



To
Chief Reporter/News Editor

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Press Release

Press conference of 24 anti-tobacco organizations reaction to the Budget **Call for subsidies on healthy food by raising price and taxes of tobacco**

In the proposed budget without bringing any change in the price of lower and middle tier, the 10 sticks cigarette price remains same tk. 39 and tk. 63 as previous year. Moreover there are no changes in the price of biri, jorda and gul also. But, with the increase of per capita income, the inflation and price of regular essential products also increases. Considering that, the price of tobacco products is not increased in that rate. So these products becomes more available comparing to previous years. It will increase the health risk of poor and low income people specially teenager, adolescent and women. In this context, 24 anti-tobacco organizations working in tobacco control in Bangladesh have called for increasing the prices and taxes of harmful tobacco products and subsidizing healthy food. They also congratulated the 154 MP's who recommended for amendment of the Tobacco Control Act and tax hike. They urged this at a press conference on the virtual meeting platform 'Zoom' on Tuesday (June 6, 2021) at 11am. The press conference was organized to respond on the proposed price and tax on tobacco products in the budget.

SM Abdullah, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Dhaka University, delivered the keynote address at the press conference. He said, about 72% smokers in Bangladesh smokes lower tier cigarettes. The lower and middle tier cigarette users combines almost 84% of smokers. The prices and taxes of low- and mid-range cigarettes remained unchanged in the proposed budget. On the other hand, the price of 10 stick cigarettes at high and premium tiers has been increased by tk 5 (5.2%) and tk 6 (5.5%) respectively and the supplementary duty has been remained at 65%. As a result, the price of cigarettes per stick has increased by only tk 0.5 at the high and only tk 0.7 at the premium tier. Considering the increase in per capita income and inflation in one year, the real price of all tobacco products has come down as compared to the previous year. This will increase the use of tobacco by existing users and encourage teenagers and youth to start using tobacco.

Professor Dr. Golam Mohiuddin Faruque, Oncologist and Project director of Bangladesh Cancer Society moderated the event. Professor Dr. Nasiruddin Ahmed, Former chairman of NBR; Professor Dr. Rumana Huque, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka and Convener of BNTTP; Professor Sohel Reza Choudhury, Head, Department of Epidemiology & Research, National Heart Foundation; Saifuddin Ahmed, coordinator of Bangladesh Anti-Tobacco Alliance; Farida Akhter, Coordinator of Tamak Birodhi Nari Jote (Tabinaj); Advocate Syed Mahbul Alam, Technical Adviser of The Union; Iqbal Masood, Director of Health Sector, Dhaka Ahsania Mission; Dr. Nazim Uddin Ahmed, Executive Director of Shastho Shurokkha Foundation and Hasan Shahriar, Head of Program, PROGGA have expressed their opinions ad experts. They also answered the journalist's questions

Speakers at the press conference said, without introducing a Specific Taxation system, the government will lose a huge amount of revenue by continuing a faulty ad valorem taxation system and a portion of this price increase will go into the pockets of tobacco companies due to faulty tax structure. As a result they will be more encouraged to expand market of lethal products, which is extremely alarming. However, by imposing specific supplementary duties, the government would get an additional revenue of tk 3,400 crore, which could be used to deal with the damage caused by the Corona epidemic.

The speakers said, The Honorable Prime Minister pledged to build a tobacco-free Bangladesh by 2040 and directed to formulate a comprehensive tobacco tax policy. But even after five years, there is no reflection of the implementation of the directive. The speakers proposed for imposing specific tax on all tobacco products including lower and middle tier cigarettes. They also propose to increase tax keeping pace with inflation and income growth.

The press conference was organized by AID Foundation, ARK Foundation, Bangladesh Cancer Society, Bangladesh Anti-Tobacco Alliance (BATA), BCCP, Bangladesh Network for tobacco Tax Policy (BNTTP), Bureau of Economic Research (BER), Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), Development Activities of Society (DAS), Dhaka International University (DIU), Development Organisation of the Rural Poor-DORP, Grambangla Unnayan Committee (GUC), NATAB, National Heart Foundation (NHF), Pratyasha Anti-drug Organization, Progga, Shastho Shurokkha Foundation (SSF), SUPRO, Tamak Birodhi Nari Jote (TABINAJ), Tobacco Control & Research Cell (TCRC), Unnayan Shamannay, Voice, Work for a Better Bangladesh (WBB) and Young Power in Social Action (YPSA).

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