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GOVT'S SOCIAL SAFETY NET

Monthly allotment nominal, should be increased: minister

Staff Correspondent

Planning Minister MA Mannan yesterday said the average monthly cash transfer to beneficiaries under the government's social safety net programmes should be increased to Tk 1,000.

"It's kind of my proposal," the minister said while addressing an online seminar.

He said the current amount between Tk 500 and Tk 700 a month provided to each beneficiary is nominal.

Development Journalist Forum of Bangladesh under the initiative of Action for Social Development and in association with Germany-based Bread for the World organised the online seminar on "Covid-19 Social Safety Net Programme and Health Rights".

Addressing the seminar, the planning minister said a directive has been given to the local administration to provide additional amount to those who will be qualified for the safety net programmes due to Covid-19 via local government authorities.

He also said the safety net programmes should be expanded further.



The minister said a large allocation has been proposed for the safety net programmes in the 8th Five-Year Plan, and he was trying to inject more money in the sector.

The government's social protection budget for the 2020-21 fiscal year is about Tk 95,574 crore, whereas the budget in 2019-20 fiscal was about Tk 81,865 crore, said Nazneen Ahmed, senior research fellow of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.

The government's top six social safety net programmes according to allocation in current fiscal are pension for retired government employees and their families, savings certificate interest assistance (social security part), rural infrastructure development, secondary and higher secondary stipend, food-friendly programme, and honorarium for Freedom Fighters, she said.

In her presentation on "Covid-19: A Discussion on Ensuring Social Protection and Health Rights", Nazneen said political viewpoints and programme designs of social protection in Bangladesh have gradually evolved from a poor-relief approach in the 1970s to a safety net approach in the late 1990s and finally to a lifecycle framework in 2015 with the adoption of the National Social Security Strategy.

On health concerns, she said the pandemic has exposed weaknesses of the country's healthcare system that was poorly equipped to handle the Covid-19 healthcare needs.

The poor and vulnerable faced severe income constraints to afford healthcare as out-of-pocket expenses for healthcare is very high, she said.

Nazneen suggested that the government develop a recipient database with a mechanism to update on a regular interval and improve technology literacy of local government officials, so that they can efficiently participate in recipient database development and updating.

She said urban poor should be included in the recipient database so that they can be covered by social protection, and the delivery system should be efficient and monitoring system effective.

Mafidul Islam, chief of General Economic Division of the Planning Commission, among others, spoke at the seminar.

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