

Staff Reporter

The government is going to expand the purview of schemes forming the social safety net, aiming to bring close to 10 million (1 crore) citizens overall under its coverage in the coming budget for 2020-21 fiscal that will most likely contain the aftermath of the coronavirus epidemic in Bangladesh.

According to the sources, the allocation in this sector would be increased by Tk 1633 crore while the number of the beneficiaries will increase to 98 lakh (9.8 million) from existing 81 lakh. In the coming budget the allocation will be Tk 76,000 crore while the amount is Tk 74,367 crore in the outgoing budget.

Finance Ministry sources said that generally each year the government does expand the number of beneficiaries of various social safety net programs at ten percent rate.

But this time the government is apprehending that the number of distressed people in the country will increase at an abnormal rate due to the stagnant economic situation for couple of months due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"So, the government has taken the initiative to increase the number of beneficiaries by upto 20 percent in the coming budget, and plans to allocate Tk 76,000 crore for this purpose," a senior official of the Finance Ministry said.

However, the amount of money each person gets under the various social safety net programs will not increase - rather the number of people under each scheme will see a rise. .

"The beneficiaries will get the same amount of money that they are getting now," the Finance Ministry official said.

According to the poverty alleviation strategy paper of the government has pointed out some 14 sectors.

Currently, some 2 lakh Freedom Fighters are getting Tk 12,000 per month as honorarium, Tk 10000 for festival allowance, Tk 2000 for Bengali New Year allowance and Tk 5000 for Victory Day allowance.

Some 44 lakh people are getting Tk 500 per month. Around 17 lakh widows/women persecuted by husbands are getting Tk 500 per month, about ten lakh insolvent disabled persons are getting Tk 700 per month and in different level about one lakh disabled students are getting money at different rates. The number of these beneficiaries will be increased.

The National Economic Council (NEC) already approved the Annual Development Program (ADP) of Tk 205,145 Crore for 2020-21 fiscal giving importance on transportation, education, health and agriculture sectors.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal will place his budget proposal, which is likely to be around Tk 580,000 crore, for the next fiscal year on June 11 in the Parliament.

Meanwhile, government so far in 19 packages allotted some Tk 103,117 crore which is 3.7 percent of the GDP to offset the COVID-19 shock on various sectors of the country and minimize the sufferings of the people hit hardest by the 2-month lockdown.

Among the packages, Tk 2503 crore has been allotted for free distribution of food materials, Tk 1258 crore for distributing cash among the target-based communities who lost their jobs during the shutdown, Tk 815 crore for expanding the coverage of allowance programs and Tk 2130 crore for building houses for the homeless people.

The government on May 14 launched the disbursement of Tk 1,250 crore cash assistance among 50 lakh poor families (Tk 2500 for each family) hit hard amid the COVID-19 pandemic

ahead of the Eid through mobile financial services (MFSs).