



"At this pivotal moment in the war, we must provide heavier and more advanced systems to Ukraine, and we must do it faster."
Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg



B4 Prices to rise at Ekushey book fair



P11 Young Tigresses face stiff challenge



P7 Grateful Ardern makes last bow as NZ PM



P6 Meet the man behind 'Obak Bhalobasha'

ADP REVISION

Govt doing opposite of what's needed

It can fuel inflation, intensify balance of payment pressure

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

It seems the government is doing an about-turn from the austerity stance taken at the start of the fiscal year.

Take the case of the annual development programme. As part of the belt-tightening measures, the finance division in a notice on July 3 last year pared back the programme.

Projects were classified into A, B and C categories. The A-category projects will go on as normal, while up to 75 percent of the allocation for the B-category projects can be spent. All C-category projects were put on hold.

Now, the government is walking back from that position.

As is practice, the ADP project invariably gets revised down during the course of the year, with the chop coming from the amount allocated from foreign aid.

Given the foreign exchange reserves crunch and the narrow fiscal space, the calibration in the ADP budget was expected to be different: the foreign aid portion

would stay intact, while the government's own fund is pared back.

But it is business as usual. The original ADP is expected to be trimmed down by about 6.1 percent to Tk 231,000 crore, The Daily Star has learnt from finance ministry officials involved with the exercise.

The foreign fund portion would be slashed by about 16.4 percent to Tk 76,954 crore.

The fiscal coordination council has decided to go for an expansionary fiscal policy, according to the finance ministry officials.

This would revive economic activities and generate employment.

"So, we have been asked not to cut down the government's own fund portion in revised ADP," said one of the officials, who insisted on anonymity to discuss private conversations.

In the ADP budget for fiscal 2022-23, Tk 149,016 crore has been allocated from the government's own fund.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



A MOTHER'S WILL ... With two-year-old Surya in her arms, Shefali Das polishes a shoe in her husband's shop on the footpath in front of Sena Kalyan Bhaban in the capital's Motijheel. A mother of three, Shefali had to take over the cobbler's job after her husband's sudden paralysis three years ago. She makes ends meet with an earning of Tk 500-600 per day. The struggles she endures to keep her family alive and well are a testament to her strong will.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Kamal unveils list of top 20 defaulters

Usual suspects missing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday disclosed the names of the top 20 defaulters who together account for Tk 16,588 crore of soured loans.

As of September last year, the total defaulted loans in the banking sector stood at Tk 134,396 crore, which is the highest yet, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank. That is 12.3 percent of all outstanding loans.

Kamal placed the list of the top 20 loan defaulters in parliament in a scripted response to a query from ruling Awami League MP Shahiduzzaman Sarker.

CLC Power Company tops the list of defaulters with its bad loan of Tk 1,649 crore, followed by Western Marine Shipyard (Tk 1,529 crore), Remex Footwear (Tk 1,077 crore), Rising Steel Company (Tk 990 crore) and Mohammad Elias Brothers (Tk 965 crore).

Rupali Composite Leather Wire, Crescent Leathers Products, Quantum Power Systems, Saad Musa Fabrics, BR Spinning Mills, SA Oil Refinery, Maisha Property Development, Radium Composite Textile, Samannaz Super Oil, Manha Precast Technology, Asian Education, SM Steel Re-Rolling Mills, Apollo Steel Complex, Ehsan Steel Re-Rolling and Siddiqui Traders are the other big defaulters.

Kamal said the total number of defaulters in Bangladesh is 786,065.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

Keep economy in mind

PM tells DCs on opening day of their conf'ce

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the deputy commissioners to cut their use of public funds and rein in non-essential projects.

She asked them to keep the global economic situation in mind and take measures to increase food production to be ready for a possible food crisis.

She also directed them to reduce their use of electricity.

These were among the 25 directives Hasina gave to the chief administrative and revenue officers of the districts while inaugurating the three-day DC Conference-2023 at the Shapla Hall of her office.

"While undertaking a project, you... should keep an eye on how effective it would be for the area, how many people would benefit from it, and ensure that there is no wastage... I don't like taking up projects everywhere indiscriminately. I want to implement projects that are immediately needed," reports UNB, quoting the PM as saying.

The government is not buying the electronic voting machines (EVM) because the priority now is to maintain food security, healthcare services, and people's welfare, she said.

"Why would we implement projects that are not needed now?" she asked.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

- PM for stern action against rumour spreaders, drugs, militancy and terrorism
- Action to ensure law, order and communal harmony
- DCs for allowing video calls for inmates and their families
- Tough provisions in Human Organ Transplantation Act
- Health allowance for the DCs and increase in the educational stipend for their children

House passes bill to ensure pension for all

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A bill was passed in parliament yesterday, aiming to bring the country's growing elderly population under a universal pension scheme.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal placed the Universal Pension Management Bill-2023, which was passed by a voice vote.

All citizens aged between 18 and 50, including expatriate Bangladeshis, are eligible for this scheme.

The bill seeks to bring the growing elderly population under a sustainable social safety net so they can better cope with the fallout from unemployment, disease, old age complications, or extreme poverty amid the high life expectancy rate.

In order to come under the scheme, one has to pay a fixed amount of premium for at least 10 years. After completing 60 years, the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

STUDENT INFORMATION FORM Mother's name too will do

Declares HC in landmark verdict

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

From now on, students can also mention the names of their mothers or legal guardians while filling out a student information form for examinations if their fathers' names are not available.

The High Court yesterday declared this in a landmark verdict on a 14-year-old writ petition, removing a gender discriminatory practice that has been a hurdle for many in pursuing education.

Using the father's name in the form was mandatory when the writ petition was filed in 2009. Now students need to name both the father and mother in the SIF form, said Prof Tapan Kumar Sarkar, chairman of Dhaka education board.

Delivering the judgement, the HC bench of Justice Naima Haider and Justice Md Khairul Alam declared illegal and unconstitutional the refusal to provide admit cards to SSC and HSC candidates who have not used their fathers' names in the student information form (SIF).

The court said students may have difficulties in mentioning father's name in the form, and if they are not allowed to fill in the form for omitting father's name, they will be deprived of education which is contrary to their fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution.

Details of the HC verdict will be known after the release of the full text of the judgment.

SEE PAGE 7 COL 1



Logs piled up after being cut to make room for a depot of the mass rapid transit line-1 in Pitalganj village of Narayanganj's Rugganj upazila. More than one lakh trees will have to be felled in the village to build the metro depot. Nearly 700 households will also be affected by the construction work. *Inset*, labourers knocking down a building in the area. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ



From slumber to whirr of machines

A Narayanganj village braced for a sea change to make way for MRT-1 depot

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Pitalganj, next to the Shitalakkhya and located around 1.5km south of Kanchan Bridge in Narayanganj's Rugganj upazila, is like any other village across the country.

Quiet and serene, it has almost the same socio-economic situation like the rest, where people earn their living mostly by farming or doing small businesses.

However, that scenario is about to change completely as the government is to build a depot of the country's first ever underground metro rail line there.

Though the place will witness new heights of development, it is the villagers who will have to pay a price for it, as at least 698 households will be affected due to the construction of the depot in a major portion of the village.

While a mosque, two temples, a madrasa and more such establishments will have to be relocated, over one lakh trees would have to be chopped down for the work, according to the resettlement action plan for MRT Line-1.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the physical work of the project on February 2, setting off a flurry of activities for the second biggest infrastructure project in Bangladesh, after the Rooppur nuclear power plant project.

The civil works of the Tk 52,561.43 crore project, the biggest one in the transport sector, will start with land development for the depot on 92.97 acres in Pitalganj.

- 4,632 people will be affected, of which 2,770 from Pitalganj
- 1,119 households, including 698 of Pitalganj, will be affected
- 1,376 structures on 67,098 square meters will be affected
- 1,25,562 trees, including 73,830 large ones, mostly in Pitalganj, have to be chopped down

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1