

# When health(care) comes at a high price



A CLOSER  
LOOK

Tasneem Tayeb  
is a columnist for The Daily Star.  
Her Twitter handle is  
@tasneem\_tayeb

TASNEEM TAYEB

Out-of-pocket (OOP) healthcare expenditure in Bangladesh has been growing at a steady pace, despite the government's decade-old promise to bring it down to 32 percent by 2032. According to Bangladesh National Health Accounts (BNHA) 1997-2020 data, from 62 percent in 2012, OOP healthcare expenditure in Bangladesh rose to 68.5 percent in 2020, which comes out to be Tk 77,734 crore and is equal to 2.8 percent of the GDP. Concerningly, data from the World Health Organization (WHO) suggests that the figure was 74 percent.

Over 64 percent of this expenditure pie accounts for drugs, followed by lab fees (at 11.7 percent), and then doctors (at 10.8 percent). This indicates that primary healthcare is still not fully accessible for all. A 2021 report from the Health

these figures give critical insights into the lack of understanding of lawmakers about the sufferings of the common people. While only 5.43 percent of the total budget for FY 2022-23 had been allocated for the health sector – a consistent move by policymakers of staying below the six percent threshold in health budget allocation, despite expert suggestions that this should be around 15 percent –, much of it is being focused in the secondary and tertiary sector, facilitating specialised treatment, and building hospitals and medical colleges.

But, with inflation rising and the purchasing power of people coming under significant stress, it is primary healthcare that the budget should be spent on. A WHO estimate suggested that in 2016, more than eight percent of Bangladeshis had



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**Over 64 percent of the out-of-pocket (OOP) expenditure pie accounts for drugs, followed by lab fees (at 11.7 percent), and then doctors (at 10.8 percent). This indicates that primary healthcare is still not fully accessible for all. A 2021 report from the Health Economics Unit of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare suggested that around 16.4 percent of patients did not – or could not – choose to avail healthcare services despite needing them, as OOP expenditure as percentage of the total health expenditure continued to witness an upward trend.**

Economics Unit of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare suggested that around 16.4 percent of patients did not – or could not – choose to avail healthcare services despite needing them, as OOP expenditure as percentage of the total health expenditure continued to witness an upward trend.

Read in the context of the government budget on health,

to spend more than one-fourth of their income on healthcare. Given the current scenario, things are only going to get tougher for the general populace to meet their medical expenses.

What is unfortunate is that unethical practices of pharmaceutical companies – of pushing their products into the market by rewarding doctors for

prescribing them to the patients – is causing OOP healthcare expenditure to rise. Pharma company sales representatives are often spotted outside doctors' chambers, bearing "engagement packages," often monetary in nature, and/or high-value goods and services to encourage doctors to prescribe medicines from their respective companies to their patients. As a result, except for a few bigger healthcare facilities, most doctors prescribe specific brands of medicines.

Similarly, the pharmacies are also made offers by these companies, pushing patients to buy specific brands of medicines. And given that regulation is lax in this sector, pharma companies are also able to play around with the pricing.

While ordinary people are already having trouble availing much-needed medication due to the greedy nature of pharma companies, the government itself hiked the prices of 19 generic drugs from 53 brands last year, much to the shock of middle and lower-middle class consumers. Prices of essential medicines,

including paracetamol, have been increased by at least five percent. Some of the prices are almost double of what they used to be before. For instance, one paracetamol tablet now costs Tk 1.20, while its price before the hike was Tk 0.70. And to add to that, pharma companies themselves have increased the prices of many medicines on multiple occasions. Increased costs of raw materials had been cited as the reason behind the price increase by the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA). But given that people's consumption ability has decreased in recent years due to galloping inflation, was it really the right time to increase medicine prices?

Under the Drugs (Control) Ordinance, 1982, the "government may, by notification in the official

gazette, fix the maximum price at which any medicine may be sold." This means that the government can set the maximum prices for all drugs. So why is it not intervening?

The differing prices of various tests at different healthcare facilities also bring into question the control of the government over the cost of such tests. From a simple CBC test to an MRI scan, the prices vary between healthcare facilities, brand names, and their locations. Why don't government agencies intervene and set a standard range within which everyone can afford these tests?

It is highly unfortunate that, while OOP healthcare expenditure is one of the highest in the region in Bangladesh, little is being done by the so-called regulators, policymakers, or the government to alleviate the sufferings of citizens.

It is high time authorities looked into the situation and made healthcare affordable for all. While increased budgetary allocation would be an essential component, its effective and exhaustive utilisation is also key. In the past, we have seen inadequate and misutilisation of even this meagre healthcare budget allocation. Regulators need to take a serious look into the misdeeds of the country's pharmaceutical companies and healthcare facilities, and take punitive actions, where required, so that they cannot exploit people's healthcare needs to make unethical and illegal gains. Access to affordable healthcare is a basic human right, and the relevant authorities should make sure that it is so in Bangladesh, too.



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Principal's Office

Bandarban Government College

Bandarban Hill District.

Telephone No:02333302021

Mobile No:01704447375

E-mail:bandarbancollege@gmail.com

Web site:bandarbangovtcollege.edu.bd

Memo No. BGC/CEDP/2022-23/13

Date: 25/01/2023

**e-Tender Notice: 02/2022-2023**

e-Tender is invite in the National e-Gp System portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following package;

Sl. No.	Tender ID. No.	Name of Package	Last Date and Time of Tender Security Submission	Tender Closing Date & Time
01	781962	G-12: Procurement of Desktop for different Department for Bandarban Govt. College, Bandarban Hill District	13- February-2023 01:00 PM	13- February-2023 02:00 PM

This is an on line tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-Gp portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-Gp portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-Gp system portal have to be deposited online through any registered Banks Branches up to 13-February-2023, 1:00 PM

Further information and guideline are available in the National e-Gp System portal and from e-Gp Help Desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)).



(Professor Md. Nuful Absar Chowdhury)

Principal

Bandarban Govt. College,

Bandarban

Mobile: 01704447375

e-Mail:bandarbancollege@gmail.com

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**Bangladesh Election Commission**

Identification System for Enhancing Access to Services (IDEA) Project (2nd Phase)

Nirbachan Bhaban (Floor-8), Agargaon, Dhaka-1207

**Invitation for Tenders**

1	Ministry/Division	Bangladesh Election Commission.		
2	Agency	Election Commission Secretariat.		
3	Procuring entity name	Represented by Project Director, Identification System for Enhancing Access to Services (IDEA) Project (2nd Phase), Bangladesh Election Commission.		
4	Procuring entity district	Dhaka.		
5	Invitation for	Purchasing of Microsoft System Support Software.		
6	Invitation Ref. No. & date	17.14.0000.240.07.100.2022/-265 Dated: 24 January, 2023		
<b>KEY INFORMATION</b>				
7	Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (OTM).		
<b>FUNDING INFORMATION</b>				
8	Budget and source of funds	GoB (Development Budget).		
<b>PARTICULAR INFORMATION</b>				
9	Project/program code (if applicable)	224331200		
10	Project name (if applicable)	Identification System for Enhancing Access to Services (IDEA) Project (2nd Phase).		
11	Tender Package No.	GD-34		
12	Tender package name	Purchasing of Microsoft Support Software.		
		<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	
13	Tender publication date	26 January, 2023		
14	Pre-tender meeting date and time	8 February, 2023		11:00am
15	Tender last selling date and time	22 February, 2023		04:00pm
16	Tender closing date and time	23 February, 2023		11:30am
17	Tender opening date and time	23 February, 2023		12:00pm
18	Name & address of the office(s)	Address		
Selling tender document (principal)		Assistant Director (Finance), Room No. 818, (Floor-8), Nirbachan Bhaban, Agargaon, Dhaka-1207.		
No conditions apply for sale, purchase or distribution of tender documents				
19	Pre-tender meeting	Conference Room No. 721, Nirbachan Bhaban (Floor-7), Agargaon, Dhaka-1207.		
20	Receiving tender document			
21	Opening tender document			
<b>INFORMATION FOR TENDERER</b>				
22	Eligibility of tenderer	1. Tender shall have the legal capacity to enter into the contract under the applicable law. 2. Tenderers shall be enrolled in the relevant professional or trade organization registered in Bangladesh. 3. Tenderers shall have to fulfil its obligation/obligations to pay taxes under the provisions of laws and regulations of Bangladesh. 4. Detail information has been provided in the document.		
23	Brief description of services	Purchasing of Microsoft System Support Software (M365 F3 FUSL Sub Per User, SQL Server Enterprise Core 2019 SLng 2L, Win Server DC Core 2022 SLng 2L, System Center DC Core 2022 SLng 16L, System Center DPM 2022 SLng OSE, Visual Studio Professional 2022, Visio LTSC Professional 2021, VisualSVN Server Enterprise Multinode License 25 user + Unlimited VDFS Repositories, Server, Server Farm Switch, Network Access Control (NAC) Installation (One-time Deployment) with 3 (three) Year's Service Support, Training) As specified in the Tender Document.		
24	Price of tender document (Tk)	BDT 4000.00 (Four thousand Taka only) non-refundable.		
25	Package No.	Identification of package	Location	Tender security amount (Tk)
	GD-34	Single	Dhaka	Microsoft System Support Software Tk. 24,00,000 (Twenty-four lac Taka only) as Pay Order/Bank Guaranty.
<b>PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS</b>				
26	Name of official inviting tender	Brigadier General Abul Hasnat Mohammad Sayem.		
27	Designation of official inviting tender	Project Director.		
28	Address of official inviting tender	Identification System for Enhancing Access to Services (IDEA) Project (2nd Phase), Nirbachan Bhaban (Floor-8), Agargaon, Dhaka-1207.		
29	Contact details of official inviting tender	Telephone: 00-88-02-55007594; e-mail address: <a href="mailto:pd.idea2.bd@gmail.com">pd.idea2.bd@gmail.com</a>		
30	The procuring entity reserves the right to reject all tenders or annul the tender proceedings.			



**Abul Hasnat Mohammad Sayem**

Brigadier General

Project Director

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