

Budget today

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presented his budget for this outgoing year, he had promised efficiency of project implementation as a means to achieve high investment target. That has not been delivered. The development budget still looks sitting in the dump despite a slight improvement in performance. The idea that shone bright, the private-public partnership, now looks darker with not a single takas spent.

The promise of a district budget remains a forgotten chapter as does the use of the Critical Path Method to bring discipline to and enhance the speed of project implementation.

The result -- a depressed public investment. And that has influenced private investment as well. Private investment has remained stagnant for more reasons than one. And here comes the critical issue of investment climate.

Businessmen today twitch at the idea of new investment when their old projects cannot run at full capacity because of energy crisis. According to an estimate, 30 percent capacity of readymade garment remains unutilised due to energy shortage. Textile boilers cook off for lack of gas to feed their firing chambers. A famous coffee shop in uptown Dhaka counts losses for evenings together as its generator is not enough to run the power-guzzling equipment. The hungry cry for power resounds everywhere.

Then comes the need to properly implement stimulus package given to weather the global downturn. The second stimulus package is yet to be disbursed, and exports need it badly. It has just swum up from the murky abyss of negative growth in the double digit and spouted. Care has to be taken so that the spouting becomes permanent.

But then an enabling environment for private investment also means restructuring of the moribund Board of Investment (BoI). The board has not shown any mantle in attracting investment, especially foreign investment, and snails on processing applications. Quick decision-making suffers badly today. New incentives in line with those offered across competing Asia have to be formulated and offered. This calls for new leadership and vision.

Next comes firming up of investment resources. It would be important where the funds are coming from -- banks or non-bank sources? Bank financing will always bring along the risk of increased inflation. The burgeoning capital market is a huge possibility, new instruments like zero coupon bonds, which promises a win-win situation for both sellers and buyers for its discounted rate and upfront interest payment, can be tried for the infrastructure projects.

So that brings in the third urgency -- a coherent planning of resource source and priority areas. Here energy would certainly come first. If the government has to deliver on its promise of adding 9,500 MW by 2015, the groundwork has to begin now and sequencing to be set.

"Investment sequencing is more so important to execute the cooperation deals with India and China," says Dr Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). "Secondly, we need to sequence and target stimulus for the export industries so that they can capture the opportunity of the global recovery."

The second task commands importance because competing countries like China are making inroads in segments

Robbers

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So no-one in the house of Yusuf Mollah in Shirir Chala in Gazipur doubted that they were robbers in disguise until they fled with Tk 4.7 lakh in cash and other valuables in the early hours Wednesday.

The disguised robbers entered the house two hours past midnight saying there is allegation of militancy against Yusuf's youngest son Jahangir, student of a university in the capital.

Their first task was to handcuff Yusuf's two other sons Shahjahan and Humayun, who has business in Qatar and came home four months ago, and confined them to a room.

In the name of searching the house they took Tk 4.2 lakh and some valuables and even made a seizure list to give it a more realistic touch.

As their mission was accomplished, they took the brothers outside and freed them before driving off in a microbus.

The house owner said two of the nine-member group were in uniforms. He said they thought others were plain clothes police.

Police sources say a nametag bore the name of Kamal, sub-inspector of the local outpost.

Shahjahan said they drew money from bank for construction of a building in their village home.

Assistant Superintendent of police Md Aktaruzzaman confirmed the incident last evening. He said local people might be involved as the robbers had right information regarding names of a policeman and youngest son of Yusuf.

traditionally dominated by low labour cost countries like Bangladesh, Mustafiz elaborates.

And new thoughts have to be given to a number of sectors that had promised much in the pre-crisis such as shipbuilding, leather and footwear, home textiles and light engineering.

But then how to give new impetus to the SMEs and medium enterprises (MEs) that cushion the pressure on the labour market would be crucial too. This is important in the backdrop that the prospect of manpower export is not so bright now. And the number of unemployed is growing ever faster.

All this exigencies mean the government has to be more efficient and spend more on big projects. This would need transparency as well and the cutting down of power of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) does not augur well on this count.

Even then the finance minister will have two things to worry about. In its bid to generate quick power through rental plants, the government will have to count a huge subsidy which would widen its budget deficit unless revenue collection improves or expenditure elsewhere declines. So it will have to balance harsh public finance issues. A diesel-based power generation and an investment uptake would deplete the foreign exchange reserves to some extent from its comfortable \$10 billion position. That might be another front to watch.

The finance minister will also have to watch the inflation trend closely although it is not an issue for worry right now. The initial low inflation rate that prevailed at the start of this fiscal year has finally taken off. That the food inflation is likely to come down further with the good boro output may not be a reason for enough comfort in a projected high investment scenario.

And finally, Muhith would need a strong political commitment and a favourable political canvas to find his engine of growth roaring. The question is whether these will prevail.

Cops start

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The court yesterday exempted them from personal appearance before it in connection with the contempt of court petition, but it warned of action against them if they don't comply with its order properly.

Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh filed the petition on June 7 for non-compliance with the May 4 HC order.

The OCs include Salahuddin Khan of Kotwali, Enamul Haque of Hazaribagh, Mohammad Ali of Labagh, Shafiqul Islam of Kamrangirchar, Mahub Hossain of Demra and Mohammad Asaduzzaman of Keraniganj police stations.

Advocate Manzill Murshid appeared for the rights body while Deputy Attorney General Mostafa Zaman Islam represented the state.

Shadow budget

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power between 2007 and 2008.

"The opposition leader presented her alternative budget violating the constitution, parliamentary norms and democratic values and aiming to mislead people through false and fabricated information," Awami League General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam said at a news conference at party chief's political office in Dhanmondi.

He also said Khaleda's main aim was to save the war criminals.

Awami League organised the press conference to respond to Khaleda's presentation on shadow budget before the media on Monday.

Ashraf said only the autocratic governments place budget proposals before the media in the absence of a parliament.

Khaleda has resorted to destroying the stability of the country, making the parliament dysfunctional, conspiring against democracy and calling for hartals, said Ashraf, also the LGRD and Cooperatives minister.

The minister vowed to complete trials of a large number of top war criminals within the tenure of the government.

He urged the main opposition BNP to come to the parliament and talk on the budget and make specific proposals.

If the proposals are good, they will accept them, he said.

He asked Khaleda to shun the politics of negativity and conflict.

He said Khaleda and Iajuddin should be tried for bringing unconstitutional government to power in 2007. If their trial takes place, none will dare to venture into such deeds, Ashraf said.

AL leaders Nuh-ul-Alam Lenin, AFM Bahauddin Nasim, Mrinal Kanti Das, BM Mojamal Haque, Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, Abu Sayeed Al Mahmud Swapan were present at the press conference.

People

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Hasina, also AL chief, blasted the past BNP government and the erstwhile Election Commission (EC) led by Justice MA Aziz for preparing a flawed voter list with 1.23 crore fake voters. The four-party alliance government wanted to return to the power with the fake voters, she alleged.

"Being a justice how did he [Aziz] do the unfair task of preparing the fake voter list. From this incident it is understandable the quality of judges the then BNP government appointed," she said.

She said hundreds of crores of taka public money was misused in preparing the fake voter list. "It must be investigated and the perpetrators punished so that none can dare to do it in future," she said.

She said the government will cooperate the EC if it moves to take action against preparing of fake voter list.

The representatives of the union parishads do not have accountability rather they are now holding office without being elected after expiry of their tenure in 2008, said the premier.

"Whatever amount of aid and works we allocate to union parishads, they spend some of it, but embezzle most of the rest," she said.

She said her government would take measures so that no elected representative can hold office after expiry of the tenure.

The premier however said the LGRD ministry has already talked to the EC so that union parishad elections can be held as soon as possible.

On holding free and fair election, Hasina said the government will do whatever needs to strengthen the EC.

In an oblique reference to Khaleda Zia's family, the premier said those who had only a shattered box and had to receive orphanage and widow allowances became the number one rich family in the country.

Indicating BNP leaders, she said even those who were penniless before 2001 became owner of banks, television channels, newspapers and industries by looting public money.

They were desperate to return to the power to protect the ill-gotten money, Hasina said.

On reducing traffic congestion in the capital, she said her government has taken different plans to ease the communications with Dhaka and its adjacent districts.

She said yellow and black taxicabs, which were imported during the past BNP government regime, are now being used in snatching and robbery.

The government is taking steps to stop such criminal activities, she said.

Nahid warns

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Every district and upazila will observe the day to help create social awareness, the minister said.

A colourful procession of students, parents, ministry officials, human rights activists, civil society members and celebrities will begin from the city's Muktangan at 8:00am and end at the Central Shaheed Minar on the day, he added. They will take an oath at the Shaheed Minar.

The education ministry would ask the higher authorities concerned to take punitive action against officers of law enforcing agencies for their negligence, if found, in resisting the stalkers, he continued.

Later, in parliament he urged all to join the processions on June 13 in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

"We want to change boys' attitude towards girls so that they honour them," Nahid said.

On quality of education in private universities, he said many of the 54 private universities could not fulfil the prerequisites for setting up a university even after 10 years. Even then many of them are engaged in selling certificates, he alleged.

Earlier, a bill was placed in the House to enact a law in this regard, and it is under scrutiny of the parliamentary standing committee on the education ministry, he mentioned.

Nahid said the committee is likely to place its report on June 14. "On passage of the bill, the private universities will be bound to improve the quality of education and atmosphere of their campuses," he noted.

War paint is on

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and Bangladesh Television (BTV) about playing a partisan role.

She also criticised human rights organisation for keeping silent about the "repression on the opposition."

The mass sit-in, the first anti-government programme since the December 2008 election, was organised to protest against "the government's interference in judiciary" and "appointment of incompetent and controversial persons as justices."

BNP's alliance partner Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh Jatiya Party, Islami Oikya Jote and a number of like-minded political parties, professional bodies and personalities participated in the programme for the first time after January 2007.

Hundreds of supporters of the opposition took position on the road in front of the Engineers' Institution causing severe traffic congestion in the area.

They chanted anti-government slogans during the four-hour sit-in that began at 10:00am.

Loudspeakers and large screens had been installed at different points from Shahbagh to Kadamful Chattra.

Calling for the resignation of the election commission, the BNP chief said it created a rift in BNP during the tenure of the last caretaker government.

Khaleda said the overzealous members of intelligence agencies, who are arresting and torturing opposition activists, will face grave consequences for their partisan role.

"You [the members of intelligence agencies] may have to face remand one day. Be alert and careful," said the former prime minister.

She again came down hard on former chief adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed and former army chief Moeen U Ahmed.

The leader of the opposition said all [in the army] except Moeen, and a few others along with Fakhruddin, will be pardoned.

"I have no grievance against the army as only a few people including Moeen Uddin committed crimes. If you [army personnel] give deposition that Moeen and a few others had committed the offences, you will be pardoned."

Khaleda protested against the shutdown of Amar Desh and the arrest of its acting Editor Mahmudur Rahman.

Media houses are being shut for telling the truth, she said.

The BNP chairperson said if BNP is voted back to power, those sacked by the present government will get their jobs back while the "partisan cadres" being appointed now will lose their jobs.

"The government has taught us this lesson and we will follow it in future," she said.

The BNP chairperson said she placed a budget proposal for the good of the present government that termed it unconstitutional.

"The government is violating the constitution time and again," Khaleda alleged.

Referring to the 1986 elections, she asked, "Wasn't it a violation of the constitution when they convened parliament at the South Plaza of Sangsad Bhaban after losing the polls, stage-managed by the then military dictator HM Ershad?"

The leader of the opposition urged judges to maintain neutrality, saying they need not

worry, as people will be with them if they ensure justice.

She said if voted to power again, they would set up a Supreme Court secretariat.

Khaleda alleged that BTV telecast "false" news about her and her sons.

"None will be able to protect those who are doing these against me and my sons."

Criticising human rights bodies, the former premier said they created uproar in Dinaipur over the murder of a girl when BNP was in power. But now they remain silent about the repression on the opposition by the ruling party.

"I want to know the reason behind their silence."

She demanded immediate release of Mahmudur Rahman, BNP leaders Lutfozzaman Babar, Abdus Salam Pintu and Nasiruddin Pintu.

Khaleda Zia called upon all to make the June 27 hartal a success.

She said the hartal was not called for the benefits of her party or herself but for bringing an end to people's sufferings.

BNP leaders Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Moudud Ahmed, Shawkat Mahmud, Jamaat leaders Matir Rahman Nizami and Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojaheed, Andaleev Rahman Partha of BJP, Shafiqul Alam Prodhan of Jagpa, among others, spoke.

Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Farooque and Jubo Dal president Moazzem Hossain Alal moderated the programme.

Gano Bhaban

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to their lives as mother. She bought for them ornaments, saris, and all other thing necessary for a wedding.

This was the first time that the wedding of any girl is completed at Gono Bhaban in presence of a prime minister.

Hasina adorned the three girls with gold ornaments and blessed them.

Sakina Aktar Ratna, her younger sister Faroo Akhtar Runa and Asma Akhtar lost most of their family members in the Nimtoli fire on June 3.

Ratna tied the knot with Saidur Rahman Suman, Runa with Mohammad Jamil and Asma with Mohammad Alamgir. The three girls and Jamil lost their mothers and other family members.

"I'm missing my younger brother Anik. After losing our dear ones, I'm quite happy today that the prime minister has come to our lives as a close kin," Suman said after the wedding.

Jamil said he missed his mother and other family members on such a happy occasion.

Alamgir, who married Asma, sought everyone's blessing for a happy married life.

A special prayer was offered at 11:30pm for the salvation of the departed souls of the members of the four families.

Awami League leaders Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, MA Aziz, Hazi Mohammad Selim, Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin took the bridegrooms to the stage at the conference hall of Gano Bhaban at about 9:30pm.

However, the wedding ceremony was scheduled for 7:00pm.

Local AL lawmaker Jalal said the weddings were arranged just a week after the devastating fire as there was no religious restriction and the families of the brides and bridegrooms agreed to complete the weddings as soon as possible.

Outages

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Wasequr said, adding that the scorching heat and constant perspiration is taking a heavy toll on his work life.

"We couldn't even charge our Instant Power Supplies (IPS) properly in the last two days amid power outages in every alternative hour for five to six times," said a resident of Green Road.

Shayla Ahmed of Kakrail said their suffering in the summer heat has worsened as power outages occur when they needed electricity the most.

The rickshaw pullers and day labourers are the worst sufferers of the summer burn. "When it is too much to walk in the excessive heat, imagine how tough it is for us to peddle a rickshaw under the blistering sun," said a rickshaw puller.

Power Development Board (PDB) sources said the official load shedding yesterday was of around 1,000 megawatts (MW) while it was 1,100MW the day before which jumped from earlier shortfall of 600MW.

About 3,800MW of power, the lowest in recent times, was generated during the peak hours yesterday against an official demand of 5,100MW. However, the unofficial demand in peak hours is around 6,000MW, said the sources, adding that, the average production has been between 4,000 to 4,200MW since mid-May.

According to the Met office, yesterday Dhaka has endured 35.5°C while the highest temperature was recorded at 37.5°C in Khulna.

Money whitening

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In the current FY, Tk 400 to Tk 1,500 tax per square foot is charged for whitening money in this category.

And investors in share market, and entrepreneurs setting up new industries are charged 10 percent tax for getting the facility.

Sources in the National Board of Revenue said the offer did not draw much response. In 10 months from July to April in the current FY, only 81 people took the opportunity, and whitened Tk 57 crore. Of them, 53 got the scope for buying flats.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith presents the Tk 1,32,170 crore national budget for FY 2010-11 in the Jatiya Sangsad at 3:00 pm today.

The budgetary target of revenue collection is Tk 93,000 crore. Of the amount, the NBR is to collect Tk 72,600 crore, which is more than 19 per cent higher than in the current FY.

In share market, no scope for whitening money is given to individual investors in the current FY, but persons, who made profit through institutional investment, are given the scope by imposing tax on 5 to 10 percent profit.

In the next budget, brokerage houses in share market will be brought under the VAT net. But tax at a reduced rate, maybe 5 percent, will be charged on them, sources said.

The existing import duty structure will not be changed. But increased supplementary duty may be imposed on luxury items including 1,300 to 2,000 cc motor cars.

The finance minister will also present a concept paper on district budget and unified budget today. Besides, he might present a development plan on power and energy sector, the sources mentioned.

Mahmudur

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remand for interrogation in the case filed against him for obstructing the law enforcers in discharge of their jobs on June 2.

First Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Habibur Rahman Bhuiyan passed the order after Kotwali police produced him before it on completion of a day's remand.

Kotwali police filed the case on June 2 against 130 to 150 unidentified people, including Mahmudur Rahman and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) Tejaon unit leader Habibur Rahman Kabir.

In the forwarding report, the investigation officer (IO) Sub-Inspector (SI) Moklesur Rahman said Mahmudur got infuriated when he was asked about the purpose of holding a secret meeting with government officials of different levels on November 24, 2006 at his Artisan Ceramics in Uttara.

The information derived from him during his remand is being verified, he added.

Moreover, there will be a necessity to interrogate him after being remanded in future. So, the accused should be confined in jail custody until the investigation completes, the IO said.

Earlier, Mahmudur was placed on an eight-day remand in two other criminal cases filed with Uttara and Bimanbandar police stations on different dates.

Police arrested Mahmudur Rahman on June 2 from his Amar Desh office at Karwan Bazar after its former publisher Hasmat Ali Hasu filed a cheating case against him with Tejaon Shilpanchal Police Station.

Rab men told

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attempt to implicate a Sathkira businessman in a false arms-possession charge last month.

The two officials-Operation Commander of Rab-6 (Khulna) Maj Kamruzzaman and Deputy Assistant Director Delwar Hossain appeared before the bench yesterday as per its earlier order.

The court on May 26 ordered them to appear before it on June 9 following a writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB) seeking its direction on the government to take action against the Rab officials.

The bench also said the Rab has been doing many good jobs in maintaining law and order in the country, but they should be careful to protect their goodwill and popularity.

Senior Judge of the bench Justice AHM Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik commented that the journalists are helping this court through publishing reports to take action against the incidents of violation of human and fundamental rights of people.

The journalists are doing noble deeds by risking their lives, he also said, as HRPB filed the writ petition following the newspaper reports in May this year.

Rab officials Kamruzzaman and Delwar Hossain yesterday told the court in an affidavit that a team of law enforcers went to arrest Shafiqul Islam in a village of Sathkira on the basis of specific information about arms.

The officials also said they neither tortured anybody nor tried to implicate Shafiqul Islam in any false case during their operation.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told the court that Kamruzzaman and Delwar Hossain have already been

closed, and removed from Sathkira to the Rab headquarters as per the HC order.

He gave assurance that the two Rab officials will remain at the headquarters until the investigation report on the Sathkira incidents is submitted to the court.

The attorney general also said the home ministry has formed a probe committee to investigate the incident in accordance with the HC order on May 26, and the investigation report will be submitted to it soon.

On the basis of assurance made by the attorney general the court exempted the Rab officials from personal appearance in the court until the investigation report is submitted to it.

The court also fixed July 12 for further hearing. A team of Rab led by Kamruzzaman and Delwar went to Natuadanga village in Sadar upazila of Sathkira and tried to implicate Shafiqul Islam, owner of a shrimp enclosure, in a false arms-possession charge on May 22.

Agitating villagers confined the Rab team to Shafiqul's house for over five hours following the incident.

The HC on May 26 also issued a rule upon the government to explain in two weeks why it should not be directed to take action against Kamruzzaman and Delwar for their failure to perform their duties of protecting the fundamental rights of the people.

The HC came up with the order and the rule upon a writ jointly filed by HRPB and Society of Justice.

Advocate Manzill Murshid appeared for the petitioners, while Deputy Attorney General Nazrul Islam Talukder for the state.

Daughter's death

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came to know she was burnt to death.

His relatives did not reveal the news of his daughter's death earlier as they feared it might be fatal for him.

On hearing the traumatic news, his conditions deteriorated rapidly.

"His shock was so severe it triggered breathing problems and the doctors had to calm him with sleeping draughts. Now, he cries and talks about Hafsa all the time," said Saifuddin's sister.

"He has not been normal since yesterday and is still coping with the shock of losing his daughter," said Prof Shahidul Bari of the burn unit requesting the correspondent not to ask Saifuddin anything about her.

Saifuddin, an employee of Dhaka City Corporation, is groaning in pain at the Burn and Plastic Surgery Unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) while his wife is at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) as her condition is critical.

On that fateful day, Saifuddin had bought a new frock for her daughter. But the little girl did not have time to wear it as her life was nipped off at the bud.

"What more do you want to ask me? I am exhausted. I could not save my daughter who I loved more than my life," said a grief-stricken Saifuddin.

Everything in his house was burnt into ashes and he would have no choice but to live on the streets, he added sorrowfully.

Like Saifuddin, scores of other burn victims of the DMCH burn unit are traumatized after losing their family and possessions.

Thoughts of building a future from scratch without loved ones around are making them feel more hopeless by the day.

"I don't know how to begin all over again," said Fawzia Begum, a victim undergoing treatment at the burn unit while her daughter is at the Intensive Care Unit of DMCH. "My maid servant who had been with us for five years was burnt alive. Her family is financially dependent on me and hasn't been informed yet. How can I support them when I myself have to start everything from scratch?" broke down Fawzia.

The doctors said 60 percent of these patients are in dire need of psychological support to help resume normal life.

These people need counseling and emotional support just as much as medications to heal their wounds, they said.

"Psychological support is essential to rehabilitate these patients. I am planning to request the vice-chancellor of Dhaka University so that he sends psychologists to the burn unit," said project director Dr Samantall Sen.

He also urged all to come forward to lend a hand to these unfortunate people who lost everything in a span of only two hours.

Fourteen victims of Nimtoli

disaster are still in a critical condition. Among them, two victims are now at DMCH burn unit and 12 others at CMH.

Traffic mess

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came to a standstill since 10:00am as leaders and activists of BNP and its front and associate organisations marched towards the Institution of Engineers Bangladesh.

The congestion took a serious turn in adjoining areas as traffic police had to close the road between Shahbagh and Matshya Bhaban from 10:00am to 3:00pm. The tail-back from the sit-in spot reached Farmgate on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue and Science Laboratory intersection on Mirpur Road.

The worst-affected areas were Shahbagh, Bangla Motor, Kantaban, Elephant Road, Gulistan, Motijheel, Matshya Bhaban, Jatiya Press Club, Paltan, Kakrail, and Shantinagar.

It took more than two hours to travel 2km on a bus.