

## Prudence needed in deferment decision

Postponing LDC graduation needs careful deliberation by all stakeholders

The question of whether Bangladesh should defer its graduation from the UN's Least Developed Country (LDC) category and the challenges likely to arise when it makes the transition have been a topic of debate for months. Considering the shocks impacting the country's economic growth and activities in recent years, business leaders—mostly from export-oriented industries—have asked to defer the graduation from 2026 to 2032 at a recent roundtable discussion organised by *The Daily Star*. Their concern is not without merit, yet there is much to consider before deciding on this matter.

As reasons for this deferment, speakers at the event cited a lack of preparedness to cope with the loss of trade preferences following the graduation. Among all the LDCs, Bangladesh—an entirely export-dependent economy—enjoys preferential access to the international markets the most. It is also the only LDC that uses the TRIPS waiver extensively in its pharmaceutical sector, and will suffer a huge blow in terms of drug production and prices when the waiver is lifted post-graduation. Bangladesh is also quite unprepared with coping mechanisms to deal with post-graduation repercussions. Although it will retain LDC trade benefits for three years after graduation, the country is nowhere near its biggest competitors, such as Vietnam and India, who have already secured free trade agreements with some of our biggest markets. For a country that has been waiting to become a developing country since 2018, there has been no real initiative to negotiate bilateral agreements with our biggest markets. Bangladesh also has alarmingly high logistical costs, poor governance, bureaucratic complexities, high cost of doing business, and weak infrastructure. Furthermore, compliance costs in labour standards, environmental protection, and intellectual property rights will also shoot up.

Despite these hurdles, some experts believe it's best to go along with the graduation schedule set by the UN. The white paper on the economy, published in December 2024, also states that there are "no plausible reasons" why it should be postponed. The incumbent planning adviser said a deferral may not be an option, despite there being several precedents. Indeed, Bangladesh cannot make the decision unilaterally; it needs to negotiate with the UN and the two other countries set to graduate with it in 2026—Nepal and Laos—to secure the deferment, needing to present strong evidence that a smooth transition would be significantly undermined.

In this situation, we urge the interim government to take a pause and consider all options. It must organise a national dialogue, bringing all stakeholders to the table, to consider all perspectives. The concerns raised by the business leaders must be reviewed carefully, and a pragmatic approach must be taken to deal with this situation, keeping in mind that very little time is left. Simultaneously, the issues cited above must be addressed with due haste to improve Bangladesh's competitiveness in global trade. Whatever decision is made, it must be in the country's and its people's greater interest.

## Israel must stop targeted killing of journos

It must be held accountable for its war crimes in Gaza

We are outraged by the targeted killing of journalists, including an Al Jazeera news team, in Gaza by Israeli forces on August 10. The victims were 28-year-old Anas al-Sharif, one of the most well-known Palestinian journalists in Gaza; correspondent Mohammed Qreiqeh; cameramen Ibrahim Zaher and Mohammed Noufal; and freelance journalists Moamen Aliwa and Mohammad al-Khaldi. They were killed when an Israeli drone strike hit a media tent set up outside the main gate of al-Shifa Hospital. The killings occurred just days after Israel's security cabinet approved its plans to seize Gaza City and send troops into the region. Before this incident, at least five other Al Jazeera journalists were killed by Israel since the war began. Reporters Without Borders estimates that nearly 200 journalists have been killed in the war so far. These killings underscore the grave risks faced by media workers covering the war in Gaza and Israel's clear attempt to erase witnesses to the genocide being committed in Palestine.

Sharif was one of Al Jazeera's most recognisable journalists reporting daily from Gaza since the war began. In April, he wrote a message to be shared in case of his death, where he said his voice had been silenced and urged the world "not to forget Gaza." In July, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) called for his protection after an Israeli military spokesperson targeted him online. CPJ criticised Israel for repeatedly labelling journalists as militants without credible evidence, noting that similar allegations had been made against other media workers. As Palestinians mourned the deaths of the journalists, Israel confirmed it had targeted Sharif, calling him a "terrorist" affiliated with Hamas who "posed as a journalist." However, it has yet to provide any evidence backing its claim.

According to Brown University's Costs of War project, more journalists have been killed in Gaza since the war began on October 7, 2023 than in the US Civil War, World Wars I and II, Korean War, Vietnam War, the wars in the former Yugoslavia, and the post 9/11 war in Afghanistan combined. The deliberate targeting and killing of local journalists and bar on international journalists from covering its atrocities in Gaza is nothing but Israel's tactic to obscure the brutal realities on the ground. The world must do what is needed to put an immediate end to Israel's atrocities in Gaza and stand united in protecting those who risk everything to tell the truth.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Pakistan becomes sovereign state

On this day in 1947, Pakistan emerged as a sovereign state, marking the end of British colonial rule.

# Pharma must collaborate with academia to thrive in post-LDC era



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The pharmaceutical sector in Bangladesh stands at a turning point. From a heavily import-dependent industry in the 1980s, it now meets 98 percent of domestic medicine needs and exports to over 150 countries. In FY2024-25, export earnings from this sector reached \$213 million. Its success has been largely driven by the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver under the World Trade Organization (WTO), which allowed the production of generic versions of patented drugs.

However, with Bangladesh set to graduate from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category by November 2026, the TRIPS flexibilities and other international exemptions are set to come to an end. This shift could significantly limit local production of patented medicines, raised drug prices—especially for newer treatments—and reduce export potential. Public health programmes that rely on low-cost generics may come under budgetary strain. Meanwhile, the domestic pharmaceutical industry will need to meet stricter international regulatory standards like those of the US Food and Drug Administration, European Medicines Agency and World Health Organization Good Manufacturing Practices (WHO GMP), and compete in a more complex global market. Gaps in biotechnology, active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) production, and clinical trial infrastructure will further intensify these challenges.

To navigate the post-LDC era successfully, Bangladesh must transition from a volume-driven, generics-dominated model to one centred on innovation, quality, and global integration. This can be achieved by enhancing collaboration between industry and academia. Academic research in the country has traditionally remained disconnected from industry needs. Underfunded labs, outdated infrastructure, and limited engagement from the private sector have weakened universities' role



VISUAL: MONOROM POLOK

as innovation hubs. The disconnect is evident in pharmaceutical education and research. Collaboration is hampered by theoretical research orientations, outdated curricula, and the absence of mechanisms like technology transfer offices. Applied research funding is scarce, and expertise in emerging fields like biotechnology, regulatory science, and clinical trials is limited.

Meanwhile, firms often avoid collaboration, focusing on short-term gains rather than long-term innovation. Many are reluctant to invest in joint research, curriculum development or workforce training. The lack of structured platforms for engagement, along with concerns over intellectual property and limited demand for high-end scientific expertise, further weakens cooperation.

A national strategy to bridge these divides is needed, along with investment in joint research initiatives that can drive pharmaceutical innovation and resilience.

Tertiary institutions, particularly departments of pharmacy, biochemistry and molecular biology, genetic engineering and biotechnology, microbiology, and health economics institutes, can partner with pharmaceutical companies to develop biosimilars

and new drug formulations. Industry-supported clinical trials hosted in academic settings can reduce dependency on foreign labs, lower research and development (R&D) costs, and speed up product development. Faculty members should be incentivised to pursue industry-relevant research through consultancy, collaborative grants, and

research organisations (CROs) struggle with ethical approval delays, a lack of qualified principal investigators and biostatisticians, and difficulty recruiting trial volunteers. These shortcomings force companies to outsource trials abroad, increasing costs and delaying market entry. By investing in accredited research facilities and university-based ethical review boards, Bangladesh can localise clinical research. Additionally, industry-funded training programmes in trial design, regulatory compliance, and data management can strengthen research capacity.

Academia must also play a central role in evidence-based policymaking. As Bangladesh adapts to post-LDC trade and intellectual property (IP) requirements, academic institutions can assess the economic impacts of patent compliance, propose sustainable pricing models, and help design national strategies. Establishing formal "policy labs" that bring together academics, industry leaders, and regulators could facilitate coordinated, evidence-informed decision-making. In international forums, academic voices can also advocate for equitable IP policies and targeted transition support for countries like Bangladesh.

performance-based rewards.

Workforce readiness is another pressing issue. Many employers think graduates lack the skills they are looking for. University curricula should be redesigned in consultation with pharmaceutical firms to include regulatory science, bioequivalence studies, GMP compliance, data analytics, and advanced manufacturing practices. Internship and co-op programmes can offer students real-world industry exposure, while faculty exchanges with industry can help keep teaching aligned with evolving demands.

Creating centres of excellence (CoEs) focused on pharmaceutical innovation is another strategic option. Drawing from India's National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) model, Bangladesh can establish CoEs dedicated to biotechnology, API manufacturing, clinical research, and regulatory affairs. These centres can help reduce reliance on imported APIs and strengthen the country's capacity for global-standard clinical trials. Public-private partnerships involving government, academia and industry could sustain these centres financially and institutionally.

The clinical trial infrastructure in Bangladesh remains significantly underdeveloped. Existing clinical

reforms are urgently needed. Bureaucratic bottlenecks, mutual mistrust, and misaligned incentives must be replaced with a supportive national framework for industry-academia partnership. This framework should include tax incentives, R&D grants, and co-financing mechanisms for joint initiatives. Universities should be empowered to commercialise intellectual property and engage in contract research. Performance metrics for academic institutions must evolve to reward patents, industry impact, and product innovation alongside traditional publications. Clear policies for IP ownership and benefit-sharing can also help foster mutual trust and long-term cooperation.

If policymakers, academic leaders, and industry stakeholders act with urgency and coordination, Bangladesh can build on its pharmaceutical legacy and emerge as a global leader in affordable, innovative healthcare solutions. The core foundations are already in place; what's needed now is the shared commitment to build on them strategically.

## In Gaza, Israel is waging a war on journalists, too



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After sealing Gaza off from international reporters and blocking the world's eyes from its genocide, Israel has moved to the next phase of its blackout strategy: hunting down Palestinian journalists inside Gaza. The goal is obvious: silence the last independent witnesses so that the genocide and starvation of an entire people proceed unseen, unrecorded, and unchecked by the global community.

The latest murders are of two of Gaza's most prominent TV correspondents—Anas al-Sharif, Mohammed Qreiqeh—as well as four other reporters who were in a tent outside a Gaza hospital. This brings the number of Palestinian media workers killed by Israel to more than 230, the highest killed by any country, in any conflict.

This is not just in Gaza; let us not forget Israel's cold-blooded murder of American-Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in May 2022 in the West Bank. Then, as now, Israel followed the same familiar playbook pattern: lie, deny, and distort the truth, before claiming, months later, that Abu Akleh was "accidentally" killed by a sniper's bullet.

Israel bars international journalists from covering its atrocities, and when local reporters defy the blackout,

silencing them becomes a calculated item on its "to-do list". Israel sends a clear message with every murder to those still breathing: report the truth, and you will join them.

Political Zionism, from its inception, has perfected the art of pairing the crime with the lie. Israel fabricates evidence, if any, and then the Western media unquestionably market the lie. For example, the headline for Reuters was: "Israel kills Al Jazeera journalist it says was Hamas leader." Instead of highlighting the documented Israeli death threats against the journalist or the fact that Al-Sharif's father was murdered by Israel in December 2023, Reuters, NBC and others chose to spread the unverified Israeli narrative.

This is not unique; Western media almost always treat Israeli statements with a nuance of credibility they deny non-Westerners. Consider Benjamin Netanyahu, a proven habitual liar, not by his enemies but by his close allies. He claims Israel wants to "liberate" Gaza from Hamas and relocate civilians to so-called "safe areas." Despite his proven record of deceit, Netanyahu's false assertions are well covered and repeated uncritically by Western media outlets.

Contrast this with the treatment of Russia's claims that its war in Ukraine is to "liberate" the country from neo-

Nazis. Those claims are met with great scepticism, fact-checks, and ridicule. Why does the same media grant Israeli lies a pass? Is it because of bias in favour of Israel, or an anti-Russian bias? Either way, it is hypocrisy, and it eats on the very principles that journalism is supposed to uphold.

Just over a year ago, an Israeli drone strike murdered Al-Sharif's colleague Mohamed El Ghoul, and his coworker inside a clearly marked press car. Israel made the same claim then: he was a Hamas member; to kasher his murders. If Russia did this to reporters in Ukraine, the outrage would never end. But when Israel kills journalists, the story is framed, softened, or buried.

This is how Israel's decades-long dehumanisation of Palestinians works: demonise them, diminish their suffering until their deaths generate less outrage than the injury of a dog. I wrote recently about a viral story of a dog in Gaza whose plight drew more global sympathy than the Palestinian who saved it. That was not a fluke; it was the "logical response" for people who were also victims of a propaganda that dehumanises Palestinians.

Israel could not succeed in this without help. Embedded by dual citizen Israelis and Western Zionist voices in the international media, those terrified by the "antisemitism" smear act as marketers of Israeli deshabara. They parrot Netanyahu's denial of mass starvation, even when hundreds of humanitarian agencies, including the United Nations, say otherwise.

Western outlets would never have extended that courtesy, say, to Myanmar's generals or Sudan's warlords, denying starvation in those

countries. But the lie of a European Israeli, of Polish descent, carries more weight in their newsrooms than the truth of the nonwhite victims.

Arab media are hardly immune. Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya have both handed Netanyahu and Israeli spokespersons airtime to lie without challenge, even though the former's coverage of this war has been nothing short of remarkable given the threat on the ground. However, in the name of "balance," most global media outlets have become conduits for a propaganda that justifies starving children. The idea of presenting "both sides" is meaningless when one side is propagating lies. There is no balance between lies and truths.

When a journalist is killed, their archives, contacts, and testimony are buried with them. When survivors are too afraid to speak, official lies become the only record. Israel understands this perfectly. It has turned the killing of journalists into a weapon of war, knowing that without witnesses, there is no record, and without documents, justice fails.

Allowing Israel to normalise the killing of journalists is not only a betrayal of the truth, but it is a heinous violation of the supposed mission of journalism. The press cannot claim to be the guardians of free expression while accepting that a state may carry on targeted execution of reporters and normalising the silencing of Palestinian journalists.

Targeting journalists is not just about silencing the present; it is about monopolising the future. No witnesses, no crimes—that is the darkness Israel is building; a darkness that will swallow not only Gaza, but the soul of humanity.