

# THE MOBILE RESET

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## NEIR and the Battle for Bangladesh's Mobile Future

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Bangladesh's mobile market has grown rapidly with rising incomes and smartphone use, yet the industry has been steadily hollowed out by a fast-expanding grey market that undermines the formal ecosystem.

### FIRST YEARS OF THE GREY MARKET

Early signs appeared quietly: unfamiliar brands in small shops, phones without warranties and unusually low prices. Even as consumer demand rose, official distributors saw revenues

shrink. Multinational brands that had invested in factories, retail networks and service centres suddenly faced competition from devices that bypassed regulatory costs. Government tax receipts from handset imports also began to fall, signalling a widening problem and raising concern across the still-nascent local manufacturing industry.

### RISE OF AN UNCHECKED MARKET

Official companies began

shifting to local production in 2017-18, strengthening the industry and lifting revenues; FY2021-22 saw sales reach 13 million units. This stability collapsed after the 2022-23 VAT changes. The previous 5 per cent VAT was replaced with levies at every stage of the supply chain, pushing up costs and contributing to an almost 35 per cent production drop by FY2024-25.

Higher prices drove consumers toward the grey market, where industry estimates indicated that about one in three devices sold, and in some assessments 50-60 per cent of the market, were unofficial. The impact was severe. Official manufacturers saw revenues fall sharply, while

companies that once paid significant VAT, import duties and corporate taxes struggled to stay profitable. Planned investments in local assembly stalled as grey imports bypassed both duties and compliance.

Distributors closed, authorised retailers saw margins shrink to unsustainable levels, and unofficial sellers expanded rapidly without regulatory costs. Job losses followed

safeguard but as a policy measure to protect jobs, revenue and long-term industry stability.

### REINSTATEMENT: A TURNING POINT

The government's decision to reinstate NEIR is a major turning point for Bangladesh's digital future. It signals a shift toward long-term market stability.

NEIR also aligns Bangladesh with global best practices. Countries like Turkey and India saw major revenue gains and sharp reductions in counterfeit and stolen devices after adopting similar systems. Bangladesh stands to recover a large share of taxes previously lost to smuggled handsets, strengthening its development budget.

The system further supports manufacturing and FDI by creating a predictable, fair market. Local assembly plants can expand, new factories can open and jobs can grow across production, engineering, logistics and service networks.

For consumers, NEIR delivers safer, verified devices backed by proper warranties. It does not raise handset prices; it simply ensures buyers receive genuine, compliant phones.

### A COLLABORATIVE FUTURE AHEAD

As NEIR will become operational from December 16, official mobile companies remain committed to working closely with the government to ensure its success. Multinational brands such as Samsung can collaborate even more deeply with regulators to strengthen compliance mechanisms and support initiatives that bring unofficial sellers into the formal economy.

There is also a meaningful opportunity here: those who previously operated in the grey market can now become official distributors/authorised retailers. They can continue running their businesses, only now with better protection, better product quality, and full alignment with the law.

**Bangladesh loses hundreds of crores in revenue each year to grey imports. NEIR directly targets this leak.**

across retail, logistics and assembly. The government forfeited hundreds of crores in annual revenue that could have supported healthcare, education or infrastructure. The need for a corrective mechanism became unavoidable: Bangladesh required a system capable of protecting both public revenue and consumer safety.

### NEIR: TOWARDS A SOLUTION

NEIR is straightforward: every mobile phone must be authenticated through its IMEI to access Bangladesh's networks. Registered devices stay active; unregistered ones do not. Countries like Turkey and India use similar systems to curb smuggling, support local manufacturing and protect consumers.

Implementing NEIR, however, required coordination across agencies. NBR, BTRC and law enforcement assessed the scale of grey-market inflow, while media reports highlighted the risks of unofficial devices. Brands such as Samsung also ran awareness campaigns to educate consumers. Gradually, a broad consensus emerged that NEIR was essential not just as a technical



## IMEI: Phone's Digital Fingerprint

ADRIN SARWAR

We protect our phones with cases, screen protectors, and complex passcodes. But deep within the settings of your device lies a 15-digit code that is more important than your password: the IMEI. Usually, it's written on a small label either on top of the box or on the phone itself. Most of us ignore this string of numbers until disaster happens. IMEI can save you a significant amount of money to protect your data and render a stolen phone useless to thieves.

### WHAT EXACTLY IS AN IMEI?

IMEI stands for International Mobile Equipment Identity.

Think of it as the "Social Security Number" or the "Vehicle Identification Number" (VIN) for your mobile device. Every legitimate phone manufactured in the world comes with one. Oftentimes, people confuse the IMEI number with a SIM. SIM identifies you and your phone number. You can take a SIM out and move it to another phone, whereas IMEI identifies the device. It is permanent and hard-coded into the phone itself. When your phone connects to a network tower to make a call or use data, it shows this number. The network checks it, recognises the device, and decides whether to grant it access.

### YOU CAN EASILY FIND IT

IMEI is a universal number, so you don't need to be a tech wizard to find yours. There are three easy ways to locate it:

1. Go to your dialer keypad and type \*#06#. The IMEI will instantly pop up on the screen. This works on almost every smartphone, feature phone, and tablet.

2. You can also look for it in your device's Settings menu. For iPhone: Settings > General > About. And for Android: Settings > About Phone > Status.

3. The most evident way to look for it is on the back of the original box, on the SIM card tray. For older phones with removable batteries, underneath the battery.

Save this number for later because if your phone is lost, you won't be able to look it up using the phone itself.

### IT MATTERS BECAUSE

#### 1. The "Kill Switch" for Stolen Phones

If your phone is stolen, your first instinct is to cancel your SIM card. However, the thief can simply put in a new SIM and still use your device.

This is where the IMEI becomes essential. By reporting the IMEI to your carrier or police, the number can be blacklisted. Once blacklisted, that specific device is blocked from connecting to any network in the country (and often internationally). The phone becomes a "brick"—capable of turning on, but unable to make calls or use mobile data, effectively destroying its resale value for the thief.

#### 2. Buying Used Phones Safely

The grey market is flooded with stolen devices. If you buy a phone that has been blacklisted, you have wasted your money. So before buying a device, check for its IMEI.

- Ask the seller to show you the IMEI by dialing \*#06#.

- Use a free online IMEI checker (like IMEI info or Swappa) to see if the phone is reported as lost, stolen, or still under a financial contract.

- If the IMEI on the screen doesn't match the IMEI printed on the back of the phone, walk away. The phone has been tampered with.

#### 3. Warranty and Unlocking

When you send a phone in for repair, the



knowing just your IMEI? Usually, No.

Hackers cannot access your photos, messages, or bank accounts simply by having your IMEI number. However, you should still keep it private. Bad actors can use valid IMEI numbers to "clone" devices (making a stolen phone look like your legitimate phone to the network), which can cause your phone to get blocked by mistake.

### THE HERO OF MOBILE SECURITY

The IMEI bridges the gap between the physical hardware in your hand and the vast digital networks that connect us. So, dial \*#06#. Screenshot it, write it down, and file it away. Hopefully, you will never need it—but if you do, those 15 digits will be the most valuable numbers you own.

manufacturer uses the IMEI to check your warranty status and purchase date. Additionally, if your phone is "locked" to a specific carrier, the IMEI is the code used to process an official unlock, allowing you to switch providers.

### DUAL SIM, DUAL IMEI?

If you have a phone that supports two SIM cards (Dual SIM), you will notice you have two IMEI numbers. This is normal. Since the phone has two modems to connect to two different networks simultaneously, each slot needs its own unique identification.

### BE AWARE

As IMEI is such a functional number in case of your device, can someone hack your device