

P7 Sri Lanka crowds jeer PM on rare outing



P6 Two hits with a Chery on top



P8 Should we worry about debt servicing?



P9 Popularise climate resilient housing



The capital is getting back to its usual self as more and more people are returning after the Eid holidays. The photo was taken at Bijoy Sarani yesterday morning.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

ELECTION UNDER AL GOVT

Twice bitten, BNP now firm on a 'no'

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The BNP boycotted the national election under the Awami League government in 2014. It then participated in the 2018 polls under the AL government. On both occasions, the party gained nothing.

Drawing from the experience, the BNP is now convinced that taking part in another election under this government will amount to nothing more than rubber-stamping another AL government. And so, the party has resolved not to participate in next year's general election unless it is held under a non-partisan polls-time administration.

On Saturday, Prime Minister and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina said the government would make all-out efforts to bring the BNP to the next parliamentary elections.

At a meeting of the AL Central Working Committee, the highest decision-making body of the party, she also said the next general election would be a participatory one held in a free and credible manner.

She criticised some of her party leaders, saying those who are not confident about their win do not

want the BNP to take part in the polls.

Reacting to the AL's plan to bring BNP into the electoral fray, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said there was no question of participating in the election unless the current AL government resigned.

"Our stance is very clear. If the [AL] government does not resign from the office and hand over power to a neutral, interim government, we will not join the national election. We will not join the polls if Sheikh Hasina remains in power," he said at a press conference at BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office.

Speaking on the issue, BNP leaders said they had demanded the introduction of a neutral polls-time government in 2014, and then boycotted the elections when the demand was not met.

The party joined the last parliamentary polls in 2018 despite their demand remaining unfulfilled, and was frustrated by the massive vote rigging and ballot box stuffing the night before the election day, they said.

"We have gone through the whole processes -- first boycotting and then participating in the polls.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Rail reinstates ticket examiner amid outrage

Minister says those without tickets are indeed his relatives

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Railway yesterday reinstated the job of the TTE who fined three individuals travelling on a train without tickets and claiming to be the railways minister's relatives.

BR also issued a show-cause notice to Nasir Uddin, divisional commercial officer (DCO) of Pakshey, for suspending Shafiqul Islam, the travelling ticket examiner, "without following the proper procedure".

The steps were taken hours after Railways Minister Nurul Islam Suhan admitted that the three individuals in question were indeed his relatives and that it was his wife who complained against the TTE.

As the wife of a minister, she should not have done this, he said, adding, "What happened is embarrassing for me."

Talking to reporters at the Railway

SEE PAGE 2 COL 7

Twin challenges lie in inflation, Covid losses

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and DWAIPAYAN BARUA

It appears normal service will resume with fiscal 2022-23's budget, which will see the return of double-digit growth in size -- a practice introduced by former finance minister AMA Muhith.

In a departure from the previous years, the budget size grew in single digits in the past two fiscal years as the uncertainty surrounding the global coronavirus pandemic meant Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal scaled back his ambitions.

Seeing that the country has managed to remarkably adapt to living with Covid-19, he has decided to go big with the budget this time as he looks to tackle the twin challenges of global inflation and make up for the losses of the pandemic.

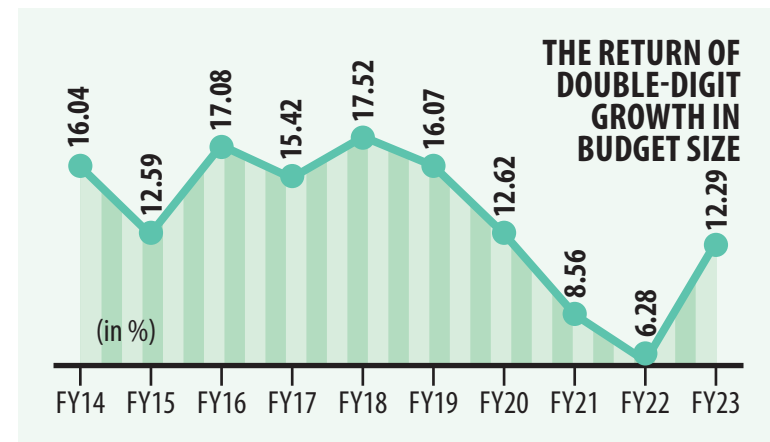
The Tk 677,864 crore budget that will be placed by Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal in the parliament on June 9 would be 12.29 percent bigger than this year.

The budget will look to tame inflation arising from the Ukraine-Russia war, attract investment, complete the implementation of the 28 stimulus packages, boost agricultural productivity particularly by incentivising farm mechanisation and enhance social security for the poor and the vulnerable, said a finance ministry report.

Job creation, rural development as well as the overall development of human resources through academic and skill development will also get focus.

In the proposed budget, the deficit will be Tk 244,864 crore, which will be a respectable 5.5 percent of the GDP, down from 6.2 percent this year.

"The return to normal service on the budget front is all very well but the monetary expansion cannot be such that inflation increases



further," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

In March, inflation leapt to a 17-month-high of 6.22 percent on the back of rising food prices.

And the spectre of inflation this time is not just restricted within the national borders; it is a global phenomenon thanks to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Regardless, the impact of inflation is felt the most by the poor and the vulnerable, he said.

The finance ministry appears to be not too worried about domestic inflation.

Referring to previous statistics, the finance ministry expects inflation to neutralise within nine months, according to the report.

"If food production remains unchanged, food prices would fall and inflation would not be adversely affected. As the production and overall marketing process of the agriculture and manufacturing sector remain normal, inflation would remain stable even if it increases slightly," it said.

Another major challenge, according to Hussain, is the contracting

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

SOYBEAN OIL

Many stores still face supply crunch

Traders say normalcy to return soon; some selling old stocks at new prices

SUKANTA HALDER and MOHAMMAD SUMAN

After the new prices came into effect, edible oil companies started supplying bottled, loose soybean and palm oil through distributors from Saturday.

However, the supplies have not reached all areas at the retail level yet -- three days after the prices of the essential cooking ingredient saw a record hike.

Traders say it will take a few more days for supplies to return to normalcy.

The Daily Star correspondents visited kitchen markets in several districts yesterday and saw consumers going from store to store in search of soybean oil.

Only a few shops were selling it and some took advantage of the crisis and charged newly fixed prices for previous supplies.

The soybean oil crisis began before Eid due to a shortage of supply. In this situation, the government on Thursday

increased the prices of the bottled soybean oil by Tk 38 per litre to Tk 198, loose soybean oil to Tk 180 per litre and palm oil to Tk 172 per litre. The new prices took effect on Friday.

Yesterday, 40 shops in Mirpur, Karwan Bazar and Farmgate areas in the capital were visited, and 24 of those did not have oil.

The scenario was the same in many markets in Chattogram, Barishal, Sherpur, Jamalpur, Naogaon, Kushtia and several other districts.

Zakir Hossain, manager of Ramganj General Store in Karwan Bazar, said he had received 76 litres of oil from the Teer Soyabean Oil and Pusti brands yesterday. "I got one-fifth of the demand, and almost all is sold out."

Mohammad Siddique, a dealer of Pusti in the same market, said he had received 11,200 litres of oil from the company so far.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



Students taking a selfie amid driving rains at the TSC on Dhaka University campus, as an hour-long shower brought a respite for the city residents from sweltering heat yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN