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GOVT SOCIAL SECURITY ALLOWANCE

Online verification shines hope on 30 thousand aspirants in 6 upazilas



With hopes higher than before, hundreds of senior citizen and widow aspirants throng the premises of Balipara Union Parishad, in Pirojpur's Indurkani upazila, to enlist their candidacy for social security allowances of the government. The photo was taken last month. Photo: Habibur Rahman

Our Correspondent, Pirojpur



Those days of eligible aspirants watching their much-needed social security allowances being pocketed by the rich and the powerful might be over soon.

Under a new initiative taken by the Ministry of Social Welfare, the national identity (NID) database of the Election Commission (EC) is now being used to verify identification of individuals seeking to receive government social security allowances in 112 poverty-stricken upazilas across the country.

Marred by irregularities and false claim, the old age, widow and differently abled (physically or mentally) allowances under social security programmes of the government are usually allocated only a fraction of funds required for a large number of recipients.

The new digital enrolment process is being undertaken by the ministry with the objective to ensure maximum coverage for eligible recipients in at least the 112 out of total 492 upazilas in the country.

In Pirojpur, the new enrolment process has been rolled out in six of its seven upazilas. Mathbaria upazila and Pirojpur municipality are being kept out of the process.

Field workers of Department of Social Services (DSS) in the six upazilas -- Nazirpur, Kaukhali, Indurkani, Bhandaria, Nesarabad and Sadar -- already made house visits to guide aspirants about documents and data required during the enlistment process.

The new process might help enrol around 30,000 genuine applicants in the six upazilas, said AKM Akteruzzaman Talukder, deputy director (DD) of DSS district office in Pirojpur.

But, like it has always been, individuals who are solvent or are already receiving at least one allowance from any ministry of the government will not be eligible to apply for any of the allowances, he added.

The digital verification process has come as a blessing for many allowance aspirants who so far failed to get any government allowance due to corruption and favouritism by local public representatives, who had previously been tasked with the enrolment process of the allowances.

Abdul Aziz, a senior citizen in Balipara village of Indurkani upazila, said despite years of relentless communication with a member of the local union parishad, the public representative did not enlist him as a recipient of the government's old age allowance.

But finally, he was able to start the process of enlistment by turning in the photocopy of his NID card recently, the elderly man said with much enthusiasm.



The elderly population usually do not have any source of income and the government allowance would be an immense support for them, said Altaf Hossain, an old age allowance aspirant in the same village.

Kabir Hossain, chairman of Balipara union in Indurkani upazila, said local public representatives had to turn down many of the eligible candidates as the allowance allocation had been limited before.

Aside from all the advantages, the new digital verification process has its limitations too. A good number of eligible aspirants might get rejected due to erroneous information, such as date of birth, on their NID cards.

Octogenarian Abdur Rahman Miah, a boatman from Southkhali char in Indurkani, is among many of the old age allowance aspirants whose application was rejected during initial manual screening of documents by DSS workers.

"My real age is 82, but according to my NID card, I'm only 32 years old -- the same age as my grandson!" lamented the man.

When this correspondent drew attention of Akteruzzaman, the DD of Pirojpur DSS, on the problem being faced by Abdur Rahman, the DD said their enlistment is conducted only through online verification of the NID database and before applying for the allowances, erroneous information on any NID card has to be corrected at the EC only.

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