

Three hurdles for 8pc growth goal

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investment in the energy sector, while financing is required in the infrastructure sector. For arranging financing in the infrastructure, the tax-GDP ratio has to increase. To do so, the VAT laws have to be implemented," he said.

In order to improve competitiveness, the barriers outlined in the WB's latest Doing Business report have to be removed. Otherwise, foreign investors would not come, said the economist.

He was backed by Rodrigo Cubera, a senior official of the International Monetary Fund. He said in future, Bangladesh would have to generate more revenue from domestic sources.

The IMF official recommended the implementation of the new VAT laws as soon as possible.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith acknowledged the plans as ambitious. "No doubt, this is an ambitious target but the consistency of our development performance in the last six years prompts us to seriously strive for achieving this new target."

He said while much of the additional resources would need to come from the national savings, there will also be a need for drawing on foreign savings.

The increased requirements of foreign resources, especially investment, will present a challenge for Bangladesh during the Seventh Plan and beyond.

"We hope that we will get our development partners on our side as before to overcome those challenges and to make our journey from lower to higher middle income country possible," he said at the opening ceremony.

The minister stated four major challenges: continued proliferation of standalone projects and heavy aid fragmentation; less vibrant coordination between sector-level working groups resulting in less alignment with sectoral plan; low harmonisation and low use of country systems; and capacity deficits and implementation lag.

Robert Watkins, UN resident coordinator in Bangladesh, said the economic growth achieved by Bangladesh was good, but inequality has to reduce and attention has to be given to governance and public safety.

In the same session, Prof Shamsul Alam, a member of the Planning Commission, made a presentation where he said Bangladesh's target of becoming a higher middle income country with zero hunger calls for huge investments from both internal and external sources.

It is estimated that Bangladesh needs about \$9 billion in additional investment in major infrastructure projects per year to sustain growth at a higher level, he said.

To secure the GDP growth rates projected for the Seventh Plan, the investment rate will need to expand from 28.9 percent in FY2015 to around 34.4 percent by FY 2020. And the country would require \$409 billion in investment to attain the Plan, said Prof Alam.

Of the total investment requirement, the government hopes to receive \$39 billion from external sources, which is 9.56 percent of the sum.

The Seventh Plan aims to increase the size of the public spending by about 5 percentage points to 21 percent of the gross domestic product by FY2019-20, with much of the expanded spending will be directed to expanded coverage and better quality of public service delivery.

But it would not be possible for the government to undertake such a major investment plan in infrastructure based entirely on budgetary resources, said the member, adding that the government would need to start its public-private partnership initiative in full force to leverage public resources with private investment.

Prof Alam said assistance from different development partners in the form of loan and grant was one of the major sources of the country's resource base. Though foreign assistance is declining, the volume is on steady rise in absolute terms.

Thus, one of the key strategies of the Seventh Plan will be to ensure effective partnership with development partners to ensure better use and results of foreign assistance," he noted.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman sustained a steady spell of six-plus percent annual average real GDP growth amid global slowdown.

He, however, talked about a couple of aspects that the government will need to focus particularly in upholding and further strengthening the growth momentum over the next five years.

He said after decades of globalisation-driven growth, global trade growth had now slowed, and was actually trailing global output growth.

"This indicates that the potential for export-led growth will be weaker and harder to realise for our export sector unless we take advantage of upcoming new opportunities in markets for goods and services that are produced using environmentally sustainable green output processes and practices."

The governor touched upon a number of areas the government has taken for green transition of output processes and practices in the businesses.

"These are only small initial steps, with lots more to do in our intended

countrywide transition to environmentally sustainable output practices and lifestyles."

Secondly, the more subdued prospects of export-led growth means that the country needs to foster more in domestic demand-led growth, said the governor.

At the opening ceremony, Kingo Toyoda, deputy director-general, International Cooperation Bureau of the foreign affairs ministry of Japan, said he sincerely hoped that all the stakeholders would strengthen the partnership to address development challenges that Bangladesh faced.

He said Japan would assist Bangladesh in establishing a growth belt along the Bay of Bengal through developing economic infrastructure, improving investment environment and fostering connectivity.

As a major development partner of Bangladesh, Japan aims at accelerating sustainable economic growth with equity and bringing people out of poverty.

"In the area of governance, Japan appreciates Bangladesh's efforts under its National Integrity Strategy. Transparency and accountability are indispensable for further development of the country."

Kingo stressed that security is a prerequisite for smooth implementation of assistance activities by the development partners.

A number of speakers identified equitable distribution of wealth as a major perquisite for high and inclusive economic growth. Such inclusive economic growth can be ensured through land ownership reforms, tax reforms, public service management reforms, quality education and expansion of social safety net.

The first working session on agriculture, food security and climate change emphasised optimising the productivity of agricultural land through appropriate use of pesticides, diversification of crops and avoidance of preservatives.

The second working session, styled Strengthening the economic foundation: Strategies for development of infrastructure, stressed on the importance of better energy mix like using coal for power generation.

During the third session, the discussants underscored the importance of a sound governance system based on rule of law for fostering development.

Jin Liqun, president-designate of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Wencai Zhang, vice president of the Asian Development Bank, and Janina Jaruzelski, head of USAID Bangladesh, also spoke in the inaugural session.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurates Bangladesh Development Forum 2015 Fair at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Stand beside us

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"In view of this, the present government is working with specific plans and programmes to realise sustainable development goals and we would be happy if the international community stands beside Bangladesh in her development pursuit."

"Our joint efforts are the key to making this beautiful world free from poverty and hunger," she added.

Hasina was addressing the inaugural session of the two-day Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF)-2015 at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital.

She told her audience that Bangladesh is now pursuing an inclusive growth strategy to become a middle-income country by 2021 and a developed one by 2041.

"We have full confidence in the international community that they would continue to support our development," she said.

The BDF, a platform of the development partners, is being held since 2005 with an aim to share strategies and priorities of the government with the development partners, civil society and private sector, and discussing how to work together to realise the plan.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, President-designate of the Asian

Infrastructure Investment Bank Jin Liqun, Vice President of Asian Development Bank Wencai Zhang, Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan Kingo Toyoda, among others, addressed the forum.

The prime minister said she sincerely believes that BDF-2015 will be able to contribute to provide joint strategies and recommendations needed for a poverty-free Bangladesh.

Pointing to the country's Vision 2021, she said it aimed at transforming Bangladesh into a middle-income country. To achieve the goal, the government has recently adopted the 7th Five Year Plan.

Referring to the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the international community, Hasina said building on the success achieved in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Bangladesh now aims to realise the SDGs.

She hoped that the BDF will reflect on how to achieve the SDGs by providing the government with prudent and effective recommendations.

Hasina stressed the need for support of the developed countries to realise the targets of the SDGs, saying the developed countries should come forward in this regard.

She also stressed that in face of cli-

mate change and other development challenges, the international community needs to revisit the current global trade system to remove the constraints.

"Trade should be considered as a means of poverty reduction and employment opportunities."

"Policies and interventions adopted by the present government proved to be effective in accelerating growth, waning budget deficit, achieving high growth in exports and ensuring foreign currency reserve at a satisfactory level," she claimed.

Hasina said Bangladesh's reliance on foreign assistance for implementing Annual Development Programme (ADP) is gradually decreasing. "However, partnership of development partners is still very crucial for Bangladesh's future prosperity," she said.

"We are of the view that regional, sub regional and bilateral cooperation in the Asia-Pacific area are essential for balanced development and ensuring a win-win situation for all," she said.

The BDF-2015 will mainly focus on goals and strategies of 7th Five Year Plan and in the meeting, Bangladesh would seek cooperation from the development partners, civil society organisations, the intelligentsia, private sector to implement the targets and programmes set out in the plan.

Dhaka to seek handover

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The criminals include: Shahadat Hossain, Khandaker Tanveer Islam Joy, Nabi Hossain Nabi, Molla Masud, Chittagong Chhatra Shibir cadre and eight murder accused Sazzad Hossain, Khan Suman, Norouzzam Saha Ashiq, Jisan, Prakash Kumar Biswas, Bikash Kumar Biswas, Shamim Ahmed Aga Shamim, Haris Ahmed, Kala Chan.

Another top criminal, Subrata Bain, who had been in Nepal, has now trespassed into India, sources said.

Sources in the law enforcement agencies said those criminals, each of whom are accused in several murder cases, have been collecting toll from people, particularly businessmen, in Bangladesh through their local cohorts.

At the meeting today, India is expected to raise the issues of the influx of fake Indian currency, cattle smuggling, and illegal infiltration. It would seek Dhaka's cooperation to completely stop these.

Bangladesh would raise the issues

of border killings, human trafficking, and drugs smuggling during the two-day parley, said a top official of the ministry yesterday.

Terrorism and militancy might also be discussed following the recent events in Paris.

The meeting starts at 1:00pm at Hotel Sonargaon with the working groups of both the countries meeting on the first day. The home secretaries would sit tomorrow morning and sign deals, said a top home ministry official.

Senior Secretary to the Home Ministry Mozammel Haque Khan would lead the Bangladesh delegation while Indian Home Secretary Rajiv Mehrishi would be his counterpart.

"We'll also want to know specifically whether any killer of Bangabandhu is staying there. If anyone is there we'll request them to hand him over," a home ministry official told The Daily Star wishing anonymity.

Our New Delhi correspondent adds: India's Border Security Force

has said the firings at the borders have been the result of its attempt to curb cattle smuggling on the instructions of the Indian government.

According to an official estimate, smuggling of cattle to Bangladesh has come down by more than 70 percent, resulting in a sharp increase in the price of beef in Bangladesh.

Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh had said in September that about 20-22 lakh cattle were smuggled to Bangladesh every year and it had come down to 2 to 2.5 lakh cattle this year.

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One attacker identified

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France stadium, or in and around the Bataclan venue.

The sports minister said at least one of the bombers who detonated their explosives near the stadium had tried to enter the venue where France were playing Germany in an international football match at the time.

Prosecutors say they believe three groups of attackers were involved in the Paris carnage, raising the possibility that one group may still be at large.

It is now known that three of the suicide bombers were French nationals, but two of the men had lived in the Belgian capital Brussels.

Two cars used in the attacks were hired in Belgium. One was quickly found near the Bataclan venue, and one overnight on Saturday in the suburb of Montreuil east of Paris, with two AK47 rifles inside.

Witnesses said the second car, a black Seat, was used by gunmen who shot dozens of people in bars and restaurants in the hip Canal St Martin area of Paris.

ATTACKER IDENTIFIED

The first attacker to be named by investigators is Omar Ismail Mostefai, a 29-year-old father and French citizen, who was identified from a severed finger among the carnage at the Bataclan, where 89 people were killed after heavily armed men in wearing explosives vests stormed the venue.

Police detained six people close to Mostefai, including his father, brother and sister-in-law, judicial sources said.

Born in the modest Paris suburb of Courcouronnes, he had eight convictions for petty crimes but had never served a prison sentence.

"It's a crazy thing, it's madness. Yesterday I was in Paris and I saw what a mess this was," one of his brothers told AFP before he was taken into custody on Saturday night.

Belgian prosecutors said two of the attackers were Frenchmen who had lived in Brussels, at least one in the neighbourhood of Molenbeek which has been linked to Islamic radicalism.

Premier Charles Michel conceded Molenbeek, a poor immigrant neighbourhood known as a hotbed of radicalisation, was a "gigantic problem".