



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Three questions for the new budget



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The nation is engrossed in politics during the budgetary season, perhaps with the understanding that the course of politics shapes economic outcomes. Since the budget is a political process, the rules of the budgetary game are set within that continuum. Nonetheless, the new budget begs three questions which are dominating public parleys.

Will the cost of living go down?

People have been suffering greatly in recent times due to the soaring prices of all kinds of food and non-food items – be it oil, soap, clothing, educational materials or transportation. As a result, the majority of the population in low- and limited-income brackets are having to cut down on expenses to run their families.

The government said prices had to be “adjusted” due to the global situation against the backdrop of the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, and that the prices would be revised as the situation “normalised.” For example, the government at one go hiked the prices of all types of fuels by 42.5-51.7 percent in August last year. But when oil prices were hovering between \$70 and \$80 per barrel in the international market for a long time, there was no sign of downward price adjustment in the domestic market as the government had promised. In fact, prices of major commodities – soybean oil, palm oil, sugar, wheat flour, onion, lentils, etc – fell significantly in the international market, but there has been no relief for consumers in Bangladesh. In addition, we are also hostage to price-fixing by a powerful rentier nexus of intermediaries who enforce exorbitant differences between the farm gate and the retail prices in absence of regulatory oversight.

If the budgetary proposals raise taxes on essentials, how would the ordinary people, who are already plagued by the cost-of-living crisis, bear the burden? Rather than increasing the base and reducing the loopholes of income tax, if higher value-added tax (VAT), which applies across the board, is imposed on daily items, how would most people survive? Besides, if the import duty on food items is raised, would the next budget not make the cost of living more excruciating?

Businesses, particularly small and micro-enterprises, too are adversely impacted by price hikes. For example, domestic yarn has become costlier due to the rise in gas and electricity prices. On the advice of the Bangladesh Bank, banks have fixed the exchange rate, yet the price of the US dollar is rising against the taka every day, though within that stipulated range, escalating the cost of commodities.

If the proposed budget imposes further tax on, say, construction materials like rod, cement, bricks, etc, which saw a 40 percent increase already, how would that impact the existing stagnant private investment? According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), private investment has fallen by 0.88 percentage points to 23.64 percent of GDP in FY2022-23, after remaining almost stagnant for at least seven years. Investment also fell due to negative growth in imports of capital equipment, stemming from the inability to open letters of credit (LCs) due to the dollar crisis. If the situation does not improve quickly, new job creation will stall, and inflationary pressure will not let up either.

Will the budget stave off cash shortage?

Low-income households are in shortage of money. According to the BBS, wages have grown at a lower rate than inflation every month for over a year. The wage growth rate was 7.23 percent in April this year, against the inflation rate of 9.24 percent. The weighted wage rate is determined by 145 low skill occupations of the poor and lower middle class, illustrating the pressure being put on these income groups. Savings, income and employment of the lower-middle and middle classes have been hit hard, pushing them into poverty. About nine percent (i.e. more than 15 million) of the people below the poverty line in Bangladesh are newly poor, per Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) data. In the

absence of employment in the formal sector, they were forced into self-employment; the rate of self-employment among the poor grew to 38.56 percent in 2022 from 33.60 percent in 2019.

Similarly, the pace of poverty reduction has slowed down, despite questions about the BBS definition of poverty used in the survey. According to the BBS, poverty has decreased by an average of 0.93 percentage points per annum over the last six years (2016-2022). Between 2010 and 2016, poverty declined by 1.3 percentage points, on average, every year.

Biased policies are the main cause of inequality of income and wealth. The Gini coefficient reached 0.499 in 2022 from 0.482 in 2016 and 0.458 in 2010, demonstrating a continuous upward trend over the last 12 years.

Would the government bring any change in its faulty and fragmented social safety net programmes, marred by inclusion and exclusion errors, to institute a life cycle-based universal social security system to supply cash to the people in need, adhering to the constitutional mandate?

The shortage of dollar and central bank restrictions to reduce pressure on the dollar have reduced imports of key raw materials. As a result, during July-March, LCs for the import of industrial capital machinery shrunk by 56 percent and imports of industrial raw materials dropped by 30 percent.

If the budgetary proposals raise taxes on essentials, how would the ordinary people, who are already plagued by the cost-of-living crisis, bear the burden? Rather than increasing the base and reducing the loopholes of income tax, if higher value-added tax (VAT), which applies across the board, is imposed on daily items, how would most people survive?

How would the budgetary proposals be harmonised with the monetary policy for setting up industries, business expansion and renovation initiatives, which have also dwindled due to want of cash?

The government is in dearth of money. For example, only 41.65 percent of the Annual Development Programme (ADP) was implemented in the first nine months of FY2023. The government is struggling to pay for imported fuel due to the dollar crisis, while the forex reserves are also dangerously low. The Bangladesh Power Development Board is under pressure to reduce the cost, including the huge capacity charges, which resulted from collusive contracts. While the budgetary question of shoring up cash for not defaulting on payments remains, there are fears that the clientele may intensify bargains for budgetary resources with the banking resources increasingly drying out, amid the banking sector exhibiting the highest rate of default after the crisis-ridden Sri Lanka.

What about the runaway debt?

The government's loan from the central bank is increasing at an abnormal rate. In the last five years, the government's borrowing from the central bank has grown by 927 percent. In just seven years, the total foreign debt more than doubled to reach \$95.23 billion, rising from \$41.17 billion in 2015-16. Foreign debt in the private sector also peaked to around \$26 billion till June 2022. Forex reserves may continue to shrink in the near future due to the large deficit in the financial account of balance of payments. Would the budgetary proposals be prudent enough to make a dent in the payment of principal and interest, which is almost 20 percent of the operating expenditure?

The only option is to increase income tax and reduce tax exemptions and tax avoidance. The nation is eagerly waiting for actions on tax evasion and exemptions, including import duty, as research has shown that most money is laundered through import and export. Or will the government opt out for the easiest route of giving the voiceless, low-income groups, while taxing concessions to the rich, as has been speculated by the media?

John Maynard Keynes, in his 1923 essay “A Tract on Monetary Reform,” wrote, “The long run is a misleading guide to current affairs. In the long run, we are all dead.” Perhaps he had in mind the adage, “A stitch in time saves nine.”

The fascinating orchid: Yesterday and today



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HASINA AHMAD

In the world of plants, orchids have a history more sensational than others. People made dangerous voyages to far-off lands in sail boats to look for orchids and procure them when possible. Orchid hunters fought with the natives, sometimes other orchid hunters, at times were killed by others or became casualties of natural forces. But they did not give up. Such was the obsession with orchids.

Orchidelirium or orchid mania in the 19th century England was no less a craze than the tulip mania in 17th century Holland. Even today, orchid enthusiasts make long and difficult journeys just to see orchids in their natural habitats. Orchids are even celebrated in novels. The rare ghost orchid is the subject of Susan Orlean's *The Orchid Thief*, a book that served as the source materials of the Academy Award-winning movie *Adaptation*. To the best of my knowledge, no novel has ever been written or a movie made whose central theme was a flower, except perhaps the Black Tulip, which was based on a book with the same name written by Alexandre Dumas.

Orchid enthusiasm in the modern era began in England in the early 19th century, when British naturalist William John Swainson sent a bunch of orchid tubers from Brazil which he had used as weeds to package other plant specimens. But to everybody's utter surprise, these tubers grew and blossomed with beautiful flowers unknown to everyone at the time. This was also an era when colonialism was at its peak, providing colonial powers rights to the natural resources of their colonies to which they had easy and exclusive access. Queen Victoria appointed Frederick Sander as the official Royal Orchid Grower. This proves that even the royalty supported the plundering of the natural resources of their colonies which included their plants.

In England, it became the craze to grow tropical orchids in the greenhouses of the upper classes. Orchid hunters and poachers were hired and sent from England to countries as far away as Indonesia. In her book *The Orchid Thief*, Susan Orleans indicated that in 1901, eight orchid hunters went on an expedition to the Philippines. Within a month, one of them had been eaten by a tiger, another had been drenched with oil and burnt alive, five had vanished into thin air, and only one had managed to stay alive. The lone survivor of this

dangerous mission ended with a huge haul of Phalaenopsis, also known as moth orchids, and probably made a huge fortune through his looted plants.

Hired orchid hunters shipped millions of orchids back to England. But the delicate orchids could not withstand the saline environment of the sea voyage for so long, and most would perish. In fact, it is estimated that less than one percent of the plant cargo would reach the destination alive. As a result of this plundering, and uprooting from their natural habitat, some orchid species became extinct. While some orchid hunters

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undoubtedly cared about the beauty of nature, the uniqueness of orchids, and scientific advancement, most were after material profits and personal fame.

It is absolutely true that the magnificent orchids have always been a source of fascination and intrigue for plant lovers since their discovery (they are found everywhere except in Antarctica). But prices and the challenges of cultivation had kept orchids largely in the domain of the elite classes and out of the reach of the middle class. This changed dramatically when hybridisation became common around the mid-20th century. The hybridisation of orchids decreased the prices substantially, and middle-class enthusiasts had the opportunity to buy and grow these beautiful flowers in their homes.

Though the nurseries and even the supermarkets are flooded with hybrid orchids at very accessible prices today, the native orchids remain the objects of expedition and subject

of research among orchid growers. The mystery around orchids, their unique habitat, sensual growth habit and rarity intrigued and challenged orchid lovers. In some cases, owning and growing rare orchids in the personal greenhouses became an obsession. Consequently, rare species still remain prized and pricey.

In order to stop illegal international trade of wildlife, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), became effective in July 1975. CITES is a global agreement among governments to regulate or ban international trade in threatened flora and fauna. Unfortunately, CITES could not stop some orchid sellers and enthusiasts from collecting the native orchids from the wild and endangering their future.

In developed countries, native orchids are protected by appropriate laws and can be sold only by the government designated nurseries. But uprooting the native orchids is a regular event in the developing countries where these plants are not adequately protected by the relevant authorities. Bangladesh is no exception in this regard. Currently, Bangladesh has approximately 150 or so orchid species that naturally grow in the wild. According to research published some three years ago, in the *International Journal of Ecology and Environmental Sciences*, 32 orchid species native to Bangladesh have become unavailable within its borders. In addition, some orchids are listed as endangered species and if not protected, there is a chance they may become extinct in the near future. There are two main reasons for this situation. First is rampant deforestation. Most orchids grow on bigger trees and simply cannot survive when the host trees are cut down. Second, there is widespread poaching of native and rare orchids.

Our native orchids are amazingly beautiful and they thrive in their natural habitat, where they get adequate sunlight, rain, and air. It is very difficult to grow orchid species in the artificial environment at home and there is a strong possibility that these orchid species would eventually perish. The sooner we understand that uprooting our orchids from their natural habitat is a direct threat to their future existence, the better it is for our native orchids.

We need awareness among people and stricter laws to avoid these dire consequences and save our native plants. We often discuss climate change, carbon emissions, air and water pollution. But we must not forget that it is our foremost duty to protect and save our natural resources, our animals and, most importantly, our forests and native plants. This is a collective responsibility that we must all share, and to which citizens and policymakers must be fully committed.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ

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স্মারক নং-পুলিশ টেলিকম/এসটি/২৭৬২/নেভার

তারিখ: ৩০/০৫/২০২৩খ্রিঃ

টিকাদার তালিকাভুক্তি/নবায়নকরণ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

২০২৩-২০২৪ অর্থ বছরে “পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট আইন-২০০৬”, “পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট (সংশোধন) আইন-২০০৯” এর বিধি ৫২ এবং “পাবলিক প্রকিউরমেন্ট (সংশোধন) আইন, ২০১৬” মোতাবেক পুলিশ টেলিকম সংস্থা কর্তৃক বিভিন্ন পূর্ত মোরামত এবং ভবন ও অবকাঠামো নির্মাণ প্রকল্প বাস্তবায়নের নিমিত্তে টিকাদার তালিকাভুক্তি/নবায়নকরণের জন্য আগ্রহী ও সংশ্লিষ্ট কাজে অভিজ্ঞতাসম্পন্ন টিকাদারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের দিকট হতে নিম্নবর্ণিত ছকে শর্ত সাপেক্ষে সরাসরি আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছেঃ

০১।	মন্ত্রণালয়	স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রণালয়।
০২।	অধিদপ্তর	বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ।
০৩।	সম্প্রদায়িক সত্তা প্রধান	অতিরিক্ত আইজি, বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ, পুলিশ টেলিকম সংস্থা, রাজারবাগ, ঢাকা।
০৪।	দরপত্র আহ্বানের উদ্দেশ্য	টিকাদার তালিকাভুক্তি/নবায়নকরণ।
০৫।	ক্রম প্রক্রিয়া	সীমিত দরপত্র পদ্ধতি (L.T.M)।
০৬।	বাজেট এবং অর্থের উৎস	রাজস্ব বাজেটের আওতাধীন পূর্ত মোরামত এবং ভবন ও অবকাঠামো নির্মাণ।
০৭।	আবেদনপত্র প্রেরণের তারিখ ও স্থান	০৪/০৬/২০২৩খ্রিঃ হতে ১১/০৬/২০২৩খ্রিঃ অবধি ঢাকালীন সময় পর্যন্ত পুলিশ টেলিকম ভবন, রাজারবাগ, ঢাকা।
০৮।	আবেদন জমা প্রদানের শেষ তারিখ ও সময়	১২/০৬/২০২৩খ্রিঃ ১১.০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে পুলিশ টেলিকম ভবন, রাজারবাগ, ঢাকার কার্যালয়ে বসিফত বাস্তু জমা প্রদান করতে হবে। নির্ধারিত তারিখ ও সময়ের পর কোন আবেদনপত্র গ্রহণযোগ্য হবে না।
০৯।	আবেদনপত্র খোলার তারিখ, সময় ও স্থান	১২/০৬/২০২৩খ্রিঃ ১১.০০ ঘটিকা, পুলিশ টেলিকম ভবন, কনফারেন্স রুম-২য় তলা, রাজারবাগ, ঢাকা (আবেদনকারীদের সম্মুখে, যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন)।
১০।	আবেদনকারীর যোগ্যতা	(ক) সিটি কর্পোরেশন/ইউনিয়ন পরিষদ কর্তৃক প্রদত্ত হালনাগাদ ট্রেড লাইসেন্স (খ) ভ্যাট রেজিস্ট্রেশন সাটিফিকেট (গ) হালনাগাদ আয়কর সাটিফিকেট (ঘ) হালনাগাদ ব্যাংক সলভেন্সি সাটিফিকেট ন্যূনতম ১০ (দশ লক্ষ) টাকা (ছ) লাইসেন্স/২১ পর্যন্ত ব্যাংক ডেটমেন্ট (জ) জাতীয় পরিচয়পত্র/ভোটার আইডি কার্ড/শাসনিক সাটিফিকেট (চ) ০২ (দুই) রপ্তি রপ্তি অধি (ছ) এলজিইডি/পলপূর্ত বিভাগ/জনস্বাস্থ্য প্রকৌশল/সরকারি সংস্থার টিকাদারী লাইসেন্স (জ) গত দুই বছরে যে কোন সরকারি সংস্থায় সর্বমোট ন্যূনতম ১০ (দশ লক্ষ) টাকা অথবা এর অধিক পূর্ত নির্মাণ ও মোরামত কাজ সম্পাদন সাটিফিকেট (ঝ) এলজিইডি/জেলা পরিষদ/পলপূর্ত বিভাগ/জনস্বাস্থ্য প্রকৌশল অধিদপ্তর অথবা সরকারি যে কোন প্রতিষ্ঠানে পূর্ত নির্মাণ ও মোরামত (নির্ভাল, স্যানিটারী, বৈদ্যুতিক, গ্যাস, লিফট ও জেনারেটর স্থাপন/মোরামত/সার্ভিসিং) কাজ সম্পাদনের অভিজ্ঞতা (বেসরকারী কাজের অভিজ্ঞতা গ্রহণযোগ্য হবে না)। সকল কাগজপত্র প্রথম শ্রেণীর পেজেটেড কর্কটক কর্তৃক সত্যায়িত করে নাম সন্নিবিষ্ট সীলসহ আবেদনপত্রের সাথে সংযুক্ত করতে হবে।
১১।	কাজের সফলকৃত বিবরণ	ক. পূর্ত মোরামত। খ. পূর্ত নির্মাণ। গ. লিফট ও জেনারেটর স্থাপন/মোরামত/সার্ভিসিং।
১২।	আবেদন ফর্মের মূল্য	৫০০/- (পাঁচশত) টাকা (অফেরতযোগ্য)।
১৩।	টিকাদার তালিকাভুক্তি ফি	৫,০০০/- (পাঁচ হাজার) টাকা এবং এর ১৫% ভ্যাট (অফেরতযোগ্য)।
১৪।	তালিকাভুক্ত টিকাদার নবায়ন ফি	২,০০০/- (দুই হাজার) টাকা এবং এর ১৫% ভ্যাট (অফেরতযোগ্য)।
সম্প্রদায়িক সত্তা বিবরণ:		
১৫।	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী অফিসারের নাম	ড. চৌধুরী মোঃ যাবেব সাদেক।
১৬।	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী অফিসারের পদবী	পুলিশ সুপার (আইডমিন অ্যান্ড ফাইন্যান্স)।
১৭।	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী অফিসারের ঠিকানা	পুলিশ টেলিকম সংস্থা, রাজারবাগ, ঢাকা-১২১৭।
১৮।	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারী অফিসারের মোবাইল, ফ্যাক্স ও ই-মেইল	মোবাইল ০১৩২০-০২০০৩৯, ফ্যাক্স ৮৩০১৪০৪।
১৯।	মন্তব্য	কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারণে দর্শনে বাতিলের কোন দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।

ড. চৌধুরী মোঃ যাবেব সাদেক

বিপি-৭৯০৬১১৭০২

পুলিশ সুপার (আইডমিন অ্যান্ড ফাইন্যান্স)

পুলিশ টেলিকম সংস্থা, রাজারবাগ, ঢাকা

মোবাইল ০১৩২০-০২০০৩৯, ফ্যাক্স ৮৩০১৪০৪

জিডি-৯৫৭