

## 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 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 cool 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 sputtered. Care has to be taken so that the sputtering becomes permanent.

But then an enabling environment for private investment also means 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 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 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 hand-cuff 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 tied 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 plainclothes 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.

## People

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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 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) 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.

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

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.

Asked, Maj Matiur submitted their probe report in seven working days since June 4.

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.

AL leaders Nuh-ul-Alam, NAFM, Bahaudin Nasim, Mrinal Kanti Das, B M Mojammeh Chowdhury, Abu Sayeed Al Mahmud Swapon were present at the press conference.

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## 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 Kadambari 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 partisanship.

"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 paraded.

"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 Sangsab 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

any contact with them.

During a visit, Ahid's office of Banani Chappal on the ground floor of Abu Bakar Jam-e-Mosque on Majed Sarder Road in Old Dhaka was found shut. Locals said no-one came to the office since the incident.

Mahbub Alam, executive member of the mosque, said, "We saw Ahid Ullah in his office three hours before the fire and then he disappeared. Some of his employees also were present at the office that night, but they also did not show up later."

The personnel from the Crime Scene Expert of Criminal Investigation Department, who collected evidence from the scene to identify the chemicals, also could not come up with any decision.

Meanwhile, the building owners alleged that chemicals owner Ahid Ullah kept those explosives like materials in the building violating the deed they signed on March 1, 2008.

They added since the catastrophe he did not make

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 Dinajpur over the murder of a girl when BNP was in power.

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

She demanded immediate release of Mahmudur Rahman, BNP leaders Lutfuzzaman 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 Matiur Rahman Nizami and Ali Ahsan Muhammadi Majeed, Andaleeb Rahman Partha of BJB, Shafiqul Alam Prodhan of Jagpa, among others, spoke.

Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abdin Farroque 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 Gano Bhaban in the presence of a prime minister.

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

Sakina Akbar Ratna, her younger sister Farooq Akhtar Runa and Asma Akhtar lost most of their family members in the Nimgoli fire on June 3.

Ratna tied the knot with Sadiq 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.

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

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.

Shahbagh, 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 Nimgoli tragedy at the DMCH burn unit are traumatised 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 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 counselling 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 Samantalal 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.