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FERTILISER SUBSIDIES

Big farmers get half: WB

Top 20% landholders receive 50% of fertiliser subsidy

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The biggest 20 percent of landholders in Bangladesh receive half of fertiliser subsidies, while the smallest 40 percent get just 13 percent, exposing serious flaws in the costly government programme, according to a recent World Bank report.

The subsidy favours larger farms because benefits rise with the quantity of fertiliser purchases. Most farms are small: 92 percent operate less than 2.5 acres, and four in 10 are marginal holdings of less than half an acre, operating only 11 percent of farmland.

Ranked by income, the poorest 40 percent of farm households receive just over a third of direct benefits, while the richest fifth capture "almost twice its share of recipients", the World Bank said in its latest Bangladesh Development Update.

Indirect benefits through food prices and agricultural wages are also skewed towards better-off households, with the bottom 40 percent receiving about one-third.

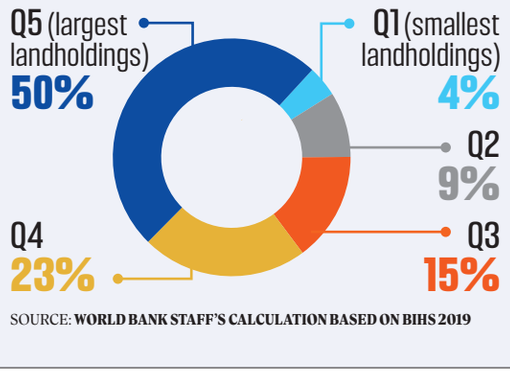
Fertiliser subsidy has nearly quadrupled to Tk 28,000 crore in five years. The World Bank has urged the government to phase out price controls and move to market-based pricing, while recommending direct support for small and marginal farmers through electronic vouchers linked to the farmer cards introduced by the BNP government.

Bangladesh spent Tk 1,02,024 crore on agricultural subsidies from FY2021-22 to FY2025-26, more than triple the previous five-year total, finance ministry data show.

The International Monetary Fund has also urged subsidy

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SHARE OF TOTAL FERTILISER SUBSIDY BY LAND QUINTILE (FY19)



SOURCE: WORLD BANK STAFF'S CALCULATION BASED ON BIHS 2019



Migrant workers wait at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport hoping to catch any flight to Saudi Arabia yesterday. After Houthi attacks, Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport has been closed until Saturday, leading to cancelled flights. Thousands of migrants with visa and job-rejoining deadlines are in trouble. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

PROBING FAKE NEWS

Press Council seeks suo moto powers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Press Council has sought the authority to launch suo moto investigations and take action against those spreading fake news, rumours and hate speech or violating journalistic ethics.

The quasi-judicial body has also proposed bringing online news portals under its jurisdiction, introducing a registration and certification system for journalists, and giving the council tribunal-like powers to adjudicate professional misconduct cases.

The proposals were

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Any flight to Saudi will do

Migrants run between airline offices and airport to get a flight before their visa, work-joining deadlines expire

TASNEEM TAYEB

Ridoy Ahmed was supposed to travel to Dammam for work, but with flights disrupted, he still does not know when he will be able to leave. His visa expires on October 17.

When The Daily Star met him at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday, he was heading towards the Biman Bangladesh Airlines office, hoping to find out what he should do next.

Some of the others The Daily Star spoke to are being placed in alternative flights to Jeddah or Medinah as airlines, recruiting agencies and government authorities try to keep migrant workers from losing valid travel windows and potentially their jobs, amid continued disruptions at two of Saudi Arabia's busiest airports.

All of Biman's Dhaka-Dammam and Dhaka-Riyadh flights would remain suspended until October 17. The airline said passengers needing to travel urgently could use Jeddah or Madinah instead and advised them to contact its sales centres for ticketing and travel arrangements.

According to the latest Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) figures, 62 flights have so far been affected by restricted operations at Saudi airports, involving 9,674 passengers. Many of them are migrant workers.

Mohammad Nasir, whose visa expires on October 20, was supposed to travel with US-Bangla Airlines. The carrier has suspended its Riyadh flights until October 21.

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HOUTHI STRIKES

MBS moves from palace to palace

Say reports as KSA probes air defence failure

AGENCIES

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) is being shuttled between heavily guarded palaces equipped with bunkers amid escalating Houthi attacks, according to reports.

Saudi Arabia faced its worst attack in a decade on Saturday after 13 were killed and at least 300 injured in an attack on Riyadh's international airport.

President Donald Trump has said that he is considering joining Saudi strikes on the Houthis while Riyadh's Makkah Pact allies have also voiced their support, reports The Independent.

Prince Salman, 41, has not been seen in public since last Tuesday when he made an appearance to give blood to support a national donation drive.

Since then, he has been shuttled between heavily guarded palaces that are equipped with bunkers, according to the Wall Street Journal citing officials familiar with his movements.

Houthis warn Riyadh airport, refinery and Aramco facility could be targeted if Sanaa oil site struck.

Saudi Arabia has launched an investigation to determine how its air defences failed to intercept a barrage of missiles and drones fired by Houthi rebels.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to comment publicly, said the initial probe showed that Houthis first fired multiple drones to pave the way for a mix of cruise and ballistic missiles to reach Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport.

The Houthis possess ballistic missiles and advanced systems fitted with warheads that can change direction during flight and pose a challenge to Patriot interceptors and other defence systems used by the Saudis, reports AP.

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