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Hundreds of Northern University students blocked the capital's Airport Road yesterday afternoon to protest the death of fellow student Nadia Akhter, creating long tailbacks from noon onwards. Nadia, who was on a motorcycle with a friend, was crushed under the wheels of a Victor Paribahan bus in front Jamuna Future Park in Pragati Sarani on Sunday. **HOW MANY NADIAS WILL IT TAKE? PAGE 3**

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## FOOD DISTRIBUTION FOR POOR

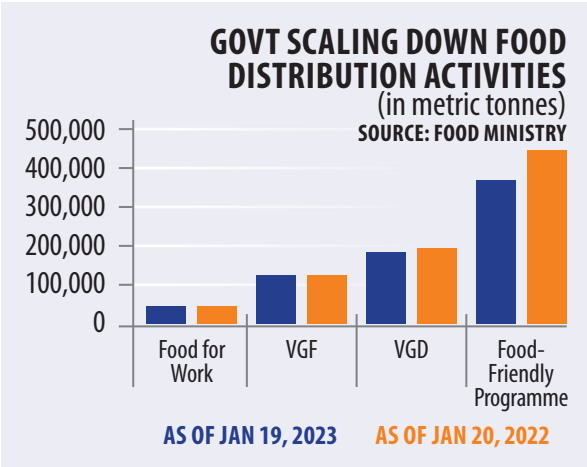
# When more is needed, govt doing less

REJAUL KARIM  
BYRON and MD  
ASADUZZAMAN

Scaling up public food distribution programmes for the poor and the vulnerable is the need of the hour — given the cost of living crisis. But the government seems to be shying away from stepping up to this task.

So far this fiscal year, it has distributed about 15 lakh tonnes of rice and wheat through its various food distribution programmes under the social safety net schemes, down 6 percent year-on-year, according to data from the food ministry until January 19.

"This is difficult to fathom at a time of soaring prices," said Zahid Hussain, a former



lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

Inflation averaged 8.76 percent in the first six months of the fiscal year, up from 5.7 percent a year earlier, according to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

In December, inflation stood at 8.71 percent and in rural areas 8.86 percent. But the

wage rate grew at 7.03 percent.

Given the recent hike in energy prices, inflation is expected to spiral further, said Bazlul Haque Khondker, chairman of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling.

How the low-income groups will manage then

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## Ramp up support for nations hit by Covid, war

### PM calls upon World Bank

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the World Bank and other international organisations to boost their support for the countries hit by the pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and climate change.

The premier made this call when World Bank Managing Director for Operations Axel van Trotsenburg paid a courtesy call on her at her office in the morning.

PM's Speech Writer Md Nazrul Islam briefed reporters after the meeting.

Hasina said Bangladesh had gained over 8 percent GDP growth before the Covid-19, but it declined due to the pandemic. When Bangladesh was regaining the growth momentum, it was affected again by the Russia-Ukraine war fallout.

The poor and developing countries like Bangladesh plunged into trouble because significant rise in fuel and food prices, and transportation cost worldwide, she said.

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## 150 CONSTITUENCIES

# EC's EVM dream over, for now

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The government has shelved a proposal for buying two lakh electronic voting machines, forcing the Election Commission to change its plan for using the machines in up to 150 constituencies in the next general polls.

The Planning Commission returned the project proposal involving Tk 8,711 crore to the EC on Sunday citing "the financial capacity of the government in the current global context" as a reason.

The move comes following criticism by many that spending around half a billion dollars for the EVMs would be unreasonable amid the economic crisis. Major opposition parties are also dead against the use of EVMs in the election.

Top EC officials yesterday told The Daily Star that the commission would now need to reduce the number of constituencies in which the machines would be used.

A top EC official said the commission is now capable of using EVMs in at best 50 constituencies as about 30 percent of the 1.5 lakh machines it has are usable.

Election commissioners had earlier said that they would need the additional 2 lakh machines for holding polls in up to 150 constituencies with the EVMs.

"The government decided not to go ahead with the project for now after detailed examination and review of the project considering its financial capacity in the current global context," EC Secretary Jahangir Alam told reporters at a press briefing yesterday.

Replying to questions from reporters, he said the project could be taken up again in future if the financial capacity improves.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Mosammat Nasima Begum, a member of the Planning Commission, said the government has to take up development projects based on priority.

**"The government decided not to go ahead with the project for now after detailed examination and review of the project considering the financial capacity of the government in the current global context."**

EC Secretary  
Jahangir Alam



Asked if there was political pressure on them to shelve the proposal, she refused to comment.

A top Planning Commission official, however, said the proposal was suspended following a signal from the government high-ups.

The move to buy additional EVMs came following the EC's August 23 last year decision to go for electronic voting in up to 150 constituencies in the polls despite objections from major opposition parties, like the BNP and Jatiya Party (Ershad).

The EC sent the Development Project Proposal (DPP) to the Planning Commission in October.

According to the DPP, an EVM with all its accessories would cost Tk 3.33 lakh and about Tk 6,660 crore would be needed to buy two lakh EVMs.

Another Tk 1,155 crore was asked for for building a customisation centre and a warehouse to store the machines and to buy 534 pickups and four SUVs.

About Tk 206 crore was sought for carrying out awareness

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Two three-wheelers, locally known as Nasiman, with oversized loads running on the Dhaka-Khulna highway in Bagerhat's Fakirhat upazila and a truck tries to get around them. Although the movement of slow-moving three-wheelers on highways is prohibited, such vehicles run on roads putting people's lives at risk. The photo was taken on Sunday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## B'BARIA BY-POLLS

# Sattar's money tripled in 4yrs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

The money of expelled BNP leader Abdus Sattar Bhuiyan, who is running for the Brahmanbaria-2 by-polls as an independent, tripled over the last four years.

In 2018, Sattar had Tk 33 lakh in cash. The amount now is Tk 1 crore, according to the affidavit he recently submitted to the returning officer.

As per the electoral rules, each candidate must submit an affidavit



containing different types of information, including wealth statement, educational background, record of criminal case (if any) and profession, to the office of returning officer before the election.

Sattar, in his affidavit before the 2018 national election, claimed he had Tk 32.79 lakh in cash.

But he has now almost Tk 1.03 crore, according to the affidavit he submitted to the RO recently.

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## AB Bank launches Agriculture Loan program through Smart Cards at Tungipara



AB Bank Limited Mujibur Rahman. The disbursed agricultural loans to 107 marginal farmers at Tungipara, the birth place of The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh

Mujibur Rahman. The loans were disbursed through smart cards which also initiated the journey of AB smart account - another first for AB Bank.

The program was organized at our Father of The Nation's memory-laden Gimadanga Tungipara Govt. Primary School where Mr. Sheikh

Tozammel Haque Tutul, Honorable Mayor, Tungipara was present as the chief guest. It was presided over by Mr. Tarique Afzal, President and Managing Director

of AB Bank Ltd. and also attended by senior officials of AB Bank and local dignitaries.

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