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Youths in Bangladesh want reform, express optimism for future

HISHAM
KHAN

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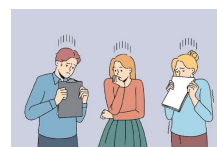
Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC) organised a press conference to share its latest Youth Matters Survey (YMS) in Dhaka recently



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Bangladesh is experiencing a pivotal moment, with its young population emerging as the catalyst for change. In light of significant political shifts and changing social norms, young people are expressing their opinions.

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They are advocating for reform and maintaining optimism for an improved future.

The latest Youth Matters Survey (YMS), conducted by the Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC), captures many such sentiments. BYLC has been running this survey every five years near national elections to understand youth perspectives on governance, democracy, and socio-economic issues. The 2024 survey took place between October and November, gathering responses from 3,238 young people, out of which 1,575 in person and 1,663 online. The results were made public on January 27, 2025.

Youth voice and governance: More and more young people feel comfortable expressing their views today. About 73.6 per cent of in-person respondents and 81.5 per cent of online respondents said they feel safer voicing opinions than during the previous government's tenure. Then again, around 20.9 per cent of in-person and 54.4 per cent of online participants fear instability in law and order.

There is also a strong support for political continuity in the current setup. About 41.4 per cent of in-person and 50.9 per cent of online respondents want the interim government to remain for another one to three years. Youths believe reforms need time to take effect. Additionally, 68.6 per cent of in-person and 84.9 per cent of online respondents believe law enforcement should operate without political bias which reinforces the demand for institutional neutrality.

Economic concerns and career aspirations: Rising costs are a major point of tension for young people which is affecting their financial security and well-being. About 75.1 per cent of in-person and 64.8 per cent of online respondents see inflation as a serious issue.



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On the other hand, entrepreneurship still remains a preferred career path for youths. About 52.5 per cent of in-person and 51.5 per cent of online respondents aim to start their own businesses. Unsurprisingly, 21.8 per cent of in-person and 47.8 per cent of online respondents are considering leaving the country. If economic conditions do not improve, Bangladesh risks losing its young talent to brain drain.

Education and student politics: Reforming the education sector is a top priority for many. About 71 per cent of in-person and 86.4 per cent of online respondents believe student politics disrupts the learning environment. There is also disagreement about the quality of education. About 77.4 per cent of in-person respondents believe the system prepares students for employment, while 79.3 per cent of online respondents disagree. This is an area that needs more probe by the authorities.

BYLC's Deputy Manager of Skills Development Munira Sultana addressed these concerns at the survey presentation. "Many online respondents believe our education system does not equip students for jobs," she said. She emphasised BYLC's focus on incorporating skills like problem-solving, conflict resolution, and public speaking into its training programs.

Social and environmental issues: Women's safety remains a serious issue. About 25.3 per cent of in-person and 70 per cent of online respondents believe the country is failing to protect women. Perspectives on communal harmony also differ. About 86.4 per cent of in-person respondents believe communal harmony prevails, but only 39.2 per cent of online respondents agree.

Environmental concerns are also on the rise. About 55.1

per cent per cent of in-person and 73.1 per cent of online respondents believe climate change is worsening conditions in Bangladesh. This suggests a growing awareness of sustainability issues among young people.

Media, misinformation, and political participation: Trust in the media is divided. About 28.9 per cent of in-person and 49.5 per cent of online respondents believe media coverage does not accurately reflect national issues. However, young people are taking a stand against misinformation. Kazria Kayes, BYLC's senior manager of Communication, Marketing & Branding, shared that many young people are actively supporting fact-checking efforts and transparency.

Even after having these concerns youths are still optimistic. About 95.5 per cent of in-person and 95.7 per cent of online respondents plan to vote in the upcoming elections.

A call for reform and optimism for the future: Young people are critical of existing issues but remain hopeful for progress. About 85.8 per cent of in-person and 82.9 per cent of online respondents are willing to return to Bangladesh if meaningful change takes place. They demand an end to corruption, prioritisation of merit, and reform within political parties to bring capable leadership to the forefront.

BYLC's Executive Director Tahsinah Ahmed summed up the survey's key message. "Young people want real change. They want to speak freely, contribute to national development, and see governance improve. While some advocate for new political parties, most prefer reforms within existing ones. It is our collective duty to make their aspirations a reality."

Founded in 2009, BYLC is Bangladesh's one of the first

leadership institutes. It equips young people with leadership, employability, and entrepreneurship skills. The organisation focuses on social responsibility, sustainability, and economic inclusion. Its mission is to empower young people to drive change across public, private, and civil sectors.

As Bangladesh enters a new era, its youths are ready to shape the future. Bangladeshi youth voices are strong, their expectations are clear, and their demands must be met with real action.

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A Message to Young Bangladeshis

Fear is holding you back

OISHI
KHAN

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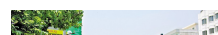
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Picture this: You're sitting in a meeting at work, or maybe in a university class. Someone presents an idea that you know won't work. You have the solution, the right question, maybe even a better approach. But you stay quiet. Why? It's not because you feel that you don't know better. It's because something inside whispers, "What if they think I'm stupid?"

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone. Across Dhaka's offices and all around the country, young Bangladeshis are wrestling with the same fear. The fear of being in the spot, of being wrong, of being an odd one out..

The stories we tell ourselves: Our minds are storytellers, and they love scary stories. "If I speak up, I'll look foolish." "If I disagree, my boss will hate me." "If I seem too confident, people will discover I'm a fraud." "I need to be perfect before I can contribute anything."

These stories feel real when they're playing in your head. But here's the thing about stories: most of them are fiction.

Take Annie Rogers, a 16-year-old from Australia who invented a device to help her non-verbal friend communicate. She said something beautiful, "I really want her to feel human." That desire to be heard, to matter, that's what we're all fighting for when we choose to speak up or stay silent.

Why our brains betray us: Your brain evolved in a world where being kicked out of the group meant death. So when you think about challenging your supervisor's idea or asking a question that might sound basic, your brain hits the panic button. It treats your office like a jungle and your colleagues like a tribe that might



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abandon you.

Ahmed Rauf, a young cafe owner who turned to entrepreneurship from Bangladesh, spent years staying quiet in corporate settings because his brain kept screaming "danger!" He eventually realised that staying invisible was actually more dangerous to his career than speaking up.

The comfort zone trap: We mistake staying invisible for staying safe. But comfort zones can be prisons. Melissa Tan, a young founder from Singapore, discovered this when she finally disagreed with someone in a meeting. Instead of the backlash she expected, she got respect. "That's when I understood that silence had been my biggest enemy," she said.

Fear is data, not a command: You don't need to eliminate fear. You need to question what it's telling you. When fear shows up, ask yourself: "Is speaking up actually dangerous, or am I just uncomfortable?" Most of the time, the real danger is in staying quiet while your ideas die in your head.

Kevin O'Leary, a renowned entrepreneur from the USA, talks about how young entrepreneurs build confidence through action, even unpaid work. Your presence, your body language, your willingness to engage, these all build your reputation before you even open your mouth.

Stop waiting for permission: Many of us wait for someone to invite us to speak. But leaders often assume silence means agreement. If you have something to say, say it. Don't wait for the perfect moment or the perfect words. Credibility comes from showing up, not from being granted permission.

Shifting your focus: Next time fear creeps in, instead of

asking "What if I'm wrong" try to ask "What happens if I stay silent, what insights might be lost, what problems might go unsolved, what opportunities might slip away."

Young Bangladeshis are changing the world-- in tech, in business, in social change. But none of that happens in silence. Your voice matters not just for you, but for everyone who benefits from your ideas.

The price of invisibility: Staying quiet might feel safe, but it comes with costs. You get overlooked for promotions. Your projects miss your perspective. Your career stalls while others move forward.

The young people who get ahead aren't fearless. They just refuse to let fear make their decisions. Every time you speak up, you train yourself and others to expect your voice. Every contribution reshapes how people see you.

Your silence might protect you from embarrassment, but it also protects the world from your ideas. And that's a price none of us can afford.

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Where Bangladesh can lead in AI

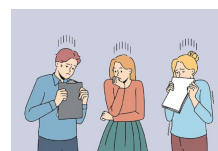
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The artificial intelligence race has declared its winners at the foundation level. Companies such as OpenAI, Google, and Anthropic are currently leading the frontier LLM and other model space with billions in capital and computational resources. For countries like ours, Bangladesh, the target should be not competing with these giants but building advantages where local knowledge and practical application matter most. In fact, we can also look for export in some areas. Three distinct areas can come as our savior in the next AI age: software-as-a-service applications for local and global market, AI-integrated hardware devices starting with local market and exporting in similar global markets, and structured adoption and efficiency development for local enterprises and people.

The SaaS success template: India has demonstrated this approach's feasibility. Freshworks, founded in Chennai, became the first Indian SaaS company listed on NASDAQ and now generates US \$713 million annually. The Indian SaaS ecosystem is projected to reach US \$50 billion by 2030. Bangladesh has SAAS like EzyCourse, founded by Md Sadek Hossain from Sylhet. The bootstrapped startup serves over 1,800 creators globally with US \$1.5 million in trailing revenue, proving Bangladeshi founders can compete internationally. Bangladesh has been SAAS companies leading in the global economy in different sector. Going forward, there are many AI SAAS ideas that we can pursue.

Domain-specific applications emerge across every business vertical. Export garment manufacturers face

lead in AI


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compliance documentation that consumes 15-20 per cent of operational costs. AI-powered systems can be built that will understand both WRAP standards and local labour regulations reduce this overhead to under 5 per cent. Legal chambers processing land disputes or commercial contracts see 40-60 per cent time savings through AI-assisted document drafting that handles Bangla legal terminology alongside English requirements.

Right now, customer service outsourcing generates significant IT industry revenue annually for Bangladesh. Innovations such as AI workflow systems trained on local linguistic patterns outperform generic global solutions by 35-40 per cent accuracy rates.

The hardware integration scope: AI-integrated IoT devices offer manufacturing advantages for Bangladesh. For example, Xiaomi's platform connects over 822 million devices worldwide, while the Chinese platform Tuya supports global smart appliance manufacturers. These companies embed AI into practical problems rather than building underlying models. On the other hand, American firm Samsara provides fleet management that reduces fuel costs. One Indian startup that is a good example here is Stellapps which monitors milk quality from farm to processing.

Bangladesh's textile and RMG industry present immediate applications. Computer vision based AI systems can detect stitching defects before garments reach quality control. Again, there can be vibration sensors can predict compressor failures in dyeing machines. If industry experts think deeply, we can adapt AI massively to boost RMG productivity. The country's retail and hospitality sectors can benefit from smart energy management systems that account for

load shedding and voltage fluctuations common in the local grid.

Agriculture cooperatives can deploy sensor networks that monitor cold storage temperatures for vegetables or track humidity levels in grain storage. Private hospitals facing staff shortages can install bed monitoring systems that alert nurses to patient movements or vital sign changes, even there are solutions for doctors that will help them give better prescription and history of patients in one go. These can be built locally integrating foundation models.

The technical barriers are manageable. Companies can source sensors from established suppliers, integrate open-source AI models for edge computing, and focus on the crucial calibration work that requires local knowledge. Dhaka's traffic patterns, monsoon humidity levels, and power grid characteristics all generate data that generic global solutions cannot handle effectively.

Enterprise AI adoption as economic strategy:

Bangladesh's startup ecosystem includes over 1,000 ventures, but the economic impact lies in enabling existing enterprises to adopt AI. Most micro, small, and medium enterprises operate on paper records, creating productivity improvement potential. In our neighbouring countries, government initiatives have moved thousands of small manufacturers online through subsidised tools and training programmes. China has equipped rural cooperatives with AI-powered crop advisory systems and demand forecasting tools through provincial development programmes.

Bangladesh can adapt these approaches through existing institutional networks. Chambers of commerce and industry associations already have established relationships with member companies. Enterprise adoption transforms productivity at scale. Data

suggests that AI-powered inventory systems reduce working capital requirements for textile manufacturers while cutting stockout losses. Customer communication platforms handle max routine inquiries automatically, allowing staff to focus on complex problems. Supply chain forecasting algorithms prevent good amount of revenue losses that come from demand miscalculation during seasonal peaks. Specific implementations around the world already show immediate results.

The integration advantage: The global pattern is clear to us. Companies like Freshworks, Samsara, and Xiaomi built billion-dollar businesses by embedding AI into domain-specific problems rather than competing on foundational research.

Bangladesh does possess some comparative

advantages: a technically capable workforce comfortable with English and Bangla, competitive manufacturing costs, and domestic testing markets.

Time for national coordination: The window for establishing leadership in applied AI is closing soon. Countries which will be building expertise now in software integration, hardware deployment, and enterprise adoption will create advantage for the next AI world that will compound over time. Those that delay face importing solutions designed elsewhere rather than building local capabilities.

Bangladesh may not control the foundation models, but it can control how those models are applied. Building the integration capability now means shaping industries, creating jobs, and positioning local firms in global value chains. We require a coordinated national strategy aligning government policy, educational institutions, and private sector investment around these three domains. Foundation models belong to the

Silicon Valleys, but the applications layer that determines how AI improves human productivity remains open for competition. The country that owns the integration between artificial intelligence and real-world problems will capture the economic benefits of the AI revolution. For Bangladesh, the choice is between building that integration capability now or watching others do it instead.

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