

‘Digging deep for healthcare expenses’

People bear 68pc cost out of pocket, speakers tell pre-budget roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People bear 68 percent of the country’s healthcare expenses out of their pocket, while the government bears only 23 percent, said speakers at a pre-budget roundtable yesterday.

Special aid, NGO spending and contributions by other institutions make up the rest of the expenditure.

Stressing the need to keep seven to eight percent of the total budget for the health sector in the upcoming national budget, they said 45 percent of the total healthcare allocation should be kept for primary treatment.

They also emphasised on proper use of the allocation, as only 51 percent of the health budget’s development allocation was spent in the 2019-2020 fiscal; 84 percent of the management allocation was used.

The roundtable was jointly organised by Bangladesh Health Watch, Brac James P Grant School of Public Health, Brac University, and Unnayan Shamannay. It was held at the capital’s The Daily Star Centre.

“As citizens bear two-thirds of the healthcare expenditure, increasing the budget is important to reduce out-of-pocket spending,” said Prof Atiur Rahman, former governor of Bangladesh Bank, who presented the keynote paper in the programme virtually.

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Prof Atiur Rahman, Former BB governor

Atiur, also chairperson of Unnayan Shamannay, said 67 percent of out-of-pocket expenditure is spent to purchase medicine and other perishable medical products, and 33 percent goes to other healthcare-related expenditure.

Barrister Rumeen Farhana, a BNP lawmaker from the reserved seat, claimed that a person’s out-of-pocket expenditure was 60 percent in 2012, which has reached 72 to 74 percent.

According to a policy paper of the government dating back to 2012, the government’s plan is to bring personal expenditure on healthcare down to 32 percent by 2032. But it is increasing continuously, she said.

Rumeen said according to the WHO, 49 percent of people do not get quality healthcare services in the country. Besides, in the last 10 months of the current fiscal (2021-2022), only 41 percent of the allocated health budget has been spent so far.

Dr Syed Abdul Hamid of Dhaka University (DU) said the main obstacle to efficient expenditure is procurement-related complexities.

Stressing the need to bring back the centralised system for expenditure, he said the government is failing to spend efficiently after decentralisation.

Dr Habibe Millat, lawmaker from Sirajganj 2, said the health budget definitely needs to be increased, but its proper expenditure in every sector is also essential.

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Speakers at the roundtable at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

PRAYER
TIMING
JUNE 7



	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
Azan	4-05	12-45	5-00	6-45	8-15
Jamaat	4-40	1-15	5-15	6-50	8-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Constable dies as bus hits bike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A police personnel died after a bus hit his motorcycle in Dhaka’s Bangla Motor area under Hatirjheel Police Station yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Korban Ali Hossain (35), a constable working as computer operator at Police Telecom Bhaban in Rajarbagh area.

The bus of “Welcome Paribahan” hit Korban’s motorcycle as he was heading to office from his Savar residence, said Suman Hossain, a sub-inspector of Hatirjheel police. The constable died on the spot, the SI said.

Police seized the bus but its driver managed to flee.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.



PHOTO: RAHSED SHUMON

Commuters had to wait for hours on the roads yesterday due to gridlocks all throughout the city. The ongoing demonstrations of RMG workers in Mirpur and start of the work week may have exacerbated the usual traffic situation. This photo was taken from Mirpur Road in Science Lab area yesterday.



People from all walks of life took a moment to remember the brave men on duty, lost forever in the flames of the Sitakunda BM Container Depot explosion, by lighting candles at the steps of the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday. Sammilita Sangskritik Jote organised the event.

PHOTO: RAHSED SHUMON



Online healthcare service for rural people Says PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government will extend online specialised healthcare services to upazilas so that rural people get treatment from home.

The premier said this while inaugurating the golden jubilee celebration and the 14th convocation of Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons (BCPS) in the capital’s Mohakhali. Hasina joined the event virtually from her official residence Gono Bhaban.

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BRTA to get 96 new staffers against demand for 2,284

Regulatory body struggling to carry out field-level work for manpower crisis

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) is going to get 96 new staffers, but this is unlikely to solve its perennial workforce crisis, especially in regards to field-level work.

Against the demand for 2,284 posts, the road transport and bridges ministry recently created only 90 posts for the regulatory body. They will also get six executive magistrates.

Of the posts, only 16 are for vehicle inspectors and eight for assistant directors, two crucial posts for field-level offices.

Issuing fitness clearance for vehicles is one of the major duties of a vehicle inspector. Currently, only 123 inspectors are struggling to ensure fitness for tens of thousands of vehicles.

Unfit vehicles are one of the main reasons behind road crashes, which saw a sharp rise in the last few years and became a serious concern. At least 641 people were killed in 528 road accidents last month, Road Safety Foundation said yesterday.

However, once the new posts are filled up, BRTA will have a dedicated workforce in every district, a director in every divisional headquarters, and an additional circle in Dhaka.

Currently, BRTA performs its functions through 57 district and five metro offices – three in Dhaka and two in Chattogram.

Now, there will be a dedicated workforce in Narail, Lalmonirhat, Jhalakathi, Barguna, Panchagarh, Meherpur and Shariatpur. Currently, officials from other circles provide services in these places.

POOR WORKFORCE HINDERING SERVICES
Established in 1987, BRTA deals with a myriad of tasks – registering vehicles, issuing and renewing driving licences and several more.

But the transport regulator has been facing a severe shortage of staffers and requisite technology

» Ministry recently created 90 posts for BRTA

» Of the posts, 16 for vehicle inspectors, 8 for assistant directors

» BRTA to also get 6 exec magistrates

» 123 vehicle inspectors struggling to carry out work

Once new posts are filled, BRTA to have dedicated workforce in every district, a director in every divisional headquarters, an additional circle in Dhaka

to issue driving licences and vehicle-fitness clearances – two vital factors for road safety.

BRTA has 823 employees against the sanctioned posts of 702, according to its 2020-21 annual report. It has been asking the ministry for more people since 2016.

In its annual performance agreements, signed with the Road Transport and Highway Division, BRTA said lack of workforce has been its main problem for the last few years.

In January 2013, BRTA made its biggest recruitment in recent times – 149 people, including 50 vehicle inspectors.

The country then had around 18.5 lakh registered vehicles. Nine years later, the number has shot up to around 52.46 lakh. But BRTA recruited an insignificant number of staffers during his time.

In the last fiscal, vehicle inspectors checked the fitness of 6.75 lakh vehicles.

The inspectors are always under pressure, and the quality of inspections gets compromised often due to this. Moreover, the shortage of inspectors causes service seekers to wait a long time for fitness certificates.

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‘Increase allocation for education’

CAMPE submits memo to finance minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The upcoming budget should increase allocation in the education sector to make up for the losses during the Covid-19 pandemic, demanded Campaign For Popular Education (CAMPE), an education advocacy and campaign network, yesterday.

CAMPE, in a memorandum submitted to Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, demanded at least 20 percent of the budget for the education sector, blended learning approach for all institutions and uninterrupted internet services, said CAMPE deputy director KM Enamul Hoque.

It also demanded introduction of special stipend for female students who were victims of

DEMANDS

- » 20pc of budget for edu sector
- » Blended learning approach
- » Uninterrupted internet service
- » Stipend for female students
- » Separate commission to appoint teachers

child marriage during the pandemic so that they can continue their education.

The rights group proposed setting up a separate commission to appoint teachers.

CAMPE also made recommendations for a separate pay scale so that dynamic and talented young individuals are encouraged to take teaching as a profession.

The budget allocation for the education sector made up 11.91 percent of the total outlay in the 2020-21 fiscal year.

The share of the education in the GDP stood at 2.08 percent in the previous fiscal year.

The minister is scheduled to place the budget for the 2022-23 fiscal on Thursday.

FLOUR BALLS FOR MEDICINES!

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

They target medicines that are widely sold in the market, like Naproxen-Plus, Pantonex, Seclo, Monas and Finix. And they make the fake versions using flour and semolina.

Their next step is to lure pharmacy owners, which becomes easier as they halve the prices for them.

And just like that, their fake medicines have successfully penetrated the market.

This is how several organised syndicates are allegedly making and selling fake medicines.

The Detective Branch’s Lalbagh division has made over 50 arrests in connection to the syndicates. Fourteen cases have been filed so far against the arrestees, Razib Al Masud, DB deputy commissioner, told this correspondent yesterday.

Interestingly, they have permission from the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA). However, the permission is for manufacturing Unani medicines.

Fake medicines saw a rise in the markets after Unani medicines were out in tablet formats, claimed Razib.

Contacted, Ayub Hossain, director of DGDA, told The Daily Star yesterday that law enforcers are suspecting that those who have taken permission for Unani medicine are making the fake ones.

“We have a strong monitoring system and we take legal action whenever we find any anomalies,” said Ayub, also the spokesperson of DGDA. “We coordinate with law enforcers against such illegal activities as well and share information,” added Ayub, also the DGDA spokesperson.

BIGGEST HAUL TO DATE
During a special drive on Sunday, DB busted a fake medicine factory in Cumilla and recovered 22 lakh fake medicines from the factory and its warehouse in Savar, making it the biggest drive in recent times.

The arrestees are Morshed Alam Shaon (35), owner of Himalaya Laboratories; Kabir Hossain (44) from Savar’s warehouse; Al Amin Chanchal (35),

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