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Budget balancing will be a tough task this year

By Inam Ahmed

The budget balancing act requires keeping expenditures in tune with the revenue situation. But as the government faces a Tk 2500 crore revenue shortfall at the end of the year – it is already Tk 1916 crore short of the target until April – it has in fact spent about Tk 500 crore more in revenue expenditure than it did last year.

Compounding with the increased ADP expenditure this year, the situation has turned out to be a major cause for strain on the economy. The government's net borrowing from the domestic sources stood at Tk 6359 crore until March with Tk 4279 crore coming from the banking system.

In the last three years, the government seemed to be experimenting with its revenue target

tic revenue collection, which reflects on the widening of the tax net.

The shortfall is primarily in the import level, which until April was about 20 per cent short of the target.

“However, this also shows that the country's tax structure has not really changed till the 1990s, which remained heavily dependent on import activities,” said Dr Omar Haider Chowdhury of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS).

“About 50 per cent of the revenue comes from import level activities, 25 to 26 per cent from domestic production and the rest from direct tax and other modes of duties.”

What went wrong? There had been some major tax re-

forms in the last 10 years. The VAT had been introduced, direct taxation system overhauled and corporate tax rates cut. Despite this, why this continuous shortfall?

Experts now point fingers to a number of things. First of all, there seems to be a wide gap between the government's comprehension of the country's economic activities. It had misjudged what level of economic activities to expect to allow for such revenue growth. This deals with the country's investment situation, law and order, port, infrastructure etc., none of which promises much to attract productive fund. Maybe, to a greater extent, the lack of reform in the administration incapacitated the revenue system.

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Budget session opens today, may run till next month

Opposition may stay out of Parliament

By Nazmul Ashraf

The Jatiya Sangsad goes into its budget session today with opposition parties still reluctant to return to the House although some of their top leaders will lose their seats if the session continues for more than 31 days.

The session, 18th of the Seventh Sangsad, will begin at 9.30am.

The House will be adjourned after nomination of a panel of chairmen and adoption of an obituary reference on Jatiya Party lawmaker Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto who died on May 29, ac-

cording the order of the day.

The JS Business Advisory Committee (BAC) at a meeting yesterday planned for continuing the session till July, a committee member said. “But duration of the session will depend on the Opposition stand regarding joining or not joining the session.”

The BAC meeting decided for a 40-hour discussion on the budget for 2000-2001 financial year.

Finance Minister SAMS Kibria is due to place the budget on June 8. This is likely to be

the last budget of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government.

The committee has also planned introduction of four new bills and disposal of 14 others, including the Zila Parishad Bill, placed in the last session.

Strengthening security around the parliament during the budget session also came for discussion in the BAC meeting.

It is 11 months now that BNP and its allies are boycotting sessions ignoring pres-

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More than 180 shanties and shops were gutted in a fire at Bhasantek slum at Damalcourt in Mirpur in the city yesterday afternoon. —Star photo

Nurul Huda new IGP

By Staff Correspondent

Nurul Huda, Additional Inspector General of Police who heads the CID, has been promoted to the post of Inspector General of Police, said sources close to the Superior Selection Board.

The incumbent IG A Y B I Siddique has been made OSD in the Ministry of Establishment. Siddique superseded nine senior officials when he was promoted to the post of IGP on September 14, 1998.

Nurul Huda joined the then Police Service of Pakistan in 1970 and is the last officer of his batch in the police force. Huda superseded Additional IGP (Administration) Mahmud Ali Farid.

Fazlul Haq, Additional IG (Finance), has been transferred to the CID as its head. Besides, Additional Commissioner Muzammel Haq having the rank of Additional DIG, was promoted to the rank of DIG.

The separate and simultaneous programmes of BNP, Jatiya

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Case against 5 ministers

HC accepts revision suit: Hearing today

A High Court Division Bench yesterday accepted a petition seeking revision against a lower court order refusing to entertain a case filed against five ministers under Public Safety Act (PSA), court officials said, reports BSS.

They said the bench comprising Justice Mohammad Nurul Islam and Justice Monzuddin Ahmed received the case. The bench is expected to hear the case today.

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Police intercepted Opposition activists at Bangla Motor Crossing yesterday on their way to Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city to lay a siege to the Election Commission Secretariat protesting 'unilateral' appointment of CEC. — Star photo

EC siege: Opposition halted on way

By Staff Correspondent

Police halted hundreds of Opposition activists as they marched to lay a siege to the Election Commission Secretariat in the city yesterday to protest 'unilateral' appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner.

The programme which included laying siege to district EC offices was also aimed at warning the government and the EC not to hold any local body election prior to the next parliamentary polls, and forcing CEC MA Syed to resign immediately.

The government earlier

banned rallies, processions and gatherings in an area of about two kilometres around the EC

Secretariat from 6am yesterday.

BDR, Battalion Police and Riot Police were deployed at strategic points and on all roads leading to the EC Secretariat.

Activists of BNP and its front organisations gathered at the Ramna Park wherefrom they started the march towards the EC Secretariat at 11:55 am. Jatiya Party activists marched from Kalabagan, Jamaat from Moghbazar and IOJ from Puthia Paltan.

Separate processions of BNP, IOJ and Jatra were halted. See page 12 col 1

Dress rehearsal today

By Hasan Masood

Holders Sri Lanka will take on high-flying Pakistan in the last league match of the Pepsi Asia Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

Although both teams have booked their berth for the June 7 final, they would no doubt relish the prospect of having a go at each other before the grand finale. The reason is obvious.

Sri Lanka who have got a three-day rest after their encounters against hosts Bangladesh and India had a light practice session at the

Stadium yesterday morning. However, the Pakistanis having gone through back-to-back matches after a taxing flight from the West Indies preferred to sit back in their hotel rooms.

Both teams are unlikely to make any changes in the first eleven.

Sri Lanka should have a psychological edge going into the game since they beat the Pakistanis 2-1 in a three-match one-day series in Pakistan early this year. And if the records of Asia Cup are anything to go by, then the islanders who have won five of the six outings, are the favourites. Nevertheless, Pakistan who are gunning for their first Asian title would definitely give them a run for their money.

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Today's match

Pakistan vs SL (2-30 pm)
Tomorrow is a rest day

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Inclusion of prisoners, enclave people in fresh voter list still uncertain

By Nurul Kabir

The fate of people detained in prisons and those living in most of the enclaves is still uncertain as regards inclusion in the fresh voter list.

Besides, there has been no headway as yet on enrolment of over one million Bangladeshis living abroad as voters and arrangement of postal ballots for them.

The Election Commission began house to house enlistment of voters on May 15 and

the process would now continue till June 14.

Replies to a query, Election Commissioner Abdur Rahman Chowdhury said the issue of inclusion of citizens detained in prisons, living in the enclaves or residing abroad in the voter list has nothing to do with expiry of the deadline for house to house enumeration. “Once technical problems relating to the issues are resolved, the EC would go for special arrange-

ments to make them voters.”

Section 8(4) of the Electoral Role Ordinance, 1982 says, “A person who is detained in prison or other legal custody at any place in Bangladesh shall be deemed to be resident (in the electoral area or constituency) in which he would have been if he had not been so detained”.

When contacted, Deputy Election Commissioner Mihir Sarwar Morshed said, “The jail authorities require prior per-

mission of the home ministry to enlist the prisoners as voters. We wrote a letter to the Home Ministry on May 10 and sent copies to all the jail authorities.

But a top official at Dhaka Central Jail told The Daily Star on Saturday that they were yet to get any instruction in this regard from the home ministry.

Sources in the home ministry could not provide the exact

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Lack of space in govt godowns

IRRI-Boro procurement virtually held up

By Reaz Ahmad

Over one and a half months into the season now, the government's IRRI-Boro procurement is virtually nil as silos are packed with grains because earlier stocks are still to be released for development programmes.

Officially, the procurement season began in mid-April. But it is virtually held up due to lack of space in government godowns, pushing prices down and depriving farmers from fair price of the year's most important cash crop.

The procurement target was four lakh tonnes during the current IRRI-Boro season, they said. There was a plan to procure two lakh tonnes of rice in April-May but that also could not be done due to poor management of the public food distribution system (PFDS), sources said.

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