

# Consultancy deal for MRT-5 to be signed today

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The third metro rail project of the country is being prepared for its physical work to begin from 2023, as the authority is set to sign a contract with a consortium of agencies, both foreign and Bangladeshi, today for general consultancy services.

Under the contract, the consortium, led by famous Japanese firm Nippon Koei, will prepare detailed designs, tender documents to procure a contractor and supervise the construction works of the Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Development Project (Line-5: Northern Route), officials said.

The contract, which would be around Tk 1,123 crore without VAT, is scheduled to be signed at 11:00am today virtually due to this prevailing situation, Project Director Aftab Hossain Khan said. "This is major progress for the project," he told The Daily Star on Monday.

The MRT-5 (northern route), from Savar's Hemayetpur to Bhatara via Gabtoli, Mirpur and Gulshan, would be implemented at an estimated cost of Tk 41,239 crore.

The 20km line with 14 stations will consist of underground and elevated sections. The project commits to a 2028 deadline. This would be the first east-west MRT corridor in Bangladesh.

The physical works of MRT-6, country's first metro rail project, from Uttara third phase to Motijheel, is going on, while the construction of MRT-1, which would be the country's first underground metro rail, from Airport road to Kamalapur, is expected to begin in December this year.

The government will construct six metro rails in the capital and its adjacent areas to ease traffic congestion and reduce environmental pollution. The six lines will create a 128.74km metro rail network, which will have

104 stations -- 53 underground and 51 elevated, according to Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited, the agency implementing the project.

**MRT-5 CONSTRUCTION IN 2023**  
Aftab Hossain said the consortium comprises seven companies from Japan, France, India and Bangladesh. Most of these companies are involved in another consortium, which is giving general consultancy services for the MRT-6 project, he said.

Once the contract is signed, they would start preparing a detailed design for the project. "As air communication remains suspended, they would start the paperwork and will come to Bangladesh once airlines resume operation," he said.

In the meantime, they would start the process of acquiring land and procuring a contractor, he said, adding, "We are hopeful about starting the physical work of the project in 2023 and complete it by 2028," he said.

He further said that 13.5 kilometers of the line would be underground and 6.50 would be elevated. The design of MRT-1, which will also have an elevated portion from Natun Bazar to Purbachal, is almost complete. "Such structure is new in Bangladesh. However, designing [MRT-1] will help us," he added.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Necoc) in October last year approved the projects.

Aftab said that once they start land acquisition, they would require a huge amount of money. But they are going to get around Tk 700 crore from Annual Development Programme for the next fiscal year, which is less than half their demand, he added.

A total of Tk 2,000 crore would be needed for land acquisition and would start it once the consultants mobilised their workforce, some of which may face delay due to the pandemic situation.



**A child waves to his jailed father from outside the Chattogram Central Jail in the port city's Kotwali area yesterday. The rickshaw puller from the city's Ambagan area has been behind bars for about six months in a drug case. It was only the second time the child and her mother had a glimpse of their loved one since he landed behind bars.**

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

## Kamal still banks on NBR

FROM PAGE 1

"Helping people will be the focus. Providing them with food and jobs such that no one is in suffering would be the goal," Kamal told The Daily Star yesterday over the phone.

**AMBITIOUS REVENUE GENERATION TARGET**

The revenue authority though is not at all confident that it would be able to get anywhere near the target Kamal would be setting for fiscal 2020-21.

It can manage at best Tk 250,000 crore next fiscal year, NBR Chairman Abu Hena Md Rahmatul Muneem said in a letter to Finance Secretary Abdur Rouf Talukder last month.

It would be tough to achieve fiscal 2020-21's target.

In fact, this fiscal year's collections would be the first since the country's independence that it would down year-on-year.

The tax collector would be able to manage at best Tk 220,000 crore in fiscal 2019-20, which would be about 6.25 percent less than last fiscal year's receipts.

**INCOME TAX RELIEF**

The finance minister is likely to set the income tax collection goal of Tk 103,000 crore for the next fiscal year, 9.75 percent lower than fiscal 2019-20's target.

Since the pandemic is battering livelihoods and choking cash flow across the board, the tax authority is working to give a breathing room to the fixed income group, said a finance ministry official requesting anonymity as he is not authorised to speak with the media ahead of the budget session.

Tax-free limit to increase

Besides, the government may increase the tax-free income limit for individual taxpayers after five years to give relief to people in the lower-income

bracket such that they can manage the economic hardship brought on by the pandemic.

The tax-free income threshold is likely to be Tk 3 lakh, up from Tk 2.5 lakh fixed back in fiscal 2015-16.

Besides, the income tax slabs may be rearranged as well. The rates of income tax now stand at 10 percent to 30 percent but it may be cut to 5 percent to 25 percent in the next fiscal year.

Apart from the individual taxpayers, the government is also considering reducing the corporate income by 2.5 percentage points to 32.5 percent for non-listed companies with the view to strengthening their capacity such that they bounce back as early as possible from the devastating effect of shutdown.

The government is eyeing to collect Tk 182,000 crore next fiscal from value-added tax (VAT) and supplementary duty, up 6.29 percent from this fiscal year's target.

Cigarette, the biggest sources of VAT and supplementary duty, is expected to contribute more to state coffers with its increased rates. The supplementary duty on cars would be hiked by a staggering 40 to 70 percent.

The government is also likely to earn Tk 37,800 crore from import and export duties in fiscal 2020-21.

Finance ministry officials said there is a strong likelihood of raising the import duties on mobile phone and SIM cards.

To achieve a higher tax collection target to finance the budget, the government may also increase the excise duty on accounts with debit or credit balance upwards of Tk 5 crore at any time of the year by as much as 15 percent.

The government is hoping to collect Tk 3,600 crore in excise duty next fiscal, up 61 percent from this year's goal.

Development goals take backseat

The National Economic Council has

behaviours, while the rest practise those irregularly.

Besides, 78 percent of the respondents feel that there is no chance or very little chance of getting infected with coronavirus.

Such beliefs may make people reluctant to maintain precautions against the virus, observes the survey.

It also found that the need for assistance is higher in rural areas (72%) compared to urban areas (62%).

Brac Senior Director Shameran Abed said Brac provided emergency cash support to 360,000 families. Under the microfinance programme, savings were returned to 500,000 members to support the economic recovery process.

Shameran put stress on the role of microfinance institutions (MFIs) in taking cash assistance to vulnerable people and enterprises, and said it is challenging to do so through banks since they lack capacity.

"A new mechanism is needed and the mobile banking system is already delivering... people are getting easy access to finance through the system."

Lauding the Brac initiative to return savings to low-income people, Abul Kalam Azad, former principal coordinator of SDG affairs at the Prime Minister's Office, said all the MFIs and NGOs need to follow in Brac's footsteps.

"The government is trying to improve the labour intensive sectors so that it can help create more jobs. Skills

development training for migrant workers can also help them get back their jobs in the current crisis."

UNDP Resident Representative Sudipto Mukherjee said, "We cannot afford to leave anyone behind. That is more important than being concerned about duplication [on lists of beneficiaries]."

The next plan of action should focus on getting the economy back on its feet, maintaining proper health precautions, he said.

Panelists suggested introducing a "pro-poor lens" to review and implement the recovery and rehabilitation plans as well as the announced stimulus packages and incentives.

Putting emphasis on ensuring transparency of delivery mechanism for assistance and stimulus packages for private sectors, the panelists urged the government to engage NGOs and community-based organisations in monitoring the listing of beneficiaries and cash transfer through mobile banking.

They also suggested preparing a database of beneficiaries to avoid duplication and introducing a prompt complaint redressal mechanism.

Brac Senior Director KAM Morshed moderated the press conference joined by, among others, Prothom Alo Joint Editor Mizanur Rahman Khan and Brac Director Nobonita Chowdhury.

There are long queues of patients at the department seeking to book appointments for tests or of those who have booked and paid for an appointment asking for the tests to be resumed, said Dr Nurunnahar, director of the nuclear medicine department at BSMMU.

The NINMAS website too makes no mention of the tests being unavailable though many patients use it to book their appointments online.

"We are struggling to make our patients understand the current situation. In this situation, we cannot tell them anything but to wait," said Dr Nurunnahar on May 27.

She estimates it will not be possible to restart tests using Tc-99m before the end of June.

Once the isotope is finally imported, it needs to be processed before being distributed to hospitals.

"The reality is that we haven't even started to import these yet. It will take time and there is no alternative to waiting patiently for it," she added.

## Bangladesh's GDP

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8.15 percent logged in the last fiscal year.

The GDP growth would be 1 percent in the next fiscal year, again lower the 2.9 percent earlier projected.

The International Monetary Fund said Bangladesh's economy would grow by 3.8 percent in FY20 and the Centre for Policy Dialogue said on Sunday that the growth would be at best 2.5 percent.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Finance Minister Mustafa Kamal, however, said that the growth would be between 5.2 to 5.5 per cent this fiscal year given that the economy only began to feel the impact of the coronavirus pandemic in April, the 10th month of the fiscal year.

Bangladesh's growth prospect would be higher than the South Asian average of a negative 2.7 percent, according to the WB projection.

India's growth would further fall to a negative 3.2 percent this fiscal year and rebound to 3.1 percent next fiscal year.

For Pakistan, the economy would contract by 2.6 percent this fiscal year and 0.2 percent next fiscal year.

Nepal would expand by 1.8 percent this year and 2.1 percent next fiscal year and Bhutan would grow by 1.5 percent this year and 1.8 percent next year.

Sri Lanka would see a contraction by 3.2 per cent in 2020. The Maldives

would contract by 13 per cent and Afghanistan by 5.5 per cent.

Bangladesh's economy is also vulnerable to supply chain disruptions, both domestic and those stemming from imports of intermediate goods, as well as travel-related disruptions to international contractors in sectors like construction, the WB said in the report.

Spill-overs from major trading partners could be more severe than expected, the report said. Bangladesh's pharmaceuticals and textile sectors are reliant on countries abroad for intermediate inputs.

The WB said private consumption has been severely hindered as large-scale lockdowns were instituted in several economies, including Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan.

The global economy will shrink by 5.2 percent this year.

"This is a deeply sobering outlook, with the crisis likely to leave long-lasting scars and pose major global challenges," said World Bank Group Vice President for Equitable Growth, Finance and Institutions, Ceyla Pazarbasioglu.

"Our first order of business is to address the global health and economic emergency. Beyond that, the global community must unite to find ways to rebuild as robust a recovery as possible to prevent more people from falling into poverty and unemployment."

## Trial East Rajabazar

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East Rajabazar to collect essential items.

The poor and the destitute will get free food, but affluent families will have to pay for it, he added.

On Monday, Dhaka North City Corporation Mayor Atiqul Islam said East Rajabazar would be put under an "experimental" lockdown as the number of Covid-19 cases increased there.

Earlier, the authorities said they would impose containment zones in some Covid-19 hotspots and place the areas under strict lockdown on a pilot basis. They said they would implement it elsewhere if the move proved to be successful.

Meanwhile, UNB reported that a control room was set up at Naznin School and College in East Rajabazar with assistance from the DNCC ward councillor and representatives from the

Directorate General of Health Services, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, A2i, E-commerce of Bangladesh (E-Cab) and others concerned.

Only one entrance and exit on Green Road beside the IBA Hostel will remain open while the movement of all kinds of vehicles will remain suspended in the area.

Yesterday, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Directorate said army members alongside the local administration and police members will work in the field to ensure the implementation of the lockdown at East Rajabazar and for this reason, army patrol has been increased in the area.

Army members will take all necessary steps to ensure the lockdown in coordination with the local administration and police force, said an ISPR press release.

## Pandemic holds back progress

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But there were other causes behind the delay besides coronavirus.

Bearing pads supplied by the contractor to be used under the tracks failed twice, delaying the process, said an official.

"Construction work near Bangla Academy has to remain suspended for about two months every year due to the book fair. This should have been considered while preparing the plan," reads the meeting minutes.

Besides, a Japanese screw piling method, expected to speed up work, reportedly proved incompatible and the method was ditched several months after introducing it in February last year.

DMTCL chief MAN Siddique said the project progress report did not fully reflect the reality because many completed tasks had not been mentioned in it.

He added that there were still hopes of meeting this fiscal year's target.

Besides, some components being made in Japan, Italy and India were not counted in the progress report, he added.

"You will see a big leap in terms of progress," he claimed.

Construction work is now going on at more than 10 points and the number will increase gradually, he said.

He said around 10,000 local and foreign engineers and workers are involved in the physical work. Over 1,500 of them have joined work, he said recently.

The company has requested the Directorate General of Health Service (DGHS) to set up booths for its workers to get tested for coronavirus.

He added that the contractors may hire more workers to make up for the lost time without violating the social distancing rules.

## Nasim still in deep coma, not breathing on his own

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The condition of former health minister Mohammed Nasim remained unchanged yesterday as he was still in deep coma.

"Mohammed Nasim is totally unconscious. He is not breathing on his own," Prof Dr Kanak Kanti Barua, chief of the 13-member medical board formed to oversee Nasim's health, told The Daily Star last night.

Asked whether the 72-year-old Awami League lawmaker from Sirajganj-1 was clinically dead, he said they would have to carry out the "brain stem function" test to reach a decision in this regard.

"Mohammed Nasim's heart is still beating, but his blood pressure remains unstable," added Kanak, also the vice chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

Nasim, a presidium member of the AL, has been undergoing treatment at the city's Bangladesh Specialised Hospital since June 1. Later, he tested positive for Covid-19. He suffered a brain stroke on June 5.

The BSMMU VC said a healthy person usually takes 18 to 20 breaths per minute.

"But Mohammed Nasim is not taking a single breath on his own. We have put him on life support," he added.

Dr Raziul Haque, a neurosurgeon at Bangladesh Specialised Hospital, said they would take a decision on turning the life support off after conducting the "brain stem function" test.

"But before doing that, we will have to seek the consent of his family members," Raziul told this newspaper.

Nasim has been on life support since June 6 as his condition deteriorated.

His son Tanvir Shakil Joy, also a former AL MP, told media on June 5 that his father had undergone a successful surgery after suffering a stroke.

## Zafrullah feeling better

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gonoshasthaya Kendra Founder and Trustee Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, who tested Covid-19 positive on May 24, is now feeling better.

"He is feeling better now than before and is having food on his own. Thanks to the Almighty," said Prof Brig Gen (ret'd) Mamun Mostafi in a statement yesterday.

Zafrullah's overall condition is stable and did not deteriorate though he is being administered oxygen, he said.

Dr Mamun said a medical board comprised of doctors from home and abroad discussed his health condition online.

After being infected with Covid-19, he has been undergoing treatment at the Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital. He has already been administered plasma therapy thrice. He is also suffering from lung problems.

Besides, the 79-year-old physician has been undergoing kidney dialysis.

For nearly three months, Zafrullah and a team of scientists have been working relentlessly to get Gonoshasthaya Kendra-developed rapid test kit -- GR Rapid Dot Blot -- approved.

Zafrullah has been calling for emergency authorisation for the kit for large-scale test and isolation of the new coronavirus patients.

## Int'l flights to start late June

RASHIDUL HASAN

The government has planned to resume regular passenger flight operations on international routes on a limited scale from third week of June after over two-and-a-half-months of suspension due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"The specific date and time will be informed on June 14," Mohibul Haque, senior secretary to the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"At the beginning we have planned to resume flights of Biman Bangladesh Airlines on Dhaka-London route on any day in the third week of June," he said, adding, "Later, we will increase flight operations on other international routes."

The senior secretary also said the decision over other airlines had not been taken yet but Qatar Airlines was willing to operate transit flights from Bangladesh to other destinations.

"They have applied for this which will be decided after consulting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," Mohibul Haque also said.

## Covid cases jump

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Twenty-eight were from Dhaka, 11 from Chattogram, two from Sylhet, two from Rajshahi and two others from Rangpur division.

A total of 14,664 samples were tested in 55 labs across the country in the last 24 hours before 2:30pm yesterday, Dr Nasima said.

During this period, 777 Covid-19 patients have recovered, taking the total recovery number to 15,336, the DGHS official added.

According to WHO, there has been a steady rise in the infection rate since April 4.

Dhaka division has been the worst affected region till date with 678.6 infections in every million, followed by Chattogram with 214 per million, the reports show.