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Travellers are forced to walk in knee-deep water as they disembark from a ferry on the Payra river in Purakata area of Amtali, Barguna. Elevating the approach road by a few feet can save the travellers from the inconvenience.
PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

Level-headed development targets

Proposed ADP will be presented before NEC tomorrow

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON and DWAIPAYAN BARUA

Pragmatism was the order of the day when the finance division sat down to draft the development budget for fiscal 2021-22. While the overall budget would see the return of double digit growth in size as in pre-pandemic times, the annual development programme not so much.

A Tk 246,066 crore ADP has been prepared, which is an increase of 9.2 percent from this year's original budget – and Tk 38,699 crore less than what the ministries and divisions have sought.

In a populist move, the ADP size would invariably increase in double digits every year before the pandemic only for it to be quietly revised downwards on account of sluggish implementation.

But this time, it appears the government is resisting the urge to play to the gallery and is instead making funds available for development projects that are progressing at a brisk pace and at amounts they can absorb at best from a realistic viewpoint.

The biggest allocation, as in previous years, is going towards the Rooppur nuclear power, which is about 45 percent complete as of March and has been the top performer among the mega projects this year.

The project, which became mired in uncertainty following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the resulting Western sanctions against Russia, is progressing as per schedule: the first unit to open by 2024 and the second unit by 2025.

But the science and technology ministry would be taking it slow now as the auxiliary project for the installation of a power line to transmit electricity from Rooppur to the national grid is progressing at a snail's pace.

That project, which is being implemented with Indian loan, took off in 2018 and has seen only 12 percent financial progress as of March, according to the Power Grid Company of Bangladesh.

As a result, the Rooppur project would be getting Tk 13,395 crore in the upcoming fiscal year, down from Tk 18,426 crore originally this year. The allocation was revised down to Tk 14,836 crore.

The project is being constructed on a build-and-finance deal with Russian state nuclear monopoly Rosatom, which is responsible for 76 percent of global nuclear technology exports. No fund comes in from Russia but equipment and technology, whose values are counted as expenditure for setting up the nuclear plant.

Which is why the project was not hampered in any way by the SWIFT ban on Russia – for now.

"Rosatom has sufficient resources and the necessary organisational



Budget

DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR FY 2022-23

- Budget up 9.2pc to Tk 2,46,066cr
- Focus on fast-progressing projects
- Mega projects to get priority
- Rooppur power plant to get biggest allocation
- Padma rail link and Matarbari deep sea port and power plant to get impetus

PK HALDER PROBE India on trail of his laundered money

STAR REPORT

Indian investigators are trying to trace how much money PK Halder, allegedly involved in over Tk 10,000-crore loan scams in Bangladesh, laundered to India and the amount of wealth he obtained through it.

During an interrogation yesterday, PK Halder told India's Directorate of Enforcement (ED) that he held passports of India and Grenada apart from that of Bangladesh, according to sources.

"Besides Bangladesh and Indian passports, he [PK Halder] was also found in possession of a Grenada passport," reads a statement issued by the ED.

Hours after Halder's arrest, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said the Indian side had not yet officially informed Dhaka about the arrest.

"We learnt from the media that PK Halder, a wanted accused in Bangladesh, was arrested... We will take the next steps as per the law," he said at a programme yesterday afternoon.



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CUMILLA POLLS NOMINATION AL picks No 1 patron of narcos

RASHIDUL HASAN and KHALID BIN NAZRUL

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government have declared zero tolerance against narcotics. But the ruling Awami League has picked a top listed patron of the illegal drug business as its mayoral candidate for the Cumilla city polls.

Arfanul Haque Rifat is listed number one among 16 patrons of drug dealers and smugglers in the district.

The Prime Minister's Office with the assistance of a government intelligence agency listed drug traders, smugglers, their patrons and law enforcers involved with them across the country.

On January 9, 2018, the PMO sent the home ministry a letter along with the list of Chattogram division and requested actions against the persons following scrutiny.

The list, a copy of which has been obtained by this newspaper, mentions Rifat as the general secretary of Cumilla city AL,

hailing from Monohorpur area.

The party's Local Government Nomination Board finalised his nomination through a meeting at the Gono Bhaban on Friday, with AL President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Party sources say Rifat is also a former senior vice-president of Cumilla district Jubo League and currently member of Jubo League central committee. He is very close to AL lawmaker from Cumilla-6 AKM Bahauddin Bahar, they add.

A special extended meeting of Cumilla city AL, with Bahar in the chair, sent a proposal to the AL central committee to nominate Rifat as the party's mayoral candidate for the polls, slated for June 15.

Sources close to Rifat and AL insiders alleged that he maintains contacts with local drug dealers and criminals as he gets commission from illegal drug business.



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Techies worry as a2i set to enter IT fray

With govt weight behind, it'll become Agency to Innovation

ZYMA ISLAM

The government's a2i programme is set to become a full-fledged agency, entering the software and digital innovations industry as a government-subsidised player, but creating uncertainty for local tech companies.

The cabinet earlier this month approved in principle the Agency to Innovation (a2i) Act 2021 – a draft legislation that proposes to turn the a2i (Aspire to Innovate) programme into an agency called Agency to Innovation.

In response to the proposed legislation, major industry stakeholders have written to the government and communicated their fear that the subsidised national entity would emerge as a market giant and outcompete local tech companies.

The overall objective of the a2i programme – a foreign donor-supported project housed at the Prime Ministers' Office – is to innovate and digitise public services.

The programme supported the digitisation projects across the government, totalling Tk 950 crore, funded primarily by the United Nations Development Programme.

The draft law proposes that the a2i be turned into an agency empowered to accept any project or provide any consultancy needed to "establish an educated society, where technological innovations can flourish to develop citizen-friendly services".

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A child holds his baby brother on his lap as they sit and wait on the grass for their mother to finish her work in the capital's Hatirjheel. They appear to be readying themselves for a nap with a small portable fan placed before them to beat the unbearable heat yesterday.
PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN