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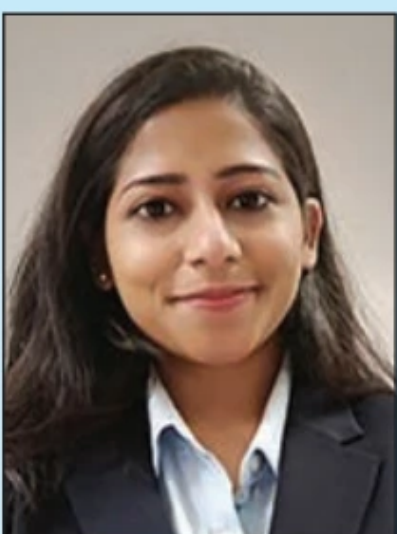
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## Asia Pharma Expo 2025 set to stimulate innovation and manufacturing growth in Bangladesh pharma industry

OUR BUREAU, MUMBAI

**T**HE 16th Asia Pharma Expo 2025 and Asia Lab Expo 2025, South Asia's premier international pharmaceutical trade platform, are set to take place at the Bangladesh China Friendship Exhibition Center (BCFEC), Purbachal, Dhaka, from February 12-14, 2025. This landmark event will not only showcase cutting-edge advancements

in pharmaceutical manufacturing technologies but also play a crucial role in accelerating Bangladesh's pharmaceutical industry's global expansion.

With over 800 exhibiting companies from 32+ countries, this year's expo marks an unparalleled opportunity for local and international stakeholders to collaborate, exchange knowledge, and forge new partnerships in the pharmaceutical industry.

The Asia Pharma Expo 2025 will feature an extensive display of cutting-edge pharmaceutical technology and solutions, including pharmaceutical processing and packaging machinery, APIs, bulk drugs, excipients, and additives; cleanroom and automation technologies; sustainable water and waste management solutions; and advanced software for pharma industry management.

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# Why is Asia Set to Dominate the Future of Pharma R&D?



DR SANJAY AGRAWAL

**A**SIA has emerged as a dynamic force in the global pharmaceutical landscape, transforming into a hub for research and development (R&D). With advancements in technology, supportive regulatory frameworks, and a growing talent pool, the region is poised to redefine the future of pharmaceutical innovation. Countries like India, China, South Korea, Singapore, and Bangladesh are driving this transformation, creating an ecosystem conducive to cutting-edge research, clinical trials, and drug development.

Among these, Bangladesh stands out as a rising star, showcasing how a focused strategy on affordable drug production, government-backed initiatives, and export-oriented growth can transform a developing nation into a significant player in the global pharmaceutical market. The progress of the Bangladeshi pharma industry highlights Asia's growing prominence and underscores the potential of the region to shape the future of global healthcare.

## Key Factors Driving Asia's Emergence as an R&D Hub

### 1. Cost-Effectiveness and Infrastructure

One of the most compelling reasons for Asia's growing prominence in pharma R&D is its cost advantage. Conducting clinical trials, manufacturing, and research in Asia costs significantly less than in the United States or Europe, making it an attractive destination for global pharmaceutical companies. Countries such as India and China offer a unique combination of low costs and high-quality infrastructure, ensuring compliance with global standards.

### 2. Expanding Talent Pool

Asia's educational institutions and research centers are producing a steady stream of highly skilled professionals in science, technology, and healthcare. Countries like India and China are home to some of the world's largest pools of STEM graduates, many of whom are actively contributing to pharmaceutical R&D. Additionally, countries like South Korea and Singapore are heavily investing in specialized training programs to further enhance their workforce capabilities.

### 3. Government Support and Incentives

Asian governments have been instrumental in fostering an environment conducive to R&D. Many countries offer tax incentives, grants, and streamlined regulatory processes to encourage investments in pharmaceutical research. For instance, Singapore has established itself as a biomedical hub through strategic government initiatives, while China's regulatory reforms have expedited drug approval processes.



### 4. Strategic Collaborations and Investments

Global pharmaceutical giants are increasingly collaborating with Asian companies to leverage the region's expertise and resources. Partnerships, mergers, and joint ventures have become common as companies aim to accelerate innovation. For example, India's Sun Pharma and China's WuXi AppTec have partnered with global firms to conduct advanced research and drug development.

### 5. Focus on Precision Medicine and Emerging Technologies

Asia is at the forefront of leveraging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and genomics to revolutionize pharma R&D. Countries like South Korea and Japan are investing heavily in precision medicine, using genetic profiling to develop targeted therapies for chronic diseases and rare conditions.

### Asia's Contribution to Clinical Trials

The region has become a preferred destination for clinical trials due to its diverse population, which offers a genetic and ethnic mix ideal for testing new drugs. India and China, in particular, host a significant share of global clinical trials, supported by their large patient populations, skilled professionals, and robust regulatory frameworks.

### The Role of Asia in Combating Global Health Challenges

Asia has played a pivotal role in addressing global health crises. For



instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian countries led vaccine development and production. India's Serum Institute of India emerged as the world's largest vaccine producer, while China's Sinovac and Sinopharm vaccines were distributed globally. These efforts underscore Asia's capacity to innovate and respond to pressing healthcare needs.

### In Asia's Pharma R&D Revolution-Challenges, Future Prospects, and

### How Bangladesh is Leading the Charge?

Asia's pharmaceutical research and development (R&D) sector is undergoing a remarkable transformation, with the region emerging as a dominant force in the global healthcare landscape. However, the path forward is not without its challenges. Issues like intellectual property (IP) protection, regulatory inconsistencies, and gaps in infrastructure continue to pose significant hurdles for many countries. Yet, the region's unwavering commitment to innovation, coupled with an increase in investments and strategic collaborations, positions Asia for a bright future in global healthcare. As the continent continues to mature as an R&D powerhouse, it is on track to redefine the way pharmaceutical development is approached worldwide.

Among the countries making the most significant strides is Bangladesh. Once considered a minor player in the global pharmaceutical market, Bangladesh has rapidly ascended to become a key player in Asia's pharmaceutical growth. Over the past two decades, the country's pharmaceutical industry has experienced an extraordinary transformation. This change has been fueled by a combination of government support, strategic innovation, and a focus on export-driven growth. As a result, Bangladesh has not only emerged as a major producer of affordable medicines but also as a prime example of how a developing nation can leverage its resources to build a robust pharmaceutical sector.

With a thriving generic drug market, world-class manufacturing capabilities, and an eye toward global expansion, Bangladesh stands as a beacon of how a nation can overcome economic challenges and carve out a leadership role in the future of pharmaceutical development. By strengthening its position as an essential part of Asia's pharma R&D ecosystem, Bangladesh is paving the way for a healthier, more accessible future for people around the world.

### The Growth Trajectory of Bangladeshi Pharma

1. The TRIPS Exemption Advantage  
 A critical turning point for the Bangladeshi pharmaceutical industry was the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellec-

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tual Property Rights (TRIPS) exemption granted to least-developed countries (LDCs). This exemption, which allows LDCs to produce generic versions of patented drugs, has enabled Bangladeshi manufacturers to focus on affordable medicine production without the burden of IP constraints.

## 2. Domestic Market Expansion

The domestic pharmaceutical market in Bangladesh has grown significantly, with an annual growth rate of approximately 12-15%. Companies like Square Pharmaceuticals, Beximco Pharma, and Renata Limited dominate the market, catering to the healthcare needs of a rapidly growing population. These companies have invested heavily in modern manufacturing facilities and R&D, aligning with international standards.

## 3. Focus on Exports

Bangladesh has successfully positioned itself as a global supplier of affordable medicines, exporting to over 150 countries, including regulated markets like the European Union, the United States, and Australia. The country's ability to produce high-quality generic drugs at competitive prices has earned it a reputation as a reliable exporter. Additionally, Bangladeshi companies are expanding their product portfolios to include biosimilars, vaccines, and complex formulations, further enhancing their global competitiveness.

## Government Initiatives Driving Growth

### 1. Policy Support and Incentives

The Bangladeshi government has implemented policies to support the pharmaceutical industry, such as tax exemptions for R&D activities and subsidies for exports. The establishment of the Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API) Industrial Park in Munshiganj is a testament to the government's commitment to reducing dependency on imported APIs and fostering self-reliance.

### 2. Regulatory Reforms

Bangladesh's regulatory framework has evolved significantly to align with global standards. The Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) has introduced measures to ensure quality control, streamline drug approvals, and enhance pharmacovigilance.

## 3. Investments in Infrastructure

Public and private investments in infrastructure have been pivotal in modernizing the pharmaceutical sector. State-of-the-art manufacturing facilities, equipped with advanced technologies, have enabled companies to meet stringent international standards, including USFDA, WHO-GMP, and EMA certifications.

## R&D and Innovation in Bangladeshi Pharma

While traditionally focused on generic drug production, Bangladeshi companies are now investing in R&D to develop innovative therapies. Biosimilars and complex formulations are areas of growing interest, with companies like Incepta Pharmaceuticals leading the way in vaccine development. Additionally, partnerships with international organizations and research institutions are fostering knowledge transfer and technological advancements.

## Challenges Faced by the Industry

Despite its impressive growth, the Bangladeshi pharmaceutical industry faces several challenges:

- **Dependence on API Imports:** The majority of APIs used in drug production are imported, primarily

from India and China. This dependency poses risks related to supply chain disruptions and cost fluctuations.

- **Skilled Workforce Shortage:** While the industry is growing, there is a need for more skilled professionals to meet the demands of advanced R&D and manufacturing.
- **Stringent Regulatory Compliance:** Entering regulated markets requires adherence to complex regulatory standards, which can be resource-intensive for smaller companies.

## Future Prospects and Opportunities

### 1. API Self-Reliance

The development of the API Industrial Park is expected to significantly reduce dependency on imports, enabling Bangladesh to produce raw materials domestically. This move will enhance the industry's resilience and cost-efficiency.

### 2. Focus on High-Value Products

Bangladeshi companies are increasingly targeting high-value products such as biologics, oncology drugs, and vaccines. These segments offer substantial growth opportunities, given the rising global demand for specialized therapies.

### 3. Digital Transformation

The adoption of digital technologies such as AI, big data, and automation is poised to revolutionize the pharmaceutical sector. These technologies can streamline drug development, enhance supply chain efficiency, and improve patient outcomes.


## 4. Expansion into Emerging Markets

Beyond regulated markets, Bangladeshi pharma companies are exploring opportunities in emerging markets across Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. These regions present untapped potential for affordable medicines.

## Conclusion

The Bangladeshi pharmaceutical industry is a shining example of how strategic policies, innovation, and resilience can transform a sector into a global powerhouse. As Bangladesh continues to invest in R&D, infrastructure, and workforce development, it is well-positioned to play a pivotal role in Asia's pharmaceutical R&D ecosystem. Combined with Asia's broader rise as a hub for pharma innovation, Bangladesh's progress underscores the region's potential to shape the future of global healthcare.

*(The author is Scientific Advisor of ALKOMEX GBN PHARMA GROUP U.S.A.)*



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