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Aethermind 2026

THE NATIONAL INNOVATION CHALLENGE

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OFFICIAL RULEBOOK AND COMPETITION GUIDELINES

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INTRODUCTION

> This document contains the official rules for the Aethermind 2026 National Innovation Challenge. The main theme is **"AI and Software for Social Good with a Sustainable Business Model"**. Teams must use artificial intelligence and software to build practical, working products that solve real problems in Bangladesh and can sustain themselves as a business.

1.0 WHO CAN JOIN AND TEAM RULES

1.1 Who Can Join

Only students currently studying in an undergraduate program at any recognized university in Bangladesh can join this competition. Masters, graduate, or diploma students are not allowed. Multi-university teams (students from different universities forming one team) are allowed.

1.2 Team Setup

Each team must have 2 to 4 members.

Rule	Requirement
Team Size	Minimum 2 and maximum 4 undergraduate students per team.
Multi-University Teams	Allowed. Team members can be from the same university or from different recognized universities across Bangladesh.
Team Leader	Every team must pick one member as the Team Leader. This person will register the team, submit all files, and talk to the organizers.
STEM Member	Every team must have at least one (1) member studying Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM).

1.3 Team Member Changes and Demo Day Attendance

- **No Member Changes:** After the Top 50 teams are announced on December 9, 2026, you cannot change, add, or remove any team members.
- **Minimum Attendance on Demo Day:** At least two (2) registered team members must be physically present at the BRAC University campus on Demo Day to show their product. If fewer than two members show up, the team will be disqualified.

2.0 COMPETITION CATEGORIES AND UN GOALS (SDG)

Every product must directly support at least one United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). Teams must name a specific SDG target number (for example, Target 4.4) and show clear proof of how their product helps reach that goal. Teams must choose one of these six categories:

2.1 Agriculture (Agro / Agritech)

Farming employs almost half the people in Bangladesh, but farmers face many middlemen and struggle to get loans or expert help. Examples of problems and solutions:

Problem	Possible Solution
Middlemen and Lost Profit: Farmers lose a big part of their profit to middlemen, and farming supplies cost too much. Also, large grocery stores are mostly in big cities, while small local markets run the rest of the country.	Business-to-business (B2B) platforms that connect farmers directly to big buyers or small shops, along with local delivery tracking for fresh food.
Lack of Loans for Small Farmers: Around 80% of farmers in Bangladesh are small farmers who cannot get regular bank loans because they do not have property for security and interest rates are too high.	New credit-scoring tools and loan apps that use simple data (like mobile money history, weather data, or crop predictions) to give small loans and help farmers buy supplies.
Crop Disease and Weather Advice: Farmers cannot easily reach farming experts to check sick crops or handle bad weather, which leads to using too many chemicals.	Bangla AI camera apps where farmers upload phone photos of sick plants to get automatic disease checks and local treatment advice.

2.2 Medical and Healthcare

Examples of problems and solutions:

Problem	Possible Solution
Few Specialist Doctors Outside Dhaka: Most top specialist doctors work in Dhaka, making it hard for people in villages and small towns to get proper tests and treatment.	Online doctor consultation systems and remote testing tools that let doctors treat and help patients across the country.
Disconnected Pharmacies and Emergency Supply: Finding emergency medical supplies and real medicines is difficult because local pharmacies are not connected and do not show what they have in stock.	Medical delivery platforms that show live medicine stock at local pharmacies and connect emergency needs—like urgent blood requests—with nearby medicine delivery services.

2.3 Daily Goods (FMCG) and Retail

Examples of problems and solutions:

Problem	Possible Solution
Manual Stock Tracking in Small Shops: The daily goods market runs on millions of small neighborhood shops (*mudi dokans*). Shopkeepers track stock by hand, which causes items to run out and makes delivery routes slow and wasteful.	B2B retail apps for small shopkeepers to order FMCG stock online, track inventory automatically, and get fast restocking from distributors.

Problem	Possible Solution
Fake Products and Expiry Losses: Small shops and buyers struggle to check if daily goods are genuine, and distributors lose money when goods expire on shelves without warning.	AI supply-chain tracking, expiry prediction alerts, and barcode/image check tools that track goods from factory to local shops and help clear stock before it expires.

2.4 Microfinance and Financial Inclusion

Examples of problems and solutions:

Problem	Possible Solution
No Credit History for Low-Income Workers: Small shopkeepers, street vendors, and rural workers cannot get fair micro-loans because they have no bank history or formal salary papers.	AI credit-scoring tools that check daily digital sales records (*Halkhata*), mobile money (MFS) usage, and utility bill payments to offer instant, low-cost micro-loans.
Paper-Based Micro-Loan Collection and High Default Risk: Many local NGOs and microfinance groups still track weekly loan payments on paper, causing mistakes, high admin costs, and missed warnings when a borrower is struggling.	Automated microfinance management platforms with smart repayment reminders, digital passbooks, and early risk alerts to help both borrowers and lenders manage loans safely.

2.5 Industry and Enterprise Automation

Examples of problems and solutions:

Problem	Possible Solution
Slow Paperwork in Offices and Factories: Local factories, government suppliers, and companies waste time on manual paperwork, rule checks, and slow buying processes.	Tools that read documents automatically (using Bangla and English OCR) to quickly pull information and speed up buying forms, rule checks, and tender applications.
Machine Downtime and Quality Checks in Factories: Garment (RMG) and manufacturing factories lose time and money from sudden machine breakdowns and slow manual fabric or product inspection.	AI computer vision systems for defect detection on production lines and predictive maintenance dashboards that warn engineers before a machine fails.

2.6 Education (Edtech)

Examples of problems and solutions:

Problem	Possible Solution
Gap Between University Study and Real Jobs: Traditional education focuses too much on memorizing and not enough on practical skills. Because of this, many university graduates do not have the skills that companies actually need.	Online learning platforms and local training programs that teach practical job skills (like software building, data work, and modern coding tools) along with student-to-student mentoring.

3.0 ROUND 1: TEAM REGISTRATION, PRELIMINARY SUBMISSION & JUDGING

3.1 Round 1 Dates and Free Registration

- **Registration Fee:** Free for Team Registration and Round 1 Preliminary Submission.
- **Team Registration Deadline:** December 2, 2026 (Teams must register their members before submitting).
- **Preliminary Submission Deadline:** December 3, 2026.
- **Round 1 Judgment & Top 50 Announcement:** December 9, 2026.

3.2 What to Submit on December 3 (All 4 Links Must Be Public)

Required Item	Format and Public Access Rule
1. Lean Canvas / Pitch Deck	Submitted as a **Google Drive PDF link** (up to 7 pages/slides) showing the problem, how users will use the product, and the business model. Access must be set to *"Anyone with the link can view"*.
2. Video Pitch	Submitted as a **public or unlisted YouTube link** (maximum 3 minutes) following the time plan table in Section 3.3.
3. Code Repository	Submitted as a **public GitHub link** created on or after **November 25, 2026**. Prior to December 11 at 12:00 PM, this repository may contain *only* the static Round 1 frontend mockup and documentation. All backend, database, and AI code is strictly banned before December 11 at 12:00 PM.
4. Basic Frontend Mockup / Prototype	Submitted as a **publicly accessible deployed link** (e.g., Vercel, Netlify, GitHub Pages, or public interactive Figma prototype) showing a basic static frontend mockup or frontend-only UI prototype of your product.

3.3 Video Pitch (3-Minute YouTube Video Time Plan)

Time Window	Section	What to Cover
0:00 – 0:30	Introduction	Team name, product name, and the main problem.
0:30 – 2:25	How It Works & Tech	How the product works, system architecture, and the technology used to build it.

Time Window	Section	What to Cover
2:25 – 2:45	UN Goal (SDG)	How the product helps reach your chosen SDG target number.
2:45 – 3:00	Future Plan	How the product will launch in the market and grow.

3.4 Round 1 Judging Criteria (December 9, 2026 — 100% Total)

Judges will evaluate all Round 1 submissions using the following structured 100% rubric to select the Top 50 teams:

Marks	Judging Area	What Judges Check
30%	Problem Statement & Solution Fit	Is the problem clearly defined, urgent, and specific to Bangladesh? Does the proposed AI and software solution directly and logically address the root cause?
25%	Market Research & Target Audience	Has the team validated the market size, existing alternatives, and real user pain points? Is the target customer segment clearly identified with solid evidence?
20%	Business Model & Scalability	Does the Lean Canvas / Pitch Deck show a clear revenue model, realistic unit economics, and a practical path to scale across Bangladesh?
15%	Technical Feasibility & Frontend Mockup	Is the proposed system architecture realistic to build in 10 days, and does the deployed static frontend mockup clearly demonstrate the core user flow?
10%	UN SDG Alignment	Does the proposal map to a specific UN SDG target number with measurable indicators of social or environmental impact?

4.0 ROUND 2: PAYMENT & SPOT CONFIRMATION (BKASH / NAGAD)

4.1 Registration Fee Structure

Teams selected in the Top 50 on December 9 will be given a **48-hour payment window (from December 9, 2026 at 12:00 PM to December 11, 2026 at 11:59 AM)** to pay the registration fee and lock in their spot for the building round (minimum 2 and maximum 4 members per team):

Team Size	Total Fee	Fee Calculation
2-Member Team (Min)	1,500 BDT	Base registration fee (covers 2 members).
3-Member Team	2,000 BDT	1,500 BDT base + 500 BDT for 1 extra member.

Team Size	Total Fee	Fee Calculation
4-Member Team (Max)	2,500 BDT	1,500 BDT base + 1,000 BDT for 2 extra members (500 BDT each).

4.2 Payment Method (bKash & Nagad Transaction ID)

- **Accepted Payment Channels:** Payments must be sent via **bKash** or **Nagad** to the official BUCC merchant/personal numbers provided in the Top 50 selection email.
- **Transaction ID (TrxID) Submission:** After sending the exact registration fee via bKash or Nagad, the Team Leader must immediately fill out the official Payment Confirmation Form and enter the valid **bKash / Nagad Transaction ID (TrxID)**, sender mobile number, payment method used, and payment screenshot.
- **Verification Rule:** A team's payment timestamp is recorded at the exact moment they submit a valid, verifiable Transaction ID (TrxID) on the confirmation form. Submitting a fake, duplicate, or unpaid TrxID will lead to immediate disqualification.

4.3 How Spots Are Filled, Waiting List & Refund Policy

- **Payment Deadline:** December 11, 2026 at 11:59 AM.
- **First 40 Teams Rule:** Only 40 teams will move to Round 3. The first 40 teams from the Top 50 to submit a verified bKash or Nagad Transaction ID (TrxID) before December 11 at 11:59 AM will lock in these spots.
- **Waiting List:** The remaining 10 teams are placed on the official waiting list and do not pay unless called up. If fewer than 40 teams complete payment by December 11 at 11:59 AM, or if a confirmed team drops out before December 13, waitlisted teams will be contacted in order of their Round 1 scores and given a 12-hour window to pay via bKash or Nagad and submit their TrxID.
- **Refund Policy:** Under any circumstances, no refund will be given once the registration fee is paid.

5.0 ROUND 3: 10-DAY PRODUCT BUILDING PHASE

5.1 Build Dates and Mentorship

- **Dates:** December 11, 2026 (12:00 PM) – December 20, 2026 (11:59 PM).
- **How It Works:** The 40 confirmed teams will build their full working products remotely with guidance and feedback from industry mentors.

5.2 Public GitHub & Commit Verification Rule

- **Active Daily Commits:** All backend, database, and AI implementation must be written and committed during this 10-day window. Each team must record commits on at least **8 of the 10 build days**, and every registered team member who writes code must push commits from their own GitHub account. Organizers will check commit timestamps and Git history logs.
- **Final Integration Window:** Teams must finish their core product development during the December 11–20 build window. On Demo Day (December 21), teams get a final morning window from 10:00 AM to 12:30 PM strictly for onsite setup, final integration, and UI polish before the **02:00 PM Final Submission & Code Freeze**.

5.3 No Old Projects and Pre-Built Code Exemption

- **Repository Creation Date:** Every team's public GitHub repository must be created on or after **November 25, 2026**. Repositories created before this date will be disqualified.
- **Round 1 Static Frontend Exemption:** Teams are allowed to build and deploy a static frontend UI mockup or interactive wireframe between November 25 and December 3, 2026 solely for their Round 1 preliminary submission.
- **Ban on Pre-Built Backend & AI Code:** All functional backend logic, database schemas, API integrations, and AI/ML model implementations are strictly banned before **December 11, 2026 at 12:00 PM**. Submitting an existing startup product, old project, or bulk-uploading pre-written code during the December 11–20 build window will result in immediate disqualification.

6.0 ROUND 4: DEMO DAY SHOWCASE, SCHEDULE & FINAL JUDGING

6.1 Demo Day Format and Parallel Judging Panels

Date: December 21, 2026 | **Place:** BRAC University Multipurpose Hall, Merul Badda Campus.

Step	What Happens on Demo Day
1. Final Integration & UI Polish (10:00 AM – 12:30 PM)	Teams set up their products at their assigned workstations, test their live deployment and hardware connections, and complete final integration and UI polish.
2. Final Submission & Code Freeze (02:00 PM)	At **02:00 PM sharp**, a strict code freeze takes effect across all repositories. All coding stops and no further commits or changes are allowed during the judging round.
3. Parallel Judging Capacity (02:00 PM – 05:00 PM)	To evaluate all 40 teams thoroughly within 3 hours, teams are divided across **5 parallel judging panels** (8 teams per panel). Each team receives an exact **20-minute slot**: 8 minutes for live product demo, 5 minutes for business model & market pitch, 5 minutes for Judge Q&A, and 2 minutes for panel transition.

6.2 Event Day Time Schedule (December 21, 2026)

Time	Activity
07:00 AM – 08:00 AM	Reporting, Registration & Souvenirs Distribution
08:00 AM – 08:30 AM	Breakfast
08:30 AM – 09:00 AM	Team Setup & Workspace Allocation
09:00 AM – 09:30 AM	Challenge Briefing & Showcase Rules
10:00 AM – 12:30 PM	Final Integration & UI Polish
12:30 PM – 02:00 PM	Lunch Break
02:00 PM	Final Submission & Code Freeze
02:00 PM – 05:00 PM	Judging Session & Presentation Round (5 Parallel Panels, 20 mins/team)
05:00 PM – 06:00 PM	Final Judges Deliberation, Score Normalization, Buffer Time & Photo Session
06:00 PM – 06:30 PM	Evening Snacks
06:30 PM – 08:00 PM	Award & Prize Giving Ceremony

6.3 Demo Day Final Judging Criteria (December 21, 2026 — 100% Total)

Marks	Judging Area	What Judges Check
35%	Working Product	Does the product built during the 10 days work smoothly, reliably, and as promised? Is the software built properly as a complete product?
30%	Business Model, Scalability and Practicality	Does the product have a clear, sustainable business model that can generate revenue? Is it practical to use in the real world, and can it scale up to serve thousands of users in Bangladesh?
15%	AI Integration	How effectively and meaningfully is AI integrated into the product to solve the problem (beyond a basic prompt wrapper)?
10%	Real Problem and SDG Impact	How well does the product solve the chosen problem and support the targeted UN SDG metric?
10%	Final Presentation	How clearly did the team explain their product, business plan, and answer the judges' questions within their 20-minute panel slot?

Breaking a Tie: If two teams get the exact same total score, the team with higher marks in "Working Product" (35%) wins. If they are still tied, the team with higher marks in "Business Model, Scalability and Practicality" (30%) wins, followed by "AI Integration" (15%).

7.0 CODE OWNERSHIP, AI RULES & GENERAL BEHAVIOR

7.1 Ownership and Code Sharing

- **Open Source Code:** All code you write for the competition must be public and use an open-source license (such as MIT or Apache 2.0).
- **Product Ownership:** Teams keep 100% ownership of the products and code they create. By joining, teams allow BUCC and event sponsors to use team names, product summaries, photos, and videos for event promotion.

7.2 Rules for Using AI and Outside Tools

- **Mentioning AI Use:** Any image or video made fully by AI must have a clear label or watermark. If you use AI tools to help write code, create data, or make audio, or if you use outside APIs and open-source tools, you must list them clearly in your repository's `README.md` file.
- **No Basic AI Wrappers:** Products that only put a simple screen over an outside AI API (like sending a basic prompt to ChatGPT without your own logic, data processing, or system work) will lose a lot of marks.

7.3 Fair Play and Good Behavior

- **Undergraduate and Multi-University Rule:** Every participant must be a current undergraduate student. Teams made up of students from different universities are welcome and treated equally.
- **Everyone Must Work:** All registered members of a team must take part in building the product.
- **Who Cannot Join:** Members of the organizing team, event volunteers, judges, and sponsors are not allowed to take part in the competition.
- **Safe and Respectful Space:** Every participant must treat other teams, volunteers, judges, and organizers with respect. Bad behavior, cheating, harassment, or damaging university property or networks will lead to immediate removal from the campus and team disqualification.

7.4 Final Decisions

All decisions made by the judges and the BUCC Organizing Committee are final and cannot be argued or appealed.