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50TH BUDGET OF BANGLADESH

Too weighed down to relish milestone

REJAU KARIM BYRON and MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

Today, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal unveils his third budget, which coincidentally is the 50th fiscal plan of independent Bangladesh.

But he cannot dwell on the historic moment as the nation is eagerly awaiting to find out what he delivers amid a pandemic that just won't go away.

External challenges involving exports and internal challenges involving the ongoing more virulent second wave, threats of further waves, uncertainty about the availability of coronavirus vaccines, and high level of poverty and unemployment are enough to give him sleepless nights in the days leading up to his budget speech in the national parliament.

Kamal is expected to announce a Tk 603,681 crore budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1.

The revenue collection target for the National Board of Revenue would be Tk

330,000 crore, a realistic goal under the current circumstances and at the current pace of tax collection.

There was almost nothing for the new poor, who may number at least one crore, in the outgoing fiscal year.

On and off lockdowns are hurting the economy. Businesses are struggling to stay afloat. Incomes did not return to the pre-pandemic level. Jobs have dried up.

He has to devise ways to support the informal sector, which employs 85 percent of the workforce and starving of funds.

The finance minister would aim to limit the budget deficit at 6.2 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), slightly up from 6.1 percent in the current fiscal year.

The new deficit target would allow him to spend an additional Tk 30,000 crore. Several economists have called for an even higher budget deficit.

The additional funds will pay off because the mass inoculation, when it begins in full

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Saudi-bound Bangladeshi expatriates line up in front of a travel agent's office at the capital's Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel yesterday. The expatriates, eager to get back to Saudi Arabia to join work, have recently been going from one office to another to manage tickets and hotel bookings. According to a recent Saudi travel advisory, travellers to the Gulf country will have to stay in mandatory quarantine in hotels at their own expense.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BUSINESS

An uphill battle ahead

The national budget for fiscal 2021-22 is being proposed today all the while the country's economy faces some tough realities amid the pandemic's second wave. The government will have to balance shrinking business with rising state spending as the hardships demand a bigger social safety net, policy support and incentives for many industries, improvements in health and education and so on, according to economists.

STORY ON B1

Covid scourge creeps up again

Highest daily cases in over a month; curbs imposed in some border dists

STAR REPORT

Restrictions have been imposed in several border districts due to fears that the Indian variant of the Sars-Cov-2 virus may spread there as the country yesterday recorded the highest number of daily Covid cases since April 30.

The health authorities reported 1,988 new cases after testing 20,259 samples, which put the daily positivity rate at 9.8 percent. On Tuesday, the positivity rate was 9.47 percent.

A total of 2,177 new cases were registered on April 30.

The overall positivity rate now stands at 13.44 percent, show data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Another 34 people were reported dead, raising the official coronavirus death toll in the country to 12,694. The mortality rate remained static at 1.58 percent yesterday.

The border districts, however, has been doing much worse than the national average.

The district administrations in Rajshahi and Naogaon yesterday imposed restrictions, stopping all night-time activities outside of home for seven days.

The restrictions exempted emergency services, agricultural activities, mango trade and online trade.

After a meeting of the district's coronavirus monitoring committee, Rajshahi DC Abdul Jalil announced 10 types of restrictions, including closure of all businesses and vehicular movement between 7:00pm and 8:00am every day until June 9.

The positivity rate in Rajshahi is at 16 percent, while daily positivity rate went up to as high as 50 percent on May 31.

In Naogaon, restrictions will be imposed between 6:00pm and 6:00am. All types of transport and NGO activities will remain closed in Naogaon municipality and Niamatpur upazila, but local markets of essentials can operate between 7:00am and 2:30pm.

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UN delegation lauds Bhasan Char project

Calls for international community's support

DIPLOMAT CORRESPONDENT

A high-level UN delegation yesterday lauded the Bhasan Char project and sought international community's support to make sure that the Rohingyas live there with dignity.

"The Bangladesh government has made an important investment in Bhasan Char by developing the housing facility. If you compare with Cox's Bazar refugee camps, the housing facilities are much better in Bhasan Char," said UN Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees (protection) Rouf Mazou, who visited the island in Noakhali on May 31.

"What needs to be done now for us and the rest of the international community is to support the government and make sure those who are in Bhasan Char and those who will be coming there can live in dignity," he told reporters after meeting Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen at the state guesthouse Padma in the capital.

Gillian Triggs, assistant high commissioner for the refugees (operations), was with Mazou when he visited Bhasan Char where the Bangladesh Navy built a housing project for 100,000 Rohingyas.

Since December last year, some 20,000 Rohingya refugees were relocated to the

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Currency swap with Sri Lanka by next month

Says BB official; \$250m to be swapped

REJAU KARIM BYRON

Bangladesh's currency swap agreement with Sri Lanka to replenish the island nation's fast-depleting foreign reserves and ease pressure on its exchange rate will be completed by next month, according to a top official of Bangladesh Bank.

A total of \$250 million would be provided, said the official working on the deal set in motion during Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda

Rajapaksa's Bangladesh visit in March.

By July, all the necessary documents would be signed and the amount given to Sri Lanka, the official told The Daily Star yesterday, seeking anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) will hand over an equivalent amount of its currency, which depreciated about 7 percent against the US dollar this year.

Yesterday, each dollar traded for 197.9 Sri Lankan rupees, according to

the CBSL.

The BB will open an account with a bank in the South Asian country to keep the sum, which will be around 49.5 billion Lankan rupees, said the BB official.

The amount would be used for import payments, the high-up pointed out.

Bangladesh's import bill with Sri Lanka is \$50-55 million a year, the official said.

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Villagers in Barguna's Patharghata upazila carrying baskets filled with sand to be put in geo bags in order to repair an embankment along the Baleswar river that was breached by tidal surges during Cyclone Yaas. The photo was taken on Monday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

BANGABANDHU MURDER CONVICTS Govt decides to strip them of gallantry awards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of Liberation War Affairs has decided in principle to revoke the state gallantry awards of four convicted killers of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The decision was made at a meeting of Jatiya Muktiyoddha Council on Tuesday. The ministry will issue a gazette in this regard within a couple of days.

Talking to reporters at the Secretariat, Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM

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No response to Bangavax

Manufacturer of home-grown vaccine yet to get ethical permission from regulatory body for human trials

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Over four months have passed with no response from a government body to a local pharmaceutical company's application to conduct clinical trials for a home-grown Covid-19 vaccine.

Vaccine developer Globe Biotech Ltd sent a letter to the Bangladesh Medical Research Council (BMRC) on January 17 this year to get ethical permission to conduct human trials.

Officials of the local drug company said they were yet to get any response from the regulatory body in this regard, adding that if they had already been allowed to conduct the trials, they would have been close to

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

শেখ হাসিনার বাংলাদেশ
জীববৈচিত্র্যসমৃদ্ধ উন্নত পরিবেশ

গণবিজ্ঞপ্তি

**সেন্টমার্টিনের বিরল জীববৈচিত্র্য ও প্রতিবেশ
সুরক্ষায় পরিপালনীয় বিধি-নিষেধ**

বাংলাদেশের একমাত্র প্রবালসমৃদ্ধ দ্বীপ সেন্টমার্টিন সরকার ঘোষিত একটি প্রতিবেশগত সংকটাপন্ন এলাকা। অনিয়ন্ত্রিত পর্যটন এবং পর্যটকদের অসচেতনতা, দায়িত্বজ্ঞানহীনতা, পরিবেশ এবং প্রতিবেশ বিরোধী আচরণের কারণে সেন্টমার্টিনের বিরল প্রতিবেশ এবং জীববৈচিত্র্য এখন ধ্বংসের দ্বারপ্রান্তে উপনীত। দ্বীপের পরিবেশ, প্রতিবেশ ও বিরল জীববৈচিত্র্য পুনরুদ্ধারসহ দ্বীপটিকে টিকিয়ে রাখার লক্ষ্যে পরিবেশ সংরক্ষণ আইন ১৯৯৫ (সংশোধিত ২০১০)-এর ০৪ ধারার ক্ষমতাবলে এ দ্বীপে ভ্রমণের ক্ষেত্রে নিম্নলিখিত কার্যক্রমসমূহ নিষিদ্ধ ঘোষণা করা হলোঃ

- ▶ দ্বীপের সৈকতে সাইকেল, মটর সাইকেল, রিক্সা, ভ্যানসহ সকল প্রকার যান্ত্রিক ও অযান্ত্রিক বাহন চালানো;
- ▶ দ্বীপের সৈকত, সমুদ্র এবং নাফ নদীতে প্লাস্টিকসহ সকল ধরনের বর্জ্য ফেলা;
- ▶ পশ্চিম পার্শ্বের সৈকতে কোনোপাড়ার পর দক্ষিণ দিকে এবং পূর্ব পার্শ্বের সৈকতে গলাচিপার পর দক্ষিণ দিকে পরিভ্রমণ;
- ▶ দ্বীপের চতুর্পার্শ্বে নৌ-ভ্রমণ করা;
- ▶ জোয়ার ভাটা এলাকায় পাথরের উপর হাঁটা;
- ▶ সামুদ্রিক কাছিমের ডিমপাড়ার স্থানে চলাফেরা, রাতে আলো জ্বালানো এবং ফ্ল্যাশ লাইট ব্যবহার করে ছবি তোলা;
- ▶ সৈকতে রাতের বেলা কোন প্রকার আলো বা আগুন জ্বালানো, আতশবাজি ও ফানুস উড়ানো;
- ▶ সৈকতে মাইক বাজানো, হে-চে এবং উচ্চস্বরে গান-বাজনা করা, বার-বি-কিউ পার্টি করা;
- ▶ ছেঁড়াডিয়া দ্বীপে স্পীড বোট, কান্ট্রি বোট, ট্রলার বা অন্যান্য জলযানে যাতায়াত এবং নোঙ্গর করা;
- ▶ সংরক্ষণের উদ্দেশ্যে সরকার কর্তৃক অধিগ্রহণকৃত ছেঁড়াডিয়া দ্বীপ ভ্রমণ;
- ▶ প্রবাল, শামুক, বিনুক, সামুদ্রিক কাছিম, পাখি, তারা মাছ, রাজকাঁকড়া, সামুদ্রিক ঘাস, সামুদ্রিক শৈবাল এবং কেয়া ফল সংগ্রহ ও ক্রয়-বিক্রয়;
- ▶ জাহাজ থেকে পাখিকে চিপস বা অন্য কোন খাবার খাওয়ানো;
- ▶ দ্বীপে সুপের ভূগর্ভস্থ পানি সীমিত বিধায় পানির অপচয় করা;
- ▶ সেন্টমার্টিন দ্বীপের প্রতিবেশের জন্য ক্ষতিকর যে কোন কার্যক্রম গ্রহণ করা;

উল্লিখিত বিধি-নিষেধের লঙ্ঘন আইনত দণ্ডনীয় অপরাধ।

**আসুন বাংলাদেশের একমাত্র প্রবালসমৃদ্ধ দ্বীপ সেন্টমার্টিনকে সংরক্ষণ করি।
বর্তমান ও আগামী প্রজন্মের জন্য টেকসই পরিবেশ গড়ি।**

মহাপরিচালক
পরিবেশ অধিদপ্তর