

Star BUSINESS



Allergy drugs emerge as fastest-growing pharma category

AHSAN HABIB

Sales of prescription allergy drugs have surged more than any other types of medicine since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Revenues from these drugs climbed to around Tk 1,200 crore in the first nine months of last year, a 72 percent rise from the same period of 2021, according to IQVIA.

Growth peaked in 2024, when sales jumped 30 percent, shows data from IQVIA, a firm that tracks pharmaceutical sales covering 93 percent of outpatient prescriptions.

M Mohibuz Zaman, chief operating officer of ACI PLC, noted that the growing use of such medicines is closely linked to environmental degradation, particularly severe air pollution, which has increased the prevalence of allergic, lung, and skin diseases.

Meanwhile, Dr Gazi Md Salahuddin Mamun of health research institute icddr, noted that skin ailments have proliferated across South Asia since the pandemic.

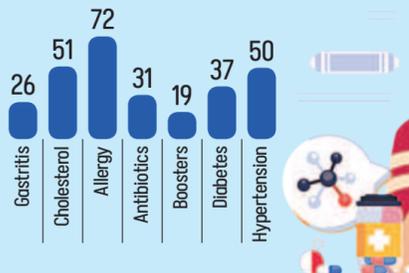
"Although many people believe Covid-19 vaccines caused the rise in skin diseases, there is no evidence to support this," he added.

Studies in several countries did report temporary upticks in inflammatory skin conditions after vaccination, but these resolved as immune systems recovered.

Bangladesh, however, faces a different threat

MEDICINE SALES GROWTH OF MAJOR THERAPEUTIC CLASSES

In the last five years (In %)



SOURCE: IQVIA

of pathogen-related skin diseases.

A fungal infection called tinea, caused by Trichophyton indotineae, has been spreading across South Asia since before the pandemic, said Dr Mamun.

High hygiene standards during lockdowns temporarily slowed its advance. Now detected in Bangladesh, it resists standard antifungal treatments.

Overall, skin diseases have increased across the subcontinent over the last four to five years.

"Dust-laden air has triggered a surge in allergies across the country," said Muhammad Halimuzzaman, deputy managing director and CEO of Healthcare Pharmaceuticals Limited.

"People are increasingly seeking quick relief from allergic discomfort, leading to frequent use of such medicines," he said, adding that

many patients also take overdoses or switch medicines without proper guidance, further boosting sales.

This pattern of self-medication, he noted, reflects growing public concern over air quality and its impact on health.

Other lifestyle drugs are booming too. During the January-September 2025 period,

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TOP SELLING BRANDS In crore taka	JAN-SEPT '24	JAN-SEPT '25
Sergel	918	918
Maxpro	486	532
Pantonix	377	437
Napa	339	314
Exium	237	277
Cef-3	274	264
Monas	242	259
Bizoran	205	211
Seclo	233	207
Nexum	163	191



Over 76% of voters interpret dev as roads, new bridges

CPD survey finds this one-dimensional view sidelines sustainability and climate adaptation

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

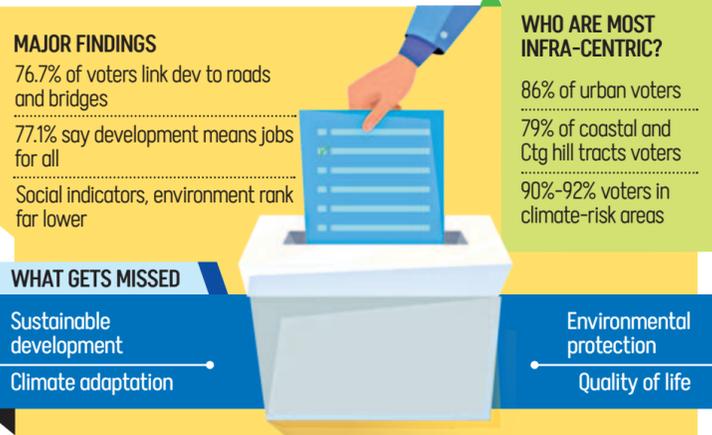
More than 76 percent of voters see development as building new roads, bridges and culverts, according to a survey, even as major political parties increasingly speak of sustainable development.

Researchers say this dominant, one-dimensional understanding leaves little room for improvements in social indicators, environmental outcomes or overall quality of life.

"But this is not their [voters'] fault," said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at local think tank Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

"Ordinary people will always prioritise their basic, immediate problems, as they still define development in traditional terms," he said at a programme in Dhaka yesterday to share the survey findings.

The survey, conducted among 1,200



Govt to seal US trade deal tomorrow to reduce tariff

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Bangladesh is scheduled to sign a trade agreement with the United States tomorrow aimed at reducing reciprocal tariffs, with commitments to import more American goods to narrow a trade imbalance heavily favouring Bangladesh.

Under the proposed agreement, the US will not levy tariffs on garment items made from American raw materials such as cotton and exported to American markets, according to Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman.

Besides, the Donald Trump administration will also reduce the reciprocal tariff rate further for Bangladesh as at least two advisers of the interim government said recently along with Secretary Rahman on several occasions. However, they did not say exactly what percentage of the reciprocal tariff may be reduced for Bangladesh.

The arrangement is expected to offer substantial relief for Bangladesh's garment sector.

For instance, if a T-shirt contains 70 percent American cotton and yarn by value, US customs authorities will exempt that portion from the 20 percent reciprocal tariff imposed on Bangladeshi goods last year.

This matters significantly because garments account for nearly 95 percent of Bangladesh's exports to the US, and many factories can use roughly 70 percent American materials in their products.

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voters and 450 political candidates nationwide, found that 76.7 percent of respondents primarily associate development with building roads and bridges, while 77.1 percent say it means ensuring employment for all.

Perceptions among political party respondents broadly mirrored those of voters.

In some cases, party representatives showed a somewhat broader understanding of development, but infrastructure-led thinking

was dominant, according to the survey.

The emphasis on physical infrastructure was particularly strong in urban and climate-vulnerable areas.

About 86 percent of urban voters equated development with roads and bridges, while the figure stands at 79 percent in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and coastal areas. In climate-risk-prone regions, including Barind areas, the share rises to 90-92 percent.

Helen Mashiyat Preoty, senior research associate at the CPD, said both voters and political parties claim to favour sustainable economic growth over traditional growth, but

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Traders split over keeping shops, malls open during polls

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Two shop owner groups representing markets and shopping malls across the country are divided over whether businesses should remain open or close during the national election on February 12.

The Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity, a government-licensed association of shop owners, has said it did not announce any closure of shops or shopping malls for the 13th National Parliamentary Election.

The platform, registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms (RJSC), clarified its position yesterday in a press statement following an announcement by another platform, the Bangladesh Shop Business Owners' Association, about shop closures during the polls.

The Dokan Malik Samity, operating since 1996, said it had issued no directive to close shops nationwide on February 11 and 12.

It added that individual market and bazaar associations may decide independently whether to keep businesses open or closed on those days.

The platform also called for a verification of whether those "spreading misinformation" have a valid licence from the Ministry of Commerce and registration with the RJSC.

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UK's trade preference shift offers Bangladesh rare post-LDC relief



ABDUR RAZZAQUE

Amid Bangladesh's fragmented preparation for LDC graduation, and at a time when unpredictable global geopolitical dynamics are reshaping competitiveness, some quietly consequential and rather rare good news has emerged from the United Kingdom. It relates to recent changes under the UK's Developing Countries Trading Scheme, known as the DCTS. The changes mean that even after graduation, Bangladesh will continue to access the UK apparel market on the same terms it currently enjoys as an LDC. Yet this development has attracted little attention, despite potentially far-

reaching implications for Bangladesh's post-graduation export competitiveness.

What changes after graduation and why it matters

Like the EU's GSP system, the DCTS is a tiered arrangement, with different levels of market access linked to income level and development status. At the top tier are LDCs, which qualify for Comprehensive Preferences, offering duty-free market access with the least restrictive rules of origin, including single-stage transformation for apparel. The second tier, Enhanced Preferences, is intended for economically vulnerable non-LDC countries. It provides duty-free access to most products, but with tighter conditions. The third tier, Standard

Preferences, applies to other countries and offers more limited tariff reductions.

LDC graduation means Bangladesh moves from Comprehensive to Enhanced Preferences. Earlier, the UK

announced that there would be no safeguard mechanism attached to a non-LDC beneficiary receiving duty-free access for apparel under Enhanced Preferences. By contrast, under the EU system, non-LDC countries with a large share of EU apparel imports face automatic safeguard measures.

This means that even if Bangladesh qualifies for GSP Plus after graduation, its apparel exports could still face MFN tariffs.

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EPA with Japan to benefit apparel

BGMEA says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The signing of the economic partnership agreement (EPA) with Japan marks a historic milestone in Bangladesh's trade diplomacy, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) said yesterday.

The EPA represents not only a trade arrangement but also the natural progression of a trusted and long-standing partnership, the association said in a statement.

It said the trade body and the entire readymade garment (RMG) sector of Bangladesh remain deeply grateful to the government of Japan for its continued support in fostering sustainable economic growth and strengthening bilateral relations.

Japan has long been Bangladesh's largest development partner and its biggest provider of official development assistance, with its support playing a pivotal role in the country's infrastructure development, industrial expansion and broader economic transformation, the statement said.

As Bangladesh prepares for graduating from the least developed country (LDC) status, securing stable and predictable market access through bilateral trade agreements has become an urgent national priority, the association said.

In this context, the Japan-Bangladesh EPA is both strategic and timely. From a trade perspective, the EPA is expected to significantly improve market access for Bangladesh's exports, particularly ready-made garments, which dominate Bangladesh's export basket to Japan.

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ShopUp enters Saudi market with Makkah Municipality JV

STAR BUSINESS DESK

ShopUp, a business-to-business commerce platform, yesterday announced a landmark expansion of its global footprint through a strategic partnership between its Saudi-based brand, Sary, and Al-Balad Al-Amin Technologies, the investment arm of the Holy Makkah Municipality.

The partnership establishes a new joint venture dedicated to activating a unified digital platform designed to organise and stabilise food supply chains within the city of Makkah, according to a press release.

The initiative marks a critical step in ShopUp's parent platform, SILQ's mission to build global trade infrastructure by applying ShopUp's deep expertise in

business-to-business (B2B) supply chains to one of the most time-critical logistics environments in the world – the Hajj and Umrah seasons.

Under the joint venture, an integrated digital ecosystem will be deployed to manage food supply operations, enabling catering contractors and suppliers to handle orders within a structured and transparent framework.

By enhancing traceability and operational discipline, the platform will help ensure the continuity and quality of food services provided to millions of pilgrims each year.

Founded to digitise and simplify procurement for small businesses in Bangladesh, ShopUp has scaled by building robust on-the-ground operating capabilities.



Representatives of ShopUp's Saudi-based brand Sary and Al-Balad Al-Amin Technologies, the investment arm of the Holy Makkah Municipality, sign a partnership agreement yesterday.

PHOTO: SHOPUP

Al-Arafah Islami Bank signs deal with Nagorik Specialised Hospital

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Al-Arafah Islami Bank PLC has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Nagorik Specialised Hospital Limited.

Md Abdullah Al Mamun, deputy managing director of Al-Arafah Islami Bank PLC, and AKM Ahsan Habib, managing director of Nagorik Specialised Hospital Limited, signed the MoU at the bank's head office in Dhaka recently, according to a press release.

Under the MoU, the bank's modern network facilities will enhance the hospital's bill collection and financial

management capabilities.

In addition, all officers, employees, and cardholders of the bank will enjoy exclusive benefits and discounts at the hospital. Tasnuva Akter, chairman and associate professor of Nagorik Specialised Hospital; Omar Siddiqui, assistant professor and adviser; and Md Mustafizul Alam, assistant manager, attended the programme.

The agreement will further expand the use of modern and innovative banking technology and open up new horizons for safe, reliable, and effective financial management for corporate customers in the healthcare sector, the release added.



AKM Ahsan Habib, managing director of Nagorik Specialised Hospital Limited, and Md Abdullah Al Mamun, deputy managing director of Al-Arafah Islami Bank PLC, exchange signed documents of the memorandum of understanding at the bank's head office in Dhaka recently.

PHOTO: AL-ARAFAH ISLAMI BANK

Standard Bank holds business review meeting

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Standard Bank PLC yesterday organised its "Business Review Meeting 2026" at the bank's head office in Dhaka.

Mohammed Abdul Aziz, chairman of Standard Bank PLC, inaugurated the programme as the chief guest, according to a press release.

In his address, Aziz called upon all concerned to work with dedication, sincerity, and a strong sense of responsibility to achieve the bank's goals and objectives.

Md Siddiqur Rahman, acting managing director of the bank, presided over the meeting. He reviewed the overall business performance and provided

strategic guidance to address prevailing domestic and global challenges in achieving the bank's targets for 2026.

Gulzar Ahmed, vice chairman of the bank, attended as the special guest and emphasised the importance of working with a service-oriented mindset to ensure the bank's overall progress and success.

Sk Sirajul Kabir, head of the special asset management division; Md Monsur Ahmed, head of the investment risk management division; Mohammad Kaiser Alam Mozumder, head of the human resources division; Mohammad Salah Uddin, chief financial officer; and Shah Rahat Uddin Ahmed, head of treasury, attended the event.



Mohammed Abdul Aziz, chairman of Standard Bank PLC, attends the bank's "Business Review Meeting 2026" at its head office in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: STANDARD BANK

Citizens Bank opens Baligaon sub-branch in Munshiganj

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Citizens Bank PLC recently launched a new sub-branch at Baligaon in Munshiganj.

Alamgir Hossain, managing director of Citizens Bank PLC, inaugurated the sub-branch as the chief guest, according to a press release.

In his speech, Hossain said that Citizens Bank would place strong emphasis on the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector by providing tailored financing solutions, working capital support, trade finance facilities, and advisory services aimed at empowering local entrepreneurs to expand their businesses and remain competitive.

He further noted that retail banking customers would have access to a diverse range of deposit products, consumer loans,

remittance services, and modern digital banking solutions, all designed to address evolving financial needs and contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of the communities served by the bank.

Md Mostafizur Rahman and Md Abdul Latif, deputy managing directors of the bank, along with other high officials of the bank and local businessmen from different segments, were also present.



Alamgir Hossain, managing director of Citizens Bank PLC, inaugurates the bank's new sub-branch at Baligaon in Munshiganj recently.

PHOTO: CITIZENS BANK

Nagad presents awards to campaign winners

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Nagad Limited recently named ASM Noman Sarkar of Cumilla as the winner of the mega prize, a Royal Enfield motorcycle, in its campaign, titled "Asha Aar Fera, Surprise Sera".

Sarkar won the prize by participating in the campaign and completing transactions in compliance with all campaign conditions.

Md Motasem Billah, administrator of Nagad Limited, presented the motorcycle to the winner at a ceremony during the two-day Nagad Carnival held at the International School Dhaka (ISD) ground in Dhaka, according to a press release.

Participants in the campaign also won several other rewards, including scooters and iPhones, alongside the mega prize.

minute received mobile recharge rewards. Through this process, Nagad distributed thousands of small, medium, and large prizes.

Among other notable winners, Sani Bepari of Barishal won an iPhone, and Sohel Rana of Mymensingh won a scooter.



Md Motasem Billah, administrator of Nagad Limited, hands out awards to the winners of its recent campaign, titled "Asha Aar Fera, Surprise Sera", at the International School Dhaka (ISD) in the capital.

PHOTO: NAGAD

UK's trade preference shift offers Bangladesh

FROM PAGE B1

Until recently, however, the UK, like the EU GSP Plus, applied double-transformation rules of origin for apparel. Countries under Enhanced and Standard Preferences were required to undertake both fabric production and garment assembly domestically to qualify for duty-free access. The latest changes allow Enhanced Preferences beneficiaries to source up to 100 percent of apparel inputs from abroad while still qualifying for duty-free entry to the UK.

This shift is particularly significant given the UK's expanding network of free trade agreements with countries such as India and Vietnam, which have large-scale and deeply integrated supply capacities. Without greater flexibility, post-LDC

countries like Bangladesh would have faced a far tougher competitive environment, where nominal duty-free access coexisted with binding origin constraints, while FTA partners benefited from full tariff elimination and stronger backward linkages. Such an outcome would risk turning LDC graduation into an economic penalty, contrary to long-standing commitments to ensure smooth transitions.

What this means for exports and jobs

The UK is Bangladesh's third-largest export market, accounting for about 10 percent of total merchandise exports. Apparel makes up more than 90 percent of these shipments. In 2024,

Bangladesh exported roughly \$3.3 billion worth of clothing to the UK,

including \$2 billion in knitwear and \$1.3 billion in woven garments.

This distinction matters. Knitwear benefits from stronger domestic backward linkages and generally meets origin requirements. Woven apparel depends heavily on imported fabrics and is therefore far more exposed to restrictive rules of origin.

Under double-transformation requirements, a large share of woven exports would fail to qualify for preferences and face standard tariffs. Extending single-stage transformation under Enhanced Preferences substantially reduces post-graduation risks and moderates competitive pressure from other exporters gaining tariff-free access through UK trade agreements.

Quantitative modelling by

Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID) shows that rules of origin matter at least as much as tariffs in determining competitiveness. Under a counterfactual scenario with double-transformation requirements, annual apparel export losses were estimated at \$283 to \$350 million, mainly in woven garments. The UK's decision removes this barrier and averts these losses.

General equilibrium simulations using the GTAP framework suggest that without the DCTS changes, Bangladesh's apparel exports to the UK could have fallen by more than 25 percent as graduation coincided with stronger competition from FTA partners. With single-stage transformation retained, projected losses fall from about \$1.18 billion

to around \$150 million, reflecting competition rather than binding origin rules.

Based on current employment intensity, this policy shift is estimated to safeguard close to 100,000 jobs, more than half held by women. This is significant amid a sharp decline in female participation in manufacturing over the past decade.

What the UK got right

Allowing single-stage transformation under Enhanced Preferences reduces the risk of abrupt export losses after LDC graduation and supports a more predictable adjustment. It sets a constructive benchmark for post-LDC trade engagement and offers a reference point for discussions with other partners, particularly the European Union.

Rules of origin flexibility, however, should be seen as a transition tool rather than an endpoint. Long-term competitiveness will still depend on strengthening domestic textile capacity and backward linkages.

The UK's approach shows that LDC graduation need not be economically punitive if trade preferences are designed with the evolving competitive landscape in mind. It also raises the bar for other partners, where rigid origin rules risk turning graduation into a disruptive shock rather than a managed transition.

The author is an economist and chairman of Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID). He can be reached at ma.razaque@gmail.com

Six new rice varieties approved for nationwide cultivation

Varieties boast high vitamin content, high yield, and tolerance to adverse conditions

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Ministry of Agriculture has approved six new rice varieties, including two hybrids, for nationwide cultivation, aiming to boost production and strengthen food security for a growing population.

With the approval, the total number of rice varieties developed by the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) rises to 127, according to a press release.

The six rice varieties include one enriched with vitamin E, one high-yielding and lodging-resistant, and another tolerant to salinity and also resistant to blast disease.

Three other varieties include a cold-tolerant strain for haor regions and two hybrid strains designed to withstand lodging.

The newly developed BRRI Dhan 115 is a vitamin E- and antioxidant-rich variety. It is also Bangladesh's first high-yielding black rice variety.

Its grains contain 14.98 mg/kg vitamin E and 29.12 mg/kg C3G, a beneficial antioxidant. The average yield is 7.4 tonnes per hectare, the statement said.

BRRI Dhan 116 is a high-yielding, late-maturing variety for the Boro season. The plant is strong and sturdy, making it resistant to lodging.

Lodging in rice refers to the bending of stems near ground level. This makes the crop difficult to harvest, causing a significant drop in yield. Therefore, lodging resistant crops generally produce higher yields.

In yield trials across ten regions, this variety produced about 13.75 percent higher yields than BRRI Dhan 92. The grain is also finer than that of BRRI Dhan 92, making the new variety a potential



PHOTO: COLLECTED

With the approval, the total number of rice varieties developed by the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) rises to 127.

substitute for the old one. The average yield is 8.59 tonnes per hectare. Moreover, it can reach the maximum yield of up to 10.36 tonnes per hectare.

BRRI Dhan 117 is a short-duration, salt tolerant, and blast disease-resistant variety for the Boro season. Its average yield is 8.6 tonnes per hectare, which can increase to as much as 9.90 tonnes per hectare. The protein content of the grains is 9.3 percent.

BRRI Dhan 118 is a cold-tolerant rice variety suitable for haor regions.

Usually, haor areas experience

unexpected flooding around the time rice reaches its semi-mature to mature state, causing a huge drop in yield. However, BRRI Dhan 118 can be sown early, and it will be at the reproductive stage during such floodings. As it is cold-tolerant at that stage, it will survive through the submersion.

Such a situation will not cause sterility, and the variety can yield at least 6.0 tonnes per hectare. The medium-sized grain has a protein content of 9.1 percent.

BRRI Hybrid Dhan 9 is lodging-tolerant and salt-tolerant to some extent.

From seedling to maturity, it can tolerate salinity levels of 4-8 dS/m. In coastal regions, the yield is 6.5-7.0 tonnes per hectare. The grains are medium in size, and the protein content is 9.3 percent.

BRRI Hybrid Dhan 10 is also lodging-tolerant. Under normal field conditions, farmers can gain yields of 9.7-10.7 tonnes per hectare. The grains are slender, and the protein content is 9.1 percent.

Including the newly developed varieties, BRRI has developed 39 rice varieties that are tolerant to adverse conditions such as floods, drought, salinity, and waterlogging, the statement said.

US, India unveil interim trade framework

REUTERS, Washington, New Delhi

The United States and India moved closer to a trade pact on Friday, releasing an interim framework that would lower tariffs, reshape energy ties and deepen economic cooperation as both countries seek to realign global supply chains.

The framework reaffirms a commitment to negotiations toward a broader bilateral trade agreement, the two governments said in a joint statement, while noting that further negotiations were needed to complete the pact.

Separately, US President Donald Trump in an executive order removed the additional 25 percent tariff imposed on Indian goods for Russian oil purchases as New Delhi "committed to stop directly or indirectly importing" Russian oil.

However, US officials will monitor and recommend reinstating the tariff if India resumes oil procurement from Russia, the order said, as Washington maintains pressure on India to restrict energy ties with Moscow.

The India-US joint statement did not mention India's Russian oil purchases or a formal pledge from India to confirm the move.

Trump announced a deal with India on Monday to cut US tariffs on Indian goods to 18 percent from 50 percent in exchange for India halting purchases of Russian oil and lowering trade barriers.

Half of the 50 percent rate had been imposed separately by Trump as punishment for India's purchases of Russian oil, which he said were fuelling Moscow's war effort in Ukraine. Trump signed an executive order on Friday rescinding that 25 percent portion after India agreed this week to shift its oil buying to the US and Venezuela. However, the statement indicated that New Delhi resisted Washington's push to broadly open its agricultural market.

Trade Minister Piyush Goyal said the agreement safeguards farmers' interests and rural livelihoods by "completely protecting sensitive agricultural and dairy products".

Imports of genetically modified agricultural products would not be directly allowed as there was no such provision in the pact, while fruits like apples would be allowed under a tariff quota, he said at a press briefing.

Allergy drugs emerge

FROM PAGE B1

sales of cholesterol and hypertension medicines grew by more than 50 percent, while diabetic medicines rose by 37 percent.

ACI's Zaman pointed out that while cholesterol-lowering drugs are used globally, the high incidence of hypertension and heart disease in Bangladesh is largely influenced by dietary habits alongside genetic factors.

"Increased protein intake over the past 10 to 20 years has contributed to rising cases of hypercholesterolemia and other cardiovascular conditions," he said.

He cautioned that without greater public awareness about fatty food consumption and improved health education, these trends are likely to worsen in the future.

Yet none match the dominance of gastric and ulcer treatments, which reached Tk 5,444 crore in the first nine months of last year, an 8 percent increase from the same period in 2024.

These account for roughly 15 percent of total pharmaceutical sales, a figure that says much about Bangladeshi

eating habits.

The top three acid-suppressing medicines - Healthcare's Sergel, Renata PLC's Maxpro and Incepta Pharmaceutical's Pantonix - together generated nearly Tk 1,900 crore in sales.

Sergel alone notched Tk 918 crore.

The trio has held the top spots for at least four years. Other leading names in the top 10, including Radiant Pharmaceutical's Exium and Square Pharmaceutical's Seclo and Nexum, also saw strong demand for similar conditions.

Beximco Pharmaceutical's Napa and Bisoran, Square's Sef-3, and ACME Laboratories' Monas were additional top performers, each recording sales exceeding Tk 200 crore during this period.

"People's eating habits are the main reason for the high demand for gastric and ulcer medicines," said AMShamim, founder and managing director of Labaid Group.

"Here, people prefer very spicy foods, which often cause gastric problems. Their meal routines are also irregular,

so sales of gastric medicines are the highest in the country. We also see this trend in diagnostic centres."

He added that people have become more health-conscious and now get tested whenever they feel unwell, which has led to more diagnoses of cholesterol problems.

Meanwhile, ACI's Zaman noted that the unusually high consumption of hyper-acidity medicines is largely driven by food adulteration and the widespread intake of spicy and compromised food ingredients.

"These factors have made acidity-related conditions extremely common, leading to routine prescription and over the counter use of medicines such as raniidine, omeprazole and esomeprazole for decades," he said.

He recalls that even in the 1990s, international pharmaceutical companies were surprised by the volume of these drugs consumed locally.

After gastric medicines, antibiotics ranked second, with sales reaching Tk 2,255 crore, up 7 percent year-on-year.

Over 76% of voters interpret

FROM PAGE B1

their understanding of development is largely tied to conventional infrastructure-focused models.

She said that such a narrow perception could, over time, overshadow critical issues such as sustainable development, environmental protection and climate adaptation.

Despite the dominance of infrastructure in how development is defined, voters identified the environment, education and health as their top three aspirations for the next decade.

Education ranked as the highest priority across all age groups, according to the survey.

Among social indicators, health and quality education emerged as the most pressing concerns for Bangladesh in the years ahead. Many of these challenges, however, are closely linked to environmental degradation, said CPD.

The survey also found that voters have yet to fully grasp the role of energy transition in environmental

protection and restoration.

Most respondents focused on immediate and visible environmental problems, while struggling to link renewable energy or the phase-out of fossil fuels with day-to-day environmental challenges.

When asked about environmental problems, voters cited air pollution, rising temperatures and health hazards as the top three sources of public suffering. Yet the solutions they proposed largely remained traditional, such as planting trees or reducing plastic use.

"This shows that they are not really thinking about why these problems are occurring," Moazzem said, pointing to a lack of attention to industrial emissions, brick kilns, unregulated chemical industries, river filling and sand extraction.

He said this could reflect limited awareness, fear of challenging powerful interests, or political reluctance to confront the root causes of pollution.

If meaningful change is to occur, Moazzem said, authorities

must rein in groups responsible for environmental degradation, including those involved in illegal industrial units, brick and sand businesses and river encroachment.

While political parties have issued national-level election manifestos, he said similar commitments are needed at the local government level, backed by concrete action.

He said area-based employment is important, but it should not come at the cost of environmental damage through brick kilns, sand mining or real estate development on reclaimed land.

Moazzem said members of parliament, local institutions and the government must work together to promote environmentally sustainable, green jobs, alongside investments in health and education.

He also stressed third-party monitoring to assess whether manifesto promises are realistic and implemented, calling for stronger involvement of civil society and respected community members at the local level.

Govt to seal US trade deal tomorrow

FROM PAGE B1

The prospect of preferential access has already shifted sourcing patterns. Imports of cotton and soybeans from America have increased as Bangladeshi millers and traders redirect their purchases from other countries.

The signing ceremony will be held in a hybrid format. Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin and Secretary Rahman will attend virtually, while a handful of senior commerce ministry officials will travel to Washington to attend in person alongside their American counterparts.

"We will send the documents to the US as only a few of our officials will fly there to attend the deal signing ceremony," Secretary Rahman said.

The commerce adviser cannot attend in person because the government has only one working day before the national elections

scheduled for February 12, he added.

The agreement follows intense negotiations to reduce the US tariff burden on Bangladesh. The country exports more than \$8 billion worth of goods to the US but imports only \$2 billion, creating a substantial trade gap.

In his Liberation Day announcement on April 2 last year, US President Donald Trump imposed a 37 percent additive reciprocal tariff on Bangladeshi exports. After negotiations, the Trump administration agreed to lower the rate to 20 percent in exchange for Bangladesh's commitment to import more US products.

Bangladesh has pledged to buy American aircraft from Boeing, along with greater quantities of cotton, soybeans, liquefied petroleum gas and other goods to reduce the trade gap with the US. An agreement has

been signed to import 3.5 million tonnes of wheat from America over five years, with approximately 660,000 tonnes already purchased.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association said in a statement that negotiations with the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) regarding the deal have been ongoing for over six months.

"Although we are informed that a formal trade deal will be signed on February 9, we urge the Ministry of Commerce and all parties negotiating with the USTR to ensure that the signing is completed within this timeframe so that Bangladesh can start preparing itself with the preferential deal of utilising US cotton to attain zero tariff access, which we understand as the centrepiece of the trade deal," the association added.

EPA with Japan to benefit apparel

FROM PAGE B1

In fiscal year 2024-25, Bangladesh exported \$1.41 billion worth of garments to Japan, while Japan's total global imports stood at approximately \$23 billion.

Japan is the world's second-largest garment importing country after the United States when considered as a single market. Despite this scale, Japan currently accounts for only about 3 percent of Bangladesh's total garment exports.

As Bangladesh aspires to reach \$100 billion in garment exports by 2035, having the EPA in effect and increasing Japan's share to at least 10 percent should be a clear strategic objective. An initial assessment of the EPA shows that it favours Bangladesh's ready-made garment sector by ensuring uninterrupted duty-free market access and maintaining favourable rules of origin.

At present, Bangladesh enjoys duty-free access to Japan under the GSP scheme. However, post-LDC graduation, Bangladesh would otherwise face Japan's general Most Favoured Nation (MFN) tariffs, which range from 8 to 15 percent for knitwear and from 10 percent to more than 15 percent for woven garments.

The BGMEA also said that under the EPA, customs duties on garment items will be eliminated entirely from the date of entry into force.

Furthermore, Bangladesh is deeply thankful to Japan for the extraordinary flexibility extended in the rules of origin, particularly for garment products, the association said.

Chapter 3 and Annex 2 of the agreement specify that garments produced under single-stage processing will qualify for duty-free access in Japan under the EPA. This is similar to the current Japan GSP rules of origin

and is among the most favourable arrangements for a garment-exporting country like Bangladesh.

As the EPA creates a favourable and predictable trade environment, it is now imperative for Bangladesh to develop a clear roadmap to fully utilise its benefits and potential in line with the \$100 billion garment export vision.

Bangladesh currently runs a trade deficit of approximately \$456 million with Japan. The BGMEA believes the EPA will also play a significant role in reducing this gap. It presents an opportunity to diversify exports beyond garments while encouraging greater engagement from Japanese garment importers, retailers, machinery suppliers, and long-term investors.

The Japan-Bangladesh EPA should be seen as the beginning of a broader and much-needed shift in Bangladesh's trade policy direction.

Traders split over keeping shops

FROM PAGE B1

They urged people not to be misled.

Earlier in the day, the Shop Business Owners' Association, launched in 2022, said it has decided to keep shops, commercial establishments and malls across Bangladesh closed for two days, including on February 12.

In a press statement, the association said the decision was taken to ensure broader public participation in the polls and the referendum.

The government had earlier declared a general holiday on February 11, the day preceding the election, while election day itself, February 12, is already observed as a

general holiday.

In addition, the Ministry of Labour and Employment has declared a general holiday on Tuesday, February 10, for workers and employees in various industrial zones.

As a result, industrial workers will enjoy three consecutive holidays from February 10 to 12.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Bangladesh Police
Office of the Commanding Officer, Rapid Action Battalion-14
Aqua Bypass, Mymensingh
Invitation for e-Tender

For Financial year 2025-2026, e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP system portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of:

Sl	Tender ID No & Reference No	Description of Works	Last Selling Date & Time	Closing/Opening Date & Time
1.	1222132, RAB-14/14208/Q/Repair/1 Date: 05/02/2026	Repair and Maintenance of DAD Mess, CQ Store, and Force Mess of Jamalpur Camp, CPC-1, RAB-14.	22-Feb-2026 17:00	23-Feb-2026 13:00
2.	1222133, RAB-14/14208/Q/Repair/2 Date: 05/02/2026	Repair and Maintenance of boundary wall with painting, installation of barbed wire fence on the wall, repair of RP post and motorcycle garage of Bhairab Camp, CPC-2, RAB-14.	22-Feb-2026 17:00	23-Feb-2026 13:00
3.	1222134, RAB-14/14208/Q/Repair/3 Date: 05/02/2026	Repair and Maintenance of force line toilet pipeline, submersible pump, DAD line, Recreation room, officers' waiting room, Kote, CQ store racks, trunks, installation of 03 toilet tins and 03 wash basins outside, and boundary wall of Tangail Camp, CPC-3, RAB-14.	22-Feb-2026 17:00	23-Feb-2026 13:00
4.	1222135, RAB-14/14208/Q/Repair/4 Date: 05/02/2026	Repair and Maintenance of force mess doors and windows, installation of barbed wire security fence on the wall, permanent security light poles with electric lines, and renovation of separate washrooms for female RAB members of Tangail Camp, CPC-3, RAB-14.	22-Feb-2026 17:00	23-Feb-2026 13:00

This is an Online tender, where only e-tender will be accepted in the national e-GP portal and no offline/Hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-tender, registration in the national e-GP portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-tender Documents from the national e-GP portal have to be deposited online through any Registered bank branches. Further information and guide lines are available in national e-GP system portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd). For details, please contact at 01777711403 (Senior Assistant Director, Quarter Master, RAB-14).


NAIMUL HASSAN
Addl DIG
CO, Rab-14, Mymensingh
Phone: 02223376750

GD-275

MONTHLY BUSINESS REVIEW

Crisis at Ctg port over new mooring terminal

Chattogram Port hit a stalemate after the High Court on January 29 rejected a petition against awarding the New Mooring Container Terminal to UAE-based DP World under a 15-year PPP. Workers and unions began an indefinite strike, citing threats to jobs and national interest, paralysing half the port's container traffic. The port handles over 90 percent of Bangladesh's trade. This work stoppage, continuing into February, backs up vessels. It is threatening RMG exports and essential imports, and creating a critical supply chain bottleneck.



REMITTANCES SOAR 45% IN JAN

RECORD INFLOW

\$3.17b

9-MONTH HIGH
▲ 45% YoY



REASONS



RAMADAN & EID



ELECTION



STABLE EXCHANGE RATE

IMPACT



FX RESERVES
\$28.9b ▲



BB BUYS
\$3.93b
FROM INTERBANK MARKET

FY26 (JUL-JAN)

TOTAL INFLOWS:

\$19.44b

▲ 21.8% YoY

EXPORTS STEADY AMID ELECTION CAUTION



January exports: **\$4.41b**

▲ **11.22%**
from December

▼ **0.5%**
year-on-year

Trend

- 6th straight month of decline
- Cautious orders ahead of election

FY26 (Jul-Jan)

Total exports: **\$28.41b**

▼ 1.93% YoY

Garments:	\$22.98b	▼ 2.43%
Knitwear:	\$12.28b	▼ 3.13%
Woven:	\$10.69b	▼ 1.60%

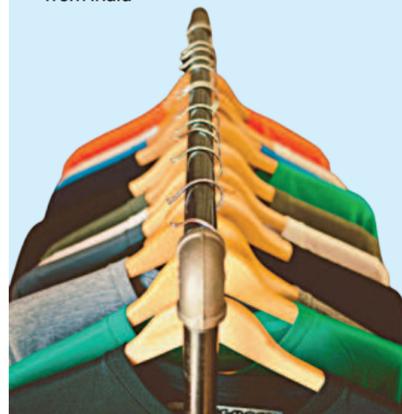
Outlook

- Order rebound expected after Feb election
- Stronger pickup likely from June

Apparel makers, spinners at loggerheads over duty-free imports

BTMA's stand

- 10-30 count duty-free yarn imports from India threaten local mills
- 78% of yarn imports in 2024-25 came from India
- Domestic stock: **Tk 12,500 crore** unsold
- Many mills run at **60%** capacity due to gas shortage
- Only **10-30 count** yarn should be restricted; others open
- High bank interest (around 16%) and financial obligations risking mills



BGMEA & BKMEA's stand

- Against ending duty-free yarn imports
- Say local yarn is costlier than imports
- Fear higher costs will hurt export competitiveness

Gold Market Sees Sharp Swings

The price of one bhorī of 22-carat gold rose by Tk 32,892 to Tk 2.55 lakh, temporarily peaking at Tk 2.86 lakh on January 29, with 18 price changes and a Tk 15,746 drop in 24 hours.



Pay Commission Proposes Major Hike

Salary hike

- Minimum: **Tk 8,250 → Tk 20,000**
- Maximum: **Tk 78,000 → Tk 160,000**
- Increase range: **100-142%**
- 20** new pay scales proposed

Expenditure impact

- Additional annual cost: **Tk 1.06 lakh cr**
- Current spending: **Tk 1.31 lakh cr** (14 lakh employees + 9 lakh pensioners)

Pensions & benefits

- Pension < **Tk 20,000** → **nearly doubled**
- Pension **Tk 20,000-40,000** → **+75%**
- Pension > **Tk 40,000** → **+55%**
- Pahela Baishakh allowance: **20% → 50%**
- Tiffin allowance: **Tk 200 → Tk 1,000** (grades 11-20)
- Health insurance & welfare reforms recommended
- Tk 2,000/month** allowance for employees with disabled children



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