



The Daily Star



REGD. No. DA 781 | Vol. XXXI No. 123 | Jaishta 9, 1428 BS | **Your Right to Know** | SHAWWAL 10, 1442 HURI | 16 PAGES PRICE : Tk12.00

Record foreign aid use in next budget

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON

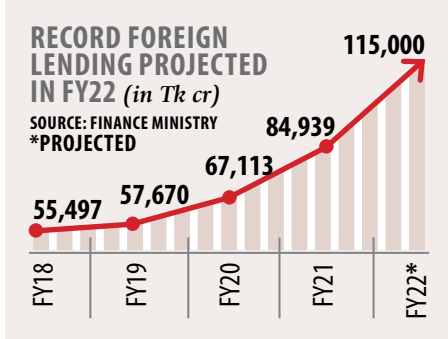
Making hay while the sun, it appears, is the finance ministry's mantra as it goes about preparing the budget for fiscal 2021-22, its second in the backdrop of the extraordinary challenges thrown by the pandemic.

The government is sitting on a record amount of foreign aid and at the same time, the development partners are chipping in liberally to help Bangladesh weather the pandemic gale. Closer to home, banks are sitting on excess liquidity and nowhere to lend to give the precarious state of the economy.

It is these two wellsprings of funds that the ministry will draw upon for the most part to bankroll the budget for the next fiscal year amid shrunken domestic revenue mobilisation.

The government is hoping to use a record Tk 115,000 crore (about \$13 billion) in foreign funding in fiscal 2021-22, up 35.4 percent year-on-year, according to finance ministry officials.

At present, about \$50.4 billion of foreign aid is present in the pipeline, while the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and other development partners have expressed their intent to provide budget



support to the Bangladesh economy to better manage the pandemic whirlwind.

Banks are expected to provide Tk 76,252 crore towards the financing of the budget, down 4.4 percent from this fiscal year.

The government would extract Tk 37,000 crore from non-bank sources, up 4.8 percent from fiscal 2020-21.

Subsequently, the budget deficit, which is the shortfall in the government's income compared with its spending, is projected to hit 6.1 percent of GDP -- the highest in recent memory.

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Buses taking a U-turn at Amin Bazar, Savar, causing a nearly two-kilometre tailback on Dhaka-Aricha highway, after they had dropped off passengers in the scorching heat. The passengers would have to walk or get other transport to the capital. After spending the Eid holidays at their hometowns, scores of people have been coming back to the city, often flouting health guidelines.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Movement curbs likely to go on for another week

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is likely to extend the ongoing restrictions on public movement and transport by another week to contain the spread of coronavirus.

The Cabinet Division has sent a proposal to extend the restrictions to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), sources said.

If the prime minister approves, the division is expected to issue a circular in this regard today, they added.

This current phase of restrictions will end today.

However, the ongoing restrictions remain only on paper as there is little enforcement by government agencies to control public movement and plying vehicles.

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ASTRAZENECA

Govt moves to buy jabs from pvt UK supplier

PORIMOL PALMA

Bangladesh has taken an initiative to buy two million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine from the private sector, after appeals to the US and UK governments for Covid-19 shots yielded nothing.

The director general of the health services directorate in Dhaka recently held a virtual meeting with a supplier of the Oxford vaccine in the UK after the Bangladesh High Commission in London contacted the supplier, a high commission official told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The DG Health had some questions for the supplying company and the answers have been provided," the source said, adding that the price of the doses is being discussed.

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'Rozina in jail as she exposed graft'

Protests rage on for fifth day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Demonstrations to demand the immediate release of Prothom Alo journalist Rozina Islam raged on for the fifth day, with different organisations yesterday staging protest rallies, human chains and a token hunger strike.

One of the demonstrations was by Nagorik Somaj, a citizens' platform, which organised a protest rally in front of the National Museum in the evening.

The platform placed a four-point demand including Rozina's release, punishment of those who harassed her and the removal of the health minister and secretary.

"The prime minister should apologise for the mistakes made by her people," said Zafrullah Chowdhury, trustee of Gonoshasthaya Kendra, at the rally.

Rozina wrote reports on irregularities in recruitment of the health ministry and on the minister who remained absent at office, said Asif Nazrul, a professor of the Dhaka University.

"This is the only reason this incident happened," he added.

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BAIL HEARING

All eyes on court today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All eyes are on the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) court in Dhaka as it is expected to deliver its order on the bail petition of Rozina Islam, senior reporter of Bangla daily Prothom Alo, today.

On Thursday, a virtual hearing of the petition began at 12:50pm and went on for more than an hour. The court of Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Baki Billah then took two hours to deliberate on his decision.

Later, on the day, the prosecution sought more time and the court postponed deciding on the

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29 countries saw 1m extra deaths

Study led by Bangladeshi researcher at Oxford finds assessing impact of pandemic last year

MOUDDUD AHMED SUJAN

Nearly one million extra deaths relating to the Covid-19 pandemic occurred in 29 high-income countries in 2020, found a study led by a team of Oxford University researchers.

Experts said although there are no equivalent statistics, Bangladesh also had more deaths than expected last year. This needs to be addressed through better healthcare to prevent avoidable deaths, they said.

Published in the British Medical Journal on May 19, the study found that except for Norway, Denmark and New Zealand, all other countries examined had more deaths than expected in 2020, more so among men than women.

The five countries with the highest absolute number of excess deaths were the US, UK, Italy, Spain, and Poland.

Measuring excess deaths -- the number of deaths above that expected during a given time period -- is a way of assessing the impact of the pandemic on deaths in various countries, said the researchers.

A team of international researchers, led by Bangladeshi physician-epidemiologist Dr Nazrul Islam from the Nuffield Department of Population Health at Oxford, set out to estimate the direct and indirect effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on mortality in 2020 in 29 high-income countries.

"The extra deaths indicate that the Covid-19 pandemic has claimed many more men than women."

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Cops took no steps despite two GDs

Alleges family of slain Pallabi trader

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

After being attacked three times in last six years, receiving numerous death threats, and even after filing general diaries in this regard, Shahinuddin, a trader, was attacked once again on May 16 and lost his life this time.

Last time he was attacked by a group of organised criminals in November last year, he fought for his life and survived.

This time, luck did not favour him when he was attacked by the same group yet again on May 16 in the capital's Pallabi area and died on the spot.

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Journalists of Prothom Alo and the paper's fans hold a candle-light vigil near their office in the capital's Karwan Bazar, demanding release of their colleague Senior Reporter Rozina Islam, who has been sued under the Official Secrets Act and arrested. The reporter, currently in jail, had written several in-depth reports on corruption in the health sector amid the pandemic.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

NEW KSA TRAVEL ADVISORY

Migrant workers' woes rise further

RASHIDUL HASAN and JAMIL MAHMUD

Several thousand Saudi-bound Bangladeshi migrant workers have been struggling due to the new travel advisory given by Saudi Arabia, which requires medical insurance, covering the risk of Covid-19 infections and hotel reservations for institutional quarantine.

The Saudi authorities said violators shall be deported and banned indefinitely from entering the Middle Eastern country.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday at the Saudia (Saudi airlines) office in the capital's Karwanbazar, Saudi-bound workers said they need to spend around Tk 65,000 to Tk 70,000 to comply with the new conditions.

Following the fresh travel regulations that came into effect from May 20, Biman Bangladesh Airlines was forced to suspend all its international flights to Saudi Arabia for five days till May 24, saying they need time to make arrangements in line with the fresh advisory.

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