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BUDGET FY2021-22 Lives and livelihood disregarded

ZINA TASREEN

He set off to save lives and livelihoods in his third budget as the finance minister and his second amid the global coronavirus pandemic, and along the way, went astray.

In the end, AHM Mustafa Kamal's proposed budget for fiscal 2021-22 came across as not of its time: in the throes of a public health crisis that is unravelling some of the progress made over the last 50 years.

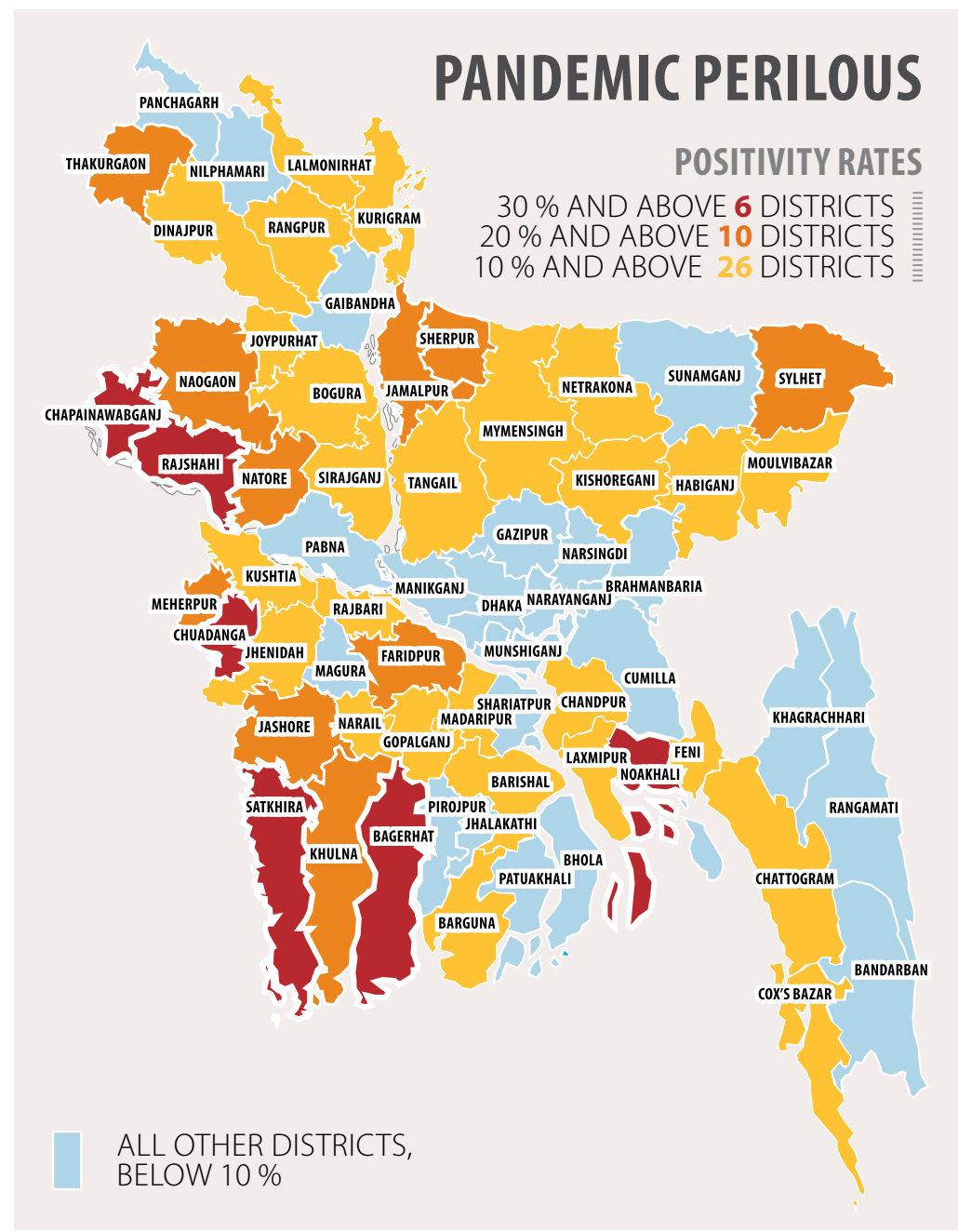
Bangladesh has been a development marvel, one which global commentators are acknowledging left, right and centre -- of late. And the cornerstone of the success has been its poverty reduction flight path and a spiralling trend of social and human indicators.

But the global coronavirus pandemic, which gripped Bangladesh in March last year like the rest of the world, has created a sea of poor -- and it is this populace that Kamal, who projects himself as a man of the people, seemed to have passed over in his intellectual callisthenics while drawing up the outlay for the incoming fiscal year.

About 20.5 percent of the population was already living in poverty and the pandemic raised the ratio to 30 percent, according to the World Bank.

Some 1.60 crore of new poor was created by the pandemic, according to an estimate of the Centre for Policy Dialogue in April, while another survey around the same time by the Power and Participation Research Centre and the Brac Institute of Governance and

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COVID-19 SURGE

It may soon hit the heartland

42 districts at high risk; hospitals in border dists grapple with rush of patients

MOUJID AHMED SUJAN

On Thursday, the authorities of Chapainawabganj Sadar Hospital increased the number of beds for Covid-19 patients to 30 from 20 to tackle the rush of patients.

As it was not enough, the number of beds had to be raised to 50 yesterday. All the beds, however, were occupied by evening, said Ahnaf Shahriar, a physician at the hospital's coronavirus unit.

"We've more patients coming," he told The Daily Star last night.

Hospitals in five other districts -- Satkhira, Chuadanga, Rajshahi, Noakhali, and Bagerhat -- were also struggling to accommodate an increasing number of coronavirus patients, said sources at the hospitals.

Except Bagerhat and Noakhali, the four other districts have borders with India.

Health experts and officials believe the situation arose due to the community transmission of the Indian variant (Delta) of the Covid-19 and slack measures to curb the spread of the virus.

The Indian variant has been held responsible recently for the massive surge in Covid-19 cases in India.

According to the weekly analysis of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), these six districts witnessed positivity rates of 30 percent and above from last week until Thursday.

It means every 30 or above number of samples tested came positive there.

The situation in Bagerhat, Noakhali, SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Positivity rate goes over 11 percent

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh yesterday recorded 11.03 percent daily positivity rate of Covid-19 tests, the highest in the last 33 days.

The rate fell below 11 percent after May 3 when the rate was 13 percent, according to statistics of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research.

The country logged 43 more deaths in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, taking the total number of fatalities to 12,801. The mortality rate is 1.58 percent.

Besides, 1,447 new cases were registered during the 24-hour period. With this, the country's caseload went up to 809,314, said a handout of the Directorate General of Health Services.

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Budget reflects no concern for environment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The proposed budget, placed before parliament just two days before World Environment Day, shows the government is hardly concerned about the country's environmental degradation.

In last year's budget, the allocation for the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change was Tk 1,246 crore. This year, the government reduced the amount by Tk 25 crore, and this year's allocation is set at Tk 1,221 crore.

While this year, the theme for World Environment Day is "Ecosystem Restoration", Bangladeshi environmentalists believe the government's negligence in the sector is affecting the country's overall environmental health.

Bangladesh is one of the most climate-vulnerable country and was ranked at 162 out of 180 countries in the 2020 Environmental Performance Index (EPI), which evaluates the environmental health of the countries and the vitality of their ecosystems.

Upon analysing the climate relevant allocation for environment, forest and climate change ministry, a significant decline between 2017-18 and 2021-22 was noticed.

The amount for the climate relevant allocation was Tk 419.92 crore in 2017-18, which dropped to Tk 379.21 crore in 2021-22.

In the proposed budget, the government allocated 25.8 percent of the SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

LEGALISING BLACK MONEY TIB slams hint at continuing the scope

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday categorically objected to the finance minister's suggestion that the option to legalise black money with ease as in the current fiscal year might roll over into fiscal 2021-22.

There was "careful applause" and temporary relief among the honest taxpayers after seeing no announcement on legalising black money in the proposed budget, the TIB said in a press statement. "But the relief has turned into anxiety within a day following the finance minister's speech in the post-budget media briefing," said the local chapter of the global anti-graft watchdog.

The option to legalise untaxed income was always present in some form but in June last year, Kamal had expanded the ambit for it.

At present, black money can be whitened by investing it in any sector and SEE PAGE 2 COL 1