

Bangladesh



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Industry Participation in Policy Development

Tobacco industry (TI) interference in policy development intensified between April 2023 and March 2025. Nearly all incidents of interference focused on thwarting the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's initiative to amend the tobacco control law. There has also been a proliferation of third-party lobbying intended to influence policymakers and mass media, and to shift public opinion against the draft amendment, particularly the proposed ban on the manufacture, import, promotion, and marketing of e-cigarettes, vaping devices, and other electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS).

2. Industry CSR Activities

British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BATB) held several events under its flagship corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs such as BONAYAN (sapling distribution) and PROBAHO (safe drinking water projects). At least one event was attended by a Member of Parliament during the inauguration of safe drinking water booths funded through the PROBAHO program. In December 2023, the Bangladesh Sustainability Excellence Awards, launched by CSR Window and a national English-language daily, prominently featured BAT's global slogan "A Better Tomorrow."

3. Benefits to the Industry

Ongoing legal uncertainty regarding the placement of graphic health warnings (GHWs) on the upper half of tobacco packs has continued to hinder effective implementation of GHW requirements. In 2023, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) established an inquiry committee to investigate the Tk 2,054 crore tax waiver granted by its Large Taxpayer Unit to BATB, amid allegations that the waiver violated legal procedures. Additionally, the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority signed an agreement with Prime Leaf Processing Company Ltd. to establish factories in Export Processing Zones.

4. Unnecessary Interaction

The NBR once again recognized the owner of a Jarda company and BATB as top taxpayers. BATB's partnership with the Department of Agriculture Extension continued throughout the reporting period. In addition, the Ministry of Industries partnered with BATB on a project to develop a "sustainable model for sugarcane cultivation."

5. Transparency

The government maintained a policy of not disclosing meetings or interactions with the TI. Rules for disclosure or registration of TI entities, affiliated organizations, individuals, or lobbyists do not exist. The NBR continued to hold pre-budget meetings with BATB, Japan Tobacco International (JTI), the Bangladesh Cigarette Manufacturers' Association, and the Bidi Industry Owners' Association during the reporting period, where companies demanded that tobacco taxes not be increased.

6. Conflict of Interest

The government continued to hold an investment stake of 9.17 percent in BATB as of 30 April 2025. A number of current and former senior officials have also served as independent or non-executive directors of BATB, raising concerns about conflicts of interest.

7. Preventive Measures

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Railway formulated guidelines in 2019 for implementing Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC within their ministries and

subordinate agencies. These guidelines remain in effect, and the government requires the TI to submit monthly revenue and health surcharge statements.

However, there is still no comprehensive policy that prohibits all government officials from accepting contributions or gifts from the TI. Nor is there a clear prohibition on contributions from the TI more broadly. For elections, candidates are required under Section 44A of the Representation of the People Order (1972) to disclose contributions received to cover campaign expenses, but this is a general requirement and not tobacco-specific.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Expedite finalization of the draft amendment to the Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage (Control) Act.
2. Formulate comprehensive guidelines for all ministries and subordinate offices to implement Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC, and raise awareness in non-health sectors such as the Ministries of Finance, Industries, and Commerce.
3. Restrict the entry of new foreign and local tobacco companies, prohibit additional investments by the TI, and deny the establishment of new tobacco-related factories in Special Economic Zones and Export Processing Zones to protect public health.
4. Exclude cigarettes from the list of essential commodities by amending the Essential Commodity Act 1956.
5. Divest government investments from tobacco companies and end public officials' positions in such companies to prevent conflicts of interest.
6. Implement a simplified tobacco price and tax policy aligned with Article 6 of the WHO FCTC to reduce demand for tobacco.