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JS debate on proposed budget 5.2pc growth absurd: Opposition Aimed at self-reliance: AL

By Staff Correspondent

The opposition MPs yesterday found the proposed budget for 1999-2000 fiscal non-transparent and accused the finance minister of concealing information about the real state of the economy.

The ruling party MPs, on the other hand, claimed that the proposed budget has given a clear sense of direction for economic self-reliance to the nation. They also blamed the opposition for making misleading statements about the budget.

The accusations and counter accusations were evident during the general debate on the proposed budget in yesterday's sitting of Jatiya Sangsad. A total of 14 legislators belonging to the Treasury and Opposition benches took part in the debate.

"The budget seriously lacks transparency, while the document is full of distorted facts and figures," BNP legislator M K Anwar told the House. "The government has done this to cover up its failure in different social and economic sectors."

Challenging the agricultural growth figure projected in the budget, the BNP lawmaker said that the rate is actually much lower. Referring to the observations made by the country's eminent economists, Anwar said the government's claim of achieving 5.2 per cent overall growth is "simply absurd".

Anwar also rejected the claim of 2.3 per cent industrial growth saying in real term, the industrial growth rate would be about one per cent.

Analysing various figures concerned, the BNP legislators said that the government claim of three per cent growth in the export sector was also baseless. "The real growth in this sector hardly exceeds one per cent."

Anwar strongly blasted the idea of 'collecting income tax in advance, even before the investment'. "Such steps would definitely discourage all kinds of investments," he warned.

Ruling party MP Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim criticised the opposition for 'failing to notice the budgetary allocation of more than Tk 8000 crore for poverty alleviation'.

Listing various proposals made to combat rural poverty, Selim said that the budget had offered given a clear direction on how to make the country self-reliant in different sectors.

The AL legislator also thanked the finance minister as he has not proposed 'any fresh tax in the new budget'.

BNP MP Hafizuddin Ahmed, a retired major, said that nobody excepting the ruling party leaders and activists had accepted the 5.2 per cent growth rate in the current fiscal.

The finance minister has blown up the figure only to hide the government's failure and mislead the people.

Claiming that growth started sliding since the AL took over power in 1996, Hafiz said: "The growth rate was 5.9 per cent in the 1996-1997 fiscal and 5.7 per cent in 1997-1998. The rate has now come down, even if we accept the government figure, to 5.2 per cent."

"The finance minister has not given any estimated figure for the years 1999-2000. Perhaps he knows that the growth rate would come down further."

Hafiz was concerned that "the size of development budget was getting smaller and revenue budget bigger every year". He advised the government to concentrate on trimming its expenditure.

Education Minister ASHK Sadeq did not find any substance in the opposition criticism of the proposed budget. He claimed that the government of Sheikh Hasina was most transparent, compared to the ones since 1975. Referring to the highest budget allocation for the education sector, the minister said it would substantially contribute to the development of education in the country.

Civil Aviation Minister Mosharraf Hossain lauded the finance minister for a presenting a pro-people budget, the announcement of which 'did not cause price hike'.

Hossain told the House that corrupt practices during the previous governments had hit the financial health of the ministry hard. "I am trying to re-structure various departments concerned with our national carrier Biman to make it a profitable concern."

Turning to the politics, the minister said it was not Major Zia who announced independence first. "It was M A Hannan of Awami League who made the announcement on behalf of Bangabandhu on March 26 1971."

Delwar Hossain Saidee of Jamaat-e-Islami refuted the government claim that it had not imposed any fresh tax. He contended that the government had proposed new taxes on the amount to Tk 1050 crore. "Most of the additional amount would come from the pockets of the poor, making them poorer in a year."

Deputy Speaker Abdul Hamid who presided over yesterday's session adjourned the House at 1:45 pm to resume it again at 9:30 this morning.



Some of the city roads went under knee-deep water due to incessant rain yesterday causing traffic congestion. This picture was taken from a road near Rajdhani Super Market.

SSC top position holders allege Political parties fuel campus violence

By Abul Kalam Azad

Political parties are responsible for campus violence. This view was expressed by some students who secured top positions in merit lists in the SSC examinations this year.

Talking to The Daily Star, they alleged that political leaders were using innocent students for their petty political interests. Had student politics been free from the influence from political parties, it would have been fair and terrorism-free, they said.

They expressed dissatisfaction over the present state of student politics in the country. They said they are not interested in such politics in which students use firearms. Some of them demanded a ban on student politics.

"They (political leaders) are giving firearms to student to serve their political interests", said Adnan Khan Khodakur who topped the list in Humanities.

Ahsanul Karim who secured the second position in Science group under Dhaka Board said many good students spoiled their future only due to student politics. The students concerned are also responsible for this. "They should be aware of the bad impact of politics in which

arms are used."

Wastur Rahman Rabin, third in the combined merit list in Science group, has no interest in student politics because it is devoid of moral values now and involves use of arms.

"I do not support student politics as it has lost its glorious past," said Karishma Zaman who secured the first position in Business Studies group. Student politics is being controlled by political parties, she said.

Though Tasnuva Ahmed has no clear idea about student politics now, she said political leaders are responsible for campus violence. Tasnuva secured the second position in the combined merit list among female candidates.

"It is almost a nasty thing now," said Tahsin Taher, third in the combined merit list under Dhaka Board. She said she is not interested in student politics.

Barnaly Dey demanded a ban on student politics. Barnaly, who secured the first position among female candidates, said the government should take stern measures to make the campus free from terrorism. Political parties are responsible for campus violence, she said.

Ctg: Road links

From Page 1

between Cox's Bazaar and Teknaf remained snapped as the road went under water in Chaingra area in Ramu thana.

People in some 41 flood-hit unions in Sadar, Ramu, Chakoria, Ukhia, Teknaf and Mosheshkhali thanas of the district face scarcity of drinking water. Meanwhile, high tide from the Bay is also inundating new areas in the coastal belt amid rough weather.

BSS adds: The low-lying areas in four thanas and parts of Khagrachhari municipality were inundated due to incessant rains and onrush of hill waters.

The low-lying areas in Khagrachhari municipality, Dighinala and Ramgarh areas were submerged following sharp rise of water levels in Chengi, Maini and Feri rivers.

Several points of the flood protection embankment of Chengi river were damaged while many areas of Muslimpara, Shabdamiapara, Colonypara, Foodbill, Bathali and Gonjapara village in Khagrachhari were inundated.

An official of Khagrachhari municipality said they have arranged shelters for about 300 affected families of Muslimpara, Colonypara and Shabdamiapara.

Local union parishads chairmen said that low-lying areas in Boalkhali, Merung and Pabalkhali under Dighinala thana were inundated while crops in vast low-lying areas under Ramgarh were damaged.

Rashidpur Gasfield Drilling ends: 4 gas sand zones struck

From Iqbal Siddiquee

SYLHET, June 23: Drilling of well number 7 at Rashidpur Gasfield in Habiganj district has been completed successfully, according to an official.

"We have struck four prospective gas sand zones within a depth of 9200-feet. The zones were struck at 9000 metres, 9200 metres, 2200 and 2600 metres, the official said, preferring anonymity. The target depth of drilling was around 9500-feet, he said.

Two gas sand zones were struck in the well number 5 which was drilled in January-March in the same gasfield under the same drilling project, the source said. Logging and casing of the well was completed successfully on Saturday.

"After analysing the data and information, we are now more optimistic about the future of the well," the official hoped.

Drilling of the well began April 22 and was scheduled to be completed in 90 days. But it had been completed earlier.

A German firm, Schemberger, had been engaged for logging. The officials are now engaged in DST (Drill Stem Test) of the well which will take a week. Production testing of the well then be done, the official said.

The location of well number 7 is about 13 kilometres off well number 5. The drilling rig used in well number 5 will also be used in the new location which is to select for the next well (well number 6). If everything goes well, drilling will begin there around the third week of the month, the official informed.

After completion of drilling in the well number 7, drilling of

the well number 6 will be started at a location which is about six kilometres off the well number 5.

The project is being implemented by the Sylhet Gas Fields Limited (SGFL), a subsidiary of Petrobangla. Oil & Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) of India has been given the task of drilling of these wells under a contract signed on May 27 last year. Japan Oil Engineering Company Limited is working as consultant for the project.

Under the project, drilling of three exploration wells will cost about Tk 124 crore including a foreign component of Tk 83.4 crore. On completion of drilling these wells, about 90 MMCFD of gas, 72 barrels of motor spirit and condensate will be produced per day.

After processing, the dry gas will be supplied to the national grid, the official said.

He said two silica-gel plants each will 45 MMCFD capacity, are being installed at a nearby location at a cost of Tk 117 crore, provided by the World Bank and IDA, to process the produced gas. Both the projects are expected to be completed by June 2000.

SGFL sources said that the approximate reserve of gas in the structure would be about 1.32 trillion cft. Four old wells in the Rashidpur Gasfield had been producing about 77 to 85 MMCFD gas which is being supplied to the national grid. Rashidpur Gasfield is one of the six gasfields under the Sylhet Gas Fields Limited (SGFL). It is located in a hilly area of Bahubal thana under the Habiganj district.

Proceedings quashed

From Page 1

and brokers. After almost two years, hearing on a charge framing against the accused began in March this year in the Third Metro Court. It framed charges against 15 directors of six companies.

Ten of these directors later went to The High Court, challenging the charge framing and obtained rules.

Three other accused -directors of Chittagong Cement Clinkers- also filed petitions for quashing the proceedings in the case and obtained HC rules. The Third Metro Court was yet to begin hearing on charge framing against them.

After hearing the parties concerned, the High Court in a judgement yesterday quashed the proceedings against Runa Alam and Mohiuddin.

"There was no allegation against Runa Alam in the body of complaint petition and the petition described her as the chairman of the accused company," Justice Golam Rabbani said.

"So the court held that the proceedings against Runa Alam is an abuse of the process of law and so the proceedings are quashed," he said.

Regarding Mohiuddin's case, Justice Rabbani said that he had resigned from the company before the date of the alleged of-

fence. "The learned Additional Attorney General did not dispute the facts so the proceedings are quashed," the judge said.

In the other judgement yesterday, the HC transferred the five cases to the Chief Metro Court saying, "We find, the Third Court of Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge passed orders without applying judicial mind and not in accordance with the terms of Section 265C of the Code of Criminal Procedure."

"Further, it is not difficult to hold that the public prosecutor did not open his case strictly in terms of section 265B of the Code of Criminal Procedure," the judgement said.

Regarding the case concerning three directors of Chittagong Cement, the judgement said, "From the affidavit-evidence before us, we do not find what was the stage of the case when rules were obtained by the three accused in the case."

"We would, therefore, set aside the orders passed in the aforesaid four sessions cases (involving H.M.S. Financial Consulting & Securities Ltd, Rupun Oil & Feeds Ltd, Imtiyaz Husain & Company and Riwan Bin Farouk of First Capital Securities) under Section 265B and onward we direct that the learned trial judge shall fix a date for taking steps under Section 265B, Cr P Code by the prosecution when the prosecution shall open his case by describing the charge and stating by what evidence he proposes to prove the charge."

"Thereafter the learned trial judge shall fix a date for hearing under Section 265C, Cr P Code. In view of this decision of ours, we need not state or consider the submissions of the learned advocates for the parties," the judgement said.

The HC also said that rules for quashment proceedings have been discharged in cases relating to Abu Tavab, Rakibur Rahman and ASM Sahidul Haque Bulbul of Chittagong Cement, Imtiyaz Husain of Imtiyaz Husain & Company and Riwan Bin Farouk of First Capital Securities.

Regarding the cases filed with the HC by Mustaque Ahmed Sadeque, Sharif Ataur Rahman, Syed Mahbub Mursheed, Hemayet Uddin Ahmed and Ahmed Iqbal Hassan of H.M.S. and Associates and Nurun Nabi of Rupun Oil, the rules obtained for discharge have been made absolute.

Child lifters

From Page 1

Police arrested Shanu from Srinagar and recovered Ramzan from a house at Bashiruddin road yesterday.

After interrogation of the arrested, police recovered three other children from the same house.

They confessed to the police that they collected the children from different hospitals in the city to sell them to childless couples.

A police official on condition of anonymity said they are members of an organised gang and they used to pick up new borns for trafficking.

A case was filed with Demra thana under Women and Children Repression Act, 1995.

Two outlaws surrender in Magura

From Our Correspondent

MAGURA, June 23: Two outlaws surrendered to Magura SP M Akbar Ali along with firearms at his office here today.

The outlaws are: Afjal Mondol of JSD Gonobahini and Ziarat Mondol of Purbo Banglar Communist Party. They also surrendered two pistols and six bullets.

After their surrender they were arrested under Section 54 of CrPC and produced in the court.

JS tidbits

By Nazmul Ashraf

Awami League MP Marjan Begum came up with a unique tax proposal while discussing the proposed budget for 1999-2000 fiscal in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

Speaking about the country's population growth, she requested Finance Minister SAMS Kibria to impose tax on those who would give birth to more than one children. The ruling party lawmaker also suggested that the one-child family be given allowance to encourage birth control.

Marjan, however, did not elaborate on the rate of tax or allowance.

Speaker Humayun Rashed Chowdhury perhaps liked AL lawmaker Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim's comment about egg production in the country as he reportedly owns a poultry farm. "The BNP government failed to implement its commitment to ensure daal-bhat for all. But we, the AL government, promise to make available daal-bhat, machch-bhat, moorgi-bhat, mangsha-bhat, dim-bhat and even dadi-bhat to all," Selim announced amid laughter in the House.

A happy Speaker appreciated the AL legislator's saying so. "I liked your comment, especially on egg."

Influential BNP lawmaker MK Anwar sought protection of the Speaker from Agriculture Minister Matia Choudhury while discussing on the new budget.

He did so when Matia was shouting at him, challenging his statistics on the growth in the agriculture sector. The BNP MP tried to disprove the agriculture growth, quoting economists.

"This is not my statistics, but of the noted economists. Don't shout at me. You'll also be allowed to defend yourself."

See page 11 col 7

Khulna citizens' body threatens to top paying tax

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, June 23: Khulna citizens' government has threatened to stop paying taxes to the government as a part of its ongoing movement demanding increased allocation in the national budget for construction of Rupsha Bridge.

In a rally followed by two-hour token hunger strike at Shahid Hadis Park on Tuesday morning, leaders of the citizens' committee called upon the people of Khulna to gear up movement for realising Taka 600 crore as recommended in the report of JICA for construction of the bridge.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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