

Sri Lanka unveils foreigner-friendly budget

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's new government Friday used its first full budget to lift taxes on foreign investors and vowed to reverse "isolationist" policies of the former regime, which faced international censure over its human rights record.

Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake said the previous administration of strongman Mahinda Rajapakse had left Sri Lanka "on the brink" of receiving Western sanctions by refusing to address rights issues.

"The foreign policy of Sri Lanka was blemished and we were on the brink of receiving stringent economic sanctions and almost left to fend for ourselves," Karunanayake said while presenting the 2016 budget in parliament.

The finance minister laid out several foreigner-friendly proposals including the lifting of restrictions on foreign ownership of land.

Former president Rajapakse banned foreigners owning property in November 2012 and ordered that any real estate leased to non-nationals will be subjected to a 100 percent tax payable upfront for the entire duration of the lease.

The new government proposed removing the lease tax on non-nationals.

The finance minister also announced removing exchange control laws that had been an impediment to direct foreign investment.

He said foreign investment approvals will be granted within 50 days under a new regulatory body known as the Agency for Development.

"This will certainly be a game changer in promoting investments," he added.

He reintroduced a resident visa scheme for foreign nationals who wish to make Sri Lanka their second home.

Karunanayake also used his speech to attack Rajapakse on numerous fronts including "adopting an isolationist foreign policy" and being guilty of large-scale corruption and cronyism.

Rajapakse, along with his family, faces several investigations, including allegations of murder.

"Law and order of the country was turning medieval and the country was gradually converting to a feudal entity," the minister said.

Karunanayake criticised the former president for not ensuring accountability for atrocities committed by both sides in Sri Lanka's 37-year civil war, although he gave him credit for ending the conflict with the crushing of Tamil Tiger rebels.

Karunanayake also used Friday's budget to raise the



Ravi Karunanayake

threshold for paying personal tax three-fold, reduce corporate income tax and announce an exemption for small businesses such as corner shops.

He reduced levies on hotels and the travel industry, as Colombo looks to revive the key growth sectors following the end of the conflict that claimed 100,000 lives between 1972 and 2009.

But he sharply increased taxes on gambling and casinos as well as motor vehicles and liquor, favourite targets of successive governments to raise revenue.

Sri Lanka still needs huge foreign and local loans to bridge the budget deficit for the calendar year 2016, estimated at 5.9 percent of the country's GDP, down from 6.0 percent in 2015.

"At present, the public debt to GDP ratio stands at around 72 percent, which is high, by accepted international standards," the minister said. "Our focus and strategy would be to comply at all times."



Md Ahsan Ullah, executive director of Bangladesh Bank, and Md Hashem Chowdhury, additional managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, exchange documents of a participation agreement while Atiur Rahman, governor of Bangladesh Bank, looks on, at the conference room of Bangladesh Bank for a long-term financing facility under the Financial Sector Support Project assisted by the World Bank.

US fines Novartis \$390m over pharmacy kickbacks

AFP, New York

The US fined Swiss drugmaker Novartis \$390 million for granting kickbacks to pharmacies that recommended the company's drugs, according to an agreement announced Friday.

In a settlement deal, Novartis admitted that it gave specialty pharmacies exceptional rebates and patient referrals in exchange for recommending Exjade, which treats excess iron in blood, and Myfortic, an anti-rejection drug for kidney transplant recipients.

The civil settlement is smaller than the \$3.3 billion fine the government originally sought in the case.

To boost sales of Exjade, Novartis leveraged its control over patient referrals to pressure pharmacies to hire or assign nurses to call Exjade patients and encourage them to order refills of the drug.

Sales of the drug had suffered up to that point due to side effects that were worse than expected, the government said.

These nurses understated the "serious, potentially life-threatening risks of taking Exjade," such as kidney and liver failure, the Justice Department said.

India unveils roadmap for phasing out corporate tax exemptions

REUTERS, Mumbai

India has unveiled details of its plan to phase out some tax exemptions for companies as the government looks to simplify tax laws and make them transparent before it lowers the tax rate.

Over four years, the government plans to lower the corporate tax rate to 25 percent from 30 percent, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said in his budget speech in February. During that period, exemptions and deductions will be phased out.

Profit-linked, investment-linked and area-based deductions will be phased out for both corporate and non-corporate tax payers, according to a document posted on the tax office's website late on Friday.

For tax incentives with no set date of

termination, the government will set March 31, 2017 as the so-called sunset date, the tax office said.

This will apply to development, operation and maintenance of infrastructure facilities, development of special economic zones as well as commercial production of natural gas and mineral blocks, according to the document.

Gokul Chaudhri, head of the direct tax practice at BMR & Associates LLP in New Delhi, said the industry "would have" hoped for a lengthened and staggered phase-out of incentives, especially for capital-intensive and long-term projects in fields such as power and upstream oil and gas.

The government has asked for stakeholder comments on the proposals within 15 days.

VW cuts 2016 capital spending plan as cheating scandal widens

REUTERS, Wolfsburg, Germany/Washington

Volkswagen AG cut 1 billion euros (\$1.1 billion) from its 2016 investment plan on Friday, as its emissions cheating scandal expanded to include tens of thousands more US vehicles.

Volkswagen has told US regulators that emissions issues in larger luxury cars and SUVs extend to an additional 75,000 vehicles dating back to 2009, the US Environmental Protection Agency said on Friday.

The disclosure widened the scandal, which had previously focused mainly on smaller-engined, mass-market cars, and raised the possibility that engineers at both the Audi and VW brands could have been involved in separate emissions schemes.

Earlier on Friday, the supervisory board of VW, Europe's biggest auto manufacturer, said it would cap spending on

property, plant and equipment at around 12 billion euros (\$12.8 billion) next year, down about 8 percent on its previous plan of around 13 billion euros.

Volkswagen (VW) is battling the biggest business crisis in its 78-year history after admitting in September that it cheated diesel emissions tests in 482,000 2.0-liter diesel cars sold in the United States since 2009.

In November, the EPA and the California Air Resources Board also accused VW of evading emissions in at least 10,000 Audi, Porsche and VW sport utility vehicles and cars with 3.0-liter V-6 diesel engines. VW initially denied the findings.

But during a meeting on Thursday, VW and Audi officials told the EPA that all 3.0-liter diesel engines from model years 2009 through 2016 had higher emissions than allowed.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics

Digitization of BBS Publication and Online Secondary Data Collection Project

Parishankhyan Bhaban, (8 floor, Block-A), E-27/A, Agargaon, Dhaka-1207

Request for Expression of Interest (National)

For selection of company/firm/firms to digitize all publications of BBS and develop an online secondary data collection system.

1 Ministry/Division	Ministry of Planning, Statistics & Informatics Division	
2 Agency	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS)	
3 Name of the Procuring entity	Digitization of BBS Publication and Online Secondary Data Collection Project	
4 Procuring entity code	5045	
5 Procuring entity district	Dhaka	
6 Expression of interest for selection of	Company/Firm for Digitization of BBS Publication and Online Secondary Data Collection	
7 EOI Ref. No.	52.01.0000.224.05.009.15-43	
8 Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	19-11-2015	
9 Procurement method	Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS)	
10 Budget and source fund	Development budget of GOB	
11 Project/Program code	1631-5045	
12 Project/Program name	Digitization of BBS Publication and Online Secondary Data Collection Project	
13 EOI closing date & time	EOI (in sealed envelope) to be submitted by 10 December, 2015 (within 5.00 pm) to the Project Director, Digitization of BBS Publication and Online Secondary Data Collection Project, Parishankhyan Bhaban, 8 th Floor (Block-02), E-27/A, Agargaon, Dhaka-1207	
14 Brief Description of the services/assignments	Terms of Reference (TOR) for Digitization of BBS Publications and Online Secondary data Collection: The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has mandated Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) as the 'National Statistical Organization (NSO)' to produce national statistics through various surveys and censuses for formulating evidence-based planning and policy decision. It has been regulated by the 'Statistics Act 2013' . Meanwhile, BBS has already been conducted several surveys and censuses since independence. But, there is a limitation of the web based soft copy of the previous survey and census results/publications due to lack of proper digital preservation methods. For this reason, the stakeholders don't have easy access to the previous BBS publications or reports. On the other hand, BBS has to collect secondary data from several institutions to produce national statistics, in particular to generate the GDP and all national accounts data. Currently, most of the secondary data are collected manually which is basically time consuming, expensive and old fashioned.	
15 Experience, Resource and delivery capacity required	The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has mandated Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) as the 'National Statistical Organization (NSO)' to produce national statistics through various surveys and censuses for formulating evidence-based planning and policy decision. It has been regulated by the 'Statistics Act 2013' . Meanwhile, BBS has already been conducted several surveys and censuses since independence. But, there is a limitation of the web based soft copy of the previous survey and census results/publications due to lack of proper digital preservation methods. For this reason, the stakeholders don't have easy access to the previous BBS publications or reports. On the other hand, BBS has to collect secondary data from several institutions to produce national statistics, in particular to generate the GDP and all national accounts data. Currently, most of the secondary data are collected manually which is basically time consuming, expensive and old fashioned.	
16 Other Information (if applicable)	The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has mandated Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) as the 'National Statistical Organization (NSO)' to produce national statistics through various surveys and censuses for formulating evidence-based planning and policy decision. It has been regulated by the 'Statistics Act 2013' . Meanwhile, BBS has already been conducted several surveys and censuses since independence. But, there is a limitation of the web based soft copy of the previous survey and census results/publications due to lack of proper digital preservation methods. For this reason, the stakeholders don't have easy access to the previous BBS publications or reports. On the other hand, BBS has to collect secondary data from several institutions to produce national statistics, in particular to generate the GDP and all national accounts data. Currently, most of the secondary data are collected manually which is basically time consuming, expensive and old fashioned.	
17 Association with Foreign Company/ Firm is	Applicable (MoU required and Lead firm should be Bangladeshi)	
18 Association with Local Company/ Firm	Having association with local Company/Firm will be treated as additional quality/qualification	
19 Name of the Official Inviting EOI	Mohiuddin Ahmed	
20 Designation of the Official Inviting EOI	Project Director Digitization of BBS Publication and Online Secondary Data Collection	
21 Address of the Official Inviting EOI	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics Parishankhyan Bhaban, Room # 919, 8 floor, Block-A, E-27/A, Agargaon Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh	
22 Contact details of the Official Inviting EOI	Land Phone : 8181669 (Off.) Fax : 880-2-9111064 (DG, BBS) Email : dg@bbs.gov.bd, mohiuddin.bbs@gmail.com	
23 The Procuring Entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the EOI proposals without showing any reason whatsoever.	The Procuring Entity reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the EOI proposals without showing any reason whatsoever.	

sd-
Mohiuddin Ahmed
Project Director
Tel : 8181669 (Off.)