

## Stop the trend of filing malicious cases

### Authorities must protect citizens from this legal assault

We are concerned about the trend of filing dubious cases against individuals with alleged ties to the Awami League, which persists even nearly nine months after the August 5, 2024 political changeover. Journalists have been frequent targets of this legal assault. According to a report, at least 137 journalists have been implicated in 32 criminal cases filed in Dhaka, Chattogram, Bogura, and Rajshahi over the July-August events—the latest of them registered at the Mirpur police station on April 20, accusing Sheikh Hasina and 407 others, including 24 journalists, of involvement in the killing of BNP activist Mahfuz Alam Shraban. In addition to murder and attempted murder, journalists have also been charged with unlawful assembly, rioting, abduction, vandalism, extortion, assault, and even genocide and crimes against humanity.

According to a Supreme Court lawyer, even in places where no student movement took place or no one died, journalists have been falsely implicated. Referring to the case of a journalist couple who were sued for murder, he noted that while journalists may have committed other offences for which they could be booked, a murder charge “sounds vague.” The argument that those who aided, committed or enabled July atrocities and those who extended moral support to the regime—through talk shows or speeches, for example—belong in the same bracket is not only legally tenuous; it also opens the door to abuse and invites question marks over any outcome of the ongoing trials. The implication of media personality Iresh Zaker in the Shraban murder case, alongside journalists, doctors, businesspeople, and lawyers, further illustrates that anyone is fair game in such a climate.

The Shraban case exemplifies how the right to file cases is being abused. Three individuals named as witnesses in the case have said they were unaware of being listed. The case statement lists eight in total, including the plaintiff, and provides the phone numbers of four. This newspaper spoke to all four; three of them denied any knowledge of their inclusion. The manner in which the whole case came into being—about nine months after the uprising, at the behest of “an administrative office in Paltan,” using false witnesses, and implicating hundreds merely for their “support” of Hasina—reeks of both personal vendetta and a broader campaign against those even loosely associated with the previous regime. Unfortunately, the current process for filing cases does not require police officers to verify claims at the outset, allowing anyone to lodge dubious complaints. This is why the government’s instruction to police not to harass or arrest anyone wrongly implicated offers little hope or protection.

For journalists, this trend marks a new chapter in a country where they already routinely face threats, harassment, and intimidation. But it must be countered for the sake of everyone. It is crucial to address the underlying loopholes in the case-filing process—by strengthening initial verification mechanisms and, if necessary, disallowing mass accusations—and to ensure accountability for any misuse of legal provisions. The government alone cannot address this problem. Political parties, too, must come forward to stop this alarming trend.

## Save migrants from forced war role

### News of young men trafficked to Russia to serve as soldiers raises alarm

Bangladeshi migrants continue to be exploited in many ways. But the revelation that a number of aspiring migrants from Bangladesh have been trafficked to Russia and forced to fight in the war against Ukraine is quite shocking. According to media reports, some travel agencies are luring young men with the promise of high-paying jobs in Russian factories and restaurants. However, instead of the promised jobs, they are then forced to join the Russian military as “contract fighters” and sent to the frontlines with little or no training.

According to a report in this daily, the Human Trafficking Cell of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) recently busted one such travel agency, which allegedly trafficked around 20 Bangladeshis to Russia over the past two years. Among them, at least three have been killed in the war and another has been critically injured. Some remain missing, with their families having lost all contact since they were sent to the battlefield.

With the Russia-Ukraine war dragging into its fourth year, it is believed that Russia, despite being the world’s second-largest military power, is struggling to recruit enough soldiers locally. As a result, it has increasingly turned to the Global South—including India, Nepal, Cuba, and Sri Lanka—for recruits, according to international media reports. Central Asian migrants already in Russia have also reportedly faced coercion or intimidation into joining the war. Recent reports from the Bangladeshi media confirm that our citizens, too, are now falling victim to traffickers who are essentially selling foot soldiers to the Russian military.

One key reason why traffickers have found a market in Bangladesh is the widespread poverty and unemployment among young men. One can only imagine the level of desperation it takes for someone to be enticed by offers of factory work in a country known for its brutal winters and volatile situation. The aspiring migrants reportedly paid between Tk 9 to Tk 12 lakh each for the promised jobs. That they would take such risks reflects a lack of faith in the opportunities available at home, pushing them into the arms of human traffickers.

We urge the authorities to raise awareness—especially in rural areas—about the dangers of war trafficking, and also to create more viable economic opportunities for youth in the country. Law enforcement drives against trafficking networks must be strengthened. Furthermore, the government must use its diplomatic channels to obtain the list of Bangladeshi nationals recruited by the Russian military, and initiate efforts to bring them back safely.

# The promises and pressures of Bangladesh’s pharma industry



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The pharmaceutical sector in Bangladesh, now valued at more than \$3.5 billion (as of 2023), stands as one of the most compelling narratives of progress in the country’s economic landscape. From meeting 98 percent of domestic medicine needs to reaching over 150 countries with exports, this industry has evolved into a cornerstone of both national health and economic resilience. Our pharmaceutical companies are not only providing affordable healthcare across the country, but they are also gradually earning recognition on the global stage. As we approach the country’s graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) status in November 2026, there is a growing need for the industry to adapt to new global norms and challenges.

This transformation has not happened overnight. Decades ago, Bangladesh was heavily reliant on imported medicines. Today, it produces nearly all essential drugs domestically, including life-saving ones such as antibiotics, insulin, and cancer treatments. With a population exceeding 170 million, the demand for accessible and cost-effective healthcare continues to grow. The local pharmaceutical sector has stepped up in response, resulting in improved health outcomes and a strengthened national supply chain. Alongside this domestic impact, the country has extended its pharmaceutical reach to international markets. In FY2023-24, pharmaceutical exports were valued at \$205.48 million, registering a 17.14 percent growth. Bangladeshi medicines reached regions in Africa, Southeast Asia, and even entered regulated markets like the United States and Europe. A key contributor to this success has been the industry’s commitment to upgrading its technological capabilities and investing in more advanced manufacturing practices, including the production of biosimilars and complex generics.

Underlying this growth has been a strategic use of policy flexibility under the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement. Bangladesh currently benefits from a waiver that allows the production of generic versions of patented drugs without the need for costly licensing. This policy has provided a significant competitive edge in global markets. However, this advantage will come to

an end after November 2026. Once the waiver expires, companies will be required to obtain a licence to produce patented medications. This shift is likely to increase production costs, potentially affecting the affordability of life-saving drugs. At the same time, global pharmaceutical giants may reclaim market space that Bangladeshi firms have started to occupy.

The expiration of the TRIPS waiver is just one aspect of a broader set of challenges that the industry will need to address. One of the most pressing issues is the overwhelming dependency on imported raw materials, specifically active pharmaceutical ingredients

manufacturing, especially in fields like biologics and hormone-based treatments, requires specialised training and a strong foundation in both research and engineering. Although progress has been made, there is still a long road ahead in terms of workforce development. Infrastructure development has not kept pace either. Projects like the long-awaited API Industrial Park have faced repeated delays, often tied to policy inconsistencies and administrative bottlenecks. As Bangladesh graduates from the LDC status, it is also set to lose various trade privileges, including duty-free access to several export markets. This shift may erode the cost competitiveness that has so far helped our pharmaceutical products find a foothold abroad.

Still, despite these hurdles, there is reason to be optimistic. While highly regulated markets have always attracted the most attention, there are numerous unregulated and semi-regulated markets in regions like Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia that

Government incentives, policy support, and funding for research facilities, when combined with private sector efficiency and ambition, can create a powerful engine for long-term growth. As part of this preparation, the government can also explore negotiating an extension to the TRIPS transition period to allow more time for adaptation. Building frameworks for patent access, including participation in global patent pools or voluntary licensing agreements, can help maintain the affordability and availability of newer medicines. Additionally, streamlining regulatory approval processes, simplifying land acquisition, and providing tax incentives for research activities would send a strong signal to investors and innovators alike.

There is no doubt that Bangladesh’s pharmaceutical industry has shown remarkable potential. But in order to sustain this momentum, we will need forward-looking policies, strong coordination across stakeholders, and a willingness to confront the industry’s structural weaknesses. This is a moment



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

(API). More than 95 percent of these are sourced from countries like India and China, which makes the entire production chain vulnerable to disruptions and external price fluctuations. Beyond sourcing materials, the path to entering highly regulated export markets is filled with obstacles. Certifications for compliance with international standards can be expensive and time-consuming, often delayed further by bureaucratic inefficiencies at home. Building new manufacturing facilities or upgrading existing ones also tends to move slowly under the current administrative frameworks.

Another critical concern lies in the gap between the industry’s technical demands and the available talent pool. Modern pharmaceutical

offer immediate opportunities. These areas typically have fewer entry barriers and a strong demand for affordable, quality medicines. Accelerating the establishment of the API Industrial Park and supporting local production capabilities can significantly reduce dependency on imported raw materials, making the industry more resilient and cost-effective in the long run. With global demographics shifting and an ageing population driving the need for drugs targeting chronic illnesses and cancer, Bangladesh has a timely opportunity to develop its expertise in biosimilars and niche therapeutic areas through targeted investment in research and development.

Collaboration between the public and private sectors will be key in unlocking the next phase of innovation.

## INTERNATIONAL NOISE AWARENESS DAY

# Laws exist, but silence does not

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Noise pollution in Bangladesh has escalated to alarming levels, posing significant threats to public health and the environment. The increasing prevalence of loud music at social events, excessive honking in traffic, relentless mechanical noise from construction sites, and industrial operations have made high-decibel sounds a regular aspect of urban life. The problem is particularly acute in cities such as Dhaka, Chattogram, and Rajshahi, where noise levels far exceed safe limits.

According to a 2022 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report, Dhaka ranked as the world’s noisiest city with average noise levels of 119 decibels, followed by Rajshahi at 103 decibels. These figures far surpass the World Health Organization’s (WHO) recommended limits—55 decibels for residential areas and 70 decibels for commercial spaces during the day. WHO’s 2018 guidelines reduced the safe limit to 53 decibels, mirrored by the Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act and the Noise Pollution (Control) Rules. Main noise sources include chaotic traffic, hydraulic horns,

outdated engines, construction work, and loudspeakers at public events. Airports and railway stations further amplify this constant high-decibel environment.

The WHO estimates that over five percent of the global population suffers from noise-related issues. The safe noise is now considered to be 55 decibels. Levels above 65 decibels may cause heart problems; over 90 can lead to ulcers, hearing loss, and nervous disorders. At 120 decibels, noise can cause pain and permanent hearing damage. Prolonged exposure contributes to stress, anxiety, sleep disorders, high blood pressure, and heart disease. Children are particularly vulnerable. Noise impairs their concentration and development. Older adults exposed to noise may experience cognitive decline, worsening conditions like dementia. Noise pollution also harms wildlife. Animals rely on sound for survival; excess noise forces them to change habitats and disrupts breeding. In aquatic environments, industrial and ship noise interferes with marine life like dolphins and whales that use echolocation for navigation and hunting.

Bangladesh introduced the Noise Pollution (Control) Rules, 2006, to address this crisis. These rules categorise five zones: silent, residential, mixed, commercial, and industrial. According to the law, authorities are required to mark these areas with signals or signs. Each zone has specific noise limits for day and night. Silent zones include hospitals, schools, offices, and the surrounding 100 metres

where the limit is 50 decibels during the day and 40 at night, and horn use is strictly prohibited. For residential zones, the day limit is 55 decibels and 45 at night. The rules allow exceptions for social, cultural, and political events such as weddings, concerts, fairs, and sports, provided permission is sought in advance. Such events can exceed limits for five hours a day, up to 10 pm. Violating these limits is a punishable offence.

Despite these detailed regulations, enforcement is weak, and violations are rampant. Government and law enforcement activities and programmes by faith-based groups are exempt from these rules, allowing sirens, horns, and loudspeakers to operate unchecked, often disturbing daily life. During the 2025 New Year celebrations, over 1,000 noise-related complaints were made to the emergency helpline 999, yet only a few prompted action, highlighting the gap between regulation and implementation. Penalties include up to one month in jail and/or a Tk 5,000 fine, with repeat offenders facing up to six months’ imprisonment and/or a Tk 10,000 fine. However, these penalties are too lenient to deter transport operators and event organisers. Additionally, residential power generators, a significant noise source, remain unregulated.

Public awareness is also a major hurdle. Most people are unaware of the rules, permitted noise limits, complaint processes, and permission procedures. The law is rarely discussed, and no large-scale public campaigns exist. As a result, the law is ineffective not

only due to lax enforcement but also because of public ignorance. Awareness campaigns, media involvement, and education programmes are crucial. When people understand the risks and legal boundaries, they are more likely to report violations and support action. Additionally, stricter enforcement is essential. Authorities must increase penalties, implement real-time noise monitoring, and regulate horn use and loudspeakers more strictly. Other countries strictly control honking and penalise loud residential music—Bangladesh must follow suit. Technology can also help. Installing noise barriers, encouraging quieter vehicles, and maintaining silent zones around schools and hospitals are important. Urban planning should include noise-reducing designs, such as better road layouts and soundproof buildings. Public celebrations should promote quieter practices, and fireworks and event sound systems must be strictly regulated.

Noise pollution is a growing crisis in Bangladesh, severely affecting public health, wildlife, and quality of life. Although laws exist, weak enforcement and a lack of awareness allow violations to continue unchecked. The problem is not solely the public’s fault—government negligence and lack of transparency also play a role. Solving this issue demands a collective effort from government, law enforcement, planners, and the public. Strengthened laws, increased awareness, technological interventions, and better planning are the keys to creating a quieter, healthier Bangladesh for all.