



Farmers harvesting half-ripe paddy



West lacking 'unity' over Ukraine war



The invisible tango with death



Marketing pills or monetising pain?

SOCIAL SAFETY NET BETTER TARGETED

Beneficiaries to be decided by the National Household Database

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government is committed to using the long-overdue National Household Database (NHD) from the next fiscal year to better target the social safety net programmes, in a development that can infuse dynamism in the flat scheme.

"We will seek to mandate the use of the National Household Database to identify beneficiaries of major social protection programs," Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal said in his letter to the World Bank on March 2 seeking \$250 million budget support for fiscal 2022-23.

The use is subject to the readiness of the necessary information technology infrastructure, he said, adding that the NHD infrastructure will be used to scale social assistance during any future extreme climate events.

The NHD, which is expected to serve as a poverty registry, is expected to be ready next month, according to Tofail Ahmed, its project director.

The database, which is based on a form of 37 questions answered by 3.5 crore families from 64 districts in three phases in 2017 and 2018, will provide a more accurate picture of the socioeconomic status of households in Bangladesh.

It was originally supposed to be complete in 2017 but was later expected by June last year.

The Armenian firm that is developing the Management Information System -- through which the various government departments can better target beneficiaries for their programmes -- had to put the work on hold for the global public health crisis, Ahmed said.

Work has resumed and the database has been forwarded to the Department of Disaster Management for vetting.

"By June, the database would be ready -- it will be useable."

He acknowledged the dated nature of the data in light of the pandemic, which is said to have thrown many into poverty.

"That is a challenge, but we will update it in future," Ahmed added.

Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, advised merging the NHD with the dataset collected by the local governments amid the pandemic.

"In that way, the newly eligible beneficiaries can be covered. The NHD is progress nonetheless for social safety net programmes," he said.

Also from next fiscal year, all the elderly and the disabled people as well as the widows, deserted and destitute women in another 100 upazilas would be brought under the coverage of the safety net schemes.

With this, 362 of the 495 upazilas would get full coverage of the social safety net schemes.

As a result, the government's allocation for social

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



Work for the Padma Bridge Rail Link Project is going on in full swing in South Keraniganj, where an elevated station is being built. Under the Tk 39,246.80 crore project, a 169-kilometre rail route would be built from the capital, through the Padma bridge, to Jashore. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

DHAKA-ASHULIA ELEVATED EXPRESSWAY

Time, cost gallop even before work starts

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and TUHIN SHUBHIRA ADHIKARY

Work for the Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway project is yet to formally start but the deadline for the mega project is to expire in just over a month.

The government had approved the project in October 2017 and the deadline for completion of the 24km expressway was set for the end of June, 2022.

The project authorities have sought four more years and an additional Tk 651.72 crore, according to project documents.

If the revision proposal, which is expected to be placed at the next Ecneec meeting on Tuesday, is approved, the project deadline will be extended to June 2026 and the total cost would be Tk 17,553.04 crore.

The authorities said the major reason for the delay in project implementation was the long time Chinese authorities took to approve the \$1.1 billion loan.

The Chinese contractor is expected to start construction work formally from next month and

as per contract it will get five years and two months for completion of the work, Project Director Shahabuddin Khan told The Daily Star yesterday.

In that case, the deadline for the project may be further extended as the contract period will exceed the project deadline.

"Yes, we may have to extend the deadline further but we will try to complete the work within four years," Shahabuddin said.

Once built, the expressway will connect Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport with Abdullahpur, Ashulia, Baipail and Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) on the Nabinagar-Chandra highway.

Vehicles will have to pay toll, said project officials.

It will allow people from 30 districts to enter and exit the capital quickly and easily. It is also expected to boost the country's gross domestic product by 0.21 percent, show project documents.

Another expressway -- the Dhaka Elevated

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

- Original deadline end of June 2022
- Project authorities seek 4 more years and additional Tk 651.72cr

ATTACK ON JCD

BCL men brag on Facebook

With council ahead, they want spotlight

SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

Soon after Tuesday's violence on Dhaka University campus, a top leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League claimed they had no "organisational involvement" in the attack on leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal.

He even tactically blamed it on general students, saying it was them who resisted the "criminal activities" of JCD.

But a number of BCL leaders posted photos, videos and texts on social media the same day to boast about their "active participation" in the attack.

One of them even expressed disappointment with two campus correspondents for not mentioning them in news reports.

Most of these BCL men hold posts in the central committee and DU hall units of the organisation.

They are looking for media coverage, even if it's for the wrong reason, as they think it will help them get better positions in the pro-AL student body when it holds council in a few months, according to insiders.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

BUSINESS

NOW SUGAR BECOMES DEARER

Consumers are already bearing the brunt of the high prices of edible oil, wheat and rice for the Russia-Ukraine war and unfavourable weather conditions. To rub salt into the wounds, India's decision to limit sugar export has started to increase the price of the sweetener in Bangladesh due to concerns over a supply crunch in the coming days.

Yesterday, the wholesale price of sugar went up by Tk 50 to Tk 60 per maund in Dhaka and Chattogram, while the retail price was up by Tk 2 to Tk 5 per kg.

STORY ON B1



Shakib Al Hasan is all smiles after the left-arm spinner was the most successful of the Bangladesh bowlers, with figures of three for 59, on the rain-hit third day of the second Test against Sri Lanka in Mirpur yesterday. Sri Lanka finished the day on 282-5, still trailing Bangladesh by 83 runs. Read more on page 11.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Doctoring EVMs almost impossible

Tech experts tell EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Information and communications technology experts yesterday said it would be almost impossible to manipulate the electronic voting machines.

After attending a views exchange programme on the EVMs with the Election Commission, Muhammed Zafar Iqbal, former professor of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, said, "I am convinced that this machine is nearly perfect and it is easy to operate."

"I have seen in the newspapers that political parties are making various demands, including formation of a new commission. I will tell the political parties that if you get to form a new commission, I will still request them to use this EVM. This will benefit you."

At the programme, the experts said tech experts from all political parties should be consulted so that the latter get a clear idea about the machines.

The experts recommended launching a countrywide mass campaign on how a vote can be cast using an EVM. The BNP has long been opposing the use of EVMs, saying that the devices would allow the ruling party to "steal votes".

A number of civil society members and eminent citizens in recent talks also advised the EC against using EVMs unless there was a national consensus supporting it.

On May 7, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at an AL Central Working Committee meeting said EVMs would be used in all 300 parliamentary constituencies, according to insiders.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibur Awal on

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4