

Home » Business

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TAMING CORONAVIRUS RAMPAGE

50 lakh poor households to get cash aid through MFS from May 14

QR-based smart cards will be issued within Ramadan for distributing food aid

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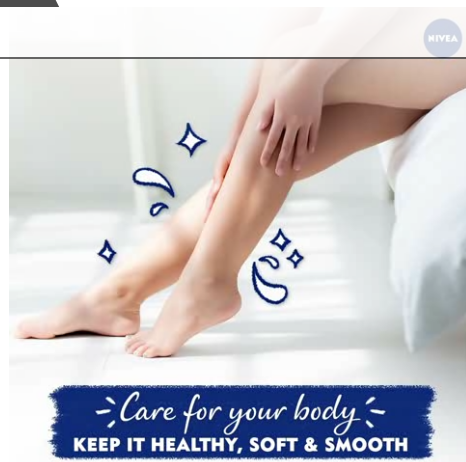
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SOCIAL SAFETY NET FUND DISBURSEMENT

Each family will get Tk **2,500** with cash-out charge
Disbursement will start from May 14



Nagad to disburse to **17** lakh families



bKash to disburse to **15** lakh families



Rocket to disburse to **10** lakh families



SureCash to disburse to **8** lakh families

Muhammad Zahidul Islam

The government's move to provide cash assistance to 50 lakh poor families hit by the coronavirus pandemic is finally taking off, with the four major mobile financial service providers set to deliver it from May 14.

The disbursement will be kicked off by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who will hand over Tk 2,500 each to ten families, said Md. Shah Kamal, senior secretary of the ministry of disaster management and relief.

The MFS operators will have to send the Tk 2,500 with the cash-out charge to each family and for disbursement purpose, the government will bear only Tk 15 (0.6 per cent) for each disbursement, said Tanvir A Mishuk, managing director of Nagad, a joint venture



the postal division and a private firm that will disburse the highest amount of Tk 425 crore.

"As our cash-out charge is 1.45 per cent, we will send an additional Tk 36.25 with the government fund of Tk 2,500 to each family. And we will get Tk 15 from the government for that."

The other operators will also get Tk 15 from the government but since their cash-out charge is higher they will have to send that full cash-out value to the beneficiary families, he added.

Market leader bKash will disburse Tk 375 crore, Rocket Tk 250 crore and SureCash Tk 200 crore.

In another move, the government has also planned to give food aid to the poor and low-income families who are battling food insecurity and hunger.

Before the food assistance disbursement begins, the government will complete the distribution of Quick Response (QR) code-based card.

Only the cardholders will get food support from the government, which will eliminate corruption in the process, said NM Zeaul Alam, senior secretary at the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Division under the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology.

With the view to plugging the loopholes in the current distribution system, the ICT and Disaster Management and Relief ministries have created a database of poor households to assist.

The database initially has 50 lakh entries but once it is fully up and running there would be 1.20 crore beneficiary families, said officials at the two ministries.

The database and the issuance of smart cards will help remove duplication, eliminate ghost lists and reduce corruption related to the government's safety net programs, Alam said.

The Access to Information programme (a2i) under the ICT Division is helping to develop the software for the database.

The initiative comes at a time when the countrywide shutdown, enforced to fend off the coronavirus outbreak, has forced tens of thousands of people to remain half-fed or unfed



and government officials are frequently seizing subsidised rice, meant for distribution among poor and low-income people, from the illegal possession of a section of local government representatives and members of the ruling Awami League.

The government had a plan to develop a database and issue smart cards earlier but the coronavirus outbreak has precipitated the process, Alam said.

"We expect that the database will be ready within Ramadan," he said.

The database contains the National Identity (NID) number of recipients, their mobile phone numbers, address, the person's age and the number of family members such that all duplications and other irregularities can be avoided, according to officials.

"If any beneficiary does not have the numbers, we will definitely include them. But our target will be to incorporate as much information as possible," Alam said.

The NID and mobile phone number are the two main tools to identifying a person.

"We will not be rigid on NID and mobile number but we want to get the input from the regional offices," he added.

NAGAD STANDS BY PM IN FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

Nagad yesterday donated Tk 60 lakh to the Prime Minister's relief and welfare fund in a ceremony held at her office to fight the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Ahmad Kaikaus, principal secretary to the Prime Minister, received Nagad's donation cheque in her presence.

"We are going through a pandemic that has defined itself as the global crisis of our time. We consider it as our duty to stand by the people of the country during such a crisis. This is a war we must conquer. We believe in saving the people saves the Nation," Mishuk said.

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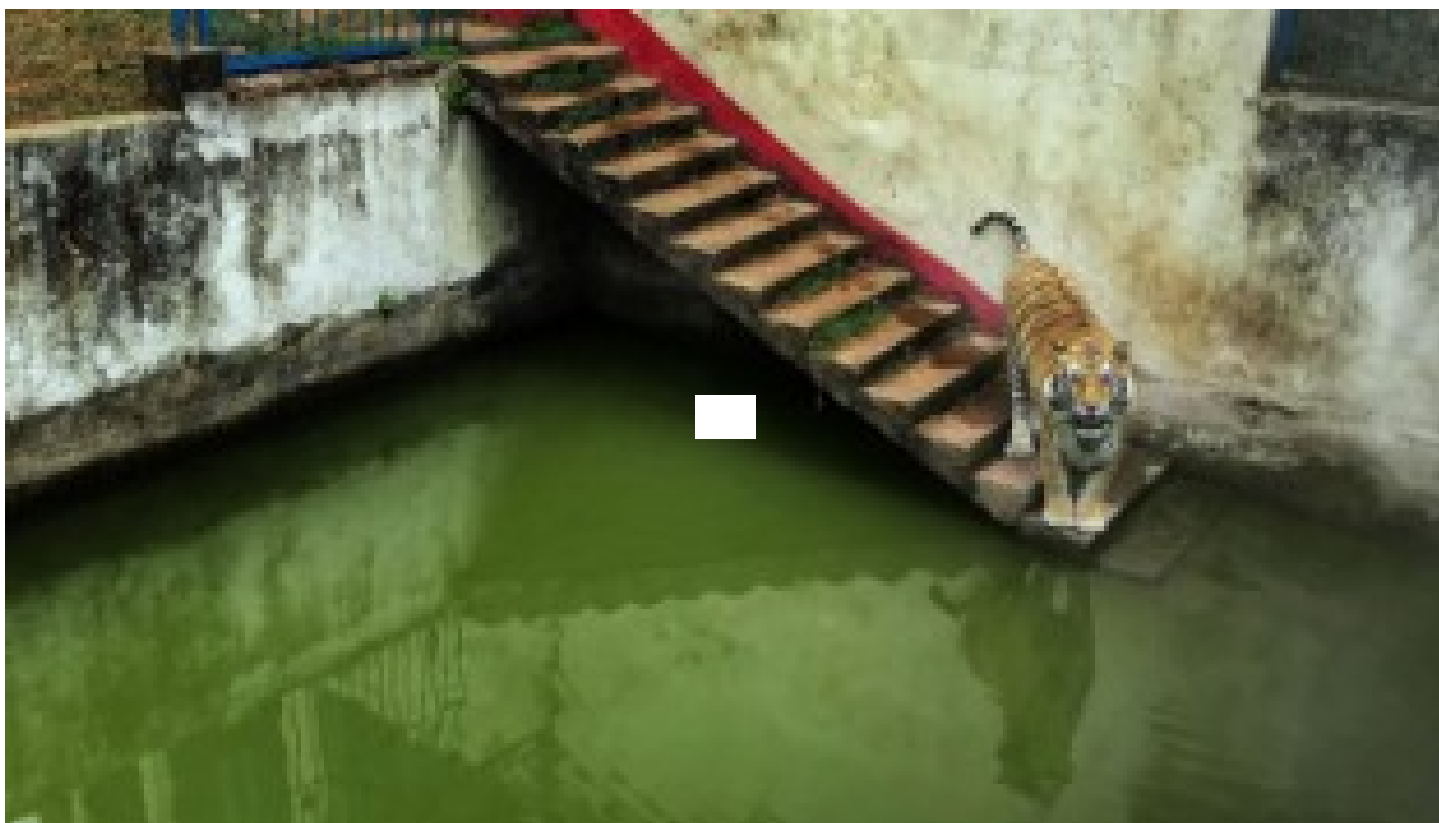
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