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Shakib's hour arrives to 'manage everything'



Hilsa brings back smiles to fishers



Drowning in a sea of distressed assets



Nearly 500 children die from hunger in Sudan

Record LGD spending in July ahead of polls

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and JAGARAN CHAKMA

July's development spending was the highest in four years on the back of enthusiastic fund utilisation by the local government division -- whose expenditure hit a record high for the first month of a fiscal year.

Last month, LGD, the unit of government responsible for developing and supporting local government bodies, spent Tk1,253.45 crore against 216 projects, according to data from the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division.

This is an increase of 27.3 percent from a year earlier and accounts for 35.9 percent of July's expenditure of Tk 3,489.09 crore from fiscal 2023-24's annual development budget.

Economists said the higher spending by LGD -- whose main activities include rural police, construction, maintenance and management of upazila, union and village roads including bridges and culverts; development of water supply, sanitation, drainage and sewage disposal in rural and urban areas -- appears to be motivated by the polls due in January next year.

"In America, this is called pork barrel -- all low-priority projects become high priority ahead of the elections," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

Pork barrel, or simply pork, is a metaphor for the appropriation of government spending for localised projects secured solely or primarily to direct spending to a representative's district.

"Are these expenses keeping the election in mind? It is never like that in the month of July," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

Planning Minister MA Mannan pinned the higher spending by LGD on the uncomplicated nature of its projects.

"LGD works at the grassroots level -- its scope is the most expansive. It needs to take up lots of projects and those projects are simple and do not need a feasibility study," Mannan told The Daily Star yesterday.

Which is why Mannan could approve many of the LGD projects without taking those up to the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council.

As the planning minister, Mannan can approve projects whose costs are less than Tk 50 crore and just inform the Ecneec of the approvals afterwards.

There was just one Ecneec meeting in July, and another one is scheduled for August 29, Mannan added.

In the months leading up to the polls in 2018, there would be frequent Ecneec meetings in which a flurry of projects was approved.

Meanwhile, five of the 15 large ministries and divisions could not spend any of their allocations in July: the secondary and higher education division, the ministry of science and technology, the bridges division, the ministry of water resources, and the ministry of civil aviation and tourism.

The shipping ministry could spend 0.04 percent of its allocation in July.

A year earlier, only the ministries of agriculture and primary and education among the 15 large ministries and divisions failed to spend a penny.

Among the 15 large ministries and divisions, whose allocations account for 79.8 percent of the year's total budget, LGD managed to spend the most of its outlay in July: 3.13 percent.

It was followed by the railway ministry (2.08 percent), the road transport and highway division (1.78 percent), the ministry of housing and public work (1.67 percent) and the agriculture ministry (1.17 percent).



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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Workers of Dhaka North City Corporation using fogger machines to kill off Aedes mosquitoes in a bid to curb the spread of dengue in the capital's Lalmatia. As of two days ago, dengue cases reached a record high in the country since the first major outbreak in the year 2000. The photo was taken yesterday.

Tale of 2 fake press releases

RASHIDUL HASAN

With the national election around the corner, a rift between Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader and its chief patron Raushan Ershad is becoming visible again.

Yesterday, two "press releases" sent out from two WhatsApp groups went viral for quite some time. One of the releases, sent by Raushan's spokesperson Kazi Mamunur Rashid, claimed that Raushan declared herself the party chairperson. The second release, also sent out by Kazi Mamun, claimed some JP leaders expressed their "no confidence" in the leadership of GM Quader.

Both the releases later turned out to be fake, as senior party leaders close to Raushan told The Daily Star that Raushan had no knowledge of the press releases.

"Kazi Mamun may have sent the releases to the media to create further unrest and division between Quader and



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DENGUE OUTBREAK 21-40 age group hit the hardest

HELEMUL ALAM

Almost 35 percent of the people who died from dengue are aged between 21 and 40 years, according to the health directorate data.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) reported eight deaths from the mosquito-borne disease and 2,168 hospital admissions in the 24 hours preceding 8:00am yesterday.

The outbreak this year has caused 493 deaths and 1,04,359 hospitalisations, the DGHS data shows.

The 21-40 age group constitutes around 46 percent of the total cases this year so far.

HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor of medicine at the Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital, said, "It is difficult to say why this age group has the highest number of deaths. But delayed visits to the hospital could be one of the reasons. People of this age group are relatively fit, and they tend to delay the first visit to the hospital."

Early consultation with a doctor and proper medication are essential if

someone has dengue, he said, adding that patients should drink coconut water, saline, and home-made fruit juice to stay hydrated. He also advised vitamins and minerals to speed up recovery.

Hasan Mohammad Al-Amin, who studies Bangladeshi mosquitos at the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute in Australia, said, "The main reason behind the higher casualties is that many of the patients have been infected for the second time."

Citing his own research done in 2014, he said 85 percent of the residents in the survey area previously had dengue.

"However, the majority of people are unaware of their past infections. This indicates the absence of proper surveillance. People are left uninformed and at increased risk of death," he said.

Entomologist Prof Kabirul Bashar of Jahangirnagar University said as people of the 21-40 age group go outdoors a lot, they are at risk of getting infected.

"People have to wear full sleeve tops, socks, shoes, and use mosquito nets while sleeping," he said.

BUSINESS

11 NBFIs leave investors in the dark

Seven months have passed since the world bid adieu to 2022, but almost half of the listed non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs) have not published their financial statements for the year, breaching securities rules.

As a result, hundreds of thousands of general investors who are holding the stocks of the companies do not know how the non-banks fared in the year.

At present, 23 NBFIs are listed on bourses, and of them, 11 are yet to publish the financial reports.

STORY ON BI

Rejoinder, our reply

Dhaka Central Jail has issued a rejoinder in response to our article titled "Tk 37.5cr mishandled in just one year," published on August 6 based on a report by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh, the country's supreme audit institution.

The rejoinder, penned by the senior jail superintendent of Dhaka Central Jail, said the report contains falsehoods and baseless claims.

The report highlighted discrepancies in the allocation of Tk 19 crore in fiscal 2019-20, including issues related to the quality of rice, substandard food supply, monotonous food menu and the provision of only rice and lentils during lunch.

The rejoinder offered a point-by-point clarification on the matters raised.

Regarding rice procurement, the rejoinder said that rice for inmates and staff is obtained through a regulated process from local food warehouses.

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A patient and her attendants walk out of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, as they are doubtful of getting proper treatment due to the ongoing strike called by intern doctors of the hospital. The indefinite strike was called by the Intern Physicians Council after the relatives of a patient, who died during treatment, vandalised the hospital and attacked staffers on Monday. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

BRICS SUMMIT Divisions re-emerge over expansion

PM reaches S Africa

REUTERS, Johannesburg

BRICS leaders met yesterday to plot the future course of the bloc of developing nations but divisions re-emerged ahead of a critical debate over a potential expansion of the group intended to boost its global clout.

Heightened tensions in the wake of the Ukraine war and Beijing's growing rivalry with the United States have



pushed China and Russia -- whose President Vladimir Putin will attend the meeting virtually -- to seek to strengthen BRICS.

They are seeking to use the Aug. 22-24 summit in Johannesburg to forge the grouping, which also includes South Africa, Brazil and India, into a counterweight to Western dominance of global institutions.

"Right now, changes in the world, in our times, and in history are unfolding in ways like never before, bringing human society to a critical juncture," China's President

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