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Planning minister talks to Star about the budget



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40 insurgents shot dead in India's Manipur



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Curtains close on Cannes film festival



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Cox's Bazar now a dengue hotspot

Reining in inflation top priority

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government is going to unveil a Tk 7,61,785 crore budget for the next fiscal year on Thursday, setting containment of high inflation as a major target.

The budget would aim at curbing inflation and maintaining the higher GDP growth trajectory, a high official of the finance ministry told The Daily Star.

It would not be "expansionary or contractionary", added the official seeking anonymity.

The budget, the last of this Awami League government's five-year term, comes at a time when people are struggling to cope with high prices for almost everything, from food to fuel and from transport fares to utility bills.

The government wants the growth to hit 7.5 percent in the next fiscal year and keep the inflation rate around 6 percent.

The provisional estimate of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) shows that the GDP has grown by 6.03 percent in the current fiscal year and the inflation rate was 8.4 percent till April.

The next budget will be 12.34 percent bigger than the current one.

It will be 15.21 percent of the projected GDP of Tk 50,06,672 crore, compared to 15.27 percent in the current fiscal year. This shows that the next budget is not ambitious, the finance ministry official pointed out.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal is set to deliver his budget speech titled "The progress of Smart Bangladesh after a decade and a half of development" in parliament on Thursday.

There will not be any major increase in the allocations for sectors like health, education, and social safety net.

Higher allocations will be made for subsidies, more than Tk 1.10 lakh crore, and for interest payments, around Tk 1.02 lakh crore. In the current fiscal year, the allocation for subsidies was around Tk 81,000 crore and for interest payment around Tk 80,000 crore.

The allocations are being raised to cushion the blows of high prices of commodities in the international market and the weak taka.

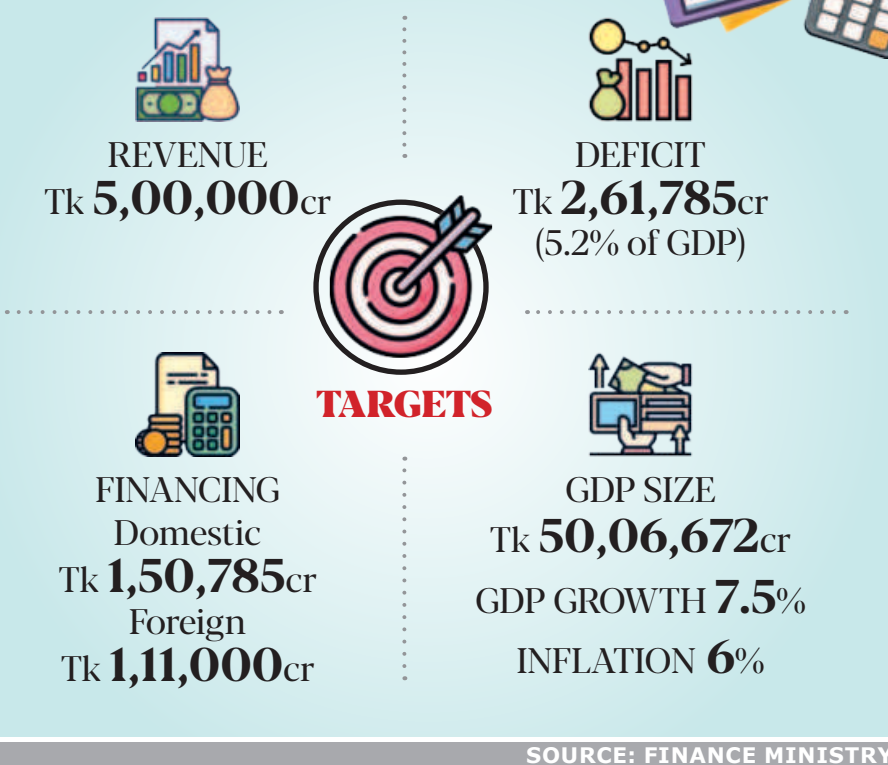
Another finance ministry official said the electricity and fertiliser prices have been raised to shed some subsidy burden but the government still needs more money for subsidies to clear arrears.

The official said the government will continue to maintain the austerity measures in the next fiscal year to reduce pressure on foreign reserves.

Salaries of government officials will not be raised through the budget, the official said.

There will not be any major increase in the allocations for sectors like health, education, and social safety net.

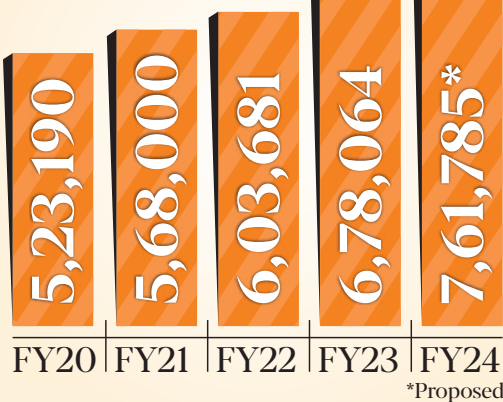
Budget 2023-24 Tk 7,61,785cr



MAJOR EXPENDITURE

Subsidy
Tk 1,10,000cr
Interest payment
Tk 1,02,000cr

BUDGET SIZE (In crore taka)



SOURCE: FINANCE MINISTRY

Development possible for peaceful environment Says Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said

Bangladesh has been able to achieve remarkable socioeconomic development over the last 14 years due to a peaceful democratic environment in the country.

She gave the credit for the success to her party, the Awami League, which formed the government in 2009 after winning the 2008 election.

The prime minister was speaking at a programme celebrating the golden jubilee of the conferment of the Joliot-Curie Peace

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Shaken, AL plans to rejig Gazipur units

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

The ruling Awami League will reorganise its Gazipur district and city units after its mayor nominee lost to an independent on Thursday.

Besides, the AL will identify the reasons why its nominee Azmat Ullah Khan lost the election and the activists who acted against him, insiders said.

Azmat, president of Gazipur city AL, met with Awami League President Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

In the Gazipur city polls, Azmat conceded defeat after officials announced that Zaida Khatun, an independent, won by a margin of 16,197 votes. Zaida is the mother of suspended Gazipur mayor and expelled AL leader Zahangir Alam.

Hasina yesterday asked Azmat about the reasons why he lost. She also wanted to know the number of votes he got in the neighbourhoods of certain party leaders and MPs. Azmat then presented the prime minister with the data, according to sources.

Hasina told Azmat to visit each ward of the city and talk to local leaders to reorganise the party, the sources added.

During the meeting, Azmat handed the PM two books he had written.

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque visited Azmat's home in Tongi last night.

The AL leadership is collecting information about the role of grassroots leaders, Azmat's polling agents, word councillors of the AL, said sources.

The AL might also form a committee to identify the reasons behind Azmat's defeat.

"We must know the reasons. Gazipur was a lesson for the Awami League. If we can't find the reasons, we can't make use of the lesson," an AL leader told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

Besides, the AL asked its leaders and activists in Dhaka city not to engage in arguments or clashes with opposition activists unless they came under attack by the opposition activists.

The directive was given at a joint meeting of the secretaries, presidents and general secretaries of Dhaka city units of the AL and its affiliated bodies.

Besides, the AL asked its leaders and activists in Dhaka city not to engage in arguments or clashes with opposition activists unless they came under attack by the opposition activists.

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AL IN CITY POLLS

Challenging in Barishal, smooth sailing in Khulna

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

The rift within the local Awami League has put its mayor nominee for Barishal city in a tight spot, while the party ticket holder in Khulna city should have an easy run since he has no strong opponents.

The polls to Barishal and Khulna city corporations are on June 12.

In Barishal, if the AL fails to resolve the feud between its mayor candidate Abul Khair Abdullah and incumbent Mayor Serniabat Sadiq Abdullah, the party may suffer a blow like it did in the recently held Gazipur city polls, said local AL leaders.

In the Gazipur City Corporation polls held on Thursday, AL candidate Azmat Ullah Khan lost to independent Zaida Khatun, mother of former GCC mayor Zahangir Alam.

Despite the intervention of central AL leaders, the dispute in Barishal AL rages on.

Tarun Chanda, former vice-president of Barishal city AL, said this conflict is an ominous sign for Barishal AL. There is a serious challenge ahead for the party if it does not take immediate steps to end the conflict.

If this situation continues, Islami Andolon Bangladesh (IAB) contender Syed Muhammad Faizul Karim may have the upper hand in the polls, said locals.

The much-hyped meeting between the central and Barishal AL leaders on Friday did not yield much fruit as Khair and his nephew Sadiq did not attend it.

From that meeting, the central AL leaders instructed leaders and activists of the party's Barishal units to work together to ensure victory of the party candidate.

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BUSINESS

Tk 10,964cr loans turn sour in 3 months

Banks in Bangladesh witnessed an accumulation of default loans by Tk 10,964 crore in the first three months of 2023, highlighting the worsening financial health of the banking sector, official figures showed.

Non-performing loans stood at Tk 131,621 crore as of March 31, up 9 per cent from three months ago and 16 per cent from a year earlier, data from the Bangladesh Bank showed.

STORY ON B1



The Dhaleshwari river has been significantly narrowed, and the reclaimed land is being used to make bricks. As is often the case, the brick kiln owners have disregarded the ecological importance of the river and bypassed legal restrictions. The photo was taken in Sirajdikhan upazila of Munshiganj recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Erdogan gets another 5 yrs

REUTERS, Istanbul

President Tayyip Erdogan claimed victory in Turkey's presidential election yesterday, a win that would steer his increasingly authoritarian rule into a third decade.

Addressing supporters, Erdogan said voters had given him the responsibility to rule for the next five years.

"The only winner is Turkey," he said, addressing cheering supporters from atop a bus in Istanbul.

Final official results have yet to be released.

There was no immediate response to Erdogan's victory speech from his challenger, Kemal Kilicdaroglu.

The election had been seen as one of the most consequential yet for Turkey, with the opposition believing it had a strong chance of unseating Erdogan after his popularity was hit by a cost of living crisis.

Instead, victory will reinforce his image of invincibility, after having already redrawn domestic, economic, security and foreign policy in the NATO member country of 85 million people and positioned Turkey as a regional power.

Supporters gathered at his Istanbul residence in anticipation of victory as data reported by both state-run Anadolu agency and the opposition ANKA news agency gave him the edge with nearly 99 percent of ballot boxes counted.

The head of the High Election Board earlier told a news conference that Erdogan was leading Kilicdaroglu with

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