

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.

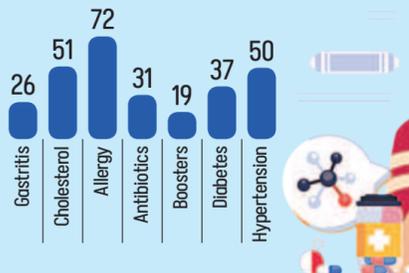
"Although many people believe Covid-19 vaccines caused the rise in skin diseases, there is no evidence to support this," he added.

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

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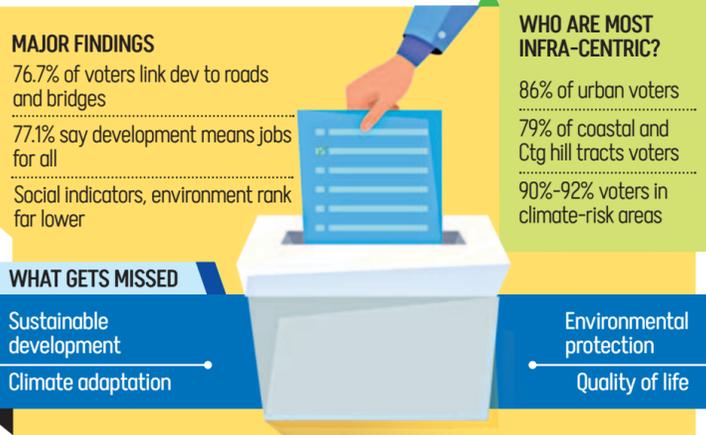
More than 76 percent of voters see development as building new roads, bridges and culverts, according to a survey, even as major political parties increasingly speak of sustainable development.

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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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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Traders split over keeping shops, malls open during polls

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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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EPA with Japan to benefit apparel

BGMEA says

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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. READ MORE ON B3