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CAMPUS

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ILLUSTRATION: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

VIDEO GAMES

POKÉMON LEGENDS: Z-A

Redefining the age-old adventure

SHAMS RASHID TONMOY

After the refreshing new take on mainline *Pokémon* games that was *Pokémon Legends: Arceus*, its spiritual successor arrives as a bold evolution of the concept. *Pokémon Legends: Z-A* is the second iteration of the *Pokémon Legends* series, sharing a lineage with its predecessor but charting a distinctly different course. Where *Arceus isekai'd* teleported players to a past Sinnoh devoid of modern technology, *Z-A* is set in the present day, unfolding in the Kalos region five years after the events of 2013's *Pokémon X and Y*.

The story

The narrative casts you as a newcomer to a Lumiose City undergoing radical "urban redevelopment". The city now features dedicated "Wild Zones", where Pokémon roam free among the boulevards, and nocturnal "Battle Zones" where registered trainers compete to climb the ranks from Z to A, the game's titular goal. Those who reach the pinnacle, Rank A, will be granted a wish from the city's mysterious planners.

As a lifelong fan, I must admit that *Z-A* features one of the most engaging plots in the series. Without venturing into spoiler territory, the game's characters are quite memorable, and the writing uniquely blends quirky side-stories with moments of genuine hilarity, often making the game feel like a whimsical comedy or slice-of-life anime – a refreshingly unique tone for *Pokémon*.

What works

Released in October 2025 amid much hype, *Legends: Z-A* delivers on its promise of a brand-new experience. Building upon *Arceus's* real-time foundations, it abandons turn-based combat entirely for a fully real-time system, bringing back fan-favourite "Mega Evolutions", which have been absent in mainline games for quite some time.

Furthermore, each move that Pokémon can use has its own cooldown, hit range, and animation speed, making positioning, timing, and physically dodging attacks as crucial as raw power. This creates an exhilarating, high-stakes pace that is a franchise first for a mainline title, and a challenging but welcome change of pace for fans both old and new.

The setting of Lumiose City is also a marvel of density. It's a vast, explorable urban jungle packed with secrets, environmental puzzles, and rewarding side quests. This focus allows for verticality and detail not seen in the wider, but often, more sparse, open worlds of recent titles. Furthermore, *Z-A* is arguably the most accessible game yet for shiny Pokémon hunting, offering a clear endgame pursuit for dedicated collectors.

What doesn't work

Despite its strengths, *Z-A* reveals significant flaws the more you play it. The most glaring is the repetitive gameplay loop that emerges during the main story and worsens in the post-game. This issue is exacerbated by the DLC, which, while adding an enjoyable new story and additional side quests, ties its best rewards to heavy grinding without sufficient quality-of-life improvements to ease the repetition, thus making it hard to justify the additional USD 30 price tag on top of the base game's USD 60 (USD 70 on Switch 2) cost.

Moreover, the singular city setting of Lumiose, while impressively built, ultimately cannot match the biome variety of *Legends: Arceus* or other older *Pokémon* games. Exploring a metropolis – no matter how large – lacks the wonder of traversing diverse wilderness such as forests, mountains, tundras, and coastlines. This limitation is compounded by the omission of beloved series staples: Pokémon Abilities, breeding, riding Pokémon or bikes, and interactive features like Amie or Camp. The total available Pokémon of roughly 364 species (with DLC) also feels like it's not enough.

As a result, while the game's first few hours feel genuinely magical, the post-game, particularly in the base release, comes across as sparse compared to the near-infinite playability for which other *Pokémon* games are loved and remembered.

Final thoughts

Pokémon Legends: Z-A delivers a bold new combat system, a fun story, memorable characters, and a captivating initial experience. In many ways, it redefines the age-old Pokémon adventure, turning familiar mechanics into a fresh, real-time, and immersive journey that feels strikingly modern. While it may not have as much variety in features or post-game playability as some previous titles, *Z-A*'s vision and execution make it a genuinely unique and thrilling experience that raises the bar for the series going forward.

OPPORTUNITIES

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EDUCATION

How to make an ACADEMIC COMEBACK

ALEENA YUSRA

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

It's the Sunday after your exam weekend. You've enjoyed living by the "ignorance is bliss" philosophy for the past two days. However, right now, you're in class, and the light seems too bright as you stare down at the result sheet in front of you. The red ink depicts two earth-shattering numbers placed together; you can't even imagine that was possible from you. The previous straight A's have brutally diversified themselves.

As uncomfortable as this might be, the very anatomy of academic recovery is built on understanding that this is neither an endpoint nor a reflection of competency. It calls for a realistic, intentional rebuilding of your approach because, without structure, all potential and hard work gets lost in translation.

Sit with the disappointment before trying to fix it

A bad grade deserves honest grief in order to metabolise into progress. A grief that diligently recognises a mistake or misunderstanding, not a measure of competency. Suppressing disappointment or redirecting it for a self-deprecating narrative often leads to frantic corrective steps that backfire and fuel the very loop you're trying to escape. Allowing yourself a slow, quiet day that creates enough distance for a deliberate response rather than a panicked one sets you up for a sustainable recovery.

Audit the semester you just survived

Rushing forward without diagnosing what habits or repetitions held you back is a fragile, unstable step. Recovery requires an unflinching look at what went wrong. It can range from things like ignoring past papers, prioritising extracurricular activities, and making passive notes to doomscrolling, procrastination, or an unkind sleep schedule. Even top-tier Feynman study tips become unproductive if you're still progressing with patterns that work against you.

Don't just guess where you went wrong

Sometimes, it's hard to see your own blind spots. Teachers are often an underused resource in such circumstances. Many students shy away from asking additional questions, clarifying confusions or seeking guidance on performance. An external perspective from a teacher or even a peer who excels in a subject can highlight things you might miss. Reach out to teachers of subjects that consistently give you an unforgiving time. Ask where marks were lost, what examiners were looking for, and how your answers could have been strengthened. Ask your peers about where focused effort is most likely to make the biggest difference for you.

Close the gaps before moving ahead

Progressing without fixing conceptual gaps only compounds the problem. As the second semester starts, this will be your foundation. A pivotal aspect of recovery is strengthening what you've already learnt to prevent future confusion. Revisit key materials from the previous semester and ensure you genuinely understand core concepts before moving on.

Experiment until it fits

Colour-coded timetables, 5 AM routines, and "study like me" videos often feed into the productivity delusion and myth of "one method fits all." Even more so, it sends you out onto a rabbit hole of hours of resource-scavenging, which ultimately just leads to an overwhelming loss of sight.

Study methods are not universal laws of physics. What works brilliantly for one student may completely fail another. What works well for a technical subject may be useless when applied to a humanities subject, or it may also sometimes unknowingly work out nicely. This part of recovery is a game of trial and error until you find a realistic, effective and sustainable strategy.

Instead of chasing productivity myths, experiment deliberately. Give yourself a two-week trial period for different methods, prioritising weak areas first. Track what actually improves understanding and not what looks impressive in a planner.

If academics feel circular, that's because they are. Learning tends to turn back in on itself, tracing familiar paths in new, sharper, truer light. A quiet return to fundamentals, followed by forward motion informed by experience. Like an ouroboros, the end feeds the beginning. The manual you thought you missed was never handed out in the first place; it's written slowly, in margins and mistakes, revisions and retries. What feels like starting over is often just returning with better instructions. And this time, they're yours.

Aleena is a struggling 9th grader who loves robots and revolutions. Send her your esoteric online archives at aleenayusra33@gmail.com.

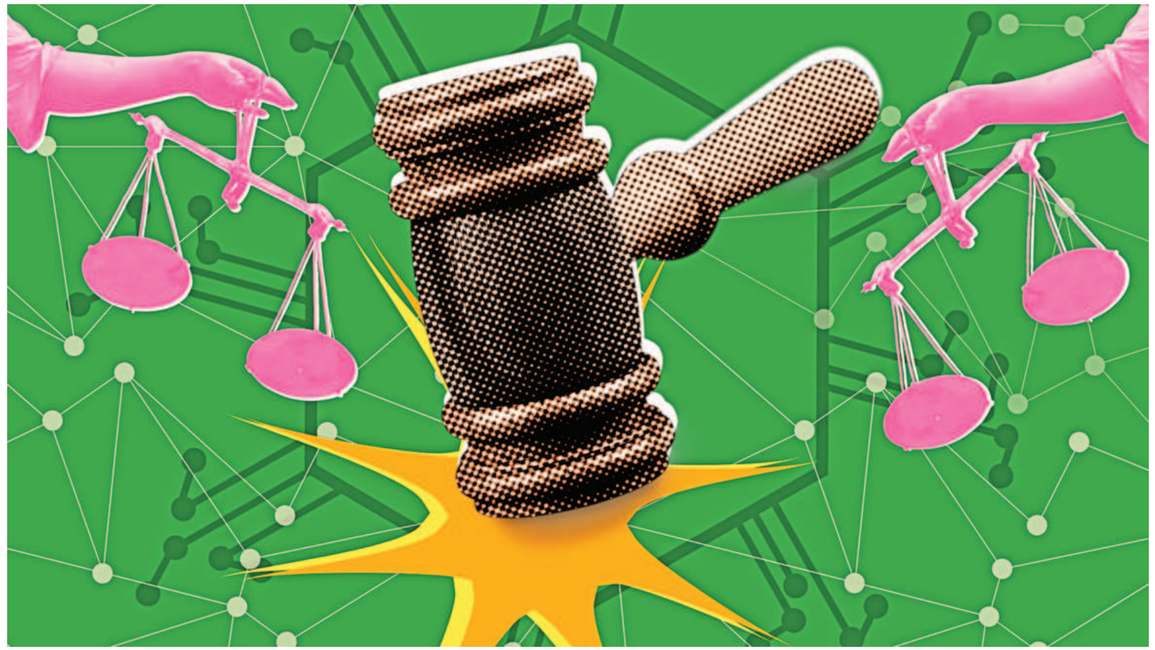


ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

CAREER

The impact of AI on the legal profession in Bangladesh

"AI is becoming a part and parcel of the practice itself," says Margub Kabir, Barrister-at-Law and Head of Chamber of Margub Kabir & Associates. "You need to be well-versed in its uses to do your cases properly because your opponents might be using it as well."

MD. NAYEEM HAIDER

Richard Susskind, a prominent British author on legal technology, penned an article for *The Times* on March 27, 2025, whose title can only inspire existential dread in those of us who aspire to build careers in the legal profession: 'Artificial intelligence could replace traditional lawyers by 2035'. In the view of many leading legal professionals globally, however, obsolescence is a distant – if not impossible – proposition. But even as debates rage, discussions flow, and applications become increasingly widespread, lawyers in our country are just as occupied in harnessing the opportunities presented by AI and gauging its potential.

"I find AI useful in my practice, and I personally know colleagues who do as well," says Barrister Faran Md Aaraf, an Advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. "I use it to find applicable case law and to locate provisions within contracts. For instance, if it is a 200-page contract, and I need to find something specific, I'd use AI to guide me to that portion of it."

Tahsin Noor Salim, an Advocate at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and an Associate at The Law Counsel, takes a similar approach in usage: "At the law chamber, I use AI to proofread drafts or to refine the language in written submissions, though I make sure to never upload confidential or privileged documents. I also use it for summarising case judgments."

"The AI feature in Manupatra really helps by making things far less time-consuming," says Sadia Afroz, Barrister-at-Law of Lincoln's Inn, Advocate, and District and Sessions Judge Court. "You previously had to read several cases all the way through, or at least skim them, to get what you wanted. But with the help of its AI feature, you can get single-paragraph summaries encapsulating entire judgements."

Manupatra is an Indian online platform used extensively by lawyers and Law students in Bangladesh for legal research. Barrister Sadia Afroz continues: "But even outside of that, if I want to research possible arguments or if I want to find some legal ground, AI such as ChatGPT can help by providing some common legal arguments or grounds, making research really expeditious."

"AI is becoming a part and parcel of the practice itself," says Margub Kabir, Barrister-at-Law and Head of Chamber of Margub Kabir & Associates. "You need to be well-versed in its uses to do your cases properly because your opponents might be using it as well."

Nevertheless, all of the above legal practitioners acknowledge that AI is a tool best used with a great deal of caution. "An AI-generated legal draft of a contract is possible, but it still requires human supervision," says Barrister Faran Md Aaraf. "So, whenever I use AI, I make sure to double-check everything."

Advocate Tahsin Noor Salim elaborates as to why this is necessary: "One has to remain mindful of the limitations of general-purpose AI. The main risk is their generation of false or misleading information — especially fictitious case references."

This problem is more pronounced in the Bangladeshi context because of the lack of legal resources online. Barrister Sadia Afroz shares her perspective on this: "AI does not have access to all our laws or bylaws. Because of this, it is even more prone to giving you the wrong conclusion. If a wrong conclusion is reached, the responsibility for that is on you as a legal practitioner."

She continues: "It is undoubtedly a good help in the initial period, as it helps to narrow things down, but the matter stands that even for research, AI cannot be blindly trusted."

Mahir Chowdhury Abir, an Associate at Avon Chambers, shares an example of the consequences of unqualified reliance on AI in legal research: "There was an intern at our law firm around a year ago who was assigned some legal research and given 15 days to conduct it. So, he came up with 15 cases, of which only two were real. The other 13 were AI-generated hallucinations that had never come before any court ever."

The present unreliability of generative AI and the perception it has created is a key reason why ABM Imdadul Haque Khan, Advocate, Appellate Division, Supreme Court of Bangladesh, discourages its usage in his law firm in the making of legal documents: "For legal opinions and pleadings, if a client gets the impression that you are dependent on AI to generate them, it is bound to make them upset. They wouldn't want to come to you ever again."

While public perception makes it undesirable to use AI for generating legal documents, according to him, AI simply lacks applicability even when drafting legal notices. He says: "Legal notices under the Negotiable Instrument Act, 1881, or the Artha Rin Adalat Ain, 2003, have specific, commonly used templates that just have to be edited. The usage of AI would not have much of an impact in this area."

Despite him maintaining a rule against direct AI usage in his law firm, Advocate ABM Imdadul Haque Khan encourages the usage of online legal platforms such as HeinOnline and Manupatra, which offer AI-powered tools to facilitate research.

However, it would be unfair to artificial intelligence and to our legal sector, which is in dire need of a spark of efficiency, if technology were judged based on what it is and not on what it could be.

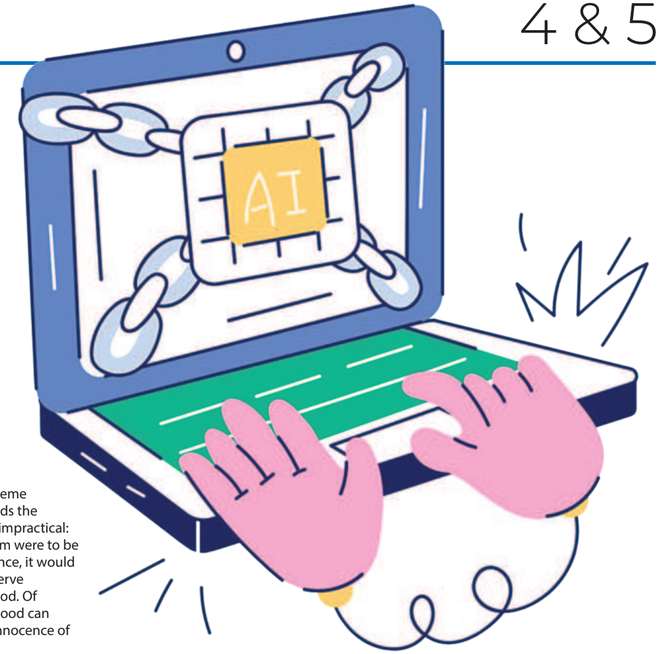
Speaking on its potential and limitations, Barrister Sadia Afroz says, "Over time, AI will make fewer errors, and it will only facilitate fewer people to get more work done. But it won't take over the legal industry."

The sentiment is one that is shared by legal professionals globally.

"The future won't be won by bots. It'll be won by lawyers who obsess over their craft, sharpen their judgement, focus on areas others overlook, and use every tool available to raise the bar — not lower it," says Matthew Leopold, the Head of Brand, PR, and Content Marketing at LexisNexis, at the end of his article 'Legal AI won't replace you. Poor judgement will'.

Taking note of the transformative potential of AI, developed nations such as the UK have already begun the work of embedding this technology into their justice systems. A July 2025 policy paper by the British Ministry of Justice, titled 'AI action plan for justice', outlines the path they wish to embark on, with the goal being to 'drive the responsible adoption of AI to enable our people to deliver world-leading public services'.

Such benefits would no doubt be more than welcome in Bangladesh, whose courts have been struggling with a staggering 45,16,603 pending cases as of December 2024, according to a Supreme Court Report published in 2025. Considering the limitations of our court system at present, one is tempted to contemplate a radical idea: What if justice could be consolidated into dispassionate algorithms free from human errors?



Aminul Hoque Helal, an Advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, finds the idea to be amusing but impractical: "Even if the justice system were to be run by artificial intelligence, it would still have to judge and serve humans of flesh and blood. Of course, only flesh and blood can determine the guilt or innocence of flesh and blood."

For this reason, he asserts that AI, despite its rapid advances, will never be an alternative to the present justice system, though it can play a role in developing and benefitting it.

Advocate ABM Imdadul Haque Khan, acknowledging the immense contribution AI could have in making our judiciary more efficient, proposes using comprehensive systems operable by judges to generate judgements on cases from a wide variety of topics. Yet, despite the obvious potential of such an innovation helping to decimate our daunting backlog of cases, he accepts that systems of such scale would take up over a decade to develop, even if the process were initiated today.

But outside of hypothetical uses and innovations, even the application of existing artificial intelligence tools is bound to face enormous technical challenges, given the fact that almost everything is done manually through offline paperwork in our lower courts.

Advocate ABM Imdadul Haque shares his assessment: "The infrastructure, knowledge, and training to apply AI in our courtrooms are simply not there at present."

He also concludes that while lawyers and law firms may work to cultivate the required knowledge and develop the necessary infrastructure, for there to be a positive impact on our justice system and our burgeoning backlog, it is the court system that must responsibly incorporate the technology.

There remains, of course, the lingering question of AI's potential and future role in advocacy. Advocate Tahsin Noor Salim shares her views: "Advocacy requires empathy, rational thinking, and the ability to think and respond on one's feet – skills that are inherently human."

"Human analytical skills can never be beaten by AI in this field because the person you are submitting to is a human," opines Barrister Margub Kabir. "AI may well crack the bar exam, but to do a case, there are lots of other things you need to keep in mind. You need to understand what the judge would appreciate, and then focus on that."

Advocate Tahsin Noor Salim continues: "As it cannot replace the understanding of human emotions, courtroom dynamics, and ethical considerations, in my opinion, AI can only serve as an assistant in advocacy." In that vein, Barrister Faran M. Aaraf postulates that as a tool, AI may be of assistance for advocacy tasks such as cross-examination, finding contradictions in statements, and helping one summarise their own submissions.

But with the application of AI rapidly gaining traction, and with its latent potential to change the very dynamics of the legal profession, Advocate ABM Imdadul Haque Khan voices a pertinent concern: "If its usage is not ethical, AI may create big problems for us."

Barrister Sadia Afroz elaborates on this: "If you tell everything about your client to the AI tool that you are using, that is a breach of confidentiality since AI tools store information. How much information they ultimately retain from users is a big concern that should affect their place in the legal industry."

Mahir Chowdhury Abir suggests a way forward: "With AI education becoming more important with each passing day, we need uniform regulations as to what we can do with AI and what we cannot. Its usage must be regulated, monitored, and above all, taught with care and expertise."

The takeaway seems to be that, as of now, the position likely to be occupied by AI in a law chamber is that of an almost all-knowing but error-prone intern. But this is nonetheless an 'intern' that possesses extraordinary potential and who must be nurtured with the greatest care.

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NOTICE BOARD

BUBT hosts Research Week 2026

Bangladesh University of Business and Technology (BUBT) organised "BUBT Research Week 2026" for the first time, which served as a week-long centre of innovative research and knowledge practice from January 25 to 29.

The inaugural ceremony was held on January 25 at the BUBT campus. The chief guest was Prof. Mohammad Anwar Hossain, Member of the University Grants Commission (UGC), and the special guest was Md Mainul Haque Bhuiyan, Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology. The ceremony was presided over by Prof. Dr A B M Shawkat Ali, the Vice-Chancellor of BUBT.

On the second day, students, teachers, and researchers from different departments of BUBT presented 66 research-based posters. On the third day, research workshops and a panel discussion titled "Application of AI Tools in Industry and Academia" were held. On the fourth day, the "Student Research Idea Competition" was held, where students from five faculties presented their creative research ideas before the judges.

The week-long event concluded on January 29 with the closing and award-giving ceremony. The chief guest was Prof. Md Abu Saleh, Adviser of BUBT. In this ceremony, teachers, researchers, research assistants, and students were honoured for their outstanding contributions to research and innovation. A total of 36 awards were presented at the closing ceremony.

Screenings of 24th DIFF concludes at Stamford University Bangladesh

The screening of films of the 24th Dhaka International Film Festival (DIFF) at Stamford University Bangladesh concluded on January 15.

The festival was held at several venues in the capital, including Alliance Française de Dhaka, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Bangladesh National Museum, and Stamford University Bangladesh, showcasing 245 films from 91 countries, including Bangladesh.

On the final day of screenings, films from Bangladesh, Argentina, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Azerbaijan were screened. Two special Q&A sessions were held where the filmmakers interacted with the audience and responded to various questions. The Q&A sessions were moderated by DIFF official and jury member Bidhan Ribeiro.

International filmmakers, including Italian filmmakers Claudia Bellasi and Markus Steiner Ender, German filmmaker Polina Piddubna, Azerbaijani filmmaker Emin Afandiyev, and American filmmaker Kai Ephron, along with several other foreign filmmakers, were present at the sessions. The Italian Ambassador to Bangladesh, Antonio Alessandro, and his wife were also present.

The Ambassador and the foreign filmmakers were warmly received by the Acting Vice-Chancellor of Stamford University Bangladesh, Prof. Dr Md Younus Mia. The successful hosting of the DIFF screenings at Stamford University Bangladesh marked a significant milestone in the university's engagement with international cinema and cultural exchange.

UIU holds seminar on "AI for Business Excellence"

United International University (UIU) organised a seminar titled "AI for Business Excellence" on February 7 at the UIU Campus. Prof. Dr Md Abul Kashem Mia, Vice-Chancellor, UIU, was present as the chief guest at the programme. Prof. Dr Hasan Sarwar, Dean of the School of Science and Engineering, UIU, and Prof. Dr Khondaker Abdullah Al Mamun, Director, MSCSE Programme and Director, IRIIC, UIU, were present as the keynote speakers. The vote of thanks was delivered by Professor Emeritus Dr M Rezwan Khan, Executive Director, IAR, UIU.

Prof. Dr Md Abul Kashem Mia stated that the use of AI is increasing across nearly every sector and has become crucial in many areas. He emphasised the need for collaboration between academia and industry to drive the country forward through the effective use of AI.

The keynote speakers at the seminar highlighted how AI-driven technologies are reshaping decision-making, enhancing management efficiency, improving customer engagement, and strengthening strategic planning across industries. Furthermore, the speakers discussed emerging AI trends, policy considerations, human resource management, and the skills required to leverage AI effectively for sustainable business growth.

Daffodil International School, Uttara Campus, hosts Annual Sports Day 2026

Daffodil International School, Uttara Campus, observed its "Annual Sports Day 2026" from February 2 to 3. The day-long programme reflected a lively celebration of student participation, discipline, and sporting excellence.

The event was held at the Daffodil International School, Uttara campus and was organised under the supervision of Nazah Salawat, Principal of the school, with Abu Saleh Md Hasan, Vice-Principal, serving as co-convener.

Tahnee Yeasmin, Director, Business Development – English and Examinations, British Council, attended as the chief guest on the first day of the programme. Shahriar Nafees Ahmed, former captain of the Bangladesh National Cricket Team and currently In-Charge of Cricket Operations (Running) at the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), attended as the chief guest on the second day.

Students from different grades participated enthusiastically in track and field events as well as various team competitions, demonstrating sportsmanship and commitment. The two-day celebration concluded with a prize-giving ceremony recognising achievement and participation, bringing the "Annual Sports Day 2026" to a close.

OFF CAMPUS

THE GHOST OF 2016

Why we're stuck rehearsing the past

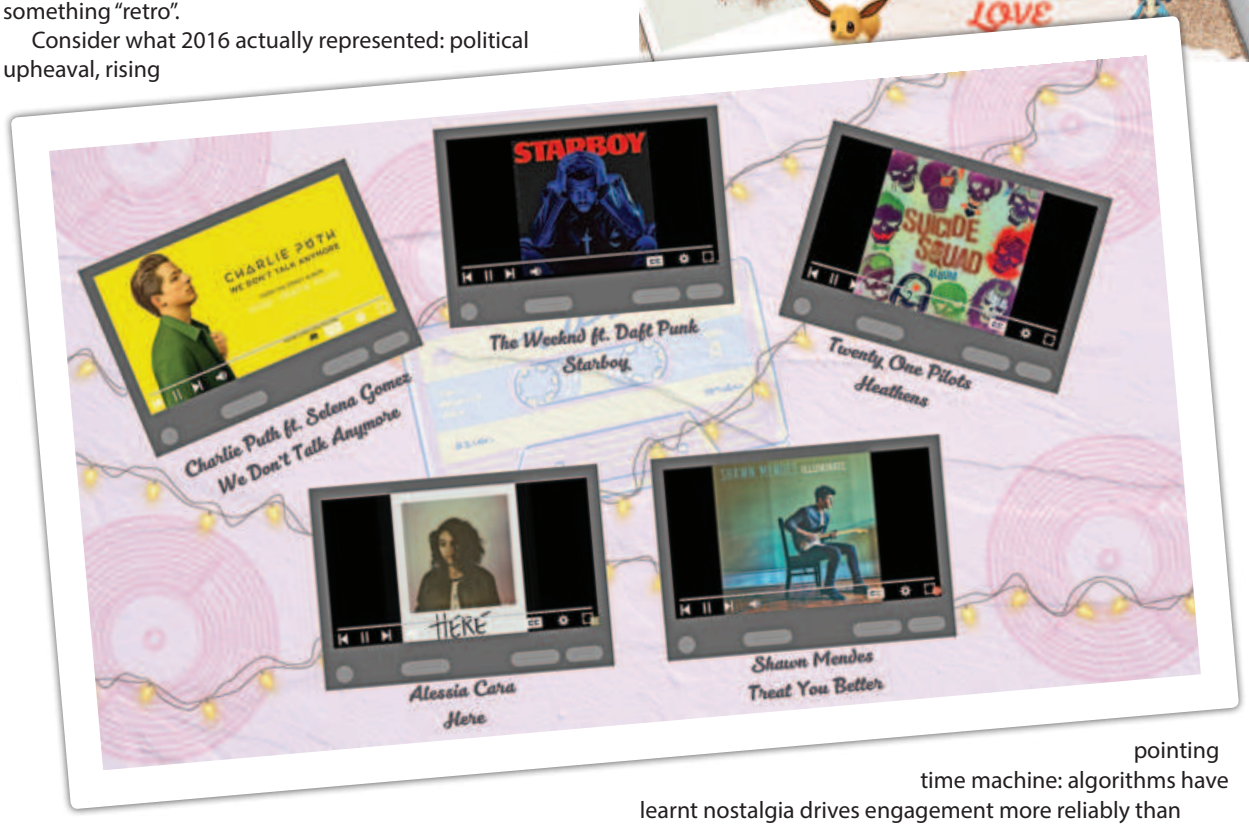
NUZHAT TAHIYA

Ten years ago, Donald Trump was preparing for his first inauguration, Pokémon GO united strangers in public parks, and Vine was still alive. Fast forward to 2026, social media is awash with references to 2016: grainy Instagram filters, Tumblr aesthetics, and decade-old pop songs charting again. 2016 feels impossibly distant yet strangely close. To understand this paradox, we need to turn to cultural theorist Mark Fisher, who explains why contemporary culture keeps circling the past instead of moving forward.

Fisher described modern culture as suffering from "hauntological" malaise: a condition wherein we are "haunted" not by the past itself, but by the futures it once promised. In *Ghosts of My Life*, he argued that the 21st century is marked by a "slow cancellation of the future", a failure of the new to arrive. So, when young people romanticise 2016, they're not actually yearning for the year itself – they're mourning a sense of forward momentum that no longer feels available. The "2026 is the new 2016" trend is hauntology in its purest form; we're not even waiting for enough time to pass before declaring something "retro".

Consider what 2016 actually represented: political upheaval, rising

DESIGNS: **ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA**



authoritarianism, the consolidation of surveillance capitalism through social media, and mounting climate anxiety. Yet retrospectively, it gets packaged as a simpler time – before the pandemic, before whatever fresh crisis currently dominates our feeds. This reveals something crucial: nostalgia isn't really about the past. It's about our inability to imagine a different future.

The younger generation's romanticisation of eras they never experienced or actively participated in is especially poignant, as they've inherited a world where being unmoored in time is the default state and cultural recycling is normal. Social media amplifies this exponentially. Online platforms function as archaeological sites of our own lives, serving "memories" from years past, training us toward retrospection over anticipation. Every app is a backwards-pointing time machine: algorithms have learnt nostalgia drives engagement more reliably than anything else – a predictable hit of dopamine wrapped in the safety of the already-experienced, it's guaranteed an emotional response.

This is what Fisher warned about: how the past and its promised-but-unrealised futures linger like ghosts. The actual 2016 isn't being mourned, but the future people believed might follow – where progress felt plausible, crises temporary, and adulthood not synonymous with burnout. That future never arrived, and as a result, even the recent past now functions as a lost utopia. We're not talking about the 60s or 90s – but about *ten years ago*. The nostalgia cycle has accelerated to the point of absurdity, revealing our crisis isn't just the future but the present, which has become so thin and unsatisfying that we immediately flee to *any* past for relief.

Crucially, nostalgia here does ideological work. It reframes dissatisfaction with the present as longing for the past rather than anger at the systems producing that dissatisfaction. Instead of asking why life feels more constrained, expensive, and surveilled, we retreat into curated memories. Nostalgia soothes without challenging anything. It is, as Fisher might say, perfectly compatible with late-stage capitalism.

There's also a subtle cruelty in how this nostalgia circulates. Declaring 2016 the "last good year" (remember when that was 2012?) implies everything since has been a slow decline, that nothing genuinely hopeful can emerge. If the best days are always behind us, why imagine alternatives? This breeds a quiet cynicism, especially among young people already inheriting a world defined by limits. Nostalgia is conservative by nature; it teaches us to look back for solutions to forward-facing problems, reducing the radical energy required to reshape the future to passive consumption of the past.

Fisher argued that breaking free from hauntology required confronting our condition honestly, without the anaesthetic of nostalgia. It meant asking: what would new music, new politics, and new ways of living actually look like? Not as a return to some imagined past glory, but as a radical break with the repetition compulsion that defines our zeitgeist.

The question facing anyone observing the "2026 is the new 2016" trend is whether this nostalgia represents a final surrender to Fisher's slow cancellation of the future, or whether, paradoxically, it might contain seeds of its own critique. Perhaps in recognising how quickly we flee to the past, we might glimpse how desperately we need to imagine and create something new.

Until then, we remain haunted by our own recent history, ghosts at a party that ended before we noticed, convinced that if we just dress the part, we might bring it back to life.

Nuzhat is a compulsive doodler and connoisseur of bad early aughts television. Send her recommendations at nuzhat.tahiya@gmail.com

OPINION

The inflation of education

Are degrees losing their value?

SHAHNAWAZ HOSSAIN JAY

In Bangladesh, where higher education was once a privilege to a few, a university degree used to be a clear marker of talent, potential, and prospects. Today, the prevalence of such degrees and the abundance of such degree holders have resulted in the blurring of these markers, leaving both graduates and employers questioning the need and impact of degrees.

Employers and graduates alike complain about skill gaps, and families express frustration over the constant rise in tuition fees. I like to call this phenomenon the "inflation of education", where the number of degrees is becoming inversely proportional to their value, and where quantity is overriding quality. Renowned sociologist, Prof. Randall Collins, in his famous book *The Credential Society*, described this phenomenon as "credential inflation"—as more people earn a degree or certain credibility, the degree or the credibility itself loses the signalling power.

Consequently, employers keep raising the eligibility bar while frustration mounts among graduates and society alike. Data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) shows that unemployment amongst Bangladeshi youth (those aged 15 to 24) rose to almost 16 percent in 2023. An August 2024 The Wall Street Journal report also underscored this, warning of the broader regional employment crisis, with Bangladesh being a particular concern. When the country produces more graduates than it can employ, it is easy to assume that Bangladesh already has enough higher-education institutions. The reality, however, is different; we need more higher education.

Enrolment into tertiary education in Bangladesh is around 24 percent – far below that of other middle-income countries, including India, Vietnam, and Indonesia. However, our approach to the expansion of education is a major concern. The University Grants Commission (UGC), on its website, lists 56 public and 116 private universities, yet the distribution of students across institutions remains sharply imbalanced. Meanwhile, the less conspicuous National University system enrols around four million students in 2,500 affiliated colleges, accommodating 70 percent of all higher education. Therefore, naturally, if quality is a question here, the whole system suffers.

The labour market tells its own story: educated youth unemployment sits near 11 percent, compared to about four percent overall, where employers consistently highlight gaps in digital, analytical, and communication skills. A World Bank blog estimated that over 650,000 graduates enter the market each year, but fewer than half secure jobs within two years. This figure clearly highlights the quizzical question: do more degrees lead to less employment?

The next logical question would then be: why are degrees losing their value? And there is not one, but rather multiple reasons that lead us to this question.

Programme proliferation is a major reason here. Universities often replicate oversaturated departments, such as Business, English, Computer Science, etc., while critical areas such as agricultural technology, logistics, energy transition, and data science remain underserved. To make matters worse, there are very few internships and apprenticeship opportunities that bridge the gap between academic study and professional need. Whether academia should focus on the professional need or teach employability skills is another question that needs to be addressed.

Finally, we also need to rethink the requirement for degrees altogether, since an increasing number of employers around the world are moving to skill-based hiring, now popularly known as the "degree reset".

So, what should we do now? Should we stop expanding higher education? The simple answer is no. Our enrolment and accessibility must grow, while emphasising quality checks and quality control at the heart of the entire system. The Bangladesh Accreditation Council (BAC) should be the gatekeeper of this process, ensuring quality entry and growth on both individual and institutional levels.

Another crucial and timely action will be to raise and nurture the standard of the National University-affiliated colleges, which alone accommodate the highest number of students. Moreover, certain fields or departments that have the scope to integrate timely professional and employable skills, along with academic ones, should revisit their objectives and review their curricula and syllabi. It is needless to mention the urgency of embracing technology and artificial intelligence, as our history shows that we tend to adapt tools only when they lose their effectiveness and relevance. Finally, archiving and publishing annual graduation and placement data should be made mandatory for the institutions and policymakers.

Overall, education must remain a ladder, not a treadmill, while considering the pace, demand, and need of the students, teachers, employers, institutions, and the world in general. Expansion without quality turns degrees into powerless papers. Yes, Bangladesh does not and is not going to suffer from "too much higher education"; it suffers, and it will continue to suffer from inflated, uneven, and thoughtlessly connected and expanded higher education. Therefore, a well-balanced connection between quality and quantity is the solution, at least for now.

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