

Budget of big ambition

ARUN DEVNATH

A record budget. The fallout of a distant war. A banking crisis. An imminent reckoning with the IMF. These are the

the economy from a distance, now sits at the centre of it, looking at the big number – a budget of Tk 9.38 lakh crore for the fiscal year beginning July 1. This is a 19 percent increase over this year's revised

The finance minister unveils Bangladesh's largest-ever budget today. The real question isn't the number – it's who pays for it, and whether it will be any different

notes Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury must play, all at once, in his first budget as finance minister – a job he has held for less than four months.

Every June, Bangladesh presents a budget. The outlay almost always gets bigger, the deficit rarely closes, and the annual ritual goes on. Arithmetically, this June is no different. But politically, it feels different. For the first time in 20 years, it is the BNP's number to announce, the BNP's deficit to explain, and the BNP's promise to keep. It is a burden, an opportunity, and quite likely, a bit of both.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, exiled in London for 17 years, who had watched

outlay and, in nominal terms, roughly 13 times larger than BNP's last budget two decades ago.

It is also, by most reasonable assessments, unaffordable.

Welcome to Bangladesh's budget season.

The country that built one of Asia's great growth stories did so by collecting taxes at roughly 7 percent of GDP – less than India, less than Vietnam, and less than almost any comparable economy. The global average for developing countries sits around 15 percent. Bangladesh, with an economy of half a trillion dollars, simply

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THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

Host US beset by controversies

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

As the curtain rises on the 2026 FIFA World Cup tonight, the United States appears to be competing for an altogether different title – one of the most inhospitable hosts in the tournament's history.

Its headline immigration and border-control policies stand in direct contradiction to FIFA's long-promoted ideals of inclusivity, anti-discrimination and "football for all".

This edition, the biggest World Cup ever, featuring 48 nations and three co-hosts – the United States, Mexico and Canada – was billed as the most inclusive tournament in history. Instead, it risks being remembered for the barriers that have prevented officials, journalists, support staff and fans from fully participating in football's greatest spectacle.

While Mexico and Canada have embraced the spirit of a global gathering united by sport, the United States – host of 78 matches, by far the most among the three nations – has generated controversy through policies that have left several participating countries feeling unwelcome.

The contrast was laid bare in a video that circulated on social media on Tuesday. Senegal's squad, arriving in the United States, was met with aggressive frisking on the tarmac and rigorous airport checks. In Mexico, meanwhile, Spain's players received a festive welcome in Puebla, greeted by mariachis, sombreros and cheering fans.

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And so, the World Cup begins

KHALID HOSSAIN

Football's ultimate prize takes centre stage across North America as the FIFA World Cup 2026 bursts into action tonight.

The much-awaited quadrennial tournament opens with a touch of nostalgia as co-hosts Mexico take on South Africa at the iconic Azteca Stadium at 1:00 am Friday (Bangladesh time), a captivating repeat of the 2010 curtain-raiser.

Playing in front of a passionate home crowd, Mexico will hope to recreate the magic of past hosting campaigns, having famously reached the quarterfinals in both 1970 and 1986.

The opening day double-header concludes with South Korea facing Czechia at the Estadio Guadalajara at 8:00 am.

This expanded 48-team tournament features 104 matches across 39 days in the United States, Mexico and Canada. For fans in Bangladesh, following the action will require true dedication.



The vast geography of the host nations means kick-off times will be notoriously gruelling in this part of the world, with matches stretching from midnight well into the early hours.

Adding another layer of intrigue, the unforgiving North American summer heat and humidity are expected to have a major influence, particularly during the group stage. Warm-up fixtures have already offered a glimpse of those challenges, with Spain held by Iraq and France suffering a surprise defeat to Ivory Coast.

Yet a lack of sleep is unlikely to dampen enthusiasm in Bangladesh, where World Cup fever has long transcended geography. Once again, the country will be sharply divided into its traditional camps of Argentina and Brazil supporters.

Defending champions Argentina face the notoriously difficult task of retaining their title, a feat untouched since 1962 when Brazil achieved it.

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DEATH OF NEWBORNS Govt unhappy with Ad-din's response

Says health minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities are not satisfied with Ad-din Medical College Hospital's response over the recent deaths of six newborns there, Health Minister Sardar Md Sakawat Husain said yesterday.

Speaking to reporters at his secretariat office, he said a meeting would be held to determine what action will be taken against the hospital and that the authorities would inform the media of their decision afterwards.

"The hospital has submitted its reply and we have reviewed it. However, instead of providing the necessary information, they

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1.5% cut for bringing in FDI Announces Tarique in JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday said anyone bringing foreign investment into Bangladesh will be entitled to a 1.5 percent consultancy fee or commission as an incentive to boost foreign direct investment.

Responding to a question from MP Joharat Adeeb Chowdhury during the question-and-answer session in parliament, the premier said the initiative will encourage expatriate Bangladeshis to invest in the country and enable skilled and qualified individuals to attract foreign investors.

The session was presided over by Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmad.

The prime minister said foreign investors had previously been reluctant to invest in Bangladesh, as they were unable to repatriate dividends.

"We have solved this problem through legislation," he said.

"Just a few days ago, we decided that if any Bangladeshi

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Home minister's claim on Islami Bank 'false'

Says Jamaat in JS; govt's claims at odds with bank's annual reports

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday demanded that Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed's remarks in parliament over Islami Bank's Rural Development Scheme (RDS) be expunged from the official record, calling the statement "false".

Raising the issue on a point of order, Jamaat MP Nazibur Rahman objected to comments made during Tuesday's parliamentary debate on Islami Bank, in which the home minister alleged that funds from the bank's RDS had been used to support a certain group's electioneering.

According to Nazibur, the minister claimed that the Jamaat had received Tk 22,000 crore in two instalments through the scheme.

"This is untrue. Islami Bank is a public limited company. Its audit reports are submitted annually. I have reviewed those reports and, if necessary, will submit them to you, honourable speaker," he said.

Citing the bank's audit reports, Nazibur said RDS financing stood at Tk 6,712 crore in 2024 and Tk 6,789 crore in 2025.

"I do not know where the Tk 11,000 crore plus Tk 11,000 crore figures – totalling Tk 22,000 crore – came from. This information is false. It is undesirable to have such a statement recorded in parliament," he said.

He urged that the remarks be removed from

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BUSINESS

Observer appointed at Islami Bank

The Bangladesh Bank has appointed Md Ashraf Alam, one of its executive directors, as observer at Islami Bank Bangladesh to monitor operations and protect depositors. The move comes amid protests, and massive withdrawal by depositors, triggered by the appointment of Md Khurshid Alam as chairman on May 24.

STORY ON B1



As anticipation builds ahead of the start of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, national flags of participating countries line Dhaka-Aricha highway in Aminbazar on the outskirts of the capital. Although Bangladesh are not among the 48 teams competing in the tournament, football fever has already gripped local fans, many of whom passionately support nations from around the world. The World Cup, to be jointly hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico, will kick off tonight with the match between Mexico and South Africa at Estadio Azteca in Mexico City.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN