



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?

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.

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

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 taxing the voiceless, low-income groups, while giving 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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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.

Orchidilirium 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 Orlean 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	পুলিশ টেলিকম সংস্থা
পুলিশ টেলিকম ভবন, রাজারবাগ, ঢাকা	তারিখ: ৩০/০৫/২০২৩স্ট্রাই
সরকার নন-পুলিশ টেলিকম/এস্টেট/২৭৩২/বেতার	০৪/০৬/২০২৩স্ট্রাই
২০২৩-২০২৪ অর্ধ বছরে "পারিস্ক প্রকিটরমেন্ট আইন-২০০৬", "পারিস্ক প্রকিটরমেন্ট (সংশোধন) আইন-২০১৬" মোতাবেক পুলিশ টেলিকম সহী কর্তৃ বিভিন্ন পৃষ্ঠ মেরামত এবং তবন ও অবকাশে নিয়ম প্রকল্প প্রকল্প সংস্থা নিয়মিতে টিকানার তালিকাভুক্ত/নবায়নকরণের জন্য আগ্রহী ও সম্পর্ক কাজে অভিজ্ঞানসম্পর্ক টিকানার প্রতিক্রিয়া কর্তৃত হতে শুরু করা যাচ্ছে।	০৫/০৬/২০২৩স্ট্রাই
০১। মুক্তাগালয়	ব্রজপুর মুক্তাগালয়।
০২। অবিষ্কৃত	বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ।
০৩। সঞ্চালকরী সংস্থা প্রধান	অভিজ্ঞ আইডি আইন প্রকল্পে নিয়ম প্রকল্প প্রকল্প সংস্থা নিয়মিতে টিকানার তালিকাভুক্ত/নবায়নকরণ।
০৪। সরকার আহামের উদ্দেশ্য	টিকানার তালিকাভুক্ত/নবায়নকরণ।
০৫। কর প্রতিক্রিয়া	সীমিত নম্পত্র প্রক্রিয়া (L.T.M.)।
০৬। বাজেট এবং অবের উদ্দেশ্য	বাংলাদেশ বাজেটের পৃষ্ঠ মেরামত এবং অবকাশে নিয়ম।
০৭। আবেদনপত্র ত্বরণের তারিখ ও ছান	০৪/০৬/২০২৩স্ট্রাই ১১:০০ মিনিটের মধ্যে পুলিশ টেলিকম ভবন, রাজারবাগ, ঢাকা কর্তৃত বাস্তবায়ন কর্তৃত হতে শুরু করা যাবে।
০৮। আবেদন জমা প্রদানের লেব তারিখ ও সময়	১২/০৬/২০২৩স্ট্রাই ১১:৩০ মিনিটের মধ্যে পুলিশ টেলিকম ভবন, রাজারবাগ, ঢাকা কর্তৃত বাস্তবায়ন কর্তৃত হতে শুরু করা যাবে।
০৯। আবেদনপত্র জমার তারিখ সময় ও ছান	১২/০৬/২০২৩স্ট্রাই ১১:৩০ মিনিটের মধ্যে পুলিশ টেলিকম ভবন, কর্তৃত বাস্তবায়ন কর্তৃত হতে শুরু করা যাবে।
১০। আবেদনকারীর যোগ্যতা	(ক) সিটি কর্পোরেশন/ইউনিয়ন কর্তৃত প্রদত্ত হালনাগাদ প্রেস্টেশন (খ) ভাট রেজিস্ট্রেশন সার্টিফিকেট (গ) হালনাগাদ অবকাশে নিয়মিত সার্টিফিকেট (ঘ) বাস্তবায়ন প্রক্রিয়া প্রেস্টেশন (১) পুলিশ টেলিকম ভবন, রাজারবাগ, ঢাকা কর্তৃত বাস্তবায়ন কর্তৃত হতে শুরু করা যাবে। (২) এভিউইডেলোন পরিচয়পত্র সংস্থা নিয়ম ও মেরামত কর্তৃত বাস্তবায়ন কর্তৃত হতে শুরু করা যাবে। (৩) এভিউইডেলোন পরিচয়পত্র সংস্থা নিয়ম ও মেরামত সিস্টেল, স্যামেটেলো, বৈমুভিক, গ্যাস, লিলট ও জেনেরেটর হাপ্পন/মেরামত/সার্ভিসিং। কাজ সম্পদের অভিজ্ঞতা (বেসিনেট কার্যকৰী অভিজ্ঞতা এবংযোগ্য হবে না)। সকল কাজগুলির প্রথম শ্রেণীর প্রেস্টেশন কর্তৃত কর্তৃত সংস্থায়িত করে নাম সংরক্ষণ কর্তৃত হতে শুরু করা যাবে।
১১। কাজের সংক্ষিপ্ত বিবরণ	ক. পুরুষ মেরামত। খ. সুর্ত মিনিমাল।
১২। আবেদন ফরমের মূল্য	৫০০/- (পুর্ণস্ট) টাকা (অক্ষেত্রে পুরুষ)।
১৩। টিকানার তালিকাভুক্ত ক্ষি	৫,০০০/- (পুরুষ হাজার) টাকা এবং এর ১৫% ভাট (অবেরত্যোগ্য)।
১৪। তালিকাভুক্ত টিকানার নবায়ন ক্ষি	২,০০০/- (নেই হাজার) টাকা এবং এর ১৫% ভাট (অবেরত্যোগ্য)।
১৫। সরপত্র আহামকারী অফিসারের নাম	ড. চৌধুরী মোঃ যাবের সান্দেক।
১৬। সরপত্র আহামকারী অফিসারের পদবী	পুলিশ সুপার (অফিসিয়াল কাফিন্যাল)।
১৭। সরপত্র আহামকারী অফিসারের ঠিকানা	পুলিশ টেলিকম সংস্থা, রাজারবাগ, ঢাকা-১২১৭।
১৮। সরপত্র আহামকারী অফিসারের মোবাইল, ফ্যাক্স ও ই-মেইল	মোবাইল ০১৭২০-০২০০০৩, ফ্যাক্স ৮৩০১৪০৪।
১৯। মন্তব্য	কর্তৃপক্ষ কেবল কাজের দর্শনাবলী ব্যক্তিকরণে কোন নম্পত্র প্রাপ্ত কর্তৃত সংরক্ষণ করেন।

ড. চৌধুরী মোঃ যাবের সান্দেক
বিপ-৪৩০২১১৯০২
পুলিশ সুপার (আভেরত্যোগ্য)
পুলিশ টেলিকম সংস্থা, রাজারবাগ, ঢাকা
মোবাইল ০১৭২০-০২০০০৩, ফ্যাক্স ৮৩০১৪০৪