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BUDGET SUBSIDIES

## Big chunks go to power, fertiliser

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The allocation for subsidies in agriculture, food, and power will be raised considerably in the next budget, with an aim to ease inflationary pressure on people.

The subsidies are expected to cushion the blows of high prices of fuel, fertiliser, and food on the global market in the fallout from the Ukraine war, according to finance ministry officials.

The total subsidy allocation will be over Tk 1,10,000 crore in the next fiscal year. In the budget for this fiscal year, it was Tk 81,000 crore, which is likely to be revised to Tk 94,000 crore.

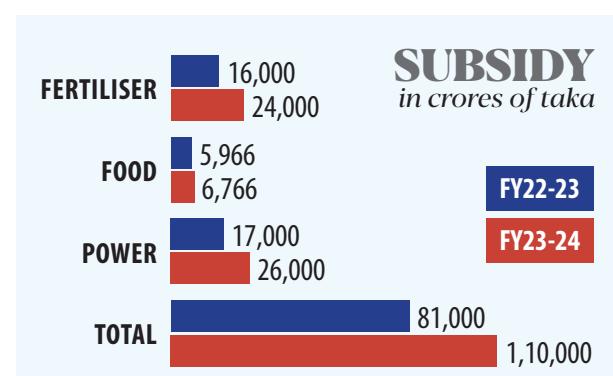
Subsidy in fertiliser has been increased gradually over the last few fiscal years to support farmers but now the prices of the agricultural inputs have risen in the international market and the weak Taka has made things worse.

The subsidy in fertiliser will be around Tk 24,000 crore in the next budget, up from Tk 16,000 crore in the original budget for the current fiscal year, said an official.

The government later increased the subsidy to Tk 26,000 crore in the revised budget for this fiscal year.

In the next budget, subsidy on food will be increased by Tk 800 crore to Tk 6,766 crore.

And the subsidy on power will be around Tk 26,000



crore, which was Tk 17,000 crore in the outgoing fiscal year, added the official.

Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank, said the government hiked power tariff but it is still paying capacity charges to power plants. The allocation might not be enough.

The economy would not benefit if the load shedding persists, he pointed out.

Planning Minister MA Mannan said there are two types of subsidies, "One is bad, and the other is good."

"We will not give subsidy to people who stay in air-conditioned rooms and travel by car. We will gradually reduce the bad subsidies and continue subsidising agriculture and food."

State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid yesterday said the government will not withdraw all subsidies from the power and energy sector in the next budget.

"If you suddenly remove the subsidy in an election year, there will be a huge impact," he said at a pre-budget dialogue organised by Forum for Energy Reporters Bangladesh at the Bidyut Bhawan.

Incentives (considered as subsidy) for remittance and export will not be enhanced in the next fiscal year since

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## UTILISING FUNDS Health ministry fares worst, yet again

 MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN and  
REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The health ministry continues to struggle with utilisation of funds allocated in the national budget, like it did in the past few years.

In the first 10 months of the current fiscal year of 2022-23, the ministry of health and family welfare has spent only 32.22 percent of its total Tk 12,189.77 crore allocation in the revised budget, according to an evaluation report by the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the Ministry of Planning.

In the revised budget, the health services division received of Tk 9,793.96 crore and the health education and family welfare division Tk 2,395.81 crore.

The two divisions of the health ministry won't be able to spend the unutilised funds in the last two months of the current fiscal, said ministry sources.

An unutilised fund means more people will be left out of government healthcare services, which has far-reaching consequences on public health, said Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed,

public health strategist and former director of Disease Control at the Directorate General of Health Services.

"The main reason is that utilisation of the health budget is poorly planned and lacks any vision," he told The Daily Star. Calling for prompt action, he urged the ministry high-ups to address all issues regarding capacity enhancement and bridge the gap between budget allocation and utilisation.

In the current fiscal, the health ministry has received the seventh

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Boy killed  
as rod from  
expressway  
falls on him

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A 12-year-old boy died after an iron rod fell on him from the Dhaka Elevated Expressway in the capital's Mohakhali area yesterday morning.

The identity of the deceased could not be known.

The boy was walking along the rail lines beneath the under-construction expressway around 9:30am when the rod fell on him.

Abdur Rahman Sheikh, a security guard of a nearby establishment, said he heard a bang followed by a scream.

"We rushed there and saw a boy lying on the rail line in a pool of blood," he said.

A rod was stuck in his head.

Locals took him to a hospital in Mohakhali. As his condition deteriorated, he was moved to Dhaka

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AL'S GAZIPUR DEBACLE  
Sadar, Gachha  
voters made  
the difference  
Party's evaluation meeting  
starts tomorrow

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Awami League mayor candidate Azmat Ullah Khan got 15,672 votes less than his rival in two thanas under Gazipur-2 constituency, and it eventually led to his defeat by 16,197 votes.

Of the thanas, Azmat lost to independent Zaida Khatun in 74 out of 96 polling centres in Sadar thana and beat his rival only in two out of 42 centres in Gachha thana.

Zaida, the mother of suspended Gazipur mayor and expelled AL leader Zahangir Alam, won the mayoral race in the Gazipur City Corporation election held on Thursday.

Azmat presented the figure before AL President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during a meeting at the Gonobhaban on Sunday afternoon.

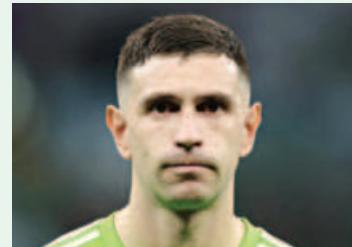
At the meeting, Hasina asked him why he thought he was defeated. She also wanted to know how many votes he got in the polling centres in three constituencies of Gazipur, said sources.

Gazipur City Corporation is comprised of parts of three constituencies -- Gazipur-1, -2 and -5.

AKM Mozammel Huq, minister of liberation war affairs, is the MP of Gazipur-1; Zahid Ahsan Russel,

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## Martinez excited about Dhaka visit



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Argentina's World Cup winning goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez, on his social media, expressed his excitement about his upcoming trip to the subcontinent.

The 30-year-old, who will tour the Indian subcontinent from July 3 to 5, wrote that he was excited to meet the Bangladesh fans, adding: 'Ami tomader bhalobashi'.

"Hello Everybody, I will be doing my maiden trip to Indian subcontinent from 3rd July to 5th July and will participate in many charitable activities including visiting as a chief guest

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Electricians installing wires on electric poles along the Dhaka-Aricha highway in Savar's Boilapur area yesterday. None of the three in this photo are wearing safety helmets.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

**Suspend DSA till  
it's 'improved  
significantly'**

Says UN special rapporteur

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter, has recommended suspending the Digital Security Act until it is significantly improved.

He has also expressed alarm at the chilling effect of the DSA as journalists, human rights defenders, opposition politicians and academics have been detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and freedom of opinion.

The UN official was speaking at a press briefing at a city hotel yesterday after wrapping up his 12-day tour to Bangladesh.

He visited Dhaka, Rangpur, Kurigram, Cox's Bazar and spoke to workers, farmers, civil society groups and government officials. He will present a report on his visit to the UN in Geneva in September.

Schutter said since the DSA came into force, more than 2,400 people have been prosecuted under the law and some of them were detained for a long time.

This is not normal that people who fight for human



Olivier De Schutter

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