#EVENTS

BEYOND THE CAGE

KHAR's mission to make MMA accessible across Bangladesh

After hosting more than 200 fighters across 12 editions, Bangladesh's amateur mixed martial arts (MMA) circuit is preparing to expand beyond Dhaka, encourage greater female participation and bring combat sports together with rock music at its next event.

For years, Bangladesh's MMA scene remained relatively small, with competitive opportunities largely concentrated around a handful of established gyms in Dhaka. For aspiring fighters outside those circles, finding opportunities to compete, gain recognition and develop their skills was often a challenge.

Established in 2025, KHAR has sought to address this gap by organising regular amateur competitions and bringing together athletes from different gyms, regions and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Across its first 12 editions, more than 200 fighters have participated. While most competitions have taken place in Dhaka, athletes from Sylhet, Savar, Chattogram and Rangamati have also entered the scene, reflecting growing interest beyond the capital.

For chairman Mohammad Maaz, making the sport accessible regardless of a fighter's circumstances has been a guiding principle.

"I believe talent should never be defined by someone's social class, financial background, gender or where they come from. A fighter from a small village deserves the same opportunity as someone training at the best gym in Dhaka. We want to create a level playing field where everyone has a fair chance to compete, grow and be recognised. MMA shouldn't belong to a handful of gyms or a particular group of people. It should be open to everyone," said Maaz.

TAKING MMA BEYOND DHAKA

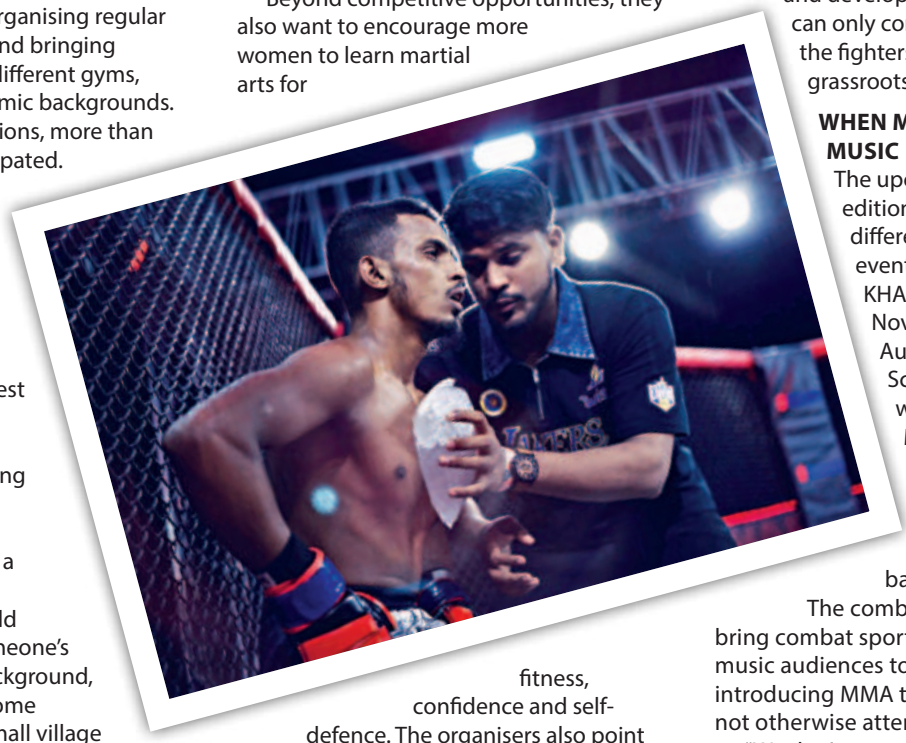
Having largely concentrated their events in the capital, the organisers plan to expand competitions across Bangladesh from 2027. The proposed expansion would give regional fighters more opportunities to compete closer to home while introducing organised MMA events to new audiences.

"When we started, the competitive scene was largely dominated by one or two gyms in Dhaka. Over the past year, we've seen more gyms and fighters coming forward from different parts of Bangladesh. Next year, we want to take KHAR across the country. We want people outside Dhaka to experience a live MMA event, and we want talented fighters to have opportunities without always having to travel to the capital," Maaz said.

ENCOURAGING WOMEN IN COMBAT SPORTS

Increasing women's participation is another stated priority. They have already hosted six women's MMA bouts, with two more scheduled for the thirteenth edition.

Beyond competitive opportunities, they also want to encourage more women to learn martial arts for fitness, confidence and self-defence. The organisers also point to encouragement from the country's president for women to take up mixed martial arts.



"I don't believe women should have fewer opportunities simply because combat sports have traditionally been male-dominated. We want women to have the same platform, recognition and respect as male athletes. At the same time, not every woman needs to become a professional fighter. Learning martial arts can help build confidence, discipline and the ability to protect oneself. We want more women across Bangladesh to have access to that training," said Maaz.

DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION

Providing amateur athletes with regular opportunities to compete has been central to their approach. Their tenth edition, KHAR X, attracted more than 500 spectators, while some participants have progressed to professional competition, including bantamweight champion Arafat Hossain.

Managing Director Sadat Kabir Rudro believes developing a strong domestic competitive structure is essential before Bangladesh can aspire to international success.

"Before we can dream of producing world-class fighters, we need to build a strong foundation at home. Our priority is to give amateur athletes consistent opportunities to compete, gain experience and develop. International success can only come when we invest in the fighters and the sport at the grassroots level," said Rudro.

WHEN MMA MEETS ROCK MUSIC

The upcoming thirteenth edition will introduce a different dimension to the events. X-Force Presents KHAR 13, scheduled for November 13 at the Australian International School (AUSIS) in Dhaka, will feature eight amateur MMA bouts followed by a full-length concert by Nemesis, one of Bangladesh's recognised rock bands.

The combination is intended to bring combat sports enthusiasts and live music audiences together, potentially introducing MMA to people who might not otherwise attend a fight event.

"We don't want people to feel they have to be MMA fans to attend a KHAR event. Someone might come for Nemesis and discover a genuine appreciation for the sport. We want to create a space where different communities can come together and experience something new," said Maaz.

The fight card includes Bhupen versus Mumit, pairing an established competitor with a recent debutant, and Md Ali versus Nafis. Two women's bouts will also feature.

Organisers expect between 750 and 1,000 spectators, making the event an opportunity to introduce emerging fighters to a wider audience.

LOOKING AHEAD

Their longer-term plans for 2027 include taking competitions to different parts of Bangladesh, creating opportunities for regional fighters and encouraging more women to participate in MMA and self-defence training.

Turning these ambitions into a sustainable competitive structure, however, will require consistent opportunities for athletes regardless of their location, gender or financial circumstances.

KHAR 13 begins at 5:30 PM on November 13. Tickets are priced at Tk 750 for standing, Tk 1,000 for gallery seating and Tk 1,250 for front-row access. Admission covers both the MMA bouts and the Nemesis concert. Tickets are available through Quicket.

The event is presented by X-Force, powered by Dour, with Jeep as supporting partner and Quicket as official ticketing partner.

— LS Desk
Photo: Courtesy

