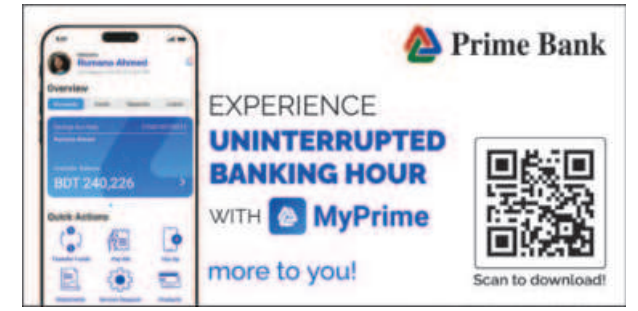


# Star BUSINESS



## Credit growth slips to 14-month low

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Private sector credit growth in Bangladesh dropped to a 14-month low of 11.23 per cent in April owing to weak credit demand amid the current business slowdown, official figures showed.

This was the fifth consecutive monthly decline as businesses continue their "wait and see" approach because of the persisting uncertainty at home and abroad.

Banks' finance to the private sector stood at Tk 14,57,400 crore in April, data from the Bangladesh Bank showed.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, warns that the private sector credit growth may decline further in the

"Banks can't disburse loans if they fail to mobilise deposits," said Mansur, also a former official of the International Monetary Fund.

"If the interest rate cap on loans is not removed, the deposit growth will not pick up."

In April 2020, the central bank imposed an interest rate cap of 9 per cent on loans with a view to giving a boost to credit growth. But it did not increase much, initially because of the slowdown induced by the coronavirus pandemic and the later by the Russia-Ukraine War.

If the credit growth continues to face such a slowdown, it will adversely affect the GDP growth, which has already been hit by a fall in demand at home and abroad owing to persistently high

## Traditional lenders fall behind Islamic banks in profit growth

Their profit fell 19% but shariah-based lenders saw 26% profit surge

AHSAN HABIB

Conventional lenders in Bangladesh fell behind shariah-based banks in 2022 in terms of profit growth mainly due to the lower interest rate regime.

Last year, the combined profit of 41 conventional banks, including foreign and state-run lenders, fell 19 per cent year on year to Tk 7,020 crore, whereas 10 shariah-based banks' profit surged 26 per cent to Tk 2,432 crore, according to their financial reports.

The collective profit of the traditional lenders was dragged down by National Bank, which suffered a loss of Tk 3,260 crore alone in 2022. If NBL's loss is excluded, the profit of conventional banks would rise 17 per cent.

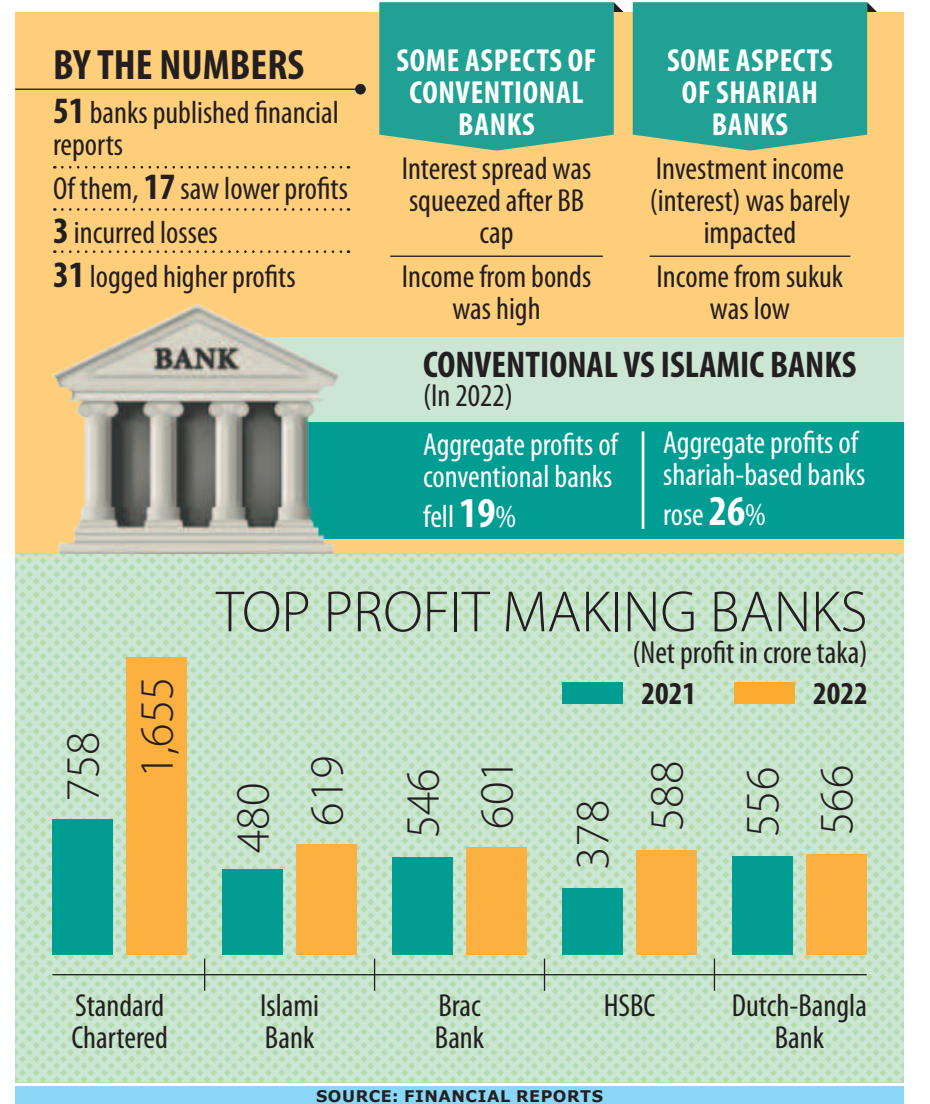
Anis A Khan, a former chairman of the Association of Banks, Bangladesh, says the cost of funds for shariah-based banks is lower compared to their conventional counterparts. "This helps them log higher profits."

He said the belief of the people who deposit funds with shariah-based banks is that the Islamic lenders are interest-neutral, so savers are happy with whatever profit they get. "Traditional banks don't get this advantage."

The Bangladesh Bank has maintained a 9 per cent interest rate cap since April 2020.

The single-digit interest rate regime has been favourable for the shariah-compliant banks as their products and services are not based on interest rates. Rather, banks and their clients share the risks and rewards of a business transaction.

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days to come as the deposit growth is on the decline.

The deposit growth slowed in the third and fourth quarters of 2022 compared to the second quarter.

Overall, the growth of deposits slowed to 5 per cent at the end of 2022, way lower than the 9.6 per cent recorded a year ago, BB data showed.

As of December, deposits totalled Tk 15,88,010 crore in the banking system.

inflation.

Syed Mahbubur Rahman, managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, says many businesses are facing problems in opening LCs to set up new industrial units, expanding the existing ones, or buying inputs.

"This has put an adverse impact on the credit growth," he said, adding that inadequate supply electricity and gas is

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## National BUDGET FY2023-24

### 'Tax on turnover even after loss is contradictory'

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The income tax provision that requires companies to pay 0.6 per cent tax on their gross receipt even after losses is contradictory to the spirit of income tax law, said Mostafa Kamal, chairman and managing director of Meghna Group of Industries (MGI).

The rule should be



Mostafa Kamal

removed as it is detrimental to firms, he added in an interview with The Daily Star.

Responding to allegations of tax evasion by claiming losses by many companies, he said the tax authority can examine records if any company claims losses year after year.

"They can investigate and if they find any anomalies, they can take action, Kamal added.

He also urged the tax administration to expand the tax net.

"Higher pressure is given on those who pay tax," Kamal said.

He then said the cost of businesses has increased and there is lack of availability of US dollar.

In addition, devaluation of taka has fuelled import costs and cumulatively led to spikes in customs duty, value added tax and other taxes.

"This is affecting us," Kamal said.

"And although commodity prices

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## Air travel tax may surge

Domestic passengers could be charged for the first time

SOHEL PARVEZ

For the first time, domestic air travellers are likely to face a travel tax while people going abroad on airplanes are expected to pay up to 67 per cent higher taxes from next fiscal year as the government looks to increase revenue collection.

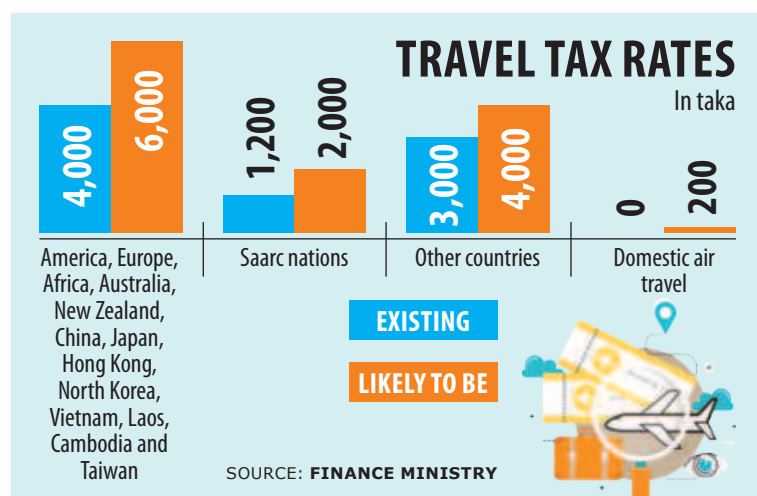
The spike is expected to come after nine years as the National Board of Revenue (NBR) had last increased the rate in 2014.

As per the plan, domestic air passengers may require paying Tk 200 as travel tax, said officials of the finance ministry.

In case of international travel, the rate of tax may rise 50 per cent to Tk 6,000 for travels to the Americas, Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, Hong Kong, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Taiwan.

At present, an air passenger pays Tk 4,000 as travel tax when travelling to these destinations, according to the NBR.

The amount of tax for people going to member countries of the South Asian Association for



Regional Cooperation (Saarc) is expected to increase 67 per cent to Tk 2,000 from the next fiscal year, which begins in July.

Air passengers to other countries and regions, such as the Middle East, the main destination of Bangladesh's migrant workers, may require paying 33 per cent higher in travel tax to Tk 4,000 on their tickets, according to the plan.

"We are considering increasing

travel tax as the current rate is low. We have kept the rates unchanged for the last nine years," said a senior official of the finance ministry.

The move comes at a time when air travel has recovered on the back of pent-up demand from migrant workers, non-resident Bangladeshis and the upper-middle class segment as countries have eased Covid-19 curbs.

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## PHP now making decorative glass

JAGARAN CHAKMA

PHP Float Glass Industries, a concern of PHP Family, started manufacturing decorative glass at its existing facility in Mirsharai, Chattogram earlier this month.

Decorative glass such as stained glass, frosted glass, textured glass and etched glass are used in interior and exterior designs in commercial buildings, hotels, shopping malls, and high-end residential projects.

According to the company's market assessment, at least Tk 30 crore worth decorative glass is being imported yearly from China, India, Turkey and some European countries.

"We will be able to create demand for decorative

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## National BUDGET FY2023-24

### No way but to unveil a restrained budget

Says economist Ahsan H Mansur

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN



Despite being the last budget before the next general election, the government has little scope to unveil a big spending plan for the next fiscal year owing to limited fiscal space driven by lower-than-expected revenue collection, a noted economist said.

"Any political government wants to spend more before the national election. But this year, the government has very limited fiscal space," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, in an interview with The Daily Star recently.

"The government must be restrained in the upcoming budget. It is not possible to increase expenditures like in the previous years. The government will not have the opportunity to spend big."

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal is set to unveil the budget for 2023-24 on Thursday.

And Mansur said the government is going to present the new budget against the backdrop of twin major challenges: macroeconomic stress and revenue shortfall.

The macroeconomic challenge was brought in primarily by external factors, namely the fallout of the dragging coronavirus pandemic and the

READ MORE ON B2



A former state-run jute mill worker uses a machine to weave dyed jute threads into carpets for a private company in Rayer Mahala area of Boyra in Khulna. Around 130 yards (1 yard equals 3 feet) of carpet can be made in a day with each yard selling for Tk 110 in the local markets. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

STOCKS	
DSEX ▼	CASPI ▼
0.11% 6,332.74	0.02% 18,681.39

COMMODITIES	
Gold ▲	Oil ▼
\$1,946.54 (per ounce)	\$72.52 (per barrel)

ASIAN MARKETS			
MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI
▲ 0.55% 62,846.38	▲ 1.03% 31,233.54	▼ 0.38% 3,195.22	▲ 0.28% 3,221.45





**MD Qamrul Islam Chowdhury, managing director of Mercantile Bank, cuts a ribbon to inaugurate two sub-branches -- Wari sub-branch and Jatrabari sub-branch in Dhaka -- from the bank's head office in the capital yesterday. M Amanullah, chairman of risk management committee, was present at Jatrabari sub-branch and Mosharref Hossain, director of the bank, was present at Wari sub-branch. Mati Ul Hasan, additional managing director, and Adil Raihan, Shamim Ahmed, Hasne Alam and Md Mahmood Alam Chowdhury, deputy managing directors, were present.**

PHOTO: MERCANTILE BANK



**Tanjil Chowdhury, chairman of Prime Bank, virtually presided over its 28th annual general meeting on Sunday. The shareholders approved 17.50 per cent cash dividend for 2022. Azam J Chowdhury, former chairman, Md Shahadat Hossain and Nazma Haque, vice-chairmen, Imran Khan, executive committee chairman, Anwaruddin Chowdhury, audit committee chairman, and Hassan O Rashid, managing director, were present.**

PHOTO: PRIME BANK

## Eastern Bank launches China Business Desk

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Eastern Bank Ltd (EBL) inaugurated a "China Business Desk" at its head office in Gulshan yesterday to facilitate trade and banking services between China and Bangladesh.

Planning Minister MA Mannan expressed his gratitude to China for support in the Padma Bridge's construction and hoped that the EBL's one-stop solution centre would better serve banking needs of enterprises and investors, said a press release.

China accounts for nearly 17 per cent of Bangladesh's total trade, surpassing that with India and the US, highlighted Ali Reza Iftikhar, managing director and CEO of the EBL.

China has growing interest in investing in sectors such as ICT, food processing, and renewable energy in Bangladesh, he added.

"Chinese companies are willing to increase trade and investment with Bangladesh," said Song Yang, economic and commercial counsellor at the Chinese embassy in Bangladesh.

The desk will better contribute to the development of bilateral economic and trade cooperation, he said.

Md Jashim Uddin, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Al Mamun Mridha, general secretary of the Bangladesh-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Sohail Murshed, chief executive officer of EBL Finance Hong Kong, were present.



**Muhammad Qaisar Ali, managing director (current charge) of Islami Bank Bangladesh, cuts a ribbon to inaugurate an Islami Bank-Hello Paisa Special Remittance Campaign at Islami Bank Tower in Dhaka yesterday.**

PHOTO: ISLAMI BANK BANGLADESH



**Planning Minister MA Mannan, Md Jashim Uddin, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Song Yang, economic and commercial counsellor of the embassy of China to Bangladesh, Al Mamun Mridha, general secretary of the Bangladesh-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Ali Reza Iftikhar, managing director of Eastern Bank, attended the inauguration of Eastern Bank's China Business Desk at the bank's head office in Gulshan, Dhaka yesterday.**

PHOTO: EASTERN BANK

## Foreign investors withdrew \$36b after selling businesses in Russia: report

REUTERS

Foreign investors who left Russia after selling their businesses there between March 2022 and March 2023 withdrew about \$36 billion from the country, the state RIA news agency reported on Monday, citing analysis of data from the Central

Bank. Scores of the world's biggest companies have left or scaled back their operations in Russia in response to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Last week, the central bank played down the impact of foreign company exits, saying that around

200 sale deals had been completed in the March 2022-23 period, with just 20 per cent involving large asset sales, those in excess of \$100 million.

Moscow calls its actions in Ukraine a special military operation, while Kyiv and its West allies call it an unprovoked aggression to grab land.

## No way but to unveil a restrained budget

FROM PAGE B1

outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war. But the impacts were exacerbated by structural problems in the domestic economy.

The former economist of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said the government has been in power for nearly 15 years, and had it taken the necessary measures, the ongoing challenge would not have emerged.

"The current situation has not been created in a day. Slowly but surely, we are moving in the wrong direction. But getting out of the current situation will not be possible overnight. There is no magic in the hands of the government."

Mansur said the failure in attaining the revenue target has been a recurrent problem but it has been intensified in FY23 due to the macroeconomic instability.

"It shrank every year. The shrinkage was a little faster this fiscal year. This has squeezed the government's fiscal space and the capacity to spend."

According to Mansur, the government is aware of the issues and knows its limitations.

"It looks like the government is going to give a restrained budget. In terms of figures, it's up around 12.5 per cent from the current fiscal year. But it usually goes up by 17 per cent."

The budget under the annual development programme (ADP)

grew more than 17 per cent in the past. But in FY24, the growth would be about 6 per cent.

Apart from lower revenue generation, factors that are holding the government from introducing a bigger budget include higher subsidy spending and interest expenses.

In FY24, the government will have to set aside more than Tk 1 lakh crore to meet interest expenditures while subsidies and incentives will go up to Tk 1 lakh crore from FY23's Tk 82,000 crore.

The administrative expenditure of the government will be Tk 1 lakh crore.

The budget for the social safety net programmes will have to be increased from the current fiscal year's more than Tk 1 lakh crore, said Mansur.

Despite the rise in expenditures, the revenue generation has not gone up proportionately.

In FY24, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) is likely to be given the task of collecting Tk 430,000 crore, which is 16 per cent higher than the current fiscal year's revenue target.

But the tax authority is already staring at missing the revenue generation goal of Tk 330,000 crore set for FY23.

"The NBR has no scope to do much overnight to accelerate revenue collection," Mansur said.

The economist said the IMF's

\$4.7-billion loan programme can help the country tackle the current macroeconomic challenges.

"The government should clearly state what reforms it is going to undertake in the next fiscal year. The reforms should include tax automation and tax policy," he said, adding that international experts should be involved in the process to bring about standard reforms.

He thinks it will take one year to prepare for the implementation of the reforms attached to the loan programme.

"There is no rush and the programme would have to be implemented in four to five years. But, the work to implement it has to be started first."

Amid lower revenue generation and limited fiscal space, austerity measures were expected in FY23 and the finance minister also targeted stopping or reducing import-dependent and less important government expenditures as well as slowing down the pace of implementation of low-priority projects to the effect.

But Mansur said he did not see any major progress in bringing down expenses.

He also said the opportunity that looks to bring back money that went abroad is not going to give the expected returns.

"I hope the government will not continue it in FY24 as it is impractical."

## Tax on turnover even after loss

FROM PAGE B1

have declined in the international market, we cannot pass the benefit to consumers," he added.

The chief of one of the leading and diversified business houses also spoke about the export of non-traditional goods.

The government is providing incentives to boost exports of non-

traditional goods and ultimately diversify the country's export basket.

However, Kamal informed that there are a lot of formalities to get the incentive.

"This should be made hassle-free. If anyone makes fake or inflated claims, policymakers can consider imposing heavy penalties," he said.

The MGI chairman went on to say there are discrepancies in the rule for incentives given to companies operating in or out of economic zones.

Companies that are making food items in economic zones are not given the 20 incentives for exports.

"This should not be the case," Kamal added.

## GPH Ispat wins SDG Brand Champion Award 2023

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Steel manufacturing company GPH Ispat won "SDG Brand Champion Award-2023" in the category of Industry Innovation and Infrastructure for the introduction of B600C-R, the highest-strength rebar ever in Bangladesh.

Akij Bashir Group in association with Aspire to Innovate (a2i), an initiative of the Sustainability Brand Forum, organised SDG Brand Champion Awards 2023, said a press release.

Mohammad Almas Shimul, additional managing director of GPH Ispat, and Sharmin Sultan, chief people officer, received an award at the ceremony held at Radisson Blu Dhaka Water Garden on Friday. GPH quantum B600C-R steel rebars are made with world-class quantum electric arc furnace with high strength and complying with BDS ISO 6935-2:2016 standard.

Tested and certified by the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, the new steel rebars cater to the increasing demand in Bangladesh's construction industry.

## Oil steady

REUTERS

Oil prices were steady on Monday after US leaders reached a tentative debt ceiling deal, possibly averting a default in the world's largest economy and oil consumer, but concerns about further interest rate hikes capped gains.

Brent crude futures climbed 14 cents, or 0.2 per cent, to \$77.09 a barrel by 0905 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$72.88 a barrel, up 21 cents, or 0.3 per cent.

PRICES OF KEY ESSENTIALS IN DHAKA CITY			
	PRICE (MAY 29, 2023)	% CHANGES FROM A MONTH AGO	% CHANGE FROM A YEAR AGO
Fine rice (kg)	Tk 60-Tk 75	0	5.47 ↑
Coarse rice (kg)	Tk 48-Tk 50	3.16 ↑	0 ↑
Loose flour (kg)	Tk 55-Tk 58	1.77 ↑	21.51 ↑
Lentil (kg)	Tk 90-Tk 100	0	-11.63 ↓
Soybean (litre)	Tk 175-Tk 185	4.96 ↑	-3.23 ↓
Potato (kg)	Tk 38-Tk 40	16.42 ↑	73.33 ↑
Onion (kg)	Tk 70-Tk 75	45 ↑	93.33 ↑
Egg (4 pcs)	Tk 47-Tk 50	10.23 ↑	19.75 ↑

SOURCE: TCB

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার			
জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, নাটোর।			
দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি			
১	মন্ত্রণালয়/বিভাগ	সমাজকল্যাণ মন্ত্রণালয়	
২	এজেন্সী	সমাজসেবা অধিদফতর, ঢাকা	
৩	সজ্ঞাহক সত্তার নাম	মহাপরিচালক, সমাজসেবা অধিদফতর, ঢাকা এর পক্ষে জেলা প্রশাসক, নাটোর।	
৪	সজ্ঞাহক সত্তার জেলা	নাটোর।	
৫	যে কাজের দরপত্র	সমাজসেবা অধিদফতর পরিচালিত সরকারি শিশু পরিবার ও সমন্বিত দূর্গ প্রতিবন্ধী শিক্ষা কার্যক্রম, নাটোর এর নিবাসীদের ২০২৩-২৪ অর্থ বছরের জন্য খাদ্য ও বায়াদানুশীলক, শিক্ষা, প্রশিক্ষণ, স্বাস্থ্য, প্রসাদানী, অন্যান্য এবং বিবিধ মালামাল সরবরাহ।	
৬	দরপত্রের নম্বর ও তারিখ	নম্বর: ৪১.০১.৬৯০০.০৩৬.০৭.০০১.২৩.১৩৫	তারিখ: ২৮/০৫/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ
৭	দরপত্র প্রচারের তারিখ	৩০/০৫/২০২৩ খ্রিঃ।	
৮	সজ্ঞাহক পদ্ধতি	উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি (৪,টি,এম)	
৯	বাজেট এবং তহবিলের উৎস	প্রাক্তন বাজেট (জিওবি)	
১০	দরপত্রের প্যাকেজ নং	ক, খ, গ, ঙ = ৪টি	
১১	দরপত্রের প্যাকেজের নাম	সমাজসেবা অধিদফতর পরিচালিত সরকারি শিশু পরিবার ও সমন্বিত দূর্গ প্রতিবন্ধী শিক্ষা কার্যক্রম, নাটোর এর নিবাসীদের ২০২৩-২৪ অর্থ বছরের জন্য 'ক'-এমপ (খাদ্য ও বায়াদানুশীলক (পচন ও অপচনশীল), 'খ'-এমপ (শিক্ষা, প্রশিক্ষণ, স্বাস্থ্য, পোশাক-পরিচ্ছদ, প্রসাদানী ও অন্যান্য), 'গ'-এমপ (খাদ্য ও বায়াদানুশীলক (পচন ও অপচনশীল), শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, পোশাক-পরিচ্ছদ, প্রসাদানী ও অন্যান্য), 'ঙ'-এমপ (বিবিধ মালামাল)।	
১২	দরপত্র সিডিউল বিরুদ্ধের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়	১৩/০৬/২০২৩ অফিস চলাকালিন।	
১৩	দরপত্র দাখিলের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়	১৪/০৬/২০২৩ দুপুর ১২:০০ টা পর্যন্ত	
১৪	দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ ও সময়	১৪/০৬/২০২৩ বেলা ১:০০টা।	
১৫	কার্যালয়ের নাম ও ঠিকানা	সংশ্লিষ্ট প্রতিষ্ঠান	
	ক. মূল দরপত্র দলিল বিরুদ্ধ	প্রতিষ্ঠানের ঠিকানা	
	১৫.১ সরকারি শিশু পরিবার	বনবেশখরিয়া, নাটোর।	
	১৫.২ সমন্বিত দূর্গ প্রতিবন্ধী শিক্ষা কার্যক্রম	বনবেশখরিয়া, নাটোর।	
	খ. দরপত্র দলিল গ্রহণ	জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, নাটোর।	
	গ. দরপত্র দলিল খোলা	জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, নাটোর।	
১৬	দরপত্র দাতার যোগ্যতা	১. বৈধ স্ববরোহকারী প্রতিষ্ঠান ২. সিডিউল ক্রয়ের টেন্ডারী চালানোর মুদ্রণিক, পূর্বে অনুরূপ কাজ করার অভিজ্ঞতার সনদপত্র, হালনাগাদ ট্রেন্ড লাইসেন্স, ব্যাংক স্বাক্ষরিত সনদ, অ্যাকসর সনদ (২০২২-২৩), ড্যাটা নিবেদনপত্রের অধিকারী হতে হবে। ৩. দরপত্র সিডিউলের মূল্য টেন্ডারী চালানোর মাধ্যমে কোড নং ১-২৯৩১-০০০০-২০৩৬ তে (অফিসেরতহবিল) জমা দিতে হবে।	
১৭	দরপত্র সিডিউলের মূল্য	দরপত্রের মূল্য	
১৮	এমপ	সংক্রান্ত বিবরণ	সিডিউলের মূল্য
	ক	খাদ্য ও বায়াদানুশীলক (পচন ও অপচনশীল)।	৫০০/-
	খ	শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, পোশাক, প্রসাদানী ও অন্যান্য।	৫০০/-
	গ	খাদ্য ও বায়াদানুশীলক (পচন ও অপচনশীল) শিক্ষা, স্বাস্থ্য, পোশাক, প্রসাদানী ও অন্যান্য।	২০০/-
	ঙ	বিবিধ মালামাল	২০০/-
		সিডিউলে দেয়া আছে	দরপত্র জামানত
		এ	সরকারি শিশু পরিবার, নাটোর
		এ	সমন্বিত দূর্গ প্রতিবন্ধী শিক্ষা কার্যক্রম, নাটোর।
		এ	দুটি প্রতিষ্ঠানের ক্ষেত্রে প্রযোজ্য
১৯	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার নাম ও পদবী	আবু নাহের ভূঁঞা, জেলা প্রশাসক, নাটোর।	
২০	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার ঠিকানা	জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, নাটোর।	
২১	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার সাথে যোগাযোগের নম্বর	০২৫৮৮৮৭৩৭৪১।	
২২	শর্তাবলী:		
	ক. পিপিএ-২০০৬ এবং পিপিআর-২০০৮ (সংশোধনসহ) এ প্রদত্ত পূর্ণাঙ্গ সজ্ঞাহক পদ্ধতি মধ্যস্থতায় অনুসরণ করা হবে।		
	খ. পূর্বে দরপত্রের নিকট হতে উদ্ধৃত মতের ১০% পারফরমেন্স সিকিউরিটি এন্ড গ্রান্টি সাপোর্টে কার্যক্রম প্রদান করা হবে।		
	গ. 'ঙ' এমপের ক্ষেত্রে বরাদ্দ প্রতি সাপোর্টে কার্যক্রম দেয়া হবে।		
	ঘ. কর্তৃপক্ষ কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ অথবা সকল দরপত্র বাতিলের ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।		
	ঙ. দরপত্র ক্রয়ের তারিখ হতে দরপত্র খোলার তারিখের নির্ধারিত সময় পর্যন্ত দরপত্র দাখিল করা যাবে।		
	চ. পূর্বা দরপত্র আহ্বানের ক্ষেত্রে আর কোন বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রদান করা হবে না। এই বিজ্ঞপ্তিতে উল্লেখিত সময় যোগাযোগ কার্যক্রম সম্পন্ন হবে।		
	ছ. বিশেষ নির্দেশনা: বিস্তারিত তথ্য দরপত্র দলিলে বর্ণিত আছে।		

আবু নাহের ভূঁঞা  
জেলা প্রশাসক  
নাটোর।

৫০০-৭৪৭





## AirAsia CEO arrives in Dhaka today

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bo Lingam, group chief executive officer of AirAsia Aviation Group Limited, will come on a three-day official visit to Dhaka today.

During his visit, Lingam will attend several meetings with the high officials of the ministry of civil aviation and tourism and AirAsia's local partners, said a press release.

He will also meet different stakeholders of the aviation market to understand further prospects of the aviation industry in Bangladesh.



Jackfruits being taken to the Sonadanga wholesale market in Khulna for sale at Tk 60 to Tk 70 per piece on an average. Every part of the fruit is usable – the outer skin as cattle feed, the greenish unripe fruit as a vegetable while the brownish ripened fruit consumed fresh. Even the seeds can be eaten, be it cooked or roasted. The largest tree-borne fruit in the world can reach up to two feet in length and weigh up to 18 kilogrammes. Around 1,000 tonnes were produced around the country in fiscal year 2020-21, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. The photo was taken at the Kathaltola Mor in Dumuria upazila on the Khulna-Satkhira highway last week.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## 8 insurers asked to raise policy renewal rate

SUKANTA HALDER

The Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (IDRA) has directed eight life insurers to increase their policy renewal rate after the second year of subscription to 70 per cent from 50 per cent at present.

The move comes in a bid to develop the insurance industry, which is not in good shape due to excessive commission payments, administrative expenses and other irregularities, according to the Financial Institutions Division (FID).

The directive was issued in line with an instruction from the FID to investigate the overall activities of 13 life insurance companies that were approved in 2013 and 2014. In July last year, the FID said the companies have already spent much of the premium taken from customers on various expenses, such as purchasing land and stocks.

As a result, it will be difficult for many of

them to pay claims on time, it added.

The IDRA conducted a probe into the 13 life insurance companies and started hearings with the firms at the beginning of May.

Currently, there are 35 life insurance companies active in the country.

The directive also states that insurance companies should reduce costs related to vehicles purchases.

In addition, the management expenses of these firms, excluding commission, should be reduced by 30 per cent while increasing the size of their life funds.

As per the IDRA's instructions, insurers should increase their gross premium income and at the same time, the rate of insurance claim settlement should be increased as well.

In addition, the rate of investment return should be made consistent with the market interest rate.

The companies are: Protective Islami Life Insurance Limited, Jamuna Life

Insurance Company Limited, Zenith Islami Life Insurance limited and Alpha Islami Life Insurance Limited.

The list also includes Diamond Life Insurance Company Limited, Chartered Life Insurance Company Limited, Mercantile Islami Life Insurance Limited and Jamuna Life Insurance Company Limited.

Jahangir Alam, a spokesperson of the IDRA, said the investigations have been completed and hearings are underway.

Nasir Uddin Ahmed, first vice-president of the Bangladesh Insurance Association, a platform for insurance companies, said the management of these companies should be governed by the guidelines given by IDRA.

The instructions given by IDRA to these eight companies are not only for them, but all life insurance companies, he added.

Mohammad Jainul Bari, chairman of IDRA, said quarterly reports are taken from the companies to check whether they

have done business in compliance with industry regulations.

"Our main objective is to increase the life fund of companies by ensuring their compliance so that they do not face any hurdle in paying claims," he added.

Bangladesh's life insurance penetration is well behind the emerging market average of 3.3 per cent. In 2020, India's life insurance penetration was 3.2 per cent while it was 2.4 per cent in China.

In 2021, life insurance penetration, measured as the ratio of gross written premium to gross domestic product, was 0.5 per cent, way lower than 0.94 per cent in 2010, according to IDRA data.

This means that most Bangladeshis are uninsured and the insurance premium is not rising in keeping with the economy, which has clocked more than 6 per cent growth in the last decade on average.

The insurance industry contributes only 0.4 per cent to Bangladesh's growing gross domestic product.

## Stocks snap two-day gaining streak

Turnover, however, remains unchanged

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Stocks listed with the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) fell yesterday, breaking a two-day gaining streak as the investors went for booking profits.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the DSE, fell 7 points, or 0.11 per cent, to 6,332.

However, the DS30, the blue-chip index, advanced 0.04 per cent to 2,198 and the DSES, the shariah-compliant index, rose 0.09 per cent to 1,369.

Turnover, an important indicator of the market, remained unchanged at Tk 1,174 crore.

Of the traded securities, 72 advanced, 111 declined and 197 did not show any price movement.

Paramount Insurance increased mostly by

Of the traded securities, 72 advanced, 111 declined and 197 did not show any price movement

posting a rise of 10 per cent followed by Meghna Insurance that rose 9.95 per cent, CAPM IBBL Islamic Mutual Fund 9.92 per cent, Midas Financing 9.91 per cent and Trust Islami Life Insurance 9.7 per cent.

Oimex Electrodes topped the list of losers by shedding more than 7.17 per cent. Midland Bank, Renwich Jaineswar, Shyampur Sugar Mills, and Bangladesh General Insurance suffered substantial losses as well.

Intraco Refueling Station was the most-traded stock of the day with its shares worth Tk 36 crore transacted.

Stocks of Bashundhara Paper Mills, Lafarge-Holcim Bangladesh, Sea Pearl Cox's Bazar Beach Resort and Spa, and Unique Hotel also traded significantly.

The stocks on the Chittagong Stock Exchange also rose yesterday. The Caspi, the all-share price index of the bourse in the port city, fell 3 points, or 0.02 per cent to close at 18,681.

Of the issues at the Chattogram bourse, 65 rose, 74 retreated and 103 did not see any price movement.

Turnover, however, edged down to 36 per cent to Tk 14 crore from the previous day's Tk 19.40 crore.



Prof Satya Prasad Majumder, vice-chancellor of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), and Zaved Akhtar, CEO and managing director of Unilever Bangladesh Limited, signed a memorandum of understanding on a collaborative journey to promote innovation and research at the Buet's ECE Bhaban in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: UNILEVER BANGLADESH

## Unilever signs research partnership MoU with Buet

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Unilever Bangladesh Limited (UBL) and the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) have embarked on a collaborative journey to promote innovation and research.

As part of this initiative, the Buet's Research and Innovation Centre for Science and Engineering (RISE) has awarded a research project to address plastic packaging circularity in Bangladesh.

UBL and RISE jointly organised a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signing ceremony which is the first step towards the collaborative approach between RISE, BUET and UBL with the research project titled 'Sustainable Plastic Packaging Circularity – Cost-Effective

Appropriate Technology'.

Zaved Akhtar, CEO and managing director of UBL, and Prof Satya Prasad Majumder, vice-chancellor of Buet, signed the MoU in Dhaka yesterday, said a press release.

"As we continue to explore avenues to create a sustainable plastic management ecosystem, there is no better time than now to start working with researchers and scientists who play a critical role in driving progress in these areas," said Akhtar.

"Industry and academia can complement each other to drive innovations for a more sustainable future, but the government's support is also crucial. In this regard, I commend the 'Smart Bangladesh Vision 2041' by our government that is facilitating research-driven

partnerships," said Majumder.

This research is part of UBL's commitment to take action on the plastic waste challenge in Bangladesh through the "Less plastic, better plastic, no plastic" model, and heading to a waste-free and sustainable Bangladesh.

The RISE, founded in the Buet, is a research and innovation hub to stimulate and foster world-class research and encourage innovations in engineering and science.

Among others, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, chair of the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry of environment, forest and climate change, Prof Abdul Jabbar Khan, pro-vice-chancellor of Buet, and Prof Muhammad Anisuzzaman Talukder, director of RISE, were present.

## Traditional lenders fall behind

FROM PAGE B1

On the other hand, traditional banks have struggled since the interest rate ceiling was put in place three years ago as the spread – the difference between the interest rate charged by banks on loans and the interest rate paid by banks for deposits – has narrowed.

The interest income constitutes the main earnings for banks.

Like all lenders, Islamic banks faced liquidity challenges last year owing to economic uncertainty and a lower level of confidence among clients because of loan scams. So, their increase in profits has surprised Khan.

"It may be some of them did not keep provisions properly," said the former managing director of Mutual Trust Bank and IDLC Finance.

Among the conventional banks, aggregate profits of five state-run lenders – Sonali, Janata, Agrani, Rupali and Bangladesh Development Bank Ltd – dropped 23 per cent to Tk 713 crore in 2022. Profits doubled to Tk 3,156 crore for nine foreign banks.

Twenty-seven local private conventional banks posted a profit growth of 2.88 per cent to Tk 6,411 crore.

Conventional banks' profits have been hit by the ceiling on the lending rate as well as the 6 per cent deposit rate that led to the narrowing of the spread, said a top official of a conventional bank.

The central bank removed the deposit floor rate completely in

January this year.

The senior banker said many banks faced a liquidity shortage because of the low deposit rate and many of them have had to offer a higher rate to woo funds, which drove down their net interest income.

"Due to the higher inflationary rate, the deposit rate has had to be increased. But the interest rate on most loans is still fixed at 9 per cent. So, the net interest income has squeezed."

In January 2023, the BB increased the lending rate cap for consumer credit to 12 per cent and removed caps on credit card loans. However, these categories represent only about 20 per cent of overall private sector credit in Bangladesh, according to a World Bank report.

The net interest income of the traditional banks edged up 1 per cent to Tk 14,131 crore in 2022 while the investment income (net interest income) of Islamic banks was up 5 per cent to Tk 9,386 crore.

The banker said instead of operating on the basis of a fixed interest rate, shariah-based banks run their operations based on deal-based investments. So, their profit growth has not been affected by the uncertainty in the local and global economy.

He said conventional banks' lower income from interests was offset slightly by the higher income from investments and commissions, fees

and exchange incomes.

The income of most banks from investments grew at a double digit as they invested more in bonds and securities rather than giving out loans amid persisting economic slowdown. The revenue from commissions, fees and foreign exchange business more than doubled.

Among the banks, Standard Chartered Bangladesh posted the highest profit of Tk 1,655 crore in 2022. Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd came second at Tk 619 crore. Third-placed Brac Bank clocked a profit of Tk 601 crore.

"The business principle that prioritises partnership and well-being of the people has impacted the bottom-line of shariah-compliant banks positively," said Zafar Alam, managing director of Social Islami Bank.

"This policy attracts more people and helps Islamic banks get more deposits," he said, adding that the income from remittance collection was higher in 2022.

Ahmed Shaheen, additional managing director of Eastern Bank, said many depositors who keep funds at shariah-based banks don't bother about the returns they get.

"Most of them only care about whether their money is safe or not. On the other hand, the depositors who keep funds with conventional banks pay heed to the interest rate they receive. So, the spread in the conventional banks is comparatively lower."

## Air travel tax may surge

FROM PAGE B1

This has also led to a surge in the NBR's collection from travel tax.

In the nine months to the end of March during fiscal year 2022-23, travel tax collection shot up 94 per cent to Tk 1,069 crore, higher than the tax authority's target for the whole fiscal year.

The latest data regarding air travel is not available.

Figures of the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) showed that roughly 50 lakh people travelled by air in 2022, which was 145 per cent higher from 20 lakh a year ago.

Meanwhile, the number of

domestic travellers soared 70 per cent year-on-year to 50.5 lakh in 2022.

The hike in travel tax will discourage passengers, said Kamrul Islam, general manager for public relations at US-Bangla Airlines Ltd.

Domestic air travellers now pay a total of Tk 725 in various taxes, he said.

"This will disappoint a section of passengers. Airlines will suffer as the spike may discourage travel," said Islam of the local private airline, which operates flights on 11 international destinations including Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, and India.

The 19-fleet carrier also flies to

eight domestic destinations.

The finance ministry official said the amount of travel tax planned to be imposed on domestic air passengers was low.

"This is unlikely to affect domestic travel as the middle and upper-middle income people mainly fly by air," he said.

Apart from air travel, people who will go abroad by road, for instance to India, are expected to pay a travel tax of Tk 1,000, double the existing rate.

In case of travel by waterways, the rate of travel tax may rise 25 per cent to Tk 1,000 per person from next fiscal year, according to the officials.

## PHP now making

FROM PAGE B1

glass worth Tk 100 crore within the next three years as the price will come down and be available in the market," said Managing Director Mohammed Amir Hossain Shohel.

"We will be able to provide decorative glass at Tk 130 to Tk 270 per square feet depending on colour and thickness while the imported one is a minimum of Tk 200 per square

feet," he added.

Now PHP is offering it in seven colours, he said.

The company invested around Tk 50 crore to add equipment from Italy to its existing float glass manufacturing facilities to get the new range of products.

Using sand from the Feni river as the major raw material, the facility can churn out around 25 tonnes of

decorative glass per day, he noted.

Demand for decorative glass has been increasing in recent years due to the growth of the construction and interior design sectors, said Shohel.

Bangladesh has been experiencing rapid urbanisation and infrastructural development, which has resulted in rising demand for modern and aesthetically appealing building materials, he noted.





Wooden furniture traders are seen sitting idle at a market in Mymensingh city. With sales dropping to nearly zero and banks reluctant to provide loans, small furniture businesses such as this are now facing extinction despite catering to about 65 per cent of the market.

PHOTO: MD AMINUL ISLAM

**LOANS ABOVE TK 1CR**  
NBFIs asked to conduct pre-audit before disbursements

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank yesterday asked non-banks in the country to carry out a pre-audit before disbursing any fund amounting to Tk 1 crore and above so that loan irregularities can be tackled.

The management of internal control and compliance (ICC) at non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs) will conduct the audits, which will ensure funds are disbursed following relevant rules and regulations.

Internal controls are a key element of risk management frameworks that include the processes to assess, mitigate and monitor risks, Bangladesh Bank said in a circular.

If any malpractice is revealed during the pre-audit, the information will have to be sent to the central bank.

Bangladesh Bank also asked NBFIs to set up a dashboard to monitor the loans they disburse.

Chief executive officers and heads of the ICC of NBFIs will follow the dashboard on a regular basis.

The central bank went on to say that some NBFIs are now facing a liquidity crunch due to the high ratio of non-performing loans.

The central bank carried out a review on the issue, which found that many NBFIs did not take collateral securities against the loans.

In some cases, they disbursed the loans violating the single-borrower exposure limit.

A central bank official said the initiative will help NBFIs strengthen their credit discipline and corporate governance as a whole.

# Small furniture makers up the creek

Many struggle for survival as sales plunge

MD AMINUL ISLAM and SUKANTA HALDER

Small wooden furniture businesses in Bangladesh are facing a deep financial crisis as the demand for their products has fallen drastically, according to market players.

Mohammad Al Amin Sheikh, a furniture trader in Dhaka's Mohammadpur, said people are giving more importance to buying daily necessities due to the high cost of living amid ongoing inflationary pressure.

Besides, rising production costs have led to increased prices for even cheap wooden furniture.

"If we compare the current situation with that of May last year, then it can be said I am struggling for survival. At present, I am managing the business with loans," he added.

The furniture industry is the country's second-largest job provider after garments, employing about 20 lakh people and contributing about 1.2 per cent of the gross domestic product.

Echoing the same, Mohammad Yaqub, a furniture trader in the capital's Kalabagan, said he did not receive any new orders this past month.

Salim H Rahman, chairman of the Bangladesh Furniture Industries Owners Association, said small furniture businesses are facing numerous issues as the overall industry is in a bad state.

Regarding these complications,

Rahman said the businesses are struggling for a lack of capital as banks refuse to provide loans considering their ability to return the funds.

Rahman, also managing director of Hatil Furniture, went on to say that most fixed-income people are only buying furniture when absolutely necessary as they are more focused on meeting basic needs.

such as chairs, bookshelves and other small items are available in the Kanchujuly and Academy Road areas of Mymensingh city as well as other places in the district.

However, these are mainly used by students and bachelors living in dormitories or other low-income groups for their cheap design.

Ramzan Ali, a furniture maker in the Kanchijhully area of Mymensingh city, said carpenters like him once enjoyed good business when the price of necessary materials, including wood, was less.

"Our sales did not go down even after plastic furniture hit the markets," he added.

Abdus Samad, a furniture maker in the city's Kathgola Bazar, said sales have fallen to such an extent that their families are now in a serious financial crisis.

Abdul Hakim, a coworker of Samad, said they are passing days in a fed or half-fed state because of the lack of loans with relaxed interest rates.

The business has been continuing in Mymensingh city since the Pakistan regime but the authorities did not make any arrangement for them to continue operations in a safe and sound manner, said Md Aslam Mia, a local furniture trader.

On various occasions, the carpenters had to pursue the assistance of Mymensingh City Corporation for allotting a piece of land on rent so that they could continue business with honour and dignity, he added.

**If we compare the current situation with that of May last year, then it can be said I am struggling for survival.**

Mohammad Al Amin Sheikh  
A furniture trader of Mohammadpur

More than 40,000 small and big companies are involved in the production and marketing of furniture, according to the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority.

And although there are more than 100 brands, including Hatil, Akhtar furnishers, Partex and Regal, about 65 per cent of the Tk 30,000 crore market is controlled by non-branded cottage, micro and small enterprises.

For example, wooden furniture

## Budgetary control and appraisal of supplementary budget

MUHAMMAD ABDUL MAZID

In theory and practice, imposed budgets are prepared from top-down direction, i.e., the resources committee sets the high-level budget (often just basic numbers), without collecting detailed information from operating staff. This total general target is then broken down into a detailed budget.

On the other hand, estimated budgets are prepared from the bottom up, i.e., operating staff collect detailed information from various departments, functions and other sources.

The logic and advantages of bottom-up budgets are manifold: (1) bottom staff may be more motivated if they participate in the budget preparation; (2) bottom staff are in regular and detailed contact with the budgeted objects; (3) they have better information compared to senior management; and (4) they are more accountable for the implementation.

However, the disadvantages of bottom-up budgeting should not be overlooked. In bottom-up budgeting, there is low control over budgets mainly because operating staff often lack a complex view and concentrate just on departmental issues, therefore the risk of not meeting the national objectives remains.

The risk of poor budget increases if operating staff do not have sufficient experience. The process of budget preparation is quite long and bottom staff may set too easy targets. So, the problems with coordination between departments and departmental budgets need to be interrelated.

Though senior management often adjusts the final aggregated figures anyway, it is very difficult to explain any variances of such budgets with actuals in the future if these adjustments are not planned in bigger operational detail.

In Bangladesh, the national budget is prepared in a manner that is somewhere between the top-down and the bottom-up approach. Both the supplementary budget and the proposed budget are placed

before the parliament in the first week of June, the last month of the fiscal year.

According to the legislative rules and procedure, the supplementary budget is cleared within a week after it is placed and the proposed budget is passed by parliament by June 30 for the assent of the honourable President.

In particular, the placing of the supplementary budget and its passage has got a very specific provision in Article 91 of the Constitution. And in line with the quoted constitutional spirit, Para 123 and 124 of the Rules of Procedure of the Bangladesh Parliament have very specific provisions.

Under this guidance, the nation seldom sees any detailed discussion or debate on the supplementary budget placed in parliament. It is cleared by the legislature mostly within the next week of its placement.

Traditionally, in this part of our world, the budget is prepared by the finance ministry, endorsed by parliament without significant scrutiny, and implemented by different ministries and agencies of the government with not much adherence as it was not proposed by them. Again, the parliament accepts the supplementary budget in a smooth way.

The budget, apart from an outline of a strategic plan and roadmap for development and non-development fiscal measures, is a fundamental memorandum of understanding between the citizen and the government and both are legally bound (accountable) to each other for its proper implementation.

Both the government and citizens are represented in the parliament by the elected representatives, so the representatives are highly expected to have an active participation in the budget making, passing and implementation.

The author is a former secretary and chairman of the National Board of Revenue. He can be reached at mazid.muhammad@gmail.com



## ADB grants \$350m loan for Sri Lanka

AFP, Manila

The Asian Development Bank approved a \$350 million loan on Monday for bankrupt Sri Lanka, buttressing an IMF bailout as the country battles its worst economic crisis.

The loan will help stabilise the economy of the South Asian nation, the ADB said, after Sri Lanka ran out of foreign currency and defaulted on its \$46 billion debt over a year ago.

The Manila-based lender was committed to supporting "Sri Lanka as it addresses its present challenges and strides toward economic stabilisation, sustainable recovery and inclusive growth," ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa said.

The latest cash injection comes just over two months after the International Monetary Fund released \$330 million as the first instalment of a \$2.9 billion, four-year bailout linked to Colombo undertaking painful reforms.

"Transparency and open communication will be crucial in building agreement around the reforms," the ADB said in a statement, referring to Colombo's plans to privatise state enterprises.

Last week, the IMF asked Sri Lanka to speed up its debt restructuring and warned any delays could undermine efforts to overcome the country's financial woes.

The crisis led to severe shortages of food, fuel and medicines last year and triggered months of protests that led to the toppling of former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa in July.

The new government has doubled taxes, scrapped energy subsidies and announced it is selling off state enterprises to raise revenue.

Foreign debt restructuring was held up as the country's main bilateral creditor, China, was initially reluctant to take a haircut and instead offered more loans to pay off old debts.

## Saudi diesel imports from Russia, exports to Singapore hit records

REUTERS, Singapore

Leading crude exporter Saudi Arabia is maximising refining profits by importing unprecedented amounts of cheap Russian diesel and in turn shipping record volumes to Singapore, where the fuel can achieve higher margins, shiptracking data shows.

Russia has had to divert the volumes it sold to Europe, previously its dominant product market, after the European Union banned oil product imports in February as part of its response to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

That allowed state oil giant Saudi Aramco to increase its May imports to Singapore to record levels and cash in on better arbitrage netbacks in the east than Europe, driven by tighter Asian supply during the maintenance season, traders and analysts said.

"Diesel supply in Singapore is relatively tight due to regional refinery maintenance, while Middle East supplies are rising, which may create spot arbitrage opportunities for traders to move the cargoes (to Singapore)," Vortexa's head of APAC analysis Serena Huang said.

Saudi Arabia will import up to 500,000 tonnes (3.7 million barrels) or more of Russian diesel in May, with most

of it arriving at Ras Tanura, where one of Saudi Aramco's refineries is located, two trading sources, Kpler and Refinitiv showed.

At the same time, diesel from Saudi Arabia arriving in Singapore is set to hit 400,000 tonnes - an unprecedented level, data from Refinitiv, Vortexa and two industry sources found. The sources

asked for anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media.

The rise in Saudi supplies could replenish Singapore stocks as exports from northeast Asia fall during the refinery overhaul season between May and July, the sources added.

It is however unclear whether Saudi Arabia was storing some of its own

production and shipping mostly Russian supplies via swap trades instead, since both are of typical diesel specifications.

Russian 10 ppm sulphur gasoil cargoes are traded at discounts of around \$30 a barrel to free-on-board Middle East quotes, versus Asia's spot premiums for the same grade at 16 cents a barrel to Singapore quotes, according to trade sources and Refinitiv data.

Globally, Saudi's diesel exports in April hit an all-time high of around 3.7 million tonnes, Kpler data showed. Jizan refinery, solely owned by Aramco, had been expected to increase diesel exports when crude runs stabilise.

Aramco declined to comment.

FGE analyst Lu Yawen said more Middle East gasoil cargoes were heading east rather than west to Europe, where high inventories and weak economic growth have depressed prices.

Falling freight costs also aided the arbitrage flow, two other oil and shipping analysts said.

The cost to charter a Long Range (LR) vessel on the Middle East to Singapore route has dropped to slightly below \$25 a tonne from around \$34 a tonne in the last two months, they added. That is half the cost for the same ship to travel to Europe, they said.



Oil tankers are parked at the Western anchorage off Singapore.

PHOTO: AFP/FILE