moving digital economy needs rules that protect citizens without strangling enterprise, and institutions that can keep pace with the stakes.

If there is a single thread running through these pages, it is that adaptation is a choice. Bangladesh's place in the world of tomorrow will be shaped by decisions made today, in classrooms, startups, boardrooms, and government offices.

Keeping up is not about running faster for its own sake. It is about moving with purpose.

Mahfuz Anam
Editor & Publisher

ILLUSTRATION: **ZARIF FAIAZ**

BANGLADESH AT CROSSROADS

Keeping pace with a transforming world

ILLUSTRATION: **ZARIF FAIAZ**

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SUMMARY

1. Bangladesh is racing to stay competitive as AI reshapes jobs, trade, and productivity worldwide.
2. Reliable, resilient internet access is now core economic infrastructure, not a luxury.
3. Automation is boosting efficiency in sectors like finance while heightening displacement risks for routine roles.
4. Data protection and cybersecurity rules are emerging, but trust depends on clear safeguards and real enforcement.
5. Startups and youth can win globally if skills, governance, and scaling support improve fast.

Bangladesh is living through a familiar national story in a new global setting. The country has repeatedly turned constraint into momentum, from scaling garment exports to building mass-market digital finance. Now it faces a different kind of test: a world being reshaped not just by faster machines, but by systems that can generate text, images, code, predictions and decisions at near-zero marginal cost. Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly the recent surge in generative AI, is becoming a general-purpose technology that seeps into every industry rather than sitting neatly inside one.

That matters because the timeline is compressing. Employers globally are not planning for AI "one day". They are reorganising around it. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 found 86% of surveyed employers expect advances in AI and information processing to transform their business by 2030, while employers estimate that 39% of workers' existing skills will be transformed or become outdated between 2025 and 2030. This is the context in which Bangladeshi youth, startups and established industries must compete: a labour market that is changing by design, not by accident.

For Bangladesh, the stakes are high because its current strengths sit alongside deep vulnerabilities. It has a young population and a vast base of mobile-first users. It also has an economy where large numbers of people depend on sectors with tight margins and limited safety nets. If AI becomes a productivity multiplier in rich economies and supply chains, then competitiveness will increasingly depend on data, skills, trust and infrastructure. Countries that cannot provide these will still participate in the global economy, but often from the lowest-value rungs.

A CONNECTED ECONOMY THAT CAN STILL BE SWITCHED OFF

Bangladesh's digital economy looks robust in headline numbers. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) reported 129.89 million internet subscriptions at the end of November 2025, including 115.27 million mobile internet subscriptions. Those figures help explain why digital services now underpin daily life, from education and shopping to banking and work.

Yet the last two years have shown how fragile connectivity can be, and how quickly a network issue becomes an economic issue. During the nationwide internet shutdown in July 2024, Reuters described businesses disrupted across sectors and highlighted the particular shock to freelancers and small exporters who depend on uninterrupted internet access. The same Reuters report, also carried by Context, noted Bangladesh's large online workforce, describing 650,000 freelancers and an IT-related sector contributing about $1bn to the economy.

That episode is worth revisiting because it captures a central tension. Bangladesh wants to be a competitive digital economy, but competitiveness rests on continuity. It is hard to persuade global clients to place high-value work in a country where the fundamentals of connectivity are perceived as uncertain. It is also hard for local firms to build secure, always-on services if the rules and reliability of the underlying infrastructure are in question.

This is one reason satellite internet has become politically salient. In March 2025, Reuters reported Bangladesh's interim leader, Muhammad Yunus, said the country expected to finalise a commercial agreement with SpaceX's Starlink within months, framing it as a route to more reliable nationwide access that cannot be disrupted by political interference. Starlink began operations in Bangladesh on 20 May 2025, Reuters reported, with a monthly price of BDT 4,200 and a one-time setup cost of BDT 47,000, making it a premium option rather than a mass-market replacement for mobile broadband.

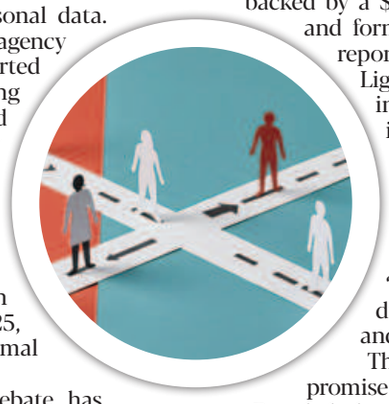
The point is not that satellite internet will solve everything. The point is that resilience is becoming an economic asset. In an AI-driven world, the countries that win investment are those that can promise stability for data, uptime for networks, and clarity for compliance.

THE DATA ECONOMY IS EXPANDING, BUT TRUST IS THE LIMITING FACTOR

Bangladesh's mobile financial services have expanded rapidly and moved beyond basic transfers into a broader payments ecosystem. Bangladesh Bank data cited by the Financial Express put the number of mobile financial services accounts at 146.46 million as of August 2025, with large rural participation.

This scale creates opportunity. AI can improve fraud detection, automate customer service, strengthen risk controls and help small businesses access credit. But it also expands the surface area for harm, from identity theft and scams to biased automated decisions. When AI models learn from messy real-world data, they can reproduce inequalities that already exist. When data is shared or reused without clear consent, trust erodes quickly. A country that wants to attract global partnerships in fintech, health tech and logistics must be able to answer basic questions from investors and customers: who owns data, who can access it, how long it is retained, and what happens when something goes wrong.

Bangladesh has begun to build a legal framework for this, but it remains contested. In October 2025, The Daily Star reported that the interim government approved drafts of the Personal Data Protection Ordinance (PDPO) 2025 and the National Data Governance Ordinance 2025, including a principle that individuals are owners of their personal data. Government news agency BSS similarly reported the approval, framing the measures as aimed at privacy, security and ownership. The Bangladesh Government Press listed the PDPO in its extraordinary gazette archive in November 2025, indicating formal publication steps.



But the public debate has been sharp. Article 19 warned in May 2025 that, without strong safeguards aligned with international human rights standards, Bangladesh's draft data protection approach risked enabling surveillance and repression. Human Rights Watch, in a joint statement on emerging digital laws, argued that broad exemptions for law enforcement and intelligence agencies could undermine core principles such as consent and purpose limitation. Transparency International Bangladesh criticised the pace and structure of the ordinances, warning about the absence of an independent data protection authority and raising concerns about governance concepts it said were inconsistent with global practice.

For a supplement focused on Bangladesh's place in the future world, this is not a niche legal argument. It is about competitiveness. Global companies and partners increasingly treat privacy and security as part of market access. A startup trying to sell to overseas clients, or a bank integrating new AI tools, will face questions about compliance and safeguards. Clear, rights-respecting laws can be an advantage that signals maturity. Unclear, overly broad or weakly governed frameworks can become a barrier.

Cybersecurity law is evolving in parallel. In May 2025, Prothom Alo reported the interim government approved a Cyber Security Ordinance that included recognition of internet access as a civic right, with the gazette to follow. Bdnews24 also reported that the draft ordinance recognised internet access as a citizen's right and repealed sections of the earlier law that had drawn criticism. Bangladesh's laws portal lists the Cyber Security Ordinance 2025 as enacted on 21 May 2025. The long-run impact will depend on implementation, oversight and how the law is used in practice, but the direction signals that digital rights and digital security are now part of the same national conversation.

STARTUPS CAN MOVE FASTER THAN INSTITUTIONS, BUT SCALING IS STILL THE HARD PART

Bangladesh's startup ecosystem has matured enough to produce regional ambition, not only local services. The standout example in 2025 was the strategic merger between Bangladesh's ShopUp and Saudi Arabia-based Sary, backed by a $110m funding round and forming SILQ Group, as reported by The Daily Star. LightCastle Partners, in its H1 2025 startup investment report, said Bangladesh's startup funding reached $119.9m in the first half of the year, with the surge "almost entirely" driven by the ShopUp and Sary transaction.

This illustrates both promise and limitation. Bangladesh can produce companies capable of cross-border scale and complex deals. At the same time, the ecosystem remains sensitive to a few headline transactions, while many early-stage firms struggle with predictable problems: limited growth capital, a small domestic market for high-value software, and regulatory uncertainty.

AI changes the startup equation in a particularly sharp way. On one side, generative tools reduce the cost of building. Small teams can prototype, test and iterate faster than ever, sometimes producing in weeks what used to take months. On the other side, AI raises the bar for credibility. Customers now ask whether a product is secure, whether data is handled safely, whether models can be audited, and whether outcomes are fair. In sectors like finance, healthcare and education, a single failure can destroy trust.

The implication is that Bangladesh's next wave of startups will need to compete on governance as well as innovation. That does not mean copying foreign regulation. It means building practical assurance: strong cybersecurity practices, transparent data handling, and clear accountability when automated systems make mistakes.

BEYOND SOFTWARE: WHY FRONTIER INDUSTRIES ARE BACK ON THE AGENDA

One reason AI is unsettling is that it changes where value sits. If routine coding and basic digital tasks become cheaper globally, the competitive advantage shifts to those who can combine AI with domain expertise, proprietary data, strong institutions and industrial capacity. For Bangladesh, that points to an uncomfortable but necessary conversation about diversification beyond garments and basic IT services.

The renewed global interest in semiconductors and electronics supply chains has reached Bangladesh's policy circles. In July 2025, The Daily Star reported that a national semiconductor taskforce recommended creating a dedicated "semiconductor fund" under the ICT Division or Bangladesh Bank to support ventures in design and testing through financing. Bangladesh's investment authorities have also published material on the taskforce and its priorities, including skills development and global linkages.

Semiconductors are not a quick win. They require long timelines, deep skills, and strong intellectual property protections. But they represent a broader strategic point. Bangladesh's future role in the global economy will be stronger if it can move into industries where value is created through knowledge, standards and trust, not only through scale and low costs. AI can help accelerate learning and productivity in these fields, but only if the ecosystem supports it.

THE CROSSROADS IS A CHOICE ABOUT PEOPLE, NOT ONLY TECHNOLOGY

Bangladesh has a familiar advantage: a large, ambitious youth cohort and a history of adapting under pressure. The risk is that the next phase of technological transformation amplifies inequality. If high-skilled workers and a small number of firms capture the gains while millions of workers face displacement, insecurity and lower bargaining power, the social and political consequences will be severe. If rules around data and cybersecurity become tools for control rather than trust, the country will struggle to attract the partnerships and investment needed for higher-value growth.

The practical path forward is not a single grand project. It is a set of aligned decisions. Resilient connectivity must be treated as economic infrastructure. Industrial upgrading must include credible retraining pathways for displaced workers. Data protection and cybersecurity must be strong enough to build trust, and restrained enough to protect rights and encourage innovation. Education and training must be designed for a labour market where skills decay faster than before, and where learning becomes a career-long expectation rather than a youth-only phase.

Bangladesh is already participating in the new world. The question is whether it will participate mainly as a source of low-cost labour in a more automated global economy, or whether it will build the institutions, safeguards and skills that allow it to climb into higher-value roles. At the tech crossroads, keeping pace is not about chasing every new tool. It is about building the foundations that make transformation work for the many, not only the few.

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Building Bangladesh's human capital in a digital age

SHAHIR CHOWDHURY

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SUMMARY

1. The vision: A new near-future for Bangladesh where digital systems help people learn, farm, work, access credit, and receive healthcare more effectively.

2. The real national challenge is human capital, not gadgets, and technology should expand capability rather than deepen inequality.

3. Education is the key lever, with tech used to reduce friction, personalise learning and free teachers to teach.

4. Affordable, reliable internet is framed as essential infrastructure for skills, services, and economic participation.

5. The next leap requires digital public infrastructure and patient capital so SMEs, startups and citizens can scale securely.

Just before sunrise in 2030, a grade 8 student named Rafi sits at a wooden desk in a tin-roofed home outside Rangpur. His mother is boiling water for tea. The electricity has stayed on through the night. On the tablet in front of him, a mathematics lesson adjusts quietly as he works through it, slowing where he struggles and moving faster where he does not. His teacher will see the same data later that morning, not to rank him, but to understand him.

Several hundred kilometres south, a farmer in Patuakhali checks his phone before stepping into the field. The app tells him how much moisture remains in the soil, which pests are likely this week, and what prices he can expect if he sells early. For most of his life, farming was an exercise in instinct and luck. Now it is closer to a calculation.

In Dhaka, a small business owner opens a dashboard that shows payroll, inventory, tax filings and supplier payments in one place. A bank he has never visited offers him working capital based not on collateral, but on transaction history. He does not feel wealthy. But he feels visible.

At a clinic in Sunamganj, a paramedic enters a patient's symptoms into a digital system. A doctor joins remotely. The diagnosis comes quickly. So does relief.

In Narayanganj, a garment worker updates her identity record and applies for a skills certificate on her phone. She is preparing for an overseas interview. The process once involved queues, agents and uncertainty. Now it is procedural, almost boring. Which is precisely the point. When systems work, people gain back time, dignity, and the emotional bandwidth to imagine better futures.

This is not a vision of a high-tech Bangladesh filled with futuristic gadgets. It is a vision of a more capable Bangladesh. One where everyday systems work well enough that people can focus on learning, earning, and improving their lives. Every technology required to build this future already exists. What separates countries that imagine progress from those that experience it is not innovation. It is intent.

Bangladesh is approaching a decisive moment. A young population, rising entrepreneurial energy, and rapid digital adoption are converging with a global economy increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence and automation. The question is no longer whether technology will reshape society. It is whether Bangladesh will use it to expand human capability or allow it to deepen existing gaps.

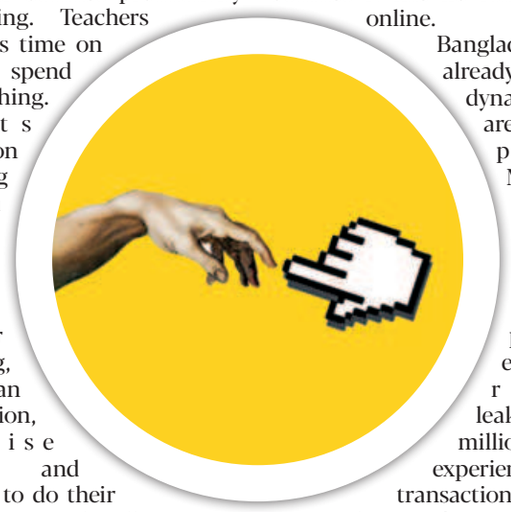
This moment of choice arrives as the country moves towards a national election. Elections do not, by themselves, solve structural challenges. But they create something rare in public life: the possibility of a fresh start. A new government will have the mandate to reset long-term development priorities and decide whether digital transformation will be treated as a peripheral initiative or the backbone of national strategy. This choice is not political. It is generational.

The most important challenge Bangladesh faces is not technological. It is human.

We have 85 million young people under the age of 25, and more than 40 million students who move through classrooms largely designed for memorisation rather than mastery. Workers possess talent that far exceeds the tools available to them. Small businesses, which form the backbone of the economy, remain constrained not by ambition but by access. Technology, when applied with purpose, does not replace people. It makes them more productive, more informed, and more competitive.

This has been true throughout history. The industrial revolution multiplied human output; it did not diminish human worth. Railways shrank distance and expanded opportunity. Electrification reshaped how cities, factories, and classrooms worked. Technology has always been an amplifier of human potential, not a rival to it. It has never been zero-sum. When used deliberately, it lifts entire economies.

Education remains the most important lever because productivity follows learning. Teachers who spend less time on paperwork spend more time teaching. Students assessed on understanding rather than recall learn more deeply. Technology is not a substitute for good teaching, but it can remove friction, personalise instruction, and allow teachers to do their best work. When used well, it accelerates learning. When misused, it distracts.



The same principle applies across sectors. Nurses make faster, safer decisions when they have timely information. Farmers reduce risk when they have access to forecasts and market data. Citizens save days when public services are digitised. Technology is leverage: it converts effort into outcomes.

But none of this is possible without one foundational input: cheap, reliable and widely accessible internet.

For Bangladesh, internet access is no longer a luxury. It is basic infrastructure for human capital development. A student without affordable data cannot learn digitally. A worker cannot upskill. A small business cannot formalise. A citizen cannot access government services. Digital literacy does not emerge from isolated training sessions. It emerges from daily use.

If Bangladesh wants a digitally capable population, it must treat internet access the way previous generations treated roads, electricity, and primary education. This requires revisiting the heavy tax burden on mobile data, encouraging long-term private investment, and expanding coverage outside major cities. The private sector already knows how to build networks. What it needs is a policy environment that rewards long-term investment rather than short-term extraction.

Cheaper internet does not simply increase usage. It changes behaviour. People experiment. They transact. They build confidence. Over time, a population becomes digitally fluent not because it was instructed to, but because it has no reason not to be online.

Bangladesh has already seen this dynamic in one area: digital payments. Mobile money transformed financial behaviour nationwide. It formalised parts of the economy, reduced leakage, and gave millions their first experience with digital transactions. But the next phase of progress requires deeper reform. True interoperability would make digital payments universal. Merchant fees could be lower. Fraud controls could be strengthened. Remittances could be integrated directly into wallets. The first decade showed what is possible. The second decade must make it accessible to all.

To unlock this next phase, Bangladesh will need to build something it does not yet fully have: a national digital public infrastructure stack.

Countries that have made the fastest digital leaps, most notably India with its Aadhaar identity system, UPI payments layer, and interoperable data networks, succeeded because the government built the rails and the private sector built the trains. Public systems created the foundation. Private companies innovated on top of it. The combination unlocked ecosystems, entrepreneurship, and economic participation at scale.

Bangladesh can do the same. A digital identity layer, a national payments and data exchange layer, and open APIs that allow innovators to build securely on top of government infrastructure would accelerate every part of the economy. It would reduce duplication, increase trust, and ensure that public goods remain public while private companies compete on service, value, and user experience.

Crucially, the goal is not to replace the private sector. It is to empower it. Bangladesh already has EdTech platforms, mobile money providers, logistics networks, fintechs, agritech tools, and health technology solutions built by local experts. What they often lack is the public infrastructure to integrate their services, move data securely with consent, and serve citizens at national scale.

Governments build the foundation. Domain experts build the future. This same logic applies particularly strongly to small and medium enterprises. Lack of SME visibility is the single biggest barrier to credit. When payments, compliance, identity, and transaction data can move through a common infrastructure stack, SMEs become legible to the financial system. Legibility reduces risk. Reduced risk attracts lending. Lending drives growth. Growth creates jobs. This is how a digital economy compounds.

But to sustain this shift, Bangladesh will need patient capital. Solving problems in education, healthcare, or labour markets is slow and uncertain, and investors commit to such work only when they trust the system around them. That trust depends on predictable regulation, transparent governance, and capital markets that function well enough for investors to enter and exit efficiently. Countries that have built deeper, better-regulated public markets often see an influx of foreign venture capital and private equity because risk can be priced sensibly and long-term bets feel viable. Without that foundation, early-stage innovation stalls, not because the ideas are weak, but because the financial architecture required to support them is too thin. Countries that underinvest here do not only lose startups. They lose problem-solvers.

Bangladesh must decide whether it wants to remain a consumer of digital solutions or become a producer of them. The outcomes will be visible in classrooms where students learn better, in clinics where care arrives faster, in fields where farmers increase yield, in businesses that grow beyond survival, and in workers who compete globally.

This is what techno-optimism should mean in Bangladesh. Not faith in machines, but confidence in people, supported by systems that work.

We cannot wait for the Bangladesh of tomorrow to emerge on its own. We have to build it. And the tools to build it are already in our hands.

ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

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Policy reset for a digital economy

Privacy, security, portability, and sandboxes

IKBAL HASAN

Barrister Ikbal Hasan is a specialist in corporate and technology law, with a refined understanding of technology policy and regulatory landscapes.

ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

SUMMARY

1. Bangladesh's digital policy is now an economic rulebook that shapes trust, investment, productivity, and inclusion.
2. A credible reset rests on four linked pillars: privacy, security, portability, and regulatory sandboxes.
3. Privacy should be built into product design through minimisation, purpose limits, retention discipline, youth protection, and workable cross-border safeguards.
4. Security must cover both infrastructure and people, including fraud, impersonation, harassment, misinformation, and synthetic content risks.
5. Portability and interoperability can strengthen user agency and competition, while sandboxes help regulators and innovators test AI-era products under strict, time-bound guardrails.

Bangladesh is approaching a moment when digital policy will increasingly determine economic outcomes. Artificial intelligence has sped up the integration of data, software, and online distribution into every sector, from retail and manufacturing to education, finance, and logistics. In parallel, the creator economy and small business digitisation have expanded rapidly, with more people earning, learning, and building networks through online platforms. In this environment, "digital economy policy" is no longer a specialised topic. It is the rulebook for trust, investment, productivity, and inclusion.

A constructive policy reset can be organised around four pillars that are now standard in mature digital ecosystems: privacy, security, portability, and regulatory sandboxes. These pillars are interdependent. Privacy shapes legitimacy. Security protects people and systems. Portability strengthens user agency and competition. Sandboxes create a structured way to learn and adapt as technology evolves. Together, they support innovation without sacrificing accountability.

PRIVACY AS AN EVERYDAY USER EXPERIENCE

Privacy is often treated as a legal construct defined by notices and consent. But for ordinary people, privacy is experienced through design. It is the ability to understand what is happening, make meaningful choices, and trust that those choices will be respected. Large consumer platforms that operate at scale have learned that privacy cannot rely on paperwork alone. It must be embedded in product architecture through clear settings, intuitive controls, and sensible defaults.

A practical privacy approach begins with data minimisation. Services should collect what is needed for a defined purpose and avoid gathering data simply because storage is cheap or future use is imaginable. Minimisation reduces risk and strengthens public confidence. It also makes compliance simpler for startups and smaller firms by narrowing what must be protected, monitored, and governed.

Purpose limitation follows naturally. When a user provides information for one function, that information should not quietly migrate into unrelated uses. This is where transparency must be clear and specific. Explanations that ordinary users can understand, delivered at the moment a feature is activated, are more effective than lengthy documents few people read. Privacy controls should also be easy to find, easy to change, and consistent across devices.

Retention discipline is equally important. Keeping personal information indefinitely increases the impact of breaches, insider misuse, and operational mistakes. A healthy digital economy encourages retention schedules that match business needs and public expectations, especially for sensitive categories of data.

Youth protection deserves a distinct lens. Bangladesh's demographics make it essential that digital services offer age-appropriate experiences, including stronger default settings for teenagers, additional friction for risky interactions, and tools that help families support safer online habits. These measures are not about limiting opportunity. They enable young people to participate in digital life, build skills, and create economic value with greater confidence.

Privacy must also be designed for a world of cross-border services. Bangladesh's entrepreneurs rely on global cloud infrastructure, cybersecurity services, payment partners, and international customer support tools. Cross-border data handling can be compatible with strong protection when accountability is clear, safeguards are enforced, and responsibilities are well defined. The objective should be to protect people while enabling legitimate digital trade and modern security operations that often depend on global threat intelligence.

SECURITY AS RESILIENCE, INTEGRITY, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Security in the AI era extends beyond protecting servers and networks. It includes fraud, impersonation, account takeovers, online harassment, and coordinated deception. It also includes the integrity of information, particularly as synthetic media becomes easier to generate and distribute. A credible security pillar must therefore protect both infrastructure and people.

At the operational level, the strongest security cultures are layered. They include secure engineering practices, continuous monitoring, strong account protections, and tested incident response procedures. Many major platforms also rely on security research engagement and vulnerability reporting channels to identify issues early, and they conduct regular internal and external assessments. These are pragmatic approaches shaped by experience: at scale, security is a constant process, not a one-time certification.

From a policy perspective, security works best when expectations are risk-based and proportionate. A payment provider, a hospital system, and a small ecommerce shop do not face the same threat profile. But every organisation that handles personal information can meet baseline practices such as access control, secure authentication, appropriate encryption, logging, vulnerability management, and incident readiness. When such baselines are widely adopted, the number of preventable failures falls and trust rises across the market.

Security also depends on tackling scams and deception. Online fraud often succeeds through social engineering rather than technical sophistication. The most effective responses combine enforcement against malicious networks with consumer education. Platforms can disrupt coordinated actors, remove impersonation attempts, and reduce exposure to suspicious behaviour. Banks, telecom operators, and consumer protection bodies can reinforce this by sharing threat patterns and supporting victims. A coordinated ecosystem approach lowers the cost of security for everyone and reduces harm at scale.

Integrity in digital spaces is now part of national economic resilience. When manipulation, misinformation, and harassment drive people offline, the costs are social and economic. Responsible platforms invest heavily in moderation, detection tools, and user reporting systems, supported by clear rules and appeals mechanisms. Transparency reporting, when done consistently, helps build confidence by showing how safety and enforcement operate in practice. These mechanisms should be recognised as part of the broader security conversation, not a separate debate.

AI raises a further requirement: clarity around synthetic and manipulated content. As generative tools become mainstream, the digital economy benefits when consumers have signals that help them judge what they are seeing. Labelling, provenance indicators where feasible, and enforcement against harmful deception can reduce the risk that trust collapses under a flood of convincing fakes.

PORTABILITY AS USER AGENCY AND PRO-COMPETITION INFRASTRUCTURE

Portability is sometimes discussed as a technical feature, but its real significance is economic. Portability strengthens user agency, reduces lock-in, and supports competitive markets where startups can challenge incumbents on quality, safety, and innovation. It also reinforces privacy by making control tangible rather than theoretical.

In practice, many large consumer services already provide mechanisms for users to access and download certain categories of account data. They also provide settings that let users manage profile visibility, interactions, and personal information. These capabilities demonstrate that portability can be implemented at scale while maintaining security safeguards.

For Bangladesh, portability can play several roles. It can increase consumer confidence among first-time digital users who worry about being trapped in one service. It can support entrepreneurship by making it easier for small businesses and creators to manage their digital presence and records. It can also contribute to healthier competition by lowering barriers for new services that offer better outcomes for users.

Portability must be designed safely. If the transfer of data is poorly secured, it becomes an avenue for fraud, coercion, or unauthorised access. Safe portability requires strong identity verification, clear user consent, limits on scope, and secure transfer methods. It also benefits from common standards so that portability is usable, not symbolic. Standards reduce friction for startups and allow regulators to supervise more effectively because expectations are consistent.

Interoperability is the natural extension of portability. In a growing digital economy, the biggest productivity gains come when services can connect securely and with permission, whether across payments, logistics, identity verification, or small business tools. Interoperability should be consent-driven, auditable, and limited to defined purposes. When done right, it expands opportunity without turning the ecosystem into an uncontrolled data-sharing environment.

SANDBOXES AS A DISCIPLINED WAY TO LEARN FASTER THAN TECHNOLOGY CHANGES

Even the best-designed policy can struggle to keep pace with AI-enabled products that evolve on quarterly cycles. Regulatory sandboxes offer a practical response: a structured method to test innovation under real conditions with clear guardrails. Sandboxes are sometimes misunderstood as relaxed regulation. The opposite is true when they are designed well. A credible sandbox is rigorous, time-bound, and evidence-driven.

Many responsible digital services already deploy new features through controlled rollouts, monitoring, and iterative improvements, especially for safety-sensitive changes. A sandbox applies similar discipline at the policy level. It creates a setting where regulators, innovators, and stakeholders can observe outcomes, measure risk, and refine safeguards before mass deployment.

For Bangladesh, sandboxes can be particularly valuable in areas where AI promises high public benefit and complex risk, including education technology, health-related services, financial tools, and digital identity adjacent services. Sandboxes can test not only products, but also governance measures such as impact assessments, bias testing, security controls, grievance mechanisms, and transparency practices. They can also help build institutional capability by exposing regulators to real-world systems rather than theoretical models.

A strong sandbox model should protect users explicitly. Participation should be voluntary with clear disclosure. The scale should be limited. The duration should be fixed. Reporting should be mandatory. Exit pathways should be clear, including conditions for scaling, conditions for modification, and conditions for stopping. When these elements are in place, sandboxes reduce uncertainty for investors and innovators while improving consumer protection through earlier, more informed oversight.

A COHERENT RESET THAT SUPPORTS GROWTH AND TRUST

The strategic objective for Bangladesh is not simply to adopt new technologies. It is to build a digital economy that can grow without recurring crises of trust. In an AI-shaped world, trust is a competitive advantage. It attracts investment, supports entrepreneurship, and keeps citizens engaged in digital services that can expand opportunity.

Privacy, security, portability, and sandboxes are most effective when treated as a single system. Privacy builds legitimacy and makes participation sustainable. Security protects people, commerce, and resilience. Portability strengthens user agency and market dynamism. Sandboxes accelerate learning and improve governance quality without freezing innovation.

Bangladesh's youth, creators, and startups are ready to compete in the economy of the future. A policy reset rooted in these pillars can ensure that the digital marketplace remains open, trusted, and resilient, enabling innovation to scale responsibly and inclusively.

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REMITTANCE 3.0

How fintech is reshaping our ties with the world

MAHMUDUL HASAN

Mahmudul Hasan is the Head of Growth at NALA Bangladesh, a mobile financial services provider.

ILLUSTRATION: **ZARIF FAIAZ**

SUMMARY

1. Bangladesh's remittance journey has moved from informal networks to bank-led channels and now to fintech-enabled "Remittance 3.0".

2. Fintech is making remittances faster, more accessible, and increasingly transparent, while pushing banks to modernise.

3. AI is strengthening fraud detection and compliance by spotting anomalies and adapting to new risks in real time.

4. Blockchain and smart contracts could shorten settlement times and reduce friction, but user trust and usability remain critical.

5. The biggest barriers are uneven digital access, language and literacy gaps, cybersecurity risks, and the need for smart, flexible regulation.

Let's walk down memory lane to 1971, when a new nation had just emerged after a brutal nine-month war. There was hope and excitement to rebuild, but the country faced severe economic challenges. Infrastructure was destroyed, industries were barely functioning, and agricultural production later fell sharply after the 1974 famine.

From the war and its aftermath to the present day, it is clear Bangladesh has made significant progress. In GDP growth, financial systems, remittances, and overall economic stability, the nation has advanced across sectors, with government institutions, private organisations and the youth contributing at the same time. Yet there is still much to achieve, as other nations have reached higher levels of development despite facing severe challenges of their own.

Remittance 3.0, a modern, technology-driven approach, can unlock economic potential and should be adopted in Bangladesh to accelerate growth.

THE EVOLUTION OF REMITTANCES

Even during that bleak period, the oil boom of the 1970s generated massive demand for foreign labour across Gulf countries. That was the first wave that ignited Bangladesh's remittance story, which emerged not only as a strategic policy choice but also as an economic necessity. Migrants' blood, sweat and tears became a lifeline for their families and communities, and a crucial source of foreign exchange. This marked the start of Remittance 1.0: an informal process of sending money back through friends, relatives, or travellers, supported by postal money orders and the growth of hundi networks.

Back then, remittances and their link to the wider economy were viewed narrowly. They were seen primarily as a survival mechanism for families. As globalisation gained momentum through the 1980s and 1990s, labour mobility became one of the country's crucial export channels.

Gradually, remittances grew steadily, shifting from household support to a macroeconomic pillar. The foreign exchange market strengthened, and parts of the rural economy stabilised. This period also pushed banks to deepen relationships with foreign banks and money transfer operators (MTOs) such as Western Union and MoneyGram, ushering in the era of Remittance 2.0.

As the sector expanded, transparency improved and reserves increased. Yet informal channels such as hundi often prevailed, driven by simpler processes and, at times, better exchange rates than formal routes. Next came Remittance 3.0: a technological shift that pulled the country further into fintech, powered by the rise of BKash and Nagad and the emergence of newer fintech players such as Nala, TapTap Send, and now Google Pay. This ripple effect also pushed traditional banks to accelerate their own fintech initiatives, reshaping remittances into a faster, more accessible, technology-driven ecosystem.

Even so, the promise of Remittance 3.0 has not reached everyone. Many users still face a quieter form of digital segregation, shaped by unfamiliar interfaces, language barriers, low digital literacy, and compliance models that can feel rigid and opaque. In practice, these frictions can deter migrants and families from using formal digital channels, even when the tools exist.

AI, BLOCKCHAIN, AND FINTECH

The remittance sector has been undergoing major change worldwide. Technology has made transfers faster, safer and more accessible. Artificial intelligence (AI) is a clear example.

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How fintech is reshaping our ties with the world

IMAGE: **JOSUE ISAI RAMOS/ UNSPLASH**

FROM PAGE 8

Machine-learning models can analyse data in real time to flag anomalies, identify fraud patterns, and support compliance with anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorism financing (CTF) requirements. They also adapt to new risks by learning from historical data across millions of transactions.

Blockchain can add a second layer. It functions as a shared, secure digital ledger in which every transaction is recorded permanently and cannot be altered. By reducing reliance on long banking chains, blockchain can shorten settlement cycles and shrink the distance between sender and receiver. Transfers that once took days can reach recipients' mobile wallets far more quickly.

For instance, Surgepay in the Philippines is often cited as part of this shift. Users acquire stablecoins (USDC, BUSD, and USDT) from an authorised cryptocurrency exchange, send them to their Surgepay wallet, and from there can make transfers with minimal transaction fees.

At the same time, fintech is changing the financial behaviour that surrounds remittances. In many countries, it is creating easier pathways to save, invest and build financial resilience, reducing how dependent households are on remittance income alone. Fintech is beginning to shift the picture in Bangladesh as well. Mobile financial services (MFS) are now widely used for domestic transactions, while a growing range of international transfer applications have become reliable channels for remittances. Digital wallets and banking technologies have also made it easier for ordinary citizens to save and invest small amounts without relying on informal channels or physical bank branches. Government services now offer digital payment options for utility bills and other fees, helping suburban and rural populations gradually adopt cashless transactions.

In Bangladesh, the combination of AI and blockchain could push these developments further by strengthening fairness, resilience and efficiency. AI can act as a smart guide for transfers routed over blockchain networks, reading congestion and cost to find quicker, cheaper routes, saving time and money for senders. Smart contracts, essentially automated rules written into software, can add efficiency too. They can verify whether a transaction meets defined conditions and then execute transfers instantly when requirements are satisfied, reducing paperwork and delays.

This blend of technologies does more than speed up remittances. It creates new ways to use money, and new routes for diaspora capital to support development. For Bangladesh to benefit fully, it will need a supportive environment. That includes clear, flexible rules, including tools such as regulatory sandboxes where new ideas can be tested safely. Data privacy must be taken seriously. Digital literacy programmes are also essential so people can use these tools confidently and safely. If these pieces come together, remittance inflows can evolve from short-term household support into a longer-term development tool.

IMAGE: **JOSH OLALDE/ UNSPLASH**

REMITTANCE 3.0 AS A TOOL OF GLOBAL INFLUENCE

Remittance 3.0 is not only about sending money faster or cheaper. It represents a shift that can strengthen Bangladesh's position in the world and reshape society from within. When remittances move through digital, formal channels, they become more transparent, traceable and reliable. This can help strengthen foreign exchange reserves and improve macroeconomic visibility. With clearer data and stronger buffers, Bangladesh may be better placed to engage with international institutions and partners, including in trade and development discussions, with greater confidence.

At the global level, this transformation can also improve Bangladesh's reputation. Successful local platforms and fintech companies demonstrate that the country can build world-class financial technology. Instead of only importing solutions, Bangladesh can increasingly share ideas, products and operational lessons. That shift can raise its soft power and position the country as a leader in digital finance within the Global South.

Remittance 3.0 also has the potential to strengthen ties between the diaspora and the homeland. Fintech platforms can go beyond transfers, allowing overseas Bangladeshis to invest directly in local businesses, community projects, or climate-resilience initiatives.

CHALLENGES AND SETBACKS

Challenges remain. Cybersecurity threats, digital fraud and data privacy risks persist. Digital literacy gaps also remain, despite efforts to address them, limiting how fully migrants and their families can benefit from digital tools. Policymakers and fintech players therefore need to work together through a rigorous, coordinated push that protects users without stifling innovation, and builds an ecosystem of trust among both senders and receivers.

Today, remittances are more than a financial flow. They can be a tool for diplomacy, social progress and shared nation-building. Digital channels have made transfers faster, safer and more traceable, but access is still uneven. To sustain diaspora engagement, Bangladesh must offer secure, trusted and user-friendly digital services. By combining smart technology with smart policy, the country can help its young population move from simply receiving money to building wealth, supporting local business growth, and creating a more self-sufficient economy.

The future of remittances in Bangladesh depends on how well technology, policy and people are aligned. Remittance 3.0 offers a chance to formalise flows, deepen trust and unlock productive use of diaspora capital. If guided by smart regulation and user-first design, fintech can transform remittances into a strategic tool for sustainable growth.

A FAIR CHANCE TO LEARN

Why the future of education depends on digital access

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

KORVI RAKSHAND

Korvi Rakshand Dhrubo is the founder and CEO of Jaago Foundation, a non-profit organisation in Bangladesh.

SUMMARY

1. Bangladesh's high connectivity numbers hide a deep learning crisis, with "digital access" too often mistaken for real educational advantage.

2. The education gap has shifted from enrolment to learning, and the cost of falling behind is rising as work and opportunity move online.

3. Digital access can narrow inequality only if it is designed as an inclusion system, combining devices, affordable data, reliable power, relevant content and digital skills.

4. Teachers are the key multiplier, and Bangladesh's existing teacher-focused digital infrastructure can help spread quality and support where it is weakest.

5. Without strong safeguards on privacy and child safety, digital learning risks eroding trust and widening the divide it is meant to close.

Bangladesh is living through a paradox. On one hand, we are more connected than ever. Official figures from the telecoms regulator show 131.49 million internet subscriptions as of October 2025, including 116.87 million mobile internet subscriptions. On the other hand, connection has not yet translated into equal opportunity. The World Bank's most recent Learning Poverty brief estimates that 51 percent of children of late primary age in Bangladesh are not proficient in reading, adjusted for out-of-school children.

These two realities coexist because "digital access" is often confused with "digital advantage". A SIM card is not a classroom. A smartphone is not a teacher. An internet subscription is not the same as meaningful connectivity, especially when a household shares one device among several siblings, electricity is unreliable, or a student must choose between buying data and buying dinner. We should be honest about this, because honesty is where progress begins.

When we talk about narrowing the education gap, we are talking about real children in real places: a girl in a rural village expected to help at home after school; a boy in an urban settlement who has never had a quiet corner to read; a child with a disability whose school was never designed with accessibility in mind; a refugee child whose education can be interrupted overnight by circumstances beyond their control. The education gap is not one gap. It is a web of gaps that reinforce one another.

In one coastal district, a Class 5 student I met shares a single phone with three siblings. Her online class begins at the same time her mother needs the phone for work. She logs in when she can, and hopes the lesson is still there.

Multiple SIM ownership, often registered under names other than the actual user, remains common.

Digital access can help cut through that web, faster than traditional systems can expand brick by brick. But it will only narrow the gap if we treat it as an inclusion strategy, not a technology project.

THE EDUCATION GAP IS SHIFTING, NOT SHRINKING

A decade ago, the gap was largely about enrollment. Today, Bangladesh has made important progress in getting children into school, yet the learning crisis remains severe. At the same time, the world is reorganising itself around data, automation and artificial intelligence. The penalty for falling behind is growing.

If a child leaves school without strong literacy, numeracy and digital confidence, they do not just face a tough job market. They face a job market being redesigned around skills they were never given the chance to build.

This is why digital access matters now more than ever. Not because screens are fashionable, but because the future is increasingly screen-mediated. Knowledge, credentials, mentorship, job discovery and professional networks are moving online. If access is unequal, the future will be unequal.

Even headline connectivity numbers can mislead us. Bangladesh's internet subscription count includes many connections that do not represent distinct individuals. Multiple SIM ownership, often registered under names other than the actual user, remains common. For education, this matters because learning is meant to extend beyond the school day. When connectivity is fragmented, shared or unstable, children experience it as scarcity, not empowerment.

WHEN DIGITAL ACCESS WIDENS INEQUALITY

The pandemic years left us with a lesson we should not forget. When schools closed and learning shifted online, research in Bangladesh showed deep socio-economic and gender-based divides in access to televisions, smartphones, computers and the internet. Crucially, it also found that technology access alone produced only modest learning gains unless other supports were present.

Putting content online is not inclusion. If a child lacks a device, cannot afford data, struggles with the language of instruction, has no quiet space to study, or has no adult to help them navigate learning, digital education becomes another advantage for the already advantaged.

We must design for the learner who has the least.

Meaningful digital access requires several elements to work together: a reliable connection, an appropriate device, affordable usage, relevant content, and the skills and safeguards to use it safely. Remove any one of these, and the promise collapses.

WHERE DIGITAL ACCESS GENUINELY NARROWS THE GAP

When meaningful access is in place, the impact can be transformative, and very practical.

A student in a school with limited subject teachers can follow high-quality lessons aligned to the national curriculum. Simple, mobile-first guidance in Bangla and plain language can help families support routines, attendance and reading practice. This is not glamorous innovation, but it is the kind that changes trajectories.

New technologies also matter. Across Bangladesh, education platforms are beginning to experiment with AI-based assessment, feedback and personalised tutoring. Used responsibly, these tools can reduce the cost of high-quality practice and coaching, services that wealthier families have always been able to buy privately, while poorer families could not. The right digital models can democratise what was once a privilege.

THE REAL BARRIERS ARE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC

Affordability remains a major constraint. Even where mobile data prices are relatively low, the true cost of learning includes the device, repairs, charging, data top-ups, and the opportunity cost of time spent studying rather than earning.

Gender norms compound the problem. Research on low-income women in Bangladesh shows how limited digital literacy, financial dependence and restrictions on device ownership shape access. When a girl must ask permission to use a phone, or when the "family smartphone" is controlled by male relatives, access becomes conditional. Conditional access does not close gaps. It reproduces them.

Structural barriers persist too: unreliable electricity, unsafe study spaces and uneven content quality. A child can be connected and still learn very little if the content is not engaging, aligned and scaffolded. This is why pandemic-era evidence is so important. Digital learning must be designed as a learning system, not a content dump.

IMAGE: ESMA MELIKE SEZER/ UNSPLASH

WHAT A SERIOUS NATIONAL APPROACH WOULD LOOK LIKE

If Bangladesh wants digital access to narrow the education gap, a few outcomes should guide us.

Within five years, every public primary school in Bangladesh should meet a minimum digital learning standard: reliable electricity, basic connectivity, shared student devices, and offline-capable national curriculum content.

Every teacher should receive ongoing digital pedagogical support, not one-off training. The existing teacher portal ecosystem is a strong foundation, but the next step is helping teachers integrate digital tools into lesson planning, assessment and remediation in ways that make classrooms more inclusive rather than more complicated.

Every learner should have access to low-bandwidth, offline-capable content. Designing offline-first is not a technical detail; it is a statement of who we prioritise. When offline functionality is treated as a core requirement, students in hard-to-reach areas stop being an afterthought.

Every young person should also see a clear pathway from school learning to employable skills. This is where Bangladesh's startup and edtech ecosystem can contribute, by building affordable, outcome-driven products that bridge school curricula and the future of work, including the skill shifts driven by AI.

TRUST, PRIVACY, AND CHILD SAFETY ARE NON-NEGOTIABLE

Digital learning environments collect data, shape behaviour and can expose children to harm if governance is weak. If families lose trust, the very communities we aim to reach will disengage.

Bangladesh is moving toward data protection legislation, but the debate highlights the need for stronger safeguards and independent oversight. In education, this is especially sensitive. Children are not consumers; they are rights-holders.

Any digital learning programme, public or private, must minimise data collection, secure it properly, be transparent about how data is used, and never condition access to learning on the surrender of privacy. Strong governance is not a barrier to innovation. It is the foundation for responsible scale.

THE OPPORTUNITY BEFORE US

Bangladesh's education system serves more than 40 million students and employs nearly one million teachers. The scale is daunting, but it is also our strength. When Bangladesh commits, we can move fast.

Digital access will shape who learns, who earns and who belongs in the next Bangladesh. If we get it right, technology becomes a ladder: portable, scalable and fair. If we get it wrong, it becomes a wall, invisible but permanent.

The choice is not about devices or platforms. It is about whether we believe every child deserves a fair chance to learn, no matter where they are born. Bangladesh has made harder choices before. This is one we must make now.

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JOBS IN TRANSITION

Which roles will emerge and disappear by 2030?

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

Faisal Bin Iqbal is the In-Charge of Campus, Rising Stars, and Star Youth.

The modern job market is crowded, with far more job-seekers than available opportunities. Add the rapid rise of artificial intelligence, which threatens to replace many roles, and the anxiety is understandable. From fresh graduates to seasoned professionals, everyone is asking the same question: which jobs will still matter tomorrow, or even four or five years from now?

According to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Future of Jobs Report 2025, the global workforce faces a dual movement: about 92 million existing roles may be displaced, while 170 million new jobs are set to emerge by 2030, leading to a net gain of 78 million roles globally. This sweeping reshuffle is driven by the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), automation, green transitions, digital platforms, and the pandemic-powered evolution of work.

The WEF report also notes that almost 40 percent of core job skills are expected to change, forcing workers to adapt or risk stagnation. In the midst of this global upheaval, it helps to understand which jobs will emerge and which will disappear.

ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

SUMMARY

1. AI and automation are reshaping the job market, eliminating some roles while creating many new ones.
2. Nearly 40 percent of job skills will change, making reskilling unavoidable.
3. Demand will rise for AI, data, cybersecurity, and sustainability roles.
4. Routine and repetitive jobs will continue to decline due to automation.
5. The future of work will still involve people, with machines reshaping—not replacing—jobs.

Let's start with the roles that are likely to emerge or gain more popularity within the next four years.

AI AND MACHINE LEARNING SPECIALISTS

Globally, the demand for AI and machine learning (ML) experts—from algorithm training to ethical governance—is surging. Specialised AI roles, in particular, are expected to grow in the coming years.

These specialised AI and ML roles are not necessarily purely technical jobs. They also include roles like ethical AI deployment, bias mitigation, and even extensive AI and ML research.

In economies like Bangladesh, where digital services and IT export are growing, this creates a stark opportunity for tech-ready talent. According to UNESCO's Bangladesh Artificial Intelligence Readiness Assessment Report, Bangladesh is already seeing plenty of academic research being done on AI. However, the focus needs to shift toward the practical use of AI across industries, rather than limiting it to just scholarly research.

DATA SCIENTISTS AND BIG DATA ANALYSTS

Information, today, is the raw material of transformation, and those who can wrangle, interpret, and act on it are in premium demand. With data volumes expanding exponentially, organisations in sectors from health to banking and agriculture seek professionals who can translate bytes into business insights.

What's more, the demand for data analysts will also continue to grow. If you don't want to learn advanced coding to work with data, you can choose to skip it—but having basic coding knowledge, along with the ability to use tools like Microsoft Power BI, is essential for anyone looking to work in this field.

CYBERSECURITY ANALYSTS

When work goes digital, risk follows. Cybersecurity roles are expanding as businesses and governments grapple with threats targeting sensitive data and critical infrastructure. A world where remote work, cloud storage, and Internet of Things (IoT) are commonplace requires defenders as much as inventors.

Emerging markets like Bangladesh, whose digital economy is gaining momentum, must build local capacity not only in software development but also in defensive cyber skills. According to the 2024 Global Cybersecurity Index, published by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Bangladesh scored more than 96 out of 100. While this is a remarkable achievement, the next step is to invest in developing skilled manpower and preparing them to tackle emerging cyber threats.

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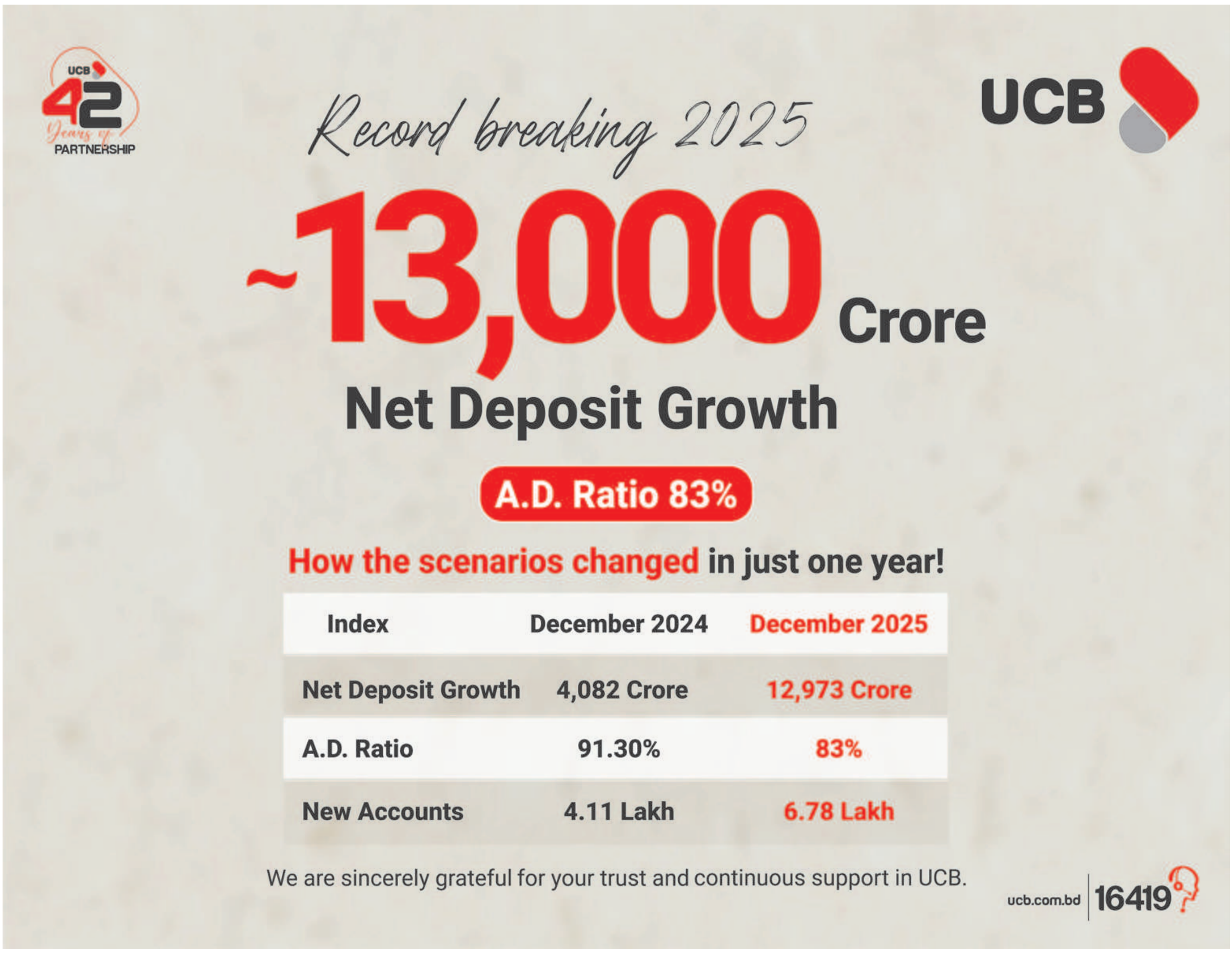

Which roles will emerge and disappear by 2030?

IMAGE: BADY ABBAS/ UNSPLASH

FROM PAGE 12

RENEWABLE ENERGY TECHNICIANS AND SUSTAINABILITY EXPERTS

The world's pivot toward net-zero emissions and climate resilience casts green jobs in the spotlight. Roles connected with solar, wind, and grid integration, as well as consultants who guide firms on environmental compliance (ESG) and sustainability, are becoming part of modern labour landscapes.

This trend is focused on societal priorities as nations confront climate change with both urgency and investment. Bangladesh, being extremely vulnerable to climate change, needs these professionals more than any other country. Together, using data and AI, our renewable energy, climate, and sustainability experts must develop models and blueprints that offer effective solutions to our climate challenges.

Several roles are also expected to decline within the next four or five years.

DATA ENTRY CLERKS

The era of manual record keeping and repetitive data chores is ending. Optical Character Recognition (OCR) powered by AI now processes volumes of structured information faster, cheaper, and more accurately than human operators could ever hope to.

What was once a common office starting point for new graduates is now being replaced by automated pipelines. Many in Bangladesh also work as data entry specialists on platforms like Fiverr and Upwork. These freelancers are also struggling to secure data entry work. Soon, those who once entered data will instead be training systems to automate such tasks.

RETAIL CASHIERS AND BANK TELLERS

Self-checkout kiosks, mobile payments, automated credential verifications, and digital banking apps have chipped away at the economics of human-operated counters. Roles that dominated retail and financial services will see a decline as consumers adopt contactless systems, not out of disdain for people, but for convenience and efficiency.

This does not mean banks will be paperless or devoid of human interaction. However, as the WEF notes, the traditional role of the teller, rooted in routine transactions, will shrink.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS AND SECRETARIAL ROLES

AI-powered assistants, scheduling bots, and document automation tools are redefining office support functions. Similar to how spreadsheets restructured accounting tasks decades ago, AI is now embedding itself into what used to be considered indispensable human support work.

This trend points to a future where organisation and communication tasks are augmented, not erased. Professionals will need new organisational skills that complement context and creativity.

WHY THESE TRANSITIONS MATTER

For many Bangladeshi youth entering the job market, this global tectonic shift will feel personal. However, jobs are not vanishing as much as they are mutating. The future professional will likely hold several careers, pivot fields, or create entirely new ones.

At present, reskilling is not optional; it has become foundational. And the better a labour market anticipates change, the better it weathers it. Countries with strong vocational training, digital inclusion, and flexible education systems will thrive. Those who cling to outdated models may see their brightest leave for greener pastures.

Put bluntly, traditional four-year degrees—once a guaranteed passport to lifelong employment—are becoming only one part of a much larger ecosystem. What matters increasingly are skills that machines cannot replace, like creativity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, complex problem solving, and intercultural communication.

The conversation about future jobs often swings between dystopian fears and utopian dreams of a machine-free life. Both extremes are exaggerated. The reality lies somewhere in between, where people will continue to work, and machines will not take over the labour market, but they will reshape it.

The conversation about future jobs often swings between dystopian fears and utopian dreams of a machine-free life. Both extremes are exaggerated. The reality lies somewhere in between, where people will continue to work, and machines will not take over the labour market, but they will reshape it.

And how we shape our skills, policies, and education today will determine who thrives in the decades ahead.

In Bangladesh and beyond, governments, universities, and industry must change in concert. Curricula should emphasise digital fluency and lifelong learning. Employers should invest in upskilling rather than downsizing. And individuals should approach careers with flexibility and courage, because the future of work is not a fixed destination, but a journey of continuous reinvention.

Youth upskilling in the age of AI: where to begin?

FAISAL BIN IQBAL

Faisal Bin Iqbal is the In-Charge of Campus, Rising Stars, and Star Youth.

SUMMARY

1. AI is transforming jobs, making traditional degrees less reliable for employment.
2. Upskilling is essential, focusing on creativity, judgment, and human-centred skills.
3. Digital literacy—understanding AI, data, and ethics—is now a basic requirement.
4. Continuous learning, including learning, unlearning, and relearning, is crucial.
5. Technical skills are valuable but should complement human skills and personal interests.

For today's youth, the future no longer arrives quietly. It updates itself overnight; one morning, you wake up to find that a task you spent years learning can now be done by a machine in seconds, and by evening, there is a new tool promising to do even more.

Today, a four-year degree no longer guarantees a job. In fact, in 2024, Bangladesh had around nine lakh unemployed graduates. With artificial intelligence (AI) creeping into our lives, more entry-level jobs are bound to disappear. For young people in Bangladesh and across the world, this has created a peculiar mix of anxiety.

While AI offers unprecedented access to knowledge, productivity, and global opportunities, it has also unsettled the old promise that education naturally leads to stable employment. Basically, degrees still matter, but they no longer guarantee relevance.

Hence, upskilling, once a corporate buzzword, has now become a survival strategy in the age of AI and rapidly evolving technology. But when everything seems important, where does one even begin?

ILLUSTRATION: **MONG SHONIE**

UNDERSTANDING THE SHIFT BEFORE CHASING SKILLS

The first mistake many young people make is treating AI as a list of tools to master rather than a structural change to understand. Learning how to use one popular platform may help today, but it offers little protection tomorrow.

What AI is really doing is automating routine work, accelerating decision-making, and raising the baseline of what is considered "basic competence". In practical terms, this means tasks that are predictable, repetitive, and rules-based are disappearing fastest. At the same time, roles that require judgment, creativity, context, and human connection are becoming more valuable.

For instance, data entry jobs are disappearing because they are repetitive and rules-based. However, leadership roles are now in demand because you need excellent leadership skills to navigate the changing dynamics of the workplace and work culture.

Upskilling, therefore, is not about racing machines at what they do best, but about leaning into what they cannot easily replicate. So, before signing up for yet another online course, young learners need to ask a more fundamental question: what kind of thinking does this skill train?

DIGITAL LITERACY IS NO LONGER OPTIONAL

If you think that the starting point for upskilling in the age of AI is advanced coding or machine learning, you're wrong. Basic digital literacy is where you start your upskilling journey in this age. This includes understanding how algorithms work at a conceptual level, how data is collected and used, and how digital platforms shape behaviour and decision-making.

Many young people in our country, as well as around the world, use AI tools daily without understanding their limitations. Be it ChatGPT or an AI image generator, they trust outputs without questioning sources, assume neutrality where there is bias, and confuse fluency with accuracy.

Digital literacy is as essential as reading and writing once were. This does not mean everyone must become a programmer. It means everyone must become an informed user. Knowing when to rely on AI, the ethics behind using AI, when to double-check, and when to apply human judgment is a skill in itself one that employers increasingly value.

LEARNING HOW TO LEARN AGAIN

Perhaps the most underrated skill in the AI era is the ability to learn continuously without formal instruction. Traditional education trained students to complete syllabi, sit exams, and move on. Bangladeshis, in particular, are fixated on this education model, thinking that this approach is what will guarantee skills and, eventually, jobs.

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Youth upskilling in the age of AI: where to begin?

FROM PAGE 14

The new reality, however, demands something different. It requires self-directed learning, rapid adaptation, and intellectual humility. That's why employers today are having to train their employees in using AI for daily work tasks. Employees themselves are working out ways to accommodate AI tools in their day-to-day workflow.

Young people who are curious can succeed in such an environment, where continuous learning is a core component. They experiment with new tools, follow emerging trends, and are comfortable being beginners repeatedly. This mindset shift can be difficult, especially in cultures where failure is discouraged and linear career paths are celebrated.

Also, upskilling today does not happen once. It happens in cycles. You learn, apply, unlearn, and relearn. A tool or algorithm you used yesterday will start becoming irrelevant today and become completely irrelevant by tomorrow. Hence, you learn, unlearn, and relearn. That is how you have to approach upskilling in the age of AI.

Upskilling in the age of AI is not about racing machines at what they do best, but about leaning into what they cannot easily replicate.

HUMAN SKILLS WILL NEVER LOSE VALUE

Communication, critical thinking, collaboration, adaptability, and ethical reasoning are no longer treated as soft skills that are simply tucked away in job descriptions. They have turned into core competencies in the AI era.

Think about it: an AI system can generate content, but it cannot read a room. It can analyse data, but it cannot understand social nuance or moral consequence.

For youth upskilling, this means investing time in skills that are transferable across roles and industries. Writing clearly, thinking logically, working with diverse teams, and managing uncertainty will remain valuable regardless of how technology evolves.

TECHNICAL SKILLS STILL MATTER

None of this is to say technical skills are irrelevant. On the contrary, technical literacy has become a powerful enabler. Skills such as data analysis, basic coding, digital marketing, UI/UX design, and AI tool integration can significantly expand opportunities.

The key is to learn these skills with purpose, not panic. Chasing every trending technology leads to shallow competence and burnout. Instead, young people should identify how technical skills complement their existing interests or academic backgrounds.

A student of economics who learns data analytics gains analytical depth. A journalism student who understands AI-assisted research gains speed and reach. A business graduate who understands automation gains a strategic advantage.

Upskilling works best when it builds on a foundation, not when it tries to replace one overnight.

Institutions are lagging; individuals cannot afford to

One uncomfortable truth is that formal education systems are struggling to keep pace with technological change. In Bangladesh, especially, curricula move slowly, while AI evolves rapidly. This gap leaves students underprepared for the realities of modern workplaces.

But waiting for institutions to catch up is a luxury young people cannot afford. The most effective upskilling today happens outside classrooms: through online platforms, open-source communities, internships, freelancing, and self-initiated projects.

Thankfully, institutions are starting to catch up. For instance, many universities in Bangladesh now offer courses and programmes on AI, data science, and so on. It's a welcome shift from the traditional computer science programmes that focus on generalised courses and topics.

That being said, those who have already graduated or are looking to stay ahead of the curve need to take it upon themselves to keep learning new things.

ETHICS AND RESPONSIBILITY

Upskilling in the age of AI is not only about employability. It is also about responsibility. As young people gain access to powerful tools, questions of misuse, misinformation, bias, and environmental cost become unavoidable.

Understanding AI ethics, data privacy, and social impact is not reserved for policymakers and technologists. It is part of being an informed citizen in a digital society. Youth who engage critically with these issues will be better prepared to shape technology, rather than simply adapt to it.

WHERE SHOULD THE YOUTH BEGIN?

In the age of AI, youth upskilling begins with awareness. Understand how AI is reshaping work and society, build digital literacy, and strengthen human skills that machines cannot replace. At the same time, choose technical skills strategically, not impulsively.

Remember: there is no single roadmap when it comes to upskilling in the modern day. Young people need not know everything, but they must remain open to change, adaptable, and willing to grow.

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Bangladesh's 5G moment: promise, challenges, and the road ahead

SHAHRIAR RAHMAN

Shahriar Rahman is a veteran digitech policy analyst specialising in the APAC region and a doctoral candidate researching 5G at RMIT University, Australia.

IMAGE: JAMES YAREMA/ UNSPLASH

SUMMARY

1. Bangladesh's 5G launch in September 2025 marks a symbolic milestone, but exposes a persistent gap between ambition and execution.
2. Years of delay after the 2022 spectrum auction have compounded lateness, leaving weak foundations in 4G uptake, device readiness and digital literacy.
3. Heavy spectrum fees and sector taxes are framed as a self-inflicted constraint that limits investment and keeps costs high for consumers.
4. A severe device affordability gap risks turning 5G into an elite service, especially as handset verification may reduce informal 5G phones on networks.
5. To make 5G economically meaningful, Bangladesh needs fiscal recalibration, clearer regulation, cheaper devices, stronger fibre and power reliability, and real sector use cases.

On September 1, 2025, Bangladesh formally entered the 5G era when Robi Axiata became the first operator to switch on commercial fifth-generation services in select areas of Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet. Within hours, Grameenphone followed with its own announcement, claiming coverage across all eight divisional headquarters. The occasion came with customary fanfare. Government officials spoke of transformative potential, operators invoked visions of smart cities and telemedicine, and the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission declared a new horizon for the sector.

Yet beneath the ceremonial rhetoric lies a more sobering reality. Bangladesh's 5G launch comes more than three years after the March 2022 spectrum auction that raised $1.23bn from operators, and nearly seven years after South Korea became the first country to deploy commercial 5G networks. More pertinently, it arrives at a moment when the gap between the country's digital aspirations and its structural capacity to realise them has rarely been starker.

THE LONG ROAD TO THE FIFTH GENERATION

Bangladesh's mobile telecommunications journey is, in many respects, a remarkable story of catch-up development. At independence in 1971, the country possessed fewer than 200,000 telephone lines serving a population of 70 million, yielding teledensity of less than 0.3%. Today, mobile subscriptions exceed 180 million, representing a penetration rate of 107%, while internet users account for roughly 73% of the population. Mobile financial services, pioneered by BKash, have brought 120 million registered accounts into the formal financial system.

Yet this progress has consistently arrived late relative to global technology cycles. The country launched 3G services in 2013, roughly 12 years after the technology's commercial debut elsewhere. 4G followed in 2018, about nine years behind the global curve. The pattern has repeated with 5G. While India launched commercial services in October 2022 and had accumulated more than 250 million active 5G users by early 2025, Bangladesh's operators spent years in a holding pattern, citing regulatory delays, unclear rollout obligations, and insufficient ecosystem readiness.

The consequences of perpetual lateness compound. According to industry analysts, only 55% of Bangladesh's mobile users currently access 4G services, and just 3% to 4% own 5G-compatible devices. Smartphone penetration, while rising, remains heavily skewed, with 64% in urban areas against 31% in rural regions. National digital literacy hovers around 31%. These figures suggest that the infrastructure of the future is being laid on foundations that remain uneven and incomplete.

THE SPECTRUM BURDEN: A SELF-INFLICTED CONSTRAINT

If 5G is to serve as a catalyst for national competitiveness rather than a prestige project for metropolitan elites, the economics of network deployment must make sense for operators. Here, Bangladesh faces a problem largely of its own making. A comprehensive study released by the GSMA in September 2025 laid bare the scale of the regulatory burden: spectrum fees in Bangladesh now account for about 16% of operators' recurring revenue, substantially higher than the Asia-Pacific median of 10% and the global median of 8%.

When revenue-share levies, universal service contributions and sector-specific taxes are added, the total fiscal burden rises to an unprecedented 55% of operators' market revenue. Corporate tax rates on mobile operators can reach 45%, levels typically reserved for harmful products such as tobacco in other jurisdictions. By comparison, India applies 35%, Pakistan 29%, and Vietnam about 20%. A supplementary duty of 20% on mobile recharges adds further pressure, passed directly to consumers who are already among the region's poorest.

The GSMA's modelling suggests that aligning spectrum costs with the Asia-Pacific median could lift average download speeds by 17% and enable 5G to reach 99% of the population by 2035, adding an estimated $34bn to GDP. Alignment with the global median, requiring about a 75% reduction in spectrum prices, could generate $45bn in additional economic value over the same period. These are not trivial sums for a country aspiring to upper-middle-income status by 2031.

The counterargument, invariably advanced by treasury officials, is that spectrum auctions and sector-specific levies represent legitimate revenue streams for a developing state with pressing fiscal demands.

SEE PAGE 18

IMAGE: **VANDERLEI LONGO/ PEXELS**

Bangladesh's 5G moment: promise, challenges, and the road ahead

FROM PAGE 17

This is true, but it misses the broader point. Telecommunications infrastructure is not a luxury; it is an enabling layer on which digital commerce, e-governance and industrial automation depend. Taxing it punitively is akin to imposing tolls on roads so high that freight costs become uncompetitive. Receipts may flow into the exchequer, but the wider economy suffers.

THE DEVICE GAP: NETWORK WITHOUT TERMINALS

Even if the regulatory burden were eased, Bangladesh faces a more immediate bottleneck: the scarcity of handsets capable of connecting to 5G networks. According to BTRC data, local manufacturers produced 1.08 lakh 5G-enabled devices in October 2025, up from 63,000 units in September, marking the second time since June 2024 that monthly production has crossed the one-lakh threshold. Yet despite this uptick, 5G devices accounted for only 4.74% of the total 22.81 lakh handsets manufactured in Bangladesh that month. Feature phones continue to dominate production with a 61.21% share, while 4G handsets account for 34.29%.

Industry estimates suggest that only 6.6% of smartphones currently in use across the country are 5G-compatible. About 62% of devices nationwide are smartphones, most of which remain 4G-enabled. Imported and expatriate-gifted handsets make up roughly 50% to 60% of the smartphone market. Many are high-end 5G-ready devices, though a significant portion consists of refurbished models.

The economics are stark. Average monthly revenue per user in Bangladesh hovers around $2, while a 5G-capable smartphone typically costs $300 to $400. Even mid-range 4G devices command prices of about $150.

Operators such as Robi have acknowledged this reality, noting that its initial rollout prioritises areas where 5G device penetration already reaches 12% to 15%, with 120 areas approaching nearly 20% penetration. Most of these imported and gifted handsets registered on its network are compatible with 5G. Nevertheless, according to Robi's estimates, it may take five to seven years for 5G adoption to reach current 4G levels, as affordability and broader economic factors remain key constraints. This is a pragmatic assessment, but it also underscores the risk of 5G becoming a service for the affluent few rather than a platform for mass digital participation. With the National Equipment Identity Register (NEIR) initiative, the government system to verify every mobile handset on Bangladesh's telecom networks, the number of informally brought 5G-enabled phones on the network is expected to fall further.

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT: FALLING BEHIND NEIGHBOURS

Bangladesh's 5G trajectory cannot be assessed in isolation. Across South Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific, the race to deploy next-generation connectivity has become a marker of technological ambition. India's 5G rollout, launched in October 2022, has been among the fastest globally, underpinned by aggressive spectrum allocation and regulatory clarity. By March 2025, the country had deployed roughly 469,000 5G base stations and connected more than 250 million active users. Even smaller economies such as Bhutan and the Maldives have achieved commercial 5G deployments in selected areas.

The stakes extend beyond bragging rights. Fifth-generation networks are designed not merely to offer faster mobile broadband but to enable qualitatively different applications, including ultra-reliable low-latency communications for industrial automation, network slicing for dedicated enterprise services, and massive machine-type communications for the internet of things. These capabilities matter for manufacturing competitiveness, logistics efficiency and the ability to attract foreign direct investment in technology-intensive sectors.

The scale of infrastructure required to support these ambitions is considerable. National bandwidth consumption in Bangladesh currently stands at about 35 terabytes and is projected to reach 50 terabytes by year's end, with demand expected to grow four to fivefold over the next five years. Meeting this demand will require substantial backbone investment beyond the wireless access layer.

For Bangladesh, whose garment industry faces mounting pressure from automation trends in competitor countries, the question is whether 5G-enabled smart manufacturing can be achieved before the window of demographic dividend closes. The country's fibre-optic backbone has expanded from 37,000 kilometres in 2015 to about 142,000 kilometres today, and 4G coverage now reaches 95% of the population. Yet only 23% of industrial zones are connected to fibre, and electricity supply remains intermittent, with urban areas experiencing two to three hours of daily outages and rural regions facing four to six hours.

THE STRETCHED REALITY OF A SMARTER NATION

Over the next 15 years, Bangladesh has aimed to become a high-income, knowledge-based economy characterised by full digitisation of government services, universal smartphone access, and an ICT sector contributing 20% to GDP.

Such aspirations are not inherently unrealistic. Bangladesh has demonstrated resilience and adaptive capacity in its development journey, repeatedly confounding sceptics who doubted its ability to transcend the circumstances of its birth. The government's infrastructure initiatives reflect both the scale of ambition and the challenges of execution. BTCL's BDT 1,059 crore 5G network expansion project, launched in 2022, aims to establish fibre capacity of 100 Gbps at upazila level, 300 Gbps at district headquarters, and up to 1,000 Gbps in metropolitan areas. Upon completion, the state-owned operator would supply about 11,250 Gbps, representing 30% of projected national bandwidth requirements for the coming decade. Such investment is essential if Bangladesh is to avoid a bandwidth bottleneck as 5G adoption accelerates.

> **Bangladesh's belated entry into the fifth-generation era raises fundamental questions about digital strategy, regulatory burdens, and the gap between ambition and execution.**

Yet there remains a persistent gap between policy pronouncements and delivery. The 5G guidelines, promised after the 2022 spectrum auction, were not finalised until 2024 and omitted clear rollout obligations. Operators that paid $1.23bn for spectrum were left without certainty on deployment timelines or coverage requirements. The interregnum allowed "ecosystem readiness" arguments to become self-fulfilling: without clear deadlines, neither operators nor device manufacturers had strong incentives to accelerate preparations.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

If Bangladesh is serious about harnessing 5G for national competitiveness rather than merely ticking a box on the technology adoption checklist, several interventions appear necessary. First, the fiscal burden on the telecommunications sector requires urgent recalibration. Spectrum pricing should be anchored to present-day market fundamentals rather than used primarily as a revenue-maximisation tool. Exempting or relaxing VAT on spectrum fees, and streamlining sector-specific taxes, deserves careful consideration.

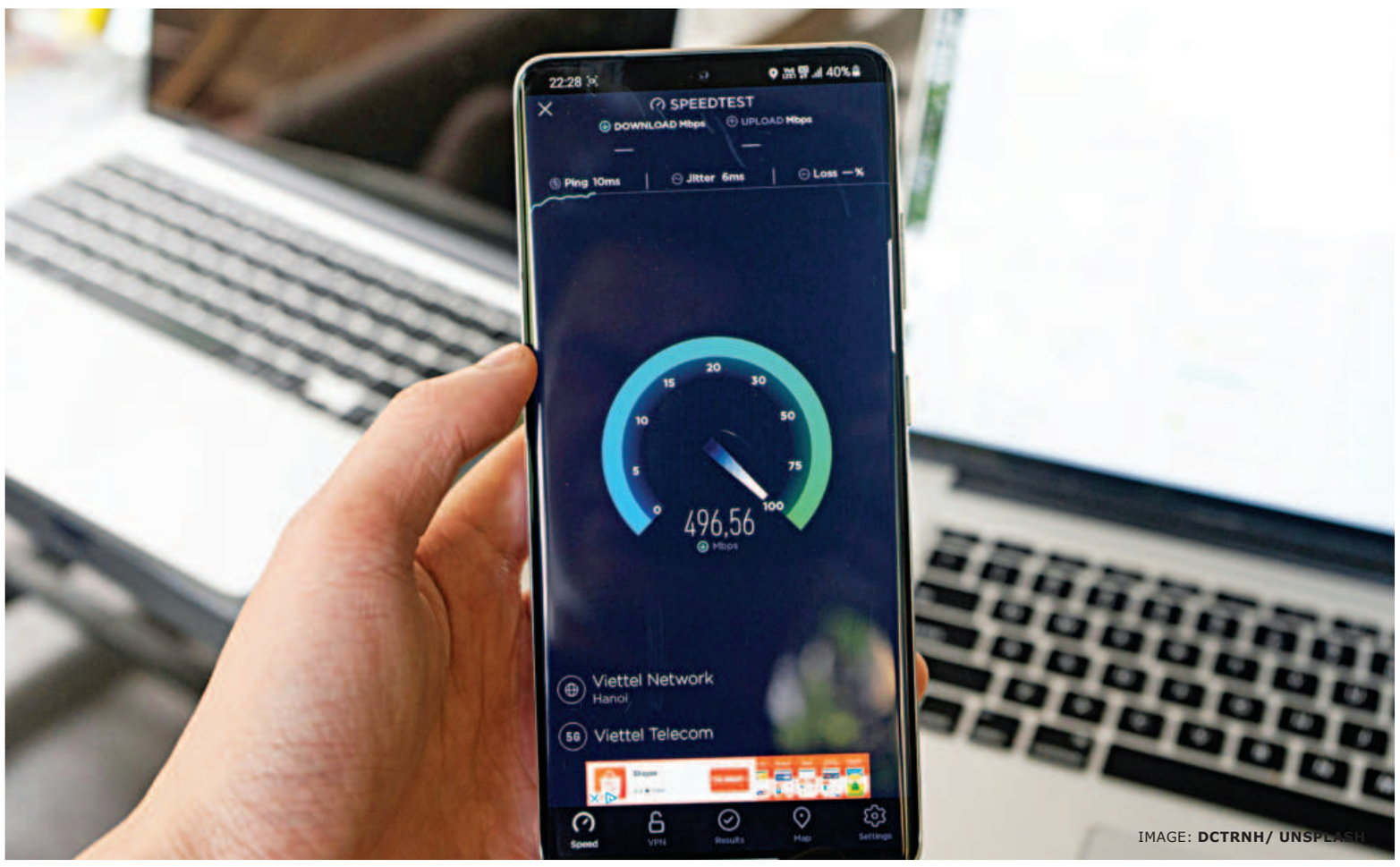
Second, device affordability must be addressed through a combination of reduced import duties on 5G-capable handsets and further incentives for local assembly. Without a critical mass of compatible devices, network investments will yield diminishing returns.

Third, regulatory clarity is essential. Operators need long-term licences with predictable renewal terms and local-currency payment options to reduce foreign exchange risk. The timely release of additional spectrum bands, particularly the 700 MHz and 3.5 GHz frequencies identified for 5G expansion, should be prioritised. The 700 MHz band is already in the pipeline, which is progress.

The need for streamlined procurement and governance is equally pressing. State-owned BTCL's 5G backbone project, currently around 50% complete and pending a technical assessment by BUET faculty, exemplifies how procurement disputes and regulatory uncertainty can delay critical infrastructure. The project's equipment, supplied by Huawei at BDT 326 crore, faced port clearance delays following an Anti-Corruption Commission inquiry into tender procedures. Due diligence is necessary, but protracted investigations that halt infrastructure deployment impose their own costs on national competitiveness.

Fourth, and perhaps most fundamentally, 5G deployment must be conceived as part of broader ecosystem development. This includes accelerating fibre connectivity to industrial zones, ensuring reliable electricity supply, building digital literacy through education reform, and developing use cases in priority sectors such as healthcare, agriculture and manufacturing that justify enterprise investment in 5G-enabled solutions.

Bangladesh stands at a familiar crossroads. The technology has arrived, albeit late. The potential is evident, if not yet realised. The question now is whether policymakers will treat 5G as a genuine enabler of economic transformation or allow it to become another instance of infrastructure serving the already connected while leaving the majority behind. For 5G to fulfil its promise, Bangladesh must address the regulatory, fiscal and infrastructural constraints that have historically impeded the translation of technological potential into broad-based development gains. The alternative is a future in which the country's digital aspirations remain perpetually just beyond reach.



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What students want from universities and employers in the age of AI

AZRA HUMAYRA

Azra Humayra is a sub-editor at Campus, Rising Stars, and Star Youth.

ILLUSTRATION: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

SUMMARY

1. University systems remain painfully slow despite rapid technological change.
2. AI affects students' lives, but institutions lag in using it meaningfully.
3. Inefficient processes make students feel their time is unvalued.
4. Education and job-market skills remain poorly aligned.
5. Students want AI to support fairness, efficiency, and human judgement.

Artificial intelligence (AI) entered our lives on tiptoe, then suddenly, it writes emails, edits videos, schedules meetings, screens CVs, and recommends what we should read next. For Bangladeshi students, it is already shaping how knowledge is produced, how work is evaluated and how opportunities are distributed.

What students want from universities and employers is to stop lagging behind the reality that is increasingly relying on AI. However, rather than being a current administrative and pedagogical tool, the discussion surrounding AI in education frequently stays superficial, framed either as a threat to academic integrity or as a futuristic luxury. Although committees are established and policies are discussed, students' real-world experiences seldom show significant change.

Afrina Sultana Ariya, currently in her final semester of her master's degree in mass communication and journalism at Dhaka University (DU), puts it plainly.

"I want my university to be more efficient in handling administrative work. Introducing automated systems would reduce bureaucratic red tape and eliminate the unnecessary delays students face in completing even simple tasks," says Ariya, pointing out that while private universities have embraced digital systems, public universities still struggle to keep up. In a context where AI enables the processing of thousands of records within seconds, prolonged delays in transcript corrections and routine approvals appear increasingly unreasonable to students.

When a university refuses to modernise, it inadvertently teaches its students a lesson that is both cynical and soul-crushing. They learn that their time does not matter. Efficiency is sometimes not just about convenience. Ariya connects this administrative inertia to a larger failure.

"Employers demand skills that graduates are not adequately equipped with, which creates serious challenges during the hiring process," she explains. Many graduates remain unemployed not because they lack ability, but because they have not been trained for the realities of work. Her expectation is reasonable and radical in its implications. Employers, she argues, must take responsibility for training recruits, while universities and industries must collaborate more seriously. AI, used well, could bridge this gap by aligning curricula with labour market data, forecasting skill demand and creating adaptive learning pathways that evolve with the economy.

Students outside Dhaka echo similar sentiments, often with sharper urgency. Sadman Sajid, a student at Rajshahi University (RU), discusses the uneven distribution of opportunities: "We know AI is changing everything, but our universities still teach as if the job market is frozen in time."

Sajid wants access to AI tools within classrooms, as instruments for learning data analysis, research design and problem-solving. From employers, he expects transparency: "If companies use AI to screen us, they should tell us what they value. Otherwise, it feels like we are being judged by a system we were never taught to understand."

From Chittagong University (CU), Rafia Tarannum frames the issue as one of trust.

"Universities should teach us how to work with AI ethically, not fear it or misuse it," she says. Tarannum imagines courses where students learn to question algorithmic bias, protect data privacy, and apply technology responsibly. Her expectations from employers are similarly grounded. She wants training that treats AI as a shared tool rather than a gatekeeping mechanism, and contracts that are clear enough to reduce the constant anxiety of disposability.

The striking thing about the student demand for AI is that nobody is actually rooting for the machines to win. They aren't looking to trade their professors for a series of circuits or their managers for a piece of code. Instead, they are simply asking for a version of the world where the systems actually work. By letting algorithms handle the mind-numbing friction of routine paperwork and rigid hiring filters, universities and employers could finally get back to the actual business of being human.

If the administrative "busy work" vanished, a university might actually have the time to offer mentorship and academic care, the kind of nuanced, irreplaceable judgement that doesn't come with a software update. It turns out that when you automate the tasks that make people miserable, you create the space for the kind of long-term development that a short-term efficiency fix can never provide.

For finance student Zobair Tawhid Opurbo, from DU, the problem is the lack of emphasis.

"Besides bookish knowledge, I want my university to focus on students' skillsets," he says. Workshops, business case competitions, exposure to real decision-making—these are not luxuries but necessities. Human value lies increasingly in judgment, interpretation and ethical reasoning in the age of AI. Zobair wants employers to open their doors earlier, through company visits and internships, so students can see how theory behaves when placed under office lights.

Sumaiya Sultana, another finance student, keeps it even simpler. She wants well-structured courses that cater to our potential careers and help us learn real-life skills. She also hopes employers will hire based on skills and professionalism rather than experience. It is an expectation influenced by the reality of AI-driven recruitment systems, in which algorithms already scan CVs for keywords and competencies. If machines can assess potential, she suggests, humans should be willing to look beyond years of experience and invest in growth.

At Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Sarah Mahbub, a first-year student, has already seen what structured engagement can achieve. She describes a career and education fest where dozens of companies met students, CVs changed hands, and hundreds reportedly secured jobs before graduation. What she hopes for from employers is patience—the time to learn, adjust, and grow. She wants a workplace free of politics and toxicity, with training programmes that recognise that learning does not end at graduation. AI may accelerate processes, but Sarah expects that it should also create space for mentorship rather than erasing it.

Private universities, often seen as nimbler, are not exempt from scrutiny. Nafisa Mahjabeen, a pharmaceutical science student at North South University (NSU), speaks with optimism. Her insistence on humane conditions feels like a reminder that progress is hollow if it forgets people. She has watched managers and directors visit her campus, conducting interviews and seminars, and hopes that by the time she graduates, these opportunities will be more robust and inclusive. Yet her expectations from employers go beyond job offers. She wants stability, safety and recognition.

"I want a stable job in a safe environment where I can give my 200 percent dedication," says Mahjabeen.

What emerges from these voices is an acceptance of technology, but a demand for coherence. Students are already using AI to study, to write, to learn. What frustrates them is that institutions pretend otherwise. Universities still assess learning as if information scarcity were the problem. Employers still recruit as if potential were invisible. Meanwhile, algorithms make decisions that make or break the students' futures. Adaptation begins with rethinking structures. Automated administrative systems are not glamorous, but they matter. Industry-academia collaboration sounds dull until you realise it can prevent years of unemployment. Ethical AI training may seem abstract until biased algorithms decide who gets shortlisted.

There is also a different expectation running through these conversations. Students want to be taken seriously. They want institutions to acknowledge that the world has changed, and that pretending otherwise is a form of negligence. They want employers who understand that innovation without accountability leads nowhere good.

The challenge today is deciding what we do with it. Bangladeshi students are asking for education that prepares them, and workplaces that respect them. We need to stop talking about AI as if it's a poltergeist. It's a tool. It's a very fast, very efficient hammer. AI can help with it all, if used thoughtfully. Or it can deepen existing inequalities, if treated as a magic fix. At this pivotal moment, the choice belongs to universities and employers. Universities should be using it to kill the bureaucracy that eats up students' time. Employers should be using it to find talent in places they usually forget to look.

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

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যমুনা ব্যাংক

RETAINING TALENT

Creating local opportunities to stem brain drain

AHMAD TOUSIF JAMI

Ahmad Tousif Jami is an international debate instructor and a policy researcher.

SUMMARY

1. Brain drain in Bangladesh is framed less as personal ambition and more as a signal that local institutions fail to convert education into mobility.
2. Since the July uprising, return hopes have faded as more students leave earlier and most do not come back, treating migration as risk management.
3. Low headline unemployment masks severe entry-level bottlenecks, making first-job access a central retention problem.
4. Raising university quality and aligning curricula with industry needs are presented as essential to keep talent and restore confidence in local education.
5. Retention also depends on predictability and quality of life, with stability, public services, and early career bridges like paid internships as immediate priorities.

ILLUSTRATION: **ZARIF FAIAZ**

Although often said in jest, the phrase "the great Bangladeshi dream is to leave Bangladesh" is becoming a reality. Here, brain drain is less a story of lack of interest and more a structural signal that our institutions do not reliably convert education into mobility at home.

After the July uprising of 2024, there were strong calls for talented Bangladeshis to return and help reform the country. For the most part, that aspiration has not materialised. More students are leaving as early as their undergraduate years, and the vast majority never return. The reasons are clear: opportunities for growth abroad are significantly greater, and the overall quality of life, including safety and stability, feels more assured elsewhere. For young minds, migration is not just ambition; it is risk management.

Although headline unemployment remains at about 4.7% (World Bank WDI 2024), the youth picture is starker: about 1.94 million young people are unemployed (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Survey 2023). Put simply, overall joblessness is low by international standards, but entry-level bottlenecks are pronounced. This is exactly the kind of friction that nudges graduates to treat migration as risk management. Fixing entry-level demand is therefore a key priority and requires revisiting the higher education system.

RESHAPING THE HIGHER EDUCATION FOCUS

Keeping talent begins with world-class local classrooms. Today, from a global ranking perspective, Bangladesh has only three universities in the QS top 1000: the University of Dhaka at 554, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology at 761–770, and North South University at 951–1000. This perception gap fuels outbound mobility even at the undergraduate level. The University Grants Commission's 2023 system reports also emphasise the need to strengthen faculty, research funding, and quality assurance so curricula can credibly claim international parity, but they do not offer a concrete action plan.

If curricula remain disconnected from industry needs, university graduates will continue to see foreign markets as the only stage for skills development. It is not only about curricula; faculty strength matters too, and Bangladesh does not yet have a university system that consistently meets international standards. This may sound demanding, but there truly is no alternative to providing top-notch higher education. Whether through pooling resources from private donors or dedicating a larger share of the national budget, this must move up the list of projects and priorities. The initial cost would be high, yes, but the long-term outcomes would be worth it.

Beyond producing graduates who can contribute and lead, and helping industries compete globally, stronger universities would help retain talent. They would also change the brand of Bangladeshi higher education. Many people feel, and often rightly so, that even the best local education falls short of world-class standards. It is high time we prioritised fixing this, because it is a key element in how we develop and shape talent locally.

BRIDGING THE GAP IN INDUSTRY AND ACADEMIC COLLABORATION

Employers routinely report skills mismatches among graduates. In the World Bank Enterprise Survey (2022), firms flag an "inadequately educated workforce" among binding constraints. The World Bank policy note "Skills for Tomorrow's Jobs (Bangladesh)" recommends curriculum co-design with industry, structured apprenticeships, and stronger quality assurance to align programmes with Fourth Industrial Revolution skills demand. This points to a clear need to update curricula in ways that match what employers actually require.

From an employment perspective, many employers cannot maximise capacity or expand because they struggle to find graduates with the skills they need. This is largely because there is a gap between what industry demands and what academia produces. The solution is straightforward. The government should revisit curricula, through institutions such as the University Grants Commission, in collaboration with industry. This can be done through roundtables and dedicated committees that include industry leaders.

In practice, this could mean redesigning MBA programmes based on feedback from corporate leaders, or revising an international relations degree based on input from practitioners and academics. It could also include practitioners teaching alongside faculty through adjunct tracks, faculty externships where lecturers spend a term inside firms, and co-supervised theses and capstones where students solve live business or policy problems. The goal is to prepare graduates who are ready to be employed, and whom employers are keen to hire.

THE CERTAINTY FACTOR IN THE QUALITY-OF-LIFE EQUATION

Talent retention is not only about jobs; it is also about dignity and security. Public services in Bangladesh, including healthcare, social protection, and urban safety, remain weak links in the retention chain. Skilled professionals weigh not just salaries but the cost of living, access to reliable healthcare, and the predictability of civic systems. Given the fear, or more accurately the valid concern, of potential instability, many people believe they are erring on the side of caution by moving abroad.

One caveat is that many Bangladeshi students leave first, only to later realise that life abroad is not as rosy as they were led to believe. It may be useful for both the government and the private sector to run awareness campaigns that explain how an improved quality of life in Bangladesh can also be excellent, and that the trade-off of leaving behind family and friends is not always worth it.

The crucial nuance is that retention depends on predictability, and statistics alone do not create it. The World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index (2024) ranks Bangladesh 127 out of 142, while the Global Peace Index (2024) places the country 93 out of 163. These are not the kinds of signals that reassure young professionals when weighing everyday certainty. This means the government's approach to stemming talent loss must be multidisciplinary and long-term.

RETHINKING THE "WHY" APPROACH OF BRAIN DRAIN

Of course, long-term challenges such as predictability and stronger public services will take time. But there are also short-term actions that can help.

For instance, entry-level bottlenecks can be eased through structural solutions targeted at early-career pathways. Universities and employers should embed paid internships as early as the second or third year of a bachelor's degree, tied to academic credit, and assessed learning outcomes.

At the same time, supply-side reforms must produce graduates who are both job-ready and AI-ready. There should be a distinct focus on annual faculty upskilling in AI pedagogy and ethics so classrooms keep pace with frontier practice. All things considered, the country needs matching infrastructure that reduces friction between talent supply and labour-market demand.

Ultimately, retention rises when staying does not feel like a gamble. If we turn early internships into reliable bridges, align classrooms with the frontier of work, and make stability more legible through clear rules and benefits, the risk-management logic of migration softens. Then settling in Bangladesh becomes not an act of faith, but a reasonable plan.

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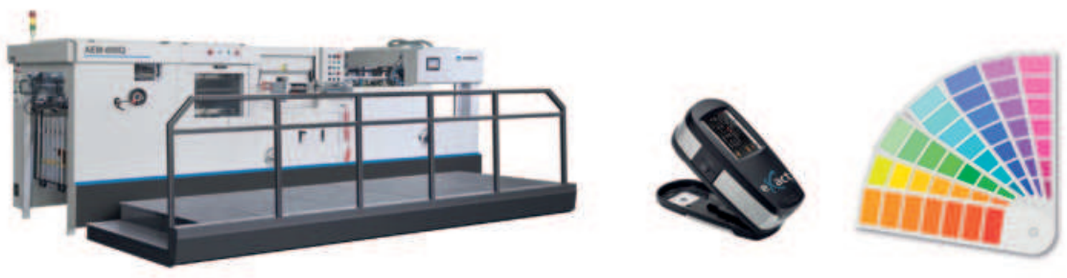

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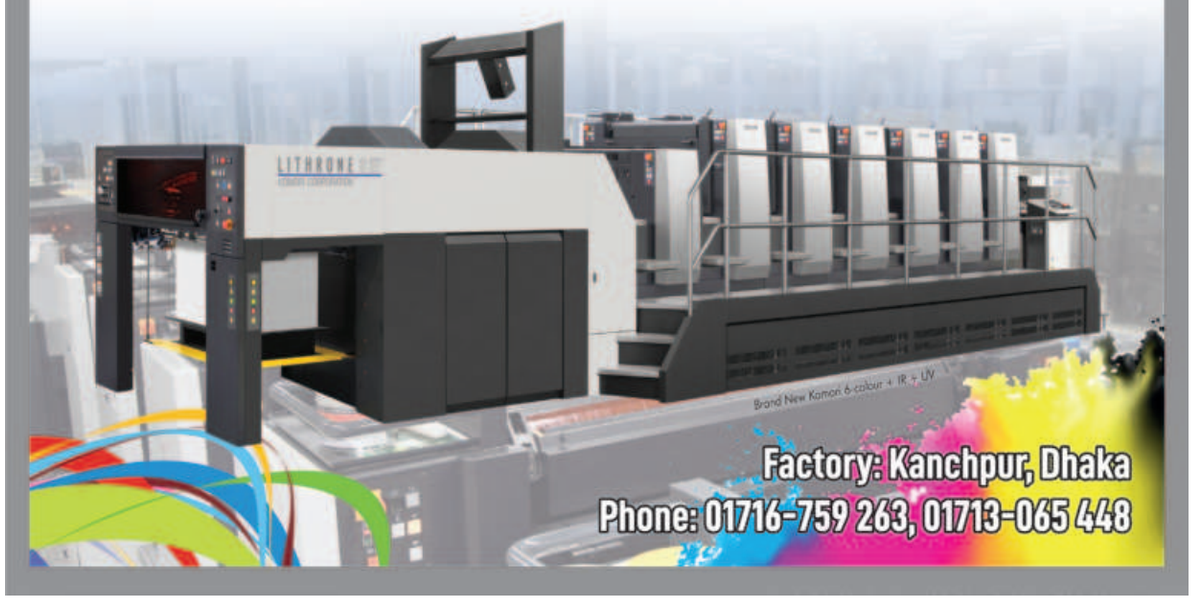

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Why the youth must rethink how they use AI

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

Zabin Tazrin Nashita is a sub-editor at Campus, Rising Stars, and Star Youth.

I distinctly remember attending a class lecture in November 2022, when ChatGPT was first released to the public, where my instructor expressed his unease about the artificial intelligence (AI) tool and what it meant for learning and teaching. It was a justifiable worry, as within the brief period for which AI has been accessible to the masses, it has made a significant impact across all sectors, giving way to both uses and misuses of the powerful tool.

In fact, AI has been integrated into our lives not only on an individual level, but it has also singlehandedly reshaped the nature of many jobs, permeated across many industries, and significantly impacted education. In a more contentious turn of events, AI has even found its way into art, literature, and in more intimate capacities as a friend or conversation partner for people.

This phenomenon has brought on a whole assortment of apprehensions, specifically for the younger generations. One rather hyperbolic statement we often hear is that artificial intelligence will soon replace people in the workforce and may soon be the driving force behind our world. With so many employable young people who haven't cemented their foothold in the workforce and a great number of students preparing to battle similar situations, this is a major concern. These concerns affect the younger generations exponentially more than any other demographic, which is why the extent of AI usage among the youth may need reconsideration.

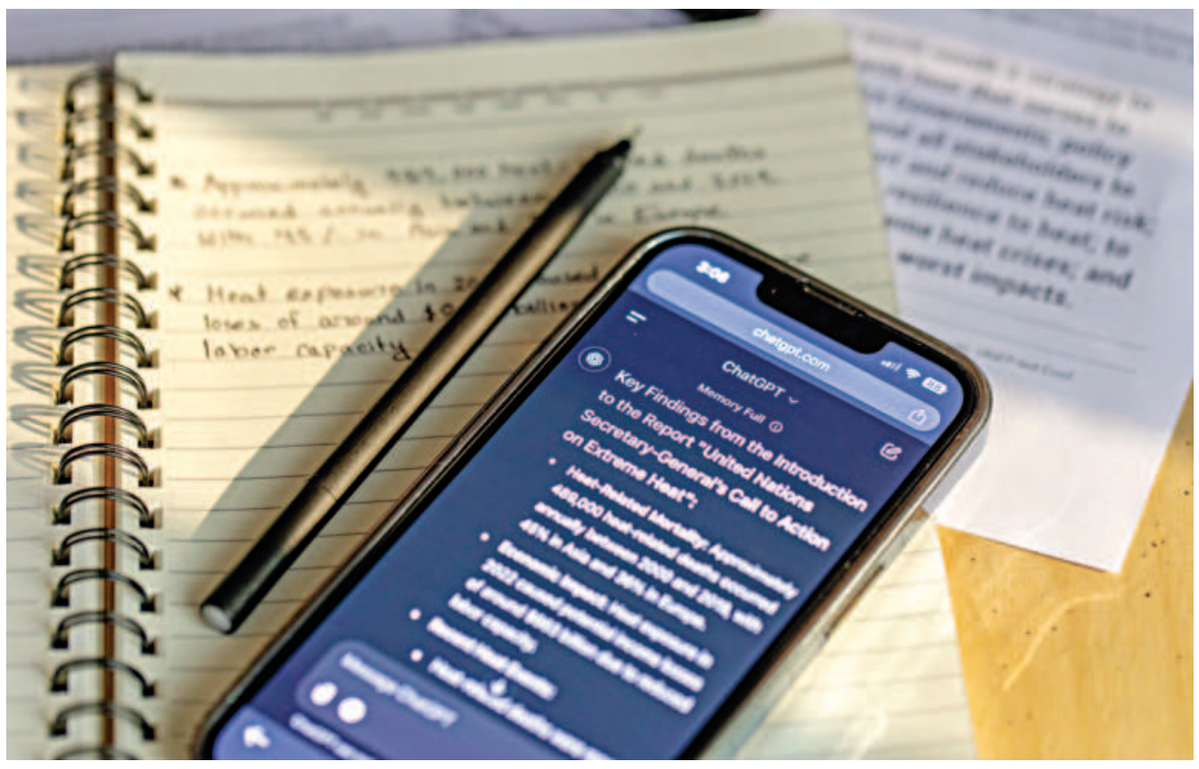

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Be that as it may, it's evident that AI has integrated itself deeply within the framework of our personal, educational, and professional lives and that it's here to stay for the foreseeable future. And just like any other innovation, it has a place in technological development, although a more regulated approach is necessary.

While it may be tempting to ask AI to write your lab report for you or code you something fundamental that you obviously can do but don't want to bother with, or even create a cute animated photograph of you and your friends, it may be best to step back and think about the broader implications of AI usage. You may also find it exhausting to talk about a situation with a friend that might receive mixed reactions, and the sweet reassurances of your AI chatbot might appear to be a more welcome social interaction, but think about whether your interpersonal communication skills are worse off for it.

Tasneem Huq Azad, a student currently pursuing medicine at Saba University School of Medicine, opines regarding the tendency people have of using AI for personal advice: "AI often helps people who use it like a personal therapist in what we call collusion, which just coddles them instead of confronting them with behaviour that needs change, which adds to the 'self' population mindset that people have because of the internet as is."

But Azad believes AI has a place in healthcare most of all. "Aside from early detection, it can be used as a teaching tool in radiology, histology, and pathology, she says. "Even in therapy, it can be used for notetaking and generating patient notes, which may relieve loads on doctors. As medical students, AI can help us study databases with cross-checked, verified label images so we can practise it and tell if we're right, give us tips for pattern recognition, generate questions, etc."

Then comes the ethical consideration. AI, while making lives easier, has created windows of misuse while significantly affecting the environment negatively. Not to mention, AI is also on its way to creating over-reliance, which not only hinders learning abilities but also dulls existing capabilities.

This isn't to say you shouldn't use AI at all; it's a powerful tool that we should be making proper use of for our own betterment. A very simple example would be that instead of asking AI to generate a 1000-word essay due tomorrow, you may ask it to offer a study plan tailored to your learning style that may help you absorb your topic before you get to work, preferably a while before the deadline. Not only does this save you from losing your critical thinking skills over time, but it also saves you the embarrassment of turning in terrible work, because artificial intelligence is far from flawless. AI might be able to generate a 3000-word essay on Macbeth, but there's a solid chance your chatbot assistant might label it the greatest love story ever written.

SEE PAGE 25

SUMMARY

1. AI has rapidly reshaped education, work, and personal life, raising serious concerns.
2. Younger generations face greater risks of job loss, skill decline, and overreliance on AI.
3. AI can assist learning and work but cannot replace human judgement or creativity.
4. Ethical issues like misuse, environmental harm, and copyright violations persist.
5. AI should support learning, not replace effort or critical thinking.

Why the youth must rethink how they use AI

FROM PAGE 24

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Raonak Binte Khalil Arpa, a student of literature in the Department of English and Modern Languages, North South University, expresses her thoughts on AI in her field: "I don't really think AI has much of a place in research work, or even teaching and learning in literature, because this is a subject that requires human touch. Hence, I can't fully trust AI to help me in my work, and although I have used it for certain purposes, I have never seen it generate deep analyses."

Arpa explains in what facets she finds AI useful and maybe beneficial, but also warns against the repercussions: "Sometimes, AI can help me come up with ideas, but it can't give me full lists of things to do. That's how I command it to get benefits. Suppose I won't ask AI to write a whole poem for me, but if I get stuck on a stanza, I might ask for opinions on how to connect and rhyme one line with another. It will give me words or ideas, but not the poem. It's basically like how I would ask a friend about this. However, I believe that if I don't use AI to polish everything I write, it will be more beneficial for me in the long run."

Souvik Ahmed, currently working as an AI intern at Datasoft Ltd., explains his outlook on how AI has affected the job market and how it's best implemented for the general population: "When I think about computer-leaning professions, I think the panic that AI will replace humans is unjustified. It may replace repetitive debugging or rule-based work, but not actual programmers. I don't like delegating everything to AI, as it can't replace human thinking, although it can cause skills to atrophy, since many computer science graduates are using AI code these days. It's trained on human data and lacks a true understanding of things, can confidently be very wrong, and can be misused for propaganda, deepfakes, and art generation. However, AI can be used to augment and hasten processes; think about an assistant helping a programmer debug their code. That being said, ethical use of AI requires more transparency on what is AI-generated content and what is not, and the data required for AI should be obtained through permission."

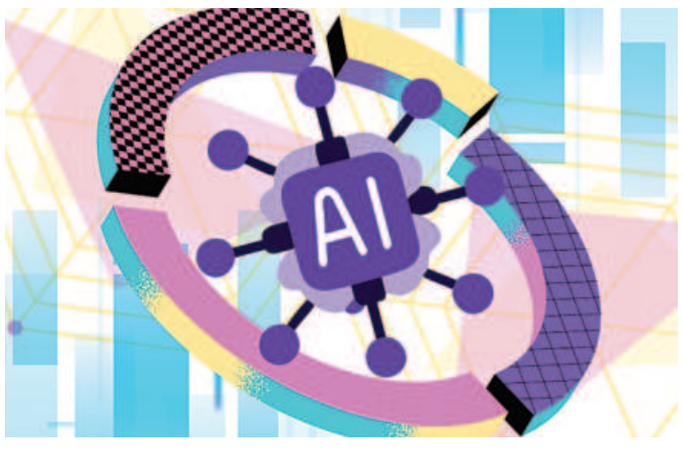

ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

When asked about his perspective on AI, Ahmed elaborates, "I have mixed feelings about whether it should be accessible to the masses or not. It's a grey area, as on one hand, I don't like the idea of tech being gatekept by authorities and corporations. On the other hand, letting everyone use it without regulations will obviously result in misuse. There definitely needs to be regulations and safeguards on what sort of AI is being open-sourced and how they should be used and customised based on the license they're under."

In the end, the common consensus surrounding the use of AI seems to be that instead of getting rid of it entirely, it's up to individuals and corporations to not misuse the tool. In cases like AI art and literature, generative AI is often trained on copyrighted data and simply generates based on merging samples, which may be defined as stealing. Companies often feel inclined to cut costs by utilising AI and not hiring employees, and in our personal lives, we may feel inclined to let AI take care of boring work.

However, considering the repercussions, we need to take it upon ourselves to ensure that we don't develop a reliance. There's no shortcut to the learning process, and there's no alternative to practice if you want to keep on constantly honing your skills. AI can help enhance your learning and working experience, and you know best of all exactly in what areas it can be of the most help. That being said, if you feel like reaching for an AI chatbot at the slightest inconvenience, it might be time for you to step back and re-evaluate the role you're letting artificial intelligence play in your life.

Teaching in the age of AI

How can the education curriculum keep up?

FARIHA LAMISA

Fariha Lamisa is a contributor at Campus, Rising Stars, and Star Youth.

SUMMARY

1. AI has rapidly changed student writing, often improving polish while weakening originality.
2. Bangladesh's school curriculum remains rooted in rote learning and unprepared for AI use.
3. Teachers lack training, incentives, and clear guidance on integrating AI responsibly.
4. Universities face policy gaps, trust issues, and a mismatch between theory and industry needs.
5. Meaningful AI integration requires curriculum reform, ethical frameworks, and critical thinking focus.

In 2021, when I started my undergraduate degree in English, I remember investing a painstaking amount of time to brainstorm and proofread for my foundation English course assignments in an effort to protect my grade. Fast forward to 2025, and the act of writing as a reflection of one's own thought has changed dramatically.

During my final term as an undergraduate student and as a teaching assistant, while sitting in the crowded writing centre at my university, I noticed how uniformly polished my students' work had become. It was safe to assume that nearly every script carried significant traces of artificial intelligence (AI) assistance, often at the expense of originality. Needless to say, generative tools, such as ChatGPT, have fundamentally reshaped how students engage with learning. Today, it has become rare to find students who do not rely on these AI tools in some capacity. Yet, despite their widespread use and their potential for both benefit and harm, one question remains: is our education curriculum truly prepared to respond to AI's growing presence in the classroom?

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Reflecting on the national school curriculum of the country, Mahfuzul Haque Sadim Chowdhury, an assistant teacher at Milestone School and College, opines that the curriculum is barely prepared to deal with the rapid growth of AI. He says, "School students are stuck at rote learning, and that makes them more vulnerable to misuse of AI, as they are habituated to treating writing tasks as a product instead of a process that needs to be developed through the conjunction of reflection and critical thinking. On top of that, teachers are not trained to incorporate AI in the learning process, and often their abysmal salary structure does not even incentivise learning and receiving training, as they are more prone to offering private tuition. After all, teachers have to sustain their basic necessities."

Although the privilege of international schooling can shield against the misuse of generative AI, it also does not guarantee critical engagement with the study materials. Tashfia Ahmed, an instructor at Scholastica, says, "The Cambridge syllabus, due to its opinion-based contextual approach to the syllabus, pushes students to personally engage with the materials."

Nevertheless, Ahmed also finds that when students are working at home by themselves, they tend to use AI to prepare their materials.

"Earlier, students used to develop synthesising skills by collecting information from different sources and evaluating that information, but now that is being outsourced to AI, and I think that is hampering their critical thinking skills," she elaborates.

It is important to note that these generative AI tools are not always ideal for research. There are well-documented regular incidents where ChatGPT has generated false information. It can be noticed that a well-designed curriculum, too, can find its learning outcomes shaken by the rapid advancement of technology.

This underpreparedness of the education system does not limit itself to the school gate. Rather, it is affecting university education as well. Sometimes, the AI trouble is showing up in a lack of clear and concrete policy, and sometimes in the study materials themselves.

SEE PAGE 27

Teaching in the age of AI: how can the education curriculum keep up?

FROM PAGE 26

ILLUSTRATION: **ZARIF FAIAZ**

Dr Nurul Huda Abul Monsur, a history professor, feels an uneasy strain while evaluating his students' scripts. He states, "I like to place a lot of trust in my students. However, sometimes when I find a student's writing quality has dramatically improved in an assignment, a sharp contrast from their classwork, then a sense of distrust does loom over. But notice that if a student is only using it to develop their vocabulary, these AI tools can be a friend in those instances. Also, I have hardly any tools to be precisely sure if cheating has occurred or not."

"Nevertheless, having no unified framework or guideline on AI usage leaves us with little room for choice," he continues. "We are bound to penalise the students. I think we need to establish a common framework regarding AI usage in students' assignments."

Unfortunately, this lack of adoption is not limited to humanities and social sciences disciplines; the engineering field, too, is equally struggling to catch up with AI, an irony in itself.

Muhammad Shafayat Oshman, a lecturer from the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at North South University, delineates how the computer science and engineering (CSE) curriculum in Bangladesh is lagging behind. He explains, "University curriculum is designed to provide a strong theoretical foundation in programming and computer science, while industry increasingly expects practical AI expertise. As a result, many courses fail to reflect real industry needs, such as Bangladesh's growing semiconductor and chip design sector, which remains largely theoretical in the curriculum. This pattern of theory-heavy teaching with limited hands-on application appears across many courses. Bridging theory with real-world industry implementation is essential to reduce this disconnect."

Observing the overall situation, Dr Mohammod Moninoor Roshid, a professor at the Institute of Education and Research (IER), Dhaka University, feels that our universities could not take the leadership charge at the inception of AI, and now they are struggling to cope. He says, "The Bangladeshi education system needs to adopt AI according to discipline and come out of the preconceived notion that AI is merely a cheating tool, and the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGC) can play a crucial role in formulating that. Besides, senior academics also need to familiarise themselves with AI instead of fearing it. Collectively, we have to recognise that our future is AI-driven and AI, if used ethically, can operate education efficiently and not just be a tool for cheating."

The rapid advancement of generative AI has exposed a critical gap between technological advancement and curriculum preparedness. From schools rooted in rote learning to universities lacking clear policies and industry alignment, the system appears reactive rather than adaptive.

While AI holds undeniable potential to make learning more efficient, regardless of its uncritical or unregulated use, it risks eroding originality, critical thinking, and trust within academic spaces. The issue, therefore, is not whether AI should be used, but how it should be meaningfully integrated. Addressing this challenge requires curriculum reform, teacher training, institutional leadership and a unified framework that views AI as a pedagogical tool rather than merely a threat.

If education is to remain relevant in an AI-driven future, curricula must evolve to prioritise process over product, critical engagement over convenience, and ethical use over prohibition.

The strong case for staying and building in Bangladesh

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Maisha Islam Monamee is a graduate from Institute of Business Administration, University of Dhaka, and currently works at Unilever.

SUMMARY

1. The old idea that success requires leaving Bangladesh is fading, replaced by a quieter confidence in building locally.
2. A globally connected generation sees "elsewhere" more clearly and is choosing meaning, agency and impact at home.
3. Lived uncertainty has not only produced cynicism, but a sense of ownership that turns crises into organising and rebuilding.
4. Staying is increasingly framed as globally engaged work done locally, with ideas and skills circulating rather than disappearing.
5. This shift is real but fragile, and it depends on whether institutions recognise, support and trust young builders, thinkers and creatives.

For a long time, success in Bangladesh came with a passport stamp, and the highest form of validation was going abroad, either to study or to work, and to finally make it. Staying back was often framed as a compromise, a temporary stop, or worse, a failure of ambition. Families celebrated visas as victories, and the idea that the brightest minds would leave was accepted as inevitable.

But that definition of success is quietly, decisively changing.

For many people of our generation, success no longer automatically points outward. Increasingly, it points inward, towards building something that matters here. This shift is not driven by nostalgia or romantic attachment to place. It is shaped by exposure, calculation, and lived experience. A generation that grew up globally connected understands both the possibilities and the limits of "elsewhere". Many are concluding that meaning, agency, and impact are not guaranteed by geography alone.

We grew up watching the world in real time. We studied global case studies, followed international movements, worked across borders, and learned from people we might never meet. Instead of motivating us to leave home, that exposure made us more aware of what was missing here, and more interested in fixing it. We no longer romanticise elsewhere the way earlier generations did. We understand that every place has its struggles. The difference is that here, the problems feel personal. Solving them feels consequential.

What has emerged is a form of homegrown confidence. Young people are starting companies because they see gaps no one else is addressing. They are choosing careers that allow them to contribute locally while remaining globally relevant. They are redefining success as impact, continuity, and ownership, rather than distance. This confidence is not loud, but it shows up in choices: in the decision to return after studying abroad; in the choice to turn down a safer job for a riskier idea; in the insistence that staying does not mean settling. These choices are reshaping how Bangladesh appears, not just to the world, but to itself.

However, there is also a deeper emotional shift at play. This generation has lived with uncertainty as a constant. For them, economic volatility, political unrest, climate disasters, and institutional fatigue are not abstract concepts but lived realities. And yet, instead of producing only cynicism, they have fostered a strange kind of ownership. When systems fail, young people organise. When crises hit, they respond. When something breaks, they try to rebuild it.

This instinct to take responsibility, even without authority, has begun to shape how people think about their careers. Work has become less about survival and more about relevance. Many young Bangladeshis want to see the effects of what they do, to know that their skills are contributing to something tangible. This desire has fuelled a rise in social enterprises, creative industries, grassroots initiatives, and locally grounded businesses. The goal is not to replicate what exists elsewhere, but to adapt ideas to local realities.

This matters because countries that become future hubs for builders, thinkers, and creatives are defined by how many choose to stay and shape. Bangladesh is beginning to show early signs of this shift. It is evident in the way young professionals talk about their work, in the way students think about their futures, and in the growing refusal to accept that meaningful work can only exist beyond our borders.

Crucially, this confidence does not reject the world. It engages with it differently. Young Bangladeshis today are deeply global in outlook even when they are physically local. They collaborate across time zones, learn continuously, benchmark themselves against international standards, and remain intensely curious about what is happening elsewhere. The difference is that they no longer see global exposure as a one-way exit. They see it as a resource they can bring back, apply, and build upon.

That creates a powerful dynamic. Instead of losing talent permanently, Bangladesh benefits from circulation: ideas flow in, skills are adapted, and global perspectives are localised. There is also an emerging redefinition of ambition. Earlier generations often had to choose between stability and significance. Today's young people are trying to refuse that trade-off. They want careers that are sustainable but also meaningful. They want to grow without disconnecting from their communities. They want to succeed without disappearing.

Of course, this shift is neither uniform nor guaranteed. Structural challenges remain significant. Opportunities are unevenly distributed.

SEE PAGE 29

ILLUSTRATION: **ZARIF FAIAZ**

The strong case for staying and building in Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 28

Institutions often move slower than the people they are meant to serve. Many still feel compelled to leave, and for valid reasons. But what has changed is the collective mindset around these challenges. They are no longer seen as final verdicts on what is possible. They are treated as constraints to navigate, systems to push against, realities to improve incrementally.

We need to acknowledge this transformative mindset. It replaces resignation with experimentation. It turns frustration into momentum. It allows young people to imagine futures that do not require erasing where they come from. Slowly, it begins to reshape the country's global identity, not as a place people escape from, but as a place people build from.

Bangladesh's place in the world of the future will be shaped by whether this emerging confidence is recognised, supported and trusted: whether young builders are given room to try and fail without being dismissed; whether thinkers are invited into conversations that shape the future rather than spoken about after decisions are made; whether creatives are valued as contributors, not distractions.

What is most striking is that this transformation is happening without spectacle. It is unfolding in classrooms, co-working spaces, neighbourhood offices, and late-night conversations about ideas that may or may not work. It is happening when someone chooses to invest their energy locally, not because it is easier, but because it feels meaningful. It is happening in small acts of belief, repeated often enough to become momentum.

There is also dignity embedded in this choice. When people decide to stay and build, they assert that their country is worth their best effort, not just their leftover energy. They refuse the idea that value must be validated elsewhere. For the first time in a long while, many young Bangladeshis are not asking, "How do I get out?" They are asking, "What can I do here?"

That question carries confidence. It suggests that staying is no longer synonymous with stagnation, and that ambition no longer has to be exported to be fulfilled. It reflects a growing belief that Bangladesh is not just a place to survive until departure, but a place where futures can be actively shaped. It carries responsibility. It carries the possibility of a nation that is not just keeping up with transformation, but shaping its own place in the world of the future. And it begins with the question that is finally facing inward: what can we build here, together?

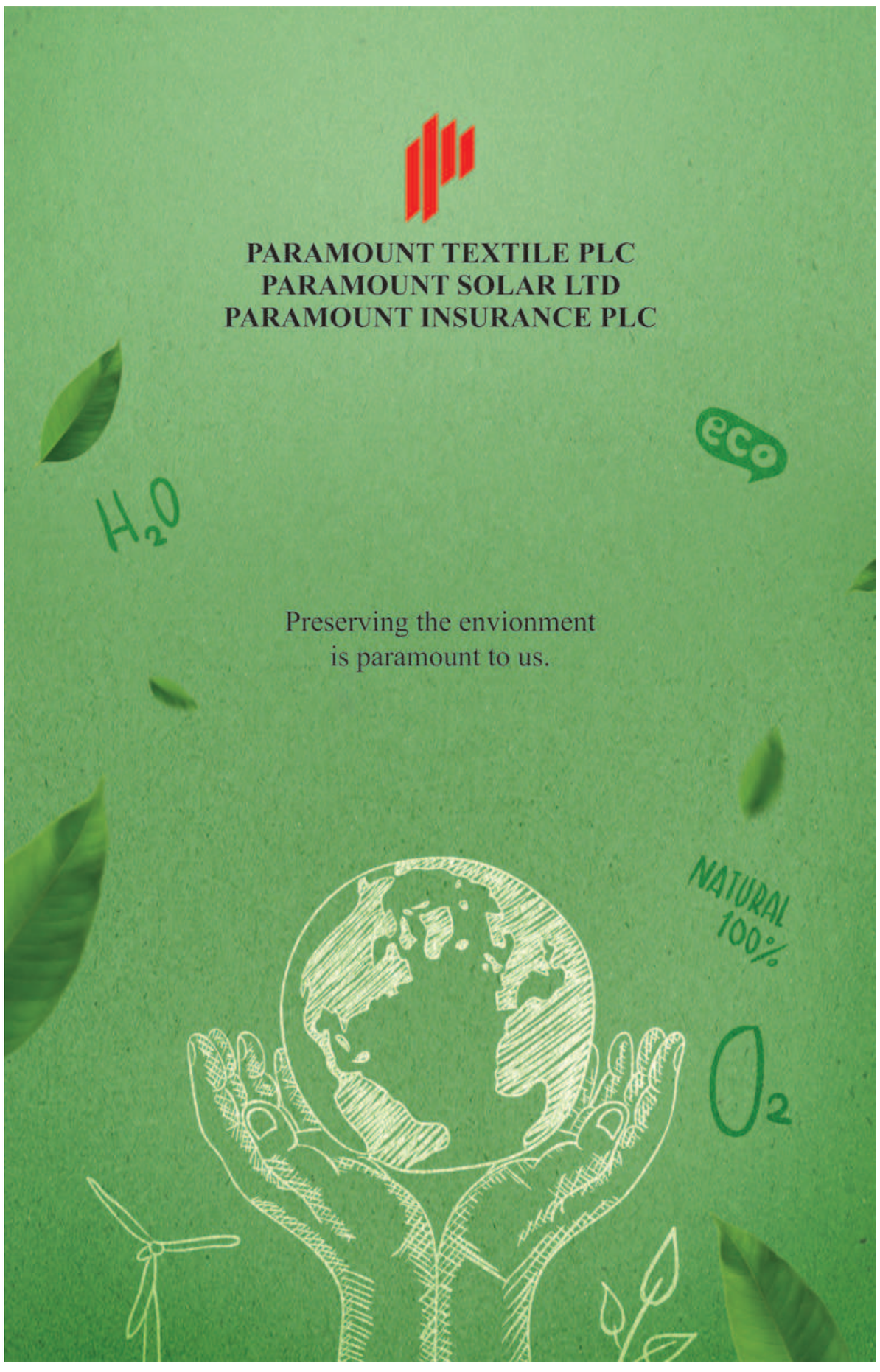

ILLUSTRATION: **ZARIF FAIAZ**

The fear and the future: what the emergence of AI can mean for our youth

ABIR HOSSAIN

Abir Hossain is a sub-editor at Campus, Rising Stars, and Star Youth.

SUMMARY

1. AI is changing entry-level work, especially in tech and creative fields, increasing anxiety among young people.
2. Students and fresh graduates are unsure how disruptive AI will be as it is able to execute tasks that were previously reserved for them.
3. In Bangladesh, youth unemployment is rising, and although AI is not the main cause, it adds pressure to an already weak job market.
4. Experts suggest AI will change how people work rather than fully replace human labour.
5. Human skills like creativity, empathy, judgement, and adaptability are expected to become more valuable.

The notion that artificial intelligence (AI) is going to rewire the basis of our understanding of many entities, even at this point in time, seems a little far-fetched. Yet, what it does have the potential to do is lead us into new territory. As things stand, though, most users are still trying to figure out its limitations, while those who develop it seek to shatter them. In between the swinging tides stand the youth. Left in limbo, the young demographic is left wondering precisely how disruptive artificial intelligence really is and what its development means for their future.

Zunayed Ahmed, a third-year software engineering student at Seneca Polytechnic in Canada and a software automation intern at Communications & Power Industries (CPI), explains how he thinks entry-level jobs in tech have been impacted due to the emergence of AI: "The bar has been raised. For example, let's say you are writing an API—Application Programming Interface. What you'd previously have to do was go through the documentation, read it, understand it, and then code. Now, it takes minutes to have a skeleton code. Because the workload is less tedious, you're expected to know a lot more and do more as well."

The development of generative AI has been meteoric. Most constraints that were conspicuous even a year ago have been rectified to various extents. Although new concerns have emerged, its integration into the professional realm has been evident. Even through AI's limited capacity, it is able to execute tasks that are typically reserved for entry-level workers, which is to say repetitive and often mundane tasks that are low-stakes. Such a prospect is understandably anxiety-inducing for fresh graduates as well as for those on the precipice of graduation and even those who are currently pursuing their education.

IMAGE: **GOOGLE DEEPMIND**

Anica Hossain, a graduate student of communications at University of Liberal Arts (ULAB), a graphic designer, and owner of art merchandise business Anico, discusses the shift she has observed: "The development of AI has impacted the industry a bit. A lot of employers and brands tend not to hire graphic designers. They're convinced that AI models can generate social media posts, write captions, and brainstorm ideas. But output that's churned out by models distinctly looks like it was made by AI. Not everyone wants that kind of work. People still look for the human touch in the design. So, I don't feel super threatened yet."

"Each artist and designer has their own distinct style, which I don't think AI models can replicate yet. As an artist, I am unsettled that the work we create is used to train these models. In the future, these tools might create output that can emulate artists' distinct styles. Right now, however, you still need designers to refine work generated by AI," Hossain adds.

Having spent their formative years pursuing a qualification, only for it to be deemed inadequate, is discouraging. The purpose of entry-level jobs has been to help young graduates transition from the classroom to the professional realm. It is a period of training, one that isn't just meant to teach and enhance the skills of fresh graduates but also allows them to figure out what kind of work they want to do. For such a crucial part of the process to become seemingly obsolete is disruptive in more than one way. In Bangladesh, particularly, this can amplify an already existing problem.

In a report by the World Bank, it was stated that unemployment in Bangladesh amongst tertiary-educated youth has increased significantly, with university-educated youth making up 27.8 percent of the total unemployment in 2022. An alarming rise from 9.7 percent in 2013. The rise in employment cannot be attributed to the rise of generative AI, though. However, with job creation stagnating and AI's rapid improvement following in tandem, the state of the job market hangs in the balance.

Salma Begum, PhD, an associate professor at the Department of Economics and Social Sciences at BRAC University and a labour economist, analyses the dynamics of the current Bangladeshi workforce: "If we look at the research, it shows that the Bangladeshi labour market is at a low exposure level. Our exposure is well below the regional average when comparing neighbouring countries. This is because we depend more on agriculture and have informal services, which have not seen much automation so far. Digital inequality, in terms of access to digital literacy and relevant education, is another contributing factor."

"AI models learn from data, and our country's availability of good-quality, reliable data is low. This is a problem because while AI will eventually affect our market, our low exposure currently indicates our low preparedness for it," she adds.

According to a report by the World Economic Forum (WEF), AI and information processing are projected to displace 9 million jobs, while creating 11 million new ones. It is expected that automation alone will cause 5 million jobs to be displaced. It must, however, be noted that the net disruption in the job market will be positive, with more jobs being created than displaced. What will be subject to change, though, is how people work, with the dynamic between humans and machines expected to alter.

"It is important to know and learn what AI tools can be leveraged to your benefit. This is something I do myself, and it does make working easier. I also think the ability to use AI tools might become a requirement in the future," emphasises Hossain.

"Using AI in my workplace is encouraged. My employers have seen how powerful a tool it is. In fact, we have a proprietary AI model that employees are expected to use. In my workflow, I use it for debugging, and sometimes to find fixes as well. I will also use it to generate snippets of code that may be considered repetitive, low-risk, and not complicated. Lastly, I use it to write documentation whenever I am finishing up work on a big file, which is supposed to guide the next person who is going to work on it," Ahmed affirmed.

A point of contention still remains, of course. WEF asks that if AI and algorithms are contributing to a larger proportion of output and income, then where does that leave people? It, thus, becomes imperative that the significance of human-machine collaboration is reinforced when these inquiries are made.

Whether such considerations are going to be made remains to be seen. Based on findings from the World Bank, 1.2 billion young people in emerging economies will become working-age adults. In contrast, the job market is projected to only create 420 million jobs, leaving almost 800 million people in a precarious employment position. To tackle an issue of this magnitude, employers across the globe are emphasising the need to reskill and upskill.

"No technology is inherently good or bad. We can harness it for productivity and efficiency increases, which is how we utilise the benefits. But we can also not be prepared for it, for which we may pay a price in terms of lost employment and opportunities," Salma Begum explains.

The conversation surrounding the impact of AI tends to devolve quickly into one of paranoia, where the most plausible outcome is envisioned to be the complete substitution of human labour. While these fears are by no means unfounded, what they do require us to do is take a step back, which can be difficult due to the uncertainty that has cloaked the entire situation. Nonetheless, the need to do so remains integral.

SEE PAGE 31

The fear and the future: what the emergence of AI can mean for our youth

FROM PAGE 30

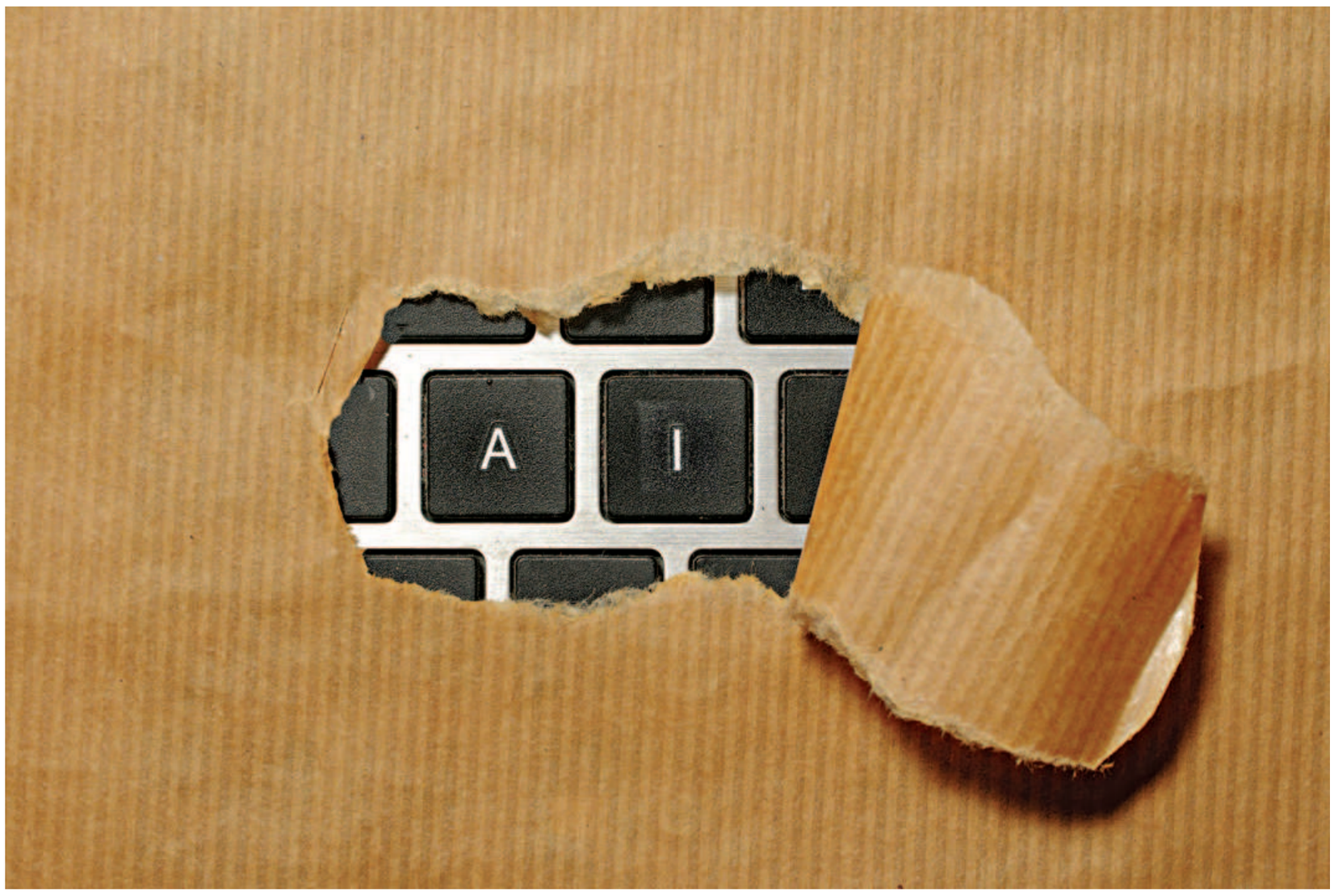

IMAGE: **IMMO WEGMANN/ UNSPLASH**

Though Ahmed finds the mechanism, even the scale and engineering, behind AI tools to be fascinating, he doesn't think it is reliable enough to replace humans. "I have seen how AI models deal with complex tasks. Each one has a context window, which can be a limiting feature as it can forget vital information. You can't replace humans with a tool that forgets or is unable to reason on its own. So, I just don't see how software engineers and developers can be replaced, at least not with the technology we currently have."

In a research paper by Isabeela Loaiza and Roberto Rigobon from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) - Sloan School of Management, the authors introduced the EPOCH framework to understand how human capabilities have the capacity to complement, rather than compete with AI. The EPOCH framework identified five groups of human capabilities that allow work in areas where machines are limited. These include Empathy, Presence, Opinion, Creativity, and Hope.

Findings from the paper suggest that US workers are shifting towards tasks that "emphasise the human-intensive capabilities". In fact, the results state that "new tasks" that appeared for the first time in 2024 are more human-intensive. It is also worth noting that human-intensive occupations were reported to experience more employment growth, hiring, and better projections. Some major occupations that had high EPOCH scores included Emergency Management Directors, Human Resource Managers, Sociologists, Clinical Psychologists, and Environmental Economists, amongst others.

Salma Begum reiterates that traditional career paths could take on a new form in the future, urging the young workforce to consider roles that bridge domains.

"Employers will want to hire people who are good learners, can solve problems, and work with new systems. Individuals who can navigate uncertainty and integrate new tools into their existing workflow are highly valued. Your ability to successfully adopt these systems in your workplace will matter more than your proficiency with any particular software," she says.

When asked what students can do to adapt to the emergence of AI tools, Salma Begum emphasised the need to build a broad set of transferable skills along with proficiency in their core area, as boundaries between industries are being blurred.

There is little doubt that AI tools are a force of disruption, transforming and being integrated into workflows across sectors. What makes it a source of anxiety, however, is that we are still not sure just how disruptive it truly is. Given the rate at which it is progressing, the limits that previously defined the question are withering away; constantly expanding its range. While we don't know the answer to this question, what it unravels is very human. As people, we are sceptical of the unknown. It is this instinct that forces us to ask questions, reason, and be critical. And this ability will determine not just how we understand AI tools but how we can use them to maximise their potential.

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DATA FRONTIERS

Where does Bangladesh fit in the global privacy debate?

ZARIF FAIAZ

Zarif Faiaz is a journalist at The Daily Star and a tech policy fellow at Tech Global Institute.

IMAGE: FLYD/ UNSPLASH

Data has become the raw material of modern power. It fuels artificial intelligence, guides advertising, shapes credit decisions, and underpins everything from ride hailing to national identity systems. Yet the same data can also be weaponised, mishandled, leaked or quietly traded. Around the world, governments are trying to answer a question that sounds technical but is deeply political: who gets to collect data, who gets to use it, and what rights do ordinary people have when their lives are reduced to records, profiles and predictions?

Bangladesh is stepping into this debate at a moment of unusual intensity. In late 2025, the country moved towards its first comprehensive privacy framework with a Personal Data Protection Ordinance and a National Data Governance Ordinance, both gazetted in November. And in early January 2026, the government approved amendments that, largely removed broad data localisation requirements for technology companies and dropped jail terms for violations by tech firms.

That combination tells us almost everything about where Bangladesh sits in the global privacy argument. It is trying to build a modern data regime quickly, under pressure from citizens who want protections and businesses that need workable rules. It is also doing so in a world where privacy law is increasingly tied to trade, geopolitics, national security and the question of whether data should flow freely across borders or be kept at home.

The result is a genuine crossroads: Bangladesh can become a credible, rights-based player in the global data economy, or it can drift into a model where "protection" is promised but "control" becomes the lived experience.

A WORLD SPLITTING INTO PRIVACY BLOCS

The global privacy debate is no longer about whether privacy matters. Most governments now accept, at least rhetorically, that it does. The argument is about the model.

Europe has tried to set the standard with the General Data Protection Regulation, which builds privacy around rights and obligations. The European Commission presents the GDPR as technology-neutral and applicable across sectors, focusing on how data is processed rather than what tools are used. Its principles, including lawfulness, fairness, transparency and purpose limitation, have become a reference point for regulators worldwide.

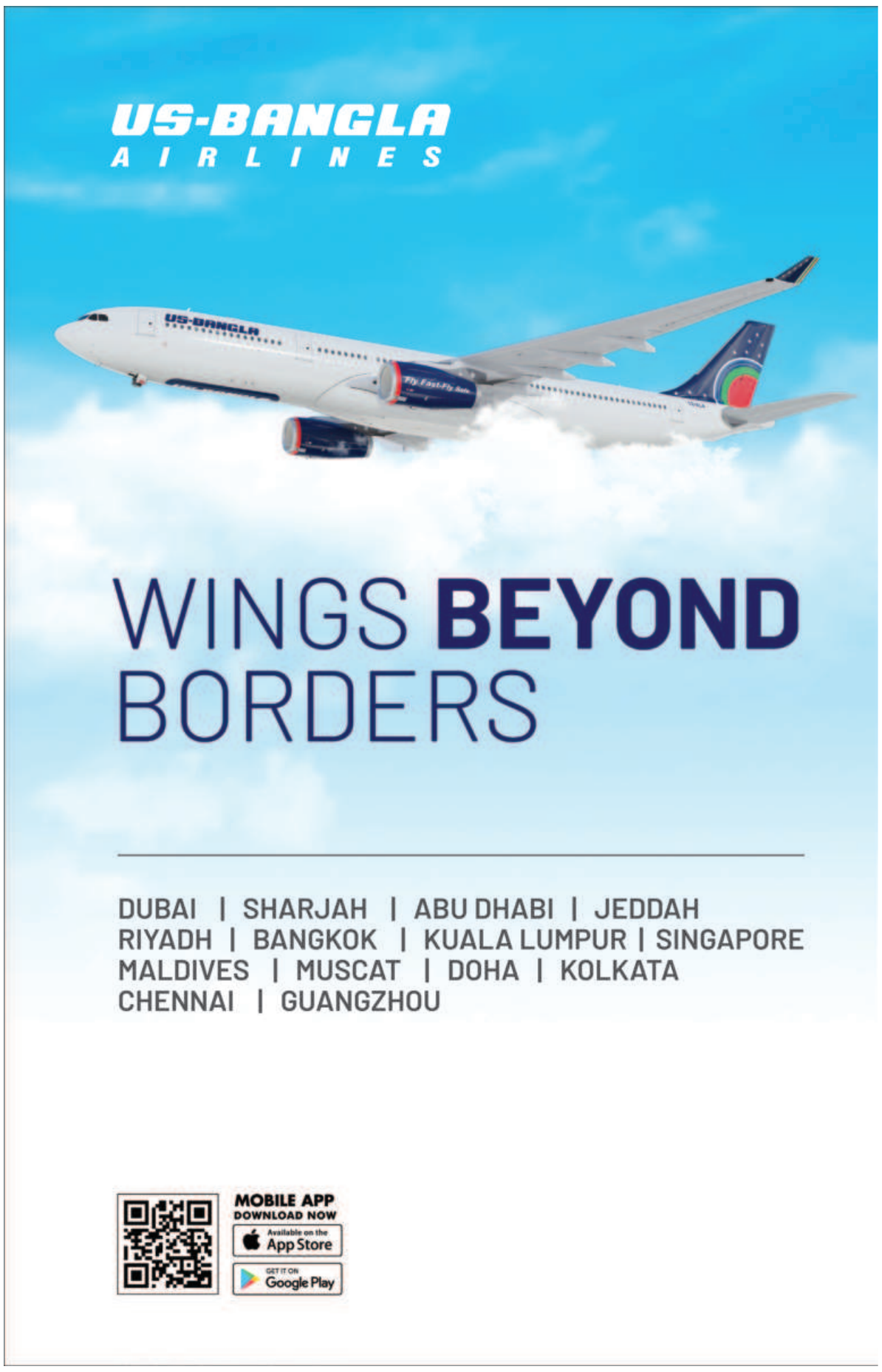
The United States, by contrast, has tended to rely on a patchwork of sector rules and state laws, with enforcement and consumer remedies often varying depending on where someone lives. California's consumer privacy regime has become one of the most influential US examples, with the state attorney general's office setting out rights such as opting out of sale or sharing and requesting corrections to inaccurate data. In early January 2026, California launched a government-run tool designed to help residents request deletion of personal information held by data brokers, underlining how the US debate is increasingly focused on the commercial trade in personal data.

China's approach sits in a different category, shaped by a strong emphasis on sovereignty and state oversight, especially for cross-border transfers. The direction of travel has been towards more structured compliance pathways for exporting personal information, including certification regimes and, in some cases, assessments and contractual tools. Reuters reported in October 2025 that Chinese regulators announced new rules for certifying cross-border transfers of personal data, scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2026.

Then there are the bridge models, including India's, which combine individual rights with a strong state role and a growing desire to manage strategic data without cutting off global commerce. In November 2025, India notified its Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, presented by the government as operationalising the Digital Personal Data Protection Act and creating a citizen-centric privacy framework.

Beneath these headline models sits the real battleground: cross-border data. Modern economies run on global cloud infrastructure, international payments, outsourced processing, and multinational platforms. But governments also worry about surveillance, foreign access, and dependence on overseas infrastructure. Data localisation measures have

SEE PAGE 34



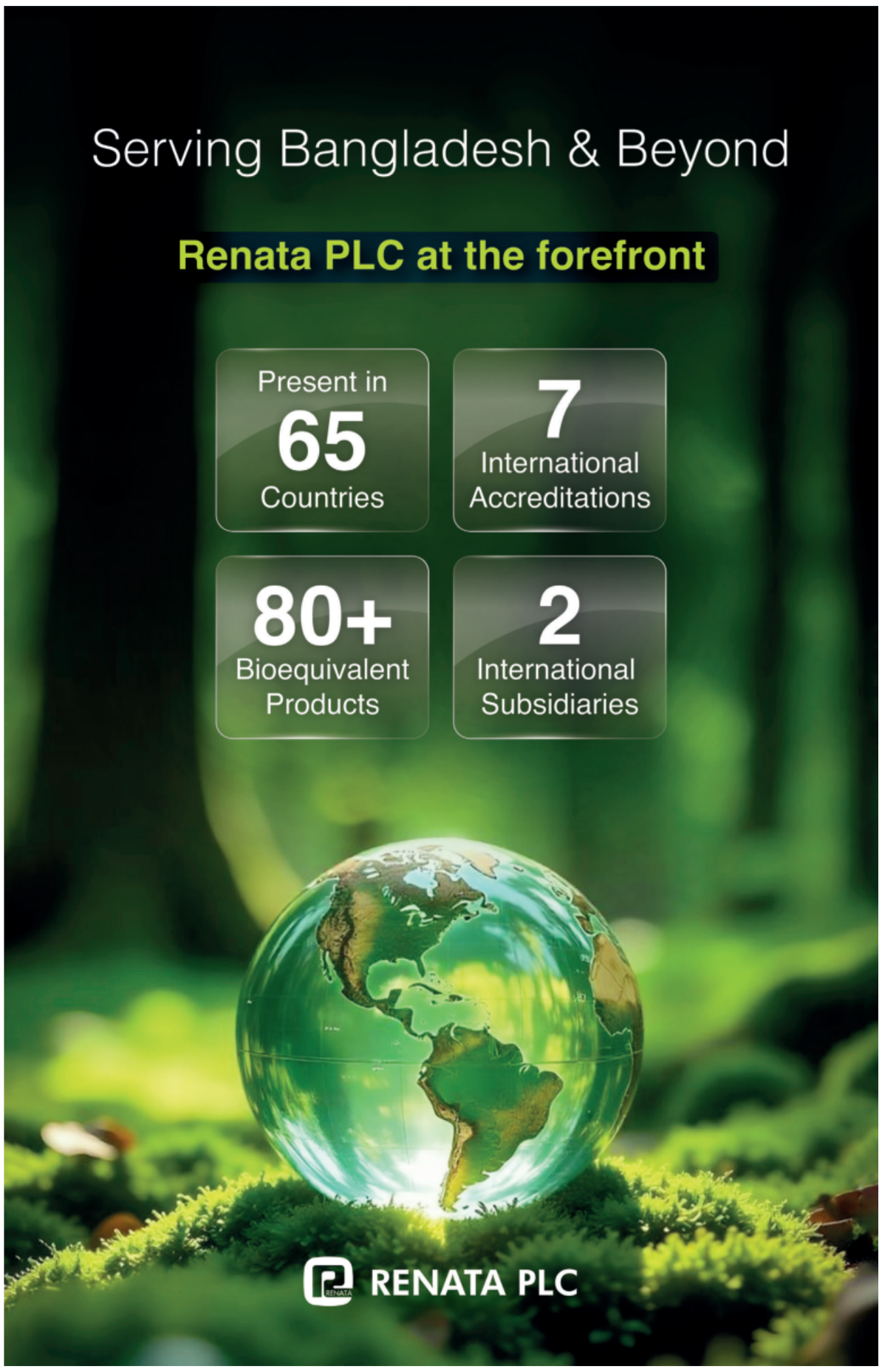


ILLUSTRATION: **ZARIF FAIAZ**

Data frontiers: where does Bangladesh fit in the global privacy debate?

FROM PAGE 33

multiplied globally, with the OECD noting that some localisation is viewed as useful and uncontroversial, while other forms are seen as barriers to the digital economy. The WTO has also pointed to the continued rise in data regulation measures, including increases in data localisation, framing it as part of a broader policy shift affecting trade.

This is the global stage on which Bangladesh is writing its rules.

BANGLADESH'S NEW DATA REGIME AND THE PROMISES IT MAKES

Bangladesh's Personal Data Protection Ordinance was gazetted in November 2025, according to the Bangladesh Government Press archive, marking a formal milestone after years of debate. DataGuidance, which tracks privacy developments, described the ordinance as effective from 6 November 2025, positioning it as a nationwide framework for personal data processing.

Public-facing explanations of the new laws emphasised rights. Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha reported that citizens would have rights including access, correction and deletion, and it also highlighted a right to restrict automated decisions made using personal data. Prothom Alo reported that a national data management authority would be established under the National Data Governance Ordinance to formulate data policies, ensure compliance and resolve complaints, while also guaranteeing security across national databases and software systems.

The Daily Star, in its early coverage of the ordinances, highlighted the idea that people are owners of their data, while the state and companies act as custodians or processors. In principle, that is a significant shift in framing. Ownership language, even if contested by lawyers in other jurisdictions, signals that the individual is not meant to be treated as a passive resource.

Yet the practical impact of any privacy law depends not on slogans but on details: who the regulator answers to, how exemptions are written, whether cross-border rules are workable, and what enforcement looks like when powerful actors breach the rules.

Those questions quickly became central to the Bangladeshi debate.

IMAGE: **LIANHAO QU/ UNSPLASH**

CONTROL, CONSULTATION, AND THE FEAR OF EXECUTIVE OVERREACH

From the start, civil society groups and some legal analysts warned that Bangladesh's new framework risked being too concentrated in executive hands. Transparency International Bangladesh criticised what it described as a hasty approval process without expert consultation and questioned whether the proposed authority would be independent and aligned with global practices. The Daily Star reported similar concerns, including criticism that key international data protection principles were missing or weak, and that the structure could create a crippled regime if not amended.

> Bangladesh can become a credible, rights-based player in the global data economy, or it can drift into a model where "protection" is promised but "control" becomes the lived experience.

A further worry has been the scope of government direction. Prothom Alo reported expert concerns about provisions that would allow the government to issue directives to the authority on grounds such as sovereignty, security and public order, and to issue orders related to data storage or transfer in urgent cases, which critics argued could grant unchecked power without judicial oversight. Article 19 has repeatedly argued Bangladesh should adopt a data protection regime grounded in international human rights law, warning against structural weaknesses that could enable surveillance rather than protection.

These arguments do not occur in a vacuum. Bangladesh's recent history of digital regulation has been shaped by controversy around laws used to police speech and online activity. Reuters reported in 2023 that Bangladesh would tone down parts of the Digital Security Act after long-standing criticism that it was draconian and could curb dissent. Separately, debate around cybersecurity law has continued, with proposals to recognise internet access as a civic right receiving attention in regional coverage.

Privacy law, in other words, is being built in a context where trust must be earned, and where people have reasons to scrutinise any broad state discretion.

DATA LOCALISATION AND THE ECONOMICS OF BEING PLUGGED INTO THE WORLD

The most explosive technical issue in Bangladesh's privacy debate has been data localisation. For governments, localisation can seem like a straightforward response to sovereignty concerns. Keeping data in-country can make it easier to enforce local laws, compel access, and build domestic data centres. It can also be sold politically as a way of preventing foreign surveillance.

For businesses, especially those using global cloud infrastructure, strict localisation can be expensive and destabilising. It can force companies to rebuild systems, complicate cybersecurity strategies, and create fragmentation where data that needs to move across borders for fraud detection, customer support or resilience is boxed in by law.

That tension appears to be driving rapid adjustment in Dhaka. In early January 2026, The Daily Star reported that the government removed broad localisation requirements for technology companies and scrapped jail terms for violations by tech firms, including global platforms, through amendments approved by the advisory council. Other reporting suggested localisation would apply more narrowly, such as to critical information infrastructure, rather than to all categories of data by default.

The speed of this shift matters. It suggests the government is attempting to reconcile two goals at once: signalling sovereignty and citizen protection, while avoiding rules that could scare off investment or break the architecture that modern services rely on.

Globally, that balancing act has become the norm. The EU promotes strict rights protections while still permitting cross-border transfers through adequacy decisions and legal mechanisms. The United States has focused on enabling data flows for commerce while negotiating safeguards in specific contexts.

SEE PAGE 35

Data frontiers: where does Bangladesh fit in the global privacy debate?

FROM PAGE 34

The EU-US Data Privacy Framework is one example, with the official programme overview explaining that the adequacy decision enables transfers of EU personal data to participating organisations consistent with EU law. China has tightened oversight while still building pathways for compliant exports. India's DPDP Rules are framed as enabling responsible data use within a new governance structure.

Bangladesh's challenge is that it is trying to land this balance while its Globally, that balancing act has become the norm. The EU promotes strict rights protections while still permitting cross-border transfers through adequacy decisions and legal mechanisms. The United States has focused on enabling data flows for commerce while negotiating safeguards in specific contexts. The EU-US Data Privacy Framework is one example, with the official programme overview explaining that the adequacy decision enables transfers of EU personal data to participating organisations consistent with EU law. China has tightened oversight while still building pathways for compliant exports. India's DPDP Rules are framed as enabling responsible data use within a new governance structure.

Bangladesh's challenge is that it is trying to land this balance while its own regulatory capacity is still developing, and while public trust in digital governance remains fragile.

SO WHERE DOES BANGLADESH FIT?

Bangladesh is unlikely to become a full replica of the European rights-first model overnight, because the GDPR depends on strong supervisory authorities, mature court oversight, and deep institutional capacity. It is also unlikely to adopt the looser US approach, because Bangladesh's political and security context pushes strongly towards state discretion, and because citizens are demanding clearer protections as data becomes embedded in everyday services.

Instead, Bangladesh is positioning itself as a hybrid, a country seeking legitimacy through rights language and modern governance architecture, while retaining broad levers for state intervention. The question is whether those levers will be narrowed and supervised enough to win credibility internationally and domestically.

To fit into the global privacy debate in a way that strengthens Bangladesh's future economy, three tests matter.

The first is independence and enforcement. A privacy regime that cannot constrain powerful institutions will not build trust, and it will not reassure foreign partners. The concern raised by TIB and Article 19 about consultation and executive influence points to a basic requirement: a regulator that can enforce rules fairly, whether the violator is a small business, a multinational platform or a state agency.

The second is cross-border realism. Bangladesh wants to scale digital exports, attract investment, and support startups that serve global markets. That cannot be done with rules that treat every data transfer as inherently suspicious or that force costly duplication without a clear security rationale. The amendments reported in January 2026 suggest policymakers recognise this, but the final shape of the regime will determine whether Bangladesh is seen as open for business or trapped in uncertainty.

The third is the AI connection. Privacy is no longer only about preventing leaks or stopping spam. It is about whether automated systems can profile people, deny them opportunities, or nudge them politically without transparency. Bangladesh's ordinance, as described by BSS, includes the idea that citizens can restrict automated decisions made using their data, which aligns with a wider global shift towards algorithmic accountability. The challenge will be turning that right into something meaningful: requiring explanations, creating appeal mechanisms, and ensuring that both public and private AI systems are auditable when they have serious impacts.

Bangladesh's data frontier is therefore not only about catching up. It is about choosing a global identity. Does Bangladesh want to be seen as a country where personal data is protected in practice, where rules are stable enough for innovation, and where state powers are constrained by law? Or does it want to prioritise rapid control over data flows even if that risks trust, investment and the legitimacy of the framework itself?

The most realistic answer is that Bangladesh will continue to negotiate between these poles, because that is what almost every country is now doing. But there is still a difference between negotiation and drift. The coming year, with amendments already on the table, will show whether Bangladesh can turn its new laws into a credible social contract rather than a contested instrument of power.

SUMMARY

1. Data has become economic and political power, and privacy rules now shape trade, trust and AI adoption.
2. Bangladesh is moving fast, with a new Personal Data Protection Ordinance and National Data Governance Ordinance entering the debate.
3. The global privacy landscape is splitting into models, from Europe's rights-based approach to sovereignty-focused regimes with tighter state control.
4. Bangladesh's biggest fault line is cross-border data, balancing sovereignty and security against investment, cloud dependence and digital exports.
5. The credibility test will be enforcement and oversight: rights on paper must translate into protections in practice, including limits on state discretion.

IMAGE: TOBIAS TULLIUS/ UNSPLASH

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Re-spawn: rethinking esports in Bangladesh

SHAFKAT ALAM

Shafkat Alam is a veteran CTO with extensive experience building startups and shaping technology policy across South Asia.

IMAGE: SANKET MISHRA/ PEXELS

When Bangladesh's Ministry of Youth and Sports formally designated esports as an official sport in July 2025, it marked a significant departure from the country's previous posture towards competitive gaming. Just four years earlier, courts banned a few of the most popular titles that command enormous followings among Bangladeshi youth, amid concerns about addiction and social harm. This volte-face reflects a government belatedly recognising that prohibition rarely succeeds when confronting an industry already embedded in the daily lives of tens of millions.

The question now is not whether Bangladesh will have an esports sector. It already does. Rather, it is whether policymakers can construct a regulatory architecture that allows the industry to flourish while mitigating its genuine risks, an approach several south-east Asian neighbours have been refining for years.

SUMMARY

1. Bangladesh's recognition of esports marks a sharp shift from earlier bans and reflects the limits of prohibition in digital life.
2. The sector already exists at scale, driven by a large youth cohort, cheap smartphones and low-cost data, but remains largely informal.
3. Bans pushed gaming underground through VPNs and workarounds, reducing oversight rather than reducing participation.
4. The real opportunity is economic: esports can create jobs far beyond pro players, from production and community roles to game development and analytics.
5. The policy test is building proportionate regulation that protects young people from real harms while enabling a professional, competitive ecosystem.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC REALITY

The numbers are difficult to ignore. Bangladesh's population includes roughly 46 million people aged 15 to 29, nearly a quarter of the country's total. This cohort has grown up with smartphones rather than inherited them. Cheap handsets and low-cost data packages have placed gaming within reach of suburban and rural youth who might never have access to a PlayStation or gaming PC.

Globally, the esports market was valued at about $2.1bn in 2024, with projections suggesting it could reach $7.5bn by 2030. Bangladesh's share remains modest, but the trajectory is clear. Local tournaments attract significant viewership on Facebook and YouTube. Content creators, shoutcasters and community managers have carved out livelihoods in the ecosystem's margins. The infrastructure, however rudimentary, exists.

THE CASE AGAINST PROHIBITION

Bangladesh's earlier experiment with bans illustrates why prohibition tends to fail in a digital economy. When courts upheld restrictions on PUBG and Free Fire, players simply migrated to VPNs or shifted to alternative titles. Gaming continued; what ceased was any meaningful oversight of an activity involving millions of young people.

This pattern will be familiar to regulators elsewhere. In the United Kingdom, the Online Safety Act 2023 represents Parliament's attempt to impose duties of care on platforms where users interact, including, increasingly, online games. The legislation does not ban gaming. It requires services to assess risks of harm, implement content moderation and provide mechanisms for reporting abuse. Xbox has begun age verification for UK players. Ofcom, the regulator, has published guidance specifically addressing the video games industry.

The contrast with outright prohibition is instructive. Where bans push activity underground, regulation brings it into the open. Where bans punish legitimate and harmful behaviour alike, regulation distinguishes between them. Where bans leave authorities blind to what young people are actually doing, regulation creates reporting obligations and transparency requirements.

None of this is to suggest that concerns about gaming are illegitimate. Excessive screen time, disrupted sleep cycles and the mental pressure of competitive play are documented phenomena. In the worst cases, online disputes have escalated into real-world violence. These are not imaginary problems. But they are problems of oversight, not of gaming per se.

BUILDING THE ECOSYSTEM FOR BETTER ECONOMIC PRIZE

Bangladesh's newly formed committee on esports policy faces an enviable opportunity wrapped in a daunting challenge. The opportunity is to establish frameworks before the industry matures, rather than attempting to retrofit regulation onto entrenched interests. The challenge is to do so without the institutional infrastructure, regulatory experience or funding that established markets enjoy.

For a government seeking to create skilled employment for a vast youth population, esports presents a compelling proposition. The industry's labour requirements extend well beyond the handful of players who achieve competitive success. Game development, 2D and 3D art, animation, sound design, narrative writing, quality assurance, community management and data analytics all represent career pathways that can be cultivated through targeted training programmes.

Several south-east Asian markets have recognised this. Singapore's institutions offer esports management qualifications. Malaysia has integrated gaming into its creative industries development strategy. Even South Korea, where esports achieved mainstream acceptance decades ago, continues to invest in pipeline

SEE PAGE 39

CYBER-RESILIENT FUTURE

How to keep up with the evolving threat landscape

SUNIL SHARMA

Sunil Sharma is the Managing Director and Vice President of Sales (India & SAARC) at Sophos.

Something has quietly changed in Bangladesh's digital economy over the past five years, and not everyone has noticed. The country that once dealt mainly with phishing emails and basic malware now faces the same cyber threats troubling organisations in London, Singapore and New York. In one sense, this is a sign of progress. Cybercriminals do not waste advanced attacks on unimportant targets. That Bangladesh's financial services, telecoms networks, manufacturing supply chains and government platforms are now receiving serious attention from organised crime groups, hacktivists and state-sponsored actors reflects how far the country's digital transformation has come.

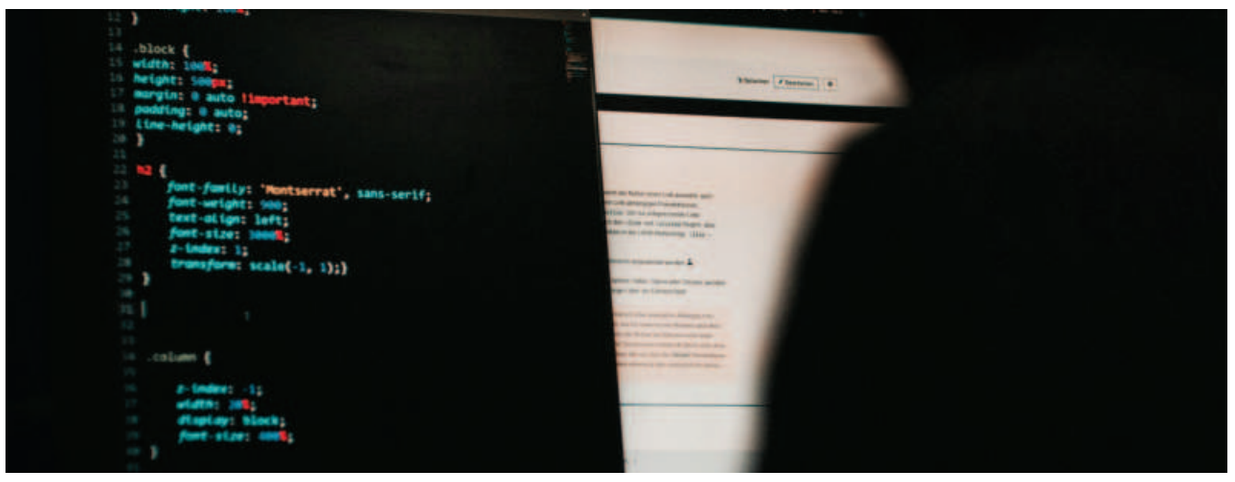

IMAGE: MIKA BAUMEISTER/ UNSPLASH

Cybercriminals adapt constantly, and security strategies must evolve just as quickly. Tools and processes that worked last year may not work today.

But this shift also brings a new reality. The old security playbook of firewalls, antivirus software and occasional security audits is no longer enough.

Insights from Sophos show that attackers now remain hidden inside systems for a median of just two days, often enough time to steal data, disrupt operations or deploy ransomware. Two days is all it takes for a security incident to become a major crisis.

For Bangladeshi organisations still viewing cybersecurity as an IT department concern rather than a business priority, this timeline should be a wake-up call. Building true cyber resilience matters. The ability not only to prevent attacks, but also to adapt, respond and recover, requires focusing on five connected principles.

UNDERSTANDING THE THREAT LANDSCAPE

Cyber threats today do not arrive at random. They follow patterns, reuse techniques, exploit known vulnerabilities and evolve in response to defensive measures. Organisations that stay informed about current attack methods and monitor threat intelligence gain a clear advantage. Those that only react after an incident has begun are always one step behind.

LOOK AT THREATS IN CONTEXT

A security alert on its own means very little. What matters is whether it affects critical systems, sensitive data or essential services. Without a clear view of business priorities, regulatory obligations and supply chain exposure, security teams can become overwhelmed by alerts while missing the real risks. The strongest organisations connect security signals to business reality and focus on what truly matters.

Cybercriminals adapt constantly, and security strategies must evolve just as quickly. Tools and processes that worked last year may not work today. Resilient organisations can adjust policies, update defences and respond to new threats without slowing business operations.

Research repeatedly points to the same conclusion: a lack of skills or awareness plays a role in most successful attacks. Technology alone cannot compensate for undertrained staff, overstretched security teams, or decision-makers who do not understand cyber risk. Investing in human capability through training, expert support and clear decision-making is essential to long-term resilience.

WORK ON SPEED AND AGILITY

As cybercriminals increasingly use automation and artificial intelligence to move faster, slow responses become costly. The ability to detect threats early, investigate quickly and respond across systems such as endpoints, networks and cloud environments can determine whether an incident remains a manageable problem or becomes an existential crisis.

For Bangladesh, the path forward is clear, even if it is not easy. Cyber resilience is not achieved by buying technology alone. It requires intelligence, context, adaptability, skilled people and speed working together as a single strategy. Organisations that understand this will be better equipped to protect digital trust, support economic growth and meet the challenges ahead.

Attackers are already paying attention to Bangladesh. The real question is whether Bangladeshi organisations are paying the same attention in return.

SUMMARY

1. Bangladesh's rapid digital growth has made it a serious target for advanced cyberattacks once seen mainly in global financial hubs.

2. Traditional security measures are no longer sufficient as modern attackers can breach systems and cause damage within just days.

3. True cyber resilience depends on understanding evolving threats and linking security risks directly to business priorities.

4. Human capability—skills, awareness and decision-making—is as critical as technology in preventing and managing cyber incidents.

5. Speed, adaptability and continuous monitoring are now essential to stop cyber incidents from escalating into major crises.

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IMAGE: **ESMA MELIKE SEZER/ UNSPLASH**

Staying human in the age of AI

NADIA JAHAN

Nadia Jahan is a development communications professional based out of Dhaka.

AI has slipped into daily life with a kind of stealth. One moment you are using it to tidy up an email or translate a paragraph, and the next you are letting it outline your presentation, draft your report, suggest your next move, even tell you what you feel. The shift is not just about new software. It is about habits. In a country where young people are under relentless pressure to compete, save time and sound polished, the temptation is obvious: delegate as much as possible, move faster than everyone else, and let the machine take the strain.

But there is a cost to handing over too much. The more we outsource, the more we risk hollowing out the very qualities that make us employable, resilient, and alive to one another. Staying human in the age of AI means knowing when to use the tool and when to step back from it, not out of nostalgia, but because some parts of life only work when we do them ourselves.

AI tools can be wrong, inconsistent, or strangely generic. They can flatten nuance, misunderstand context, and reproduce patterns that are common rather than correct.

There is an easy misunderstanding about AI that makes over-delegation feel harmless. We treat it like a calculator for words, a neutral device that simply speeds up what we already know. Yet many AI systems do more than compute. They generate. They suggest. They complete our thoughts for us, often in a tone that sounds confident and coherent. That can create the illusion of competence even when the underlying thinking is thin. If we accept that illusion too often, we begin to live in a world where sounding right matters more than being right, and where the first draft becomes the final one.

The first thing we lose is the muscle of judgement. Writing a message, shaping an argument, or making a decision is not only about producing an output. It is about weighing what matters, anticipating how it will land, and taking responsibility for the consequences. When you let AI do the heavy lifting every time, you may still get something workable on the page, but you gradually weaken the inner sense that tells you what is true, what is fair, what is missing, and what does not sound like you. That sense is slow to build and easy to erode.

There is also a practical risk: dependency makes people fragile. AI tools can be wrong, inconsistent, or strangely generic. They can flatten nuance, misunderstand context, and reproduce patterns that are common rather than correct. If you have not practised doing the work yourself, you cannot reliably catch the errors. You also struggle when the stakes rise: when a client challenges a claim, when an interviewer asks you to explain your reasoning, when you have to negotiate, persuade, or improvise in real time. In those moments, there is no prompt that can replace a well-trained mind.

The second thing we lose is originality. Not in the grand sense of artistic genius, but in the everyday sense that your work carries a trace of your experience: your curiosity, your humour, your way of seeing. AI can imitate styles and remix familiar patterns, which is exactly why it can be useful for routine tasks. But if you let it write everything, you end up speaking in borrowed rhythms. You become less memorable. You become easier to replace.

This is where the so-called "human touch" becomes more than a sentimental phrase. In competitive workplaces and crowded markets, the human touch is often the differentiator.

SEE PAGE 39

IMAGE: **GIINGERANN/ UNSPLASH**

Staying human in the age of AI

FROM PAGE 38

It is the ability to listen properly to what someone is asking, to sense what they are not saying, to respond in a way that makes them feel understood rather than processed. It is empathy, timing, judgement, tact. It is also taste: knowing what to leave out, when to simplify, when to insist on complexity, when to be firm, when to be kind. AI can help with drafts and options, but it cannot fully replace the lived intelligence that comes from being in the world, paying attention, and caring about consequences.

In Bangladesh, this matters because so much opportunity depends on relationships. Whether you are pitching a client, working in a team, running a small business, freelancing online, or building a startup, trust is the currency. Trust grows through consistency and human presence. It grows when you show up, reply thoughtfully, keep your word, and treat people as people. If AI encourages a culture of shortcuts where every message is a template and every interaction is optimised for speed, trust becomes harder to earn. You might respond faster, but you can sound less real.

SUMMARY

1. AI is a powerful helper, but delegating everything to it weakens judgement, originality, and responsibility.
2. Fluency is not truth, so over-reliance makes people more vulnerable to mistakes they can't spot.
3. The "human touch" is a competitive edge: empathy, taste, context, and trust cannot be automated.
4. Social skills are now a core survival skill, because real work and real life still run on relationships.
5. If we swap human connection for frictionless AI convenience, we risk turning ourselves into efficient, isolated machines.

The deeper danger is that over-delegation does not stop at work. It creeps into the personal. When people use AI to avoid awkward conversations, to manage emotions, to write apologies, to craft romantic messages, to mediate conflicts, they may feel relief in the moment. But avoidance has a price. Relationships are not built through perfect phrasing. They are built through vulnerability, patience, and the willingness to sit with discomfort. If you outsource the difficult parts of being with other people, you do not develop the skills that make intimacy possible.

That is why social skills are not a soft extra in the age of AI. They are a survival skill. As machines get better at routine cognitive output, what remains valuable is what machines cannot do in the same way: build rapport, read a room, resolve conflict, motivate a team, mentor someone younger, earn a customer's loyalty, handle criticism without collapsing, and communicate under pressure. These skills have always mattered. Now they matter more, because they are harder to automate and because they protect us from turning ourselves into something machine-like.

The irony is that technology often makes social skills feel optional. When you can text instead of call, when you can order without speaking, when you can work remotely and never meet your colleagues, you can go through days with minimal human friction. AI takes this further by offering a substitute for interaction: an entity that always responds, never gets tired, and rarely pushes back. If we are not careful, we start to prefer that frictionless exchange to real relationships, which are messy and demanding. Over time, the preference becomes a habit, and the habit becomes a way of life.

This is how we risk mechanising ourselves. Not because machines become human, but because humans begin to adopt the machine's logic. We optimise everything. We minimise effort. We reduce conversation to transactions. We treat people as obstacles or opportunities, not as complex beings. We choose the easiest route rather than the most meaningful one. When enough individuals do this, society becomes colder. Loneliness rises. Trust falls. Even success feels strangely thin.

Staying human, then, is partly a matter of deliberate resistance. It means choosing, again and again, to practise what AI makes easy to avoid.

It means writing sometimes without assistance, so you can hear your own voice and strengthen your ability to think through language. It means doing mental work slowly enough to understand it, rather than producing answers quickly enough to move on. It means reading deeply rather than skimming summaries, because attention is a form of respect, and because complex problems cannot be solved with shallow understanding.

It also means making extra efforts to protect human-to-human connection in a world that quietly erodes it. Call a friend instead of sending a perfectly composed message. Sit with someone in person even when it is inconvenient. Ask questions you cannot outsource. Listen without planning your next reply. Join communities that are not about productivity: sports clubs, volunteer groups, study circles, cultural events, neighbourhood networks. These are not distractions from the future. They are part of what makes any future worth living in.

For young people especially, there is a temptation to treat social skills as secondary to technical skills. Learn the tools, build the portfolio, collect the certificates, and the rest will follow. But the person who thrives in an AI-shaped economy will often be the one who can combine competence with connection. The future belongs to people who can use machines without becoming machine-like: who can collaborate across differences, communicate clearly, negotiate fairly, and keep a sense of purpose bigger than optimisation.

None of this requires rejecting AI. It requires putting it in its place. AI is best understood as an amplifier. Used wisely, it can amplify your learning, your productivity, your creativity. Used carelessly, it amplifies your laziness, your dependence, your isolation. The difference is not the tool. It is the human using it.

The point of staying human is not to prove you can do everything the hard way. It is to protect what only humans can do well: meaning-making, moral judgement, genuine care, solidarity, courage. These are not romantic ideals. They are practical advantages in a volatile world. They help people adapt, recover, cooperate, and build institutions that last.

In the coming years, Bangladesh's young people will be told, repeatedly, that the future belongs to those who embrace AI. That is true, in a narrow sense. But the broader truth is that the future belongs to those who embrace people. The real challenge is not learning to prompt a machine. It is learning to remain fully human while you do.

IMAGE: **MICHAELLE DAOUST/ UNSPLASH**

Re-spawn: Bangladesh's esports at a crossroads

FROM PAGE 36

development, recognising that the stars on stage represent only the visible fraction of an industrial base.

For Bangladesh, the economic logic is strengthened by demographic realities. A quarter of the population in the gaming-intensive age bracket represents either a problem or an opportunity, depending on policy choices. Channelled into a regulated, professionalised industry, that cohort could generate export revenue, project a modern national image and develop transferable digital skills. Left to unstructured consumption, it risks the outcomes that originally prompted judicial intervention.

Bangladesh has officially recognised competitive electronic gaming as a sport. Now comes the harder task: building a framework that nurtures talent without importing the industry's worst excesses.

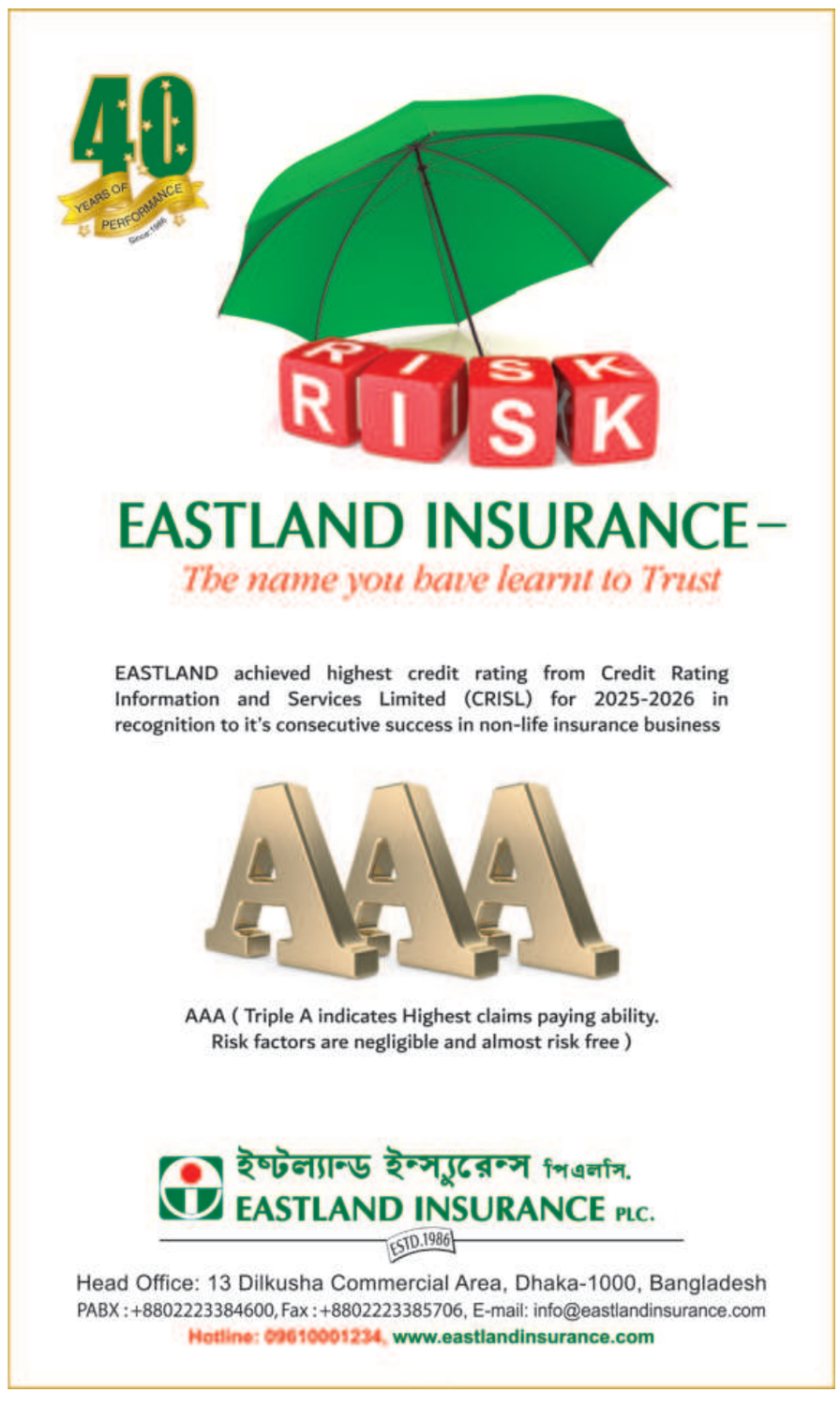
A MOMENT OF CHOICE

The temptation for policymakers will be to declare victory upon formal recognition and move on. This would be a mistake. Recognition is a necessary condition for building a sustainable esports sector, but it is far from sufficient. The committee now drafting governance proposals will determine whether Bangladesh captures the industry's benefits or merely imports its pathologies.

The model should be cautious promotion accompanied by proportionate regulation, nurturing domestic talent and infrastructure while establishing safeguards against the genuine harms that competitive gaming can facilitate. This is harder than either blanket prohibition or laissez-faire permissiveness, requiring ongoing engagement with an industry that evolves faster than regulatory processes typically accommodate.

But the alternative, oscillating between bans that fail and recognition that achieves nothing, serves no one. Bangladesh's young gamers deserve better than to be alternately criminalised and ignored. And the country's policymakers, having belatedly acknowledged the reality of digital leisure, now bear responsibility for shaping its trajectory.

The game, as it were, is on.



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