

The disabled need more than an ALLOWANCE

They need accessible infrastructure, inclusive workplaces and better opportunities

NILIMA JAHAN Last week, a post did the rounds on social media, featuring a visually impaired couple who were looking for a job to support their family and raise their four-year-old son. They have been unable to find a job for the past nine years, in spite of having graduate degrees. The husband Rafiqul

Islam completed his graduation from University of Chittagong, while the wife Shahida Afroz studied at the University of Dhaka. They got married in 2011, and in 2015, their son Siyam was born.

They have been surviving with the help of relatives and neighbours. But they are tired of begging for scraps, and so are looking for a job from the government in accordance with their qualifications.

The status update also says, "If we fail to get a government job, if any kind-hearted person can help us to form a small business, we will be able to support our family. We want to raise our child as a good human being. We don't want to beg from others, in spite of having graduated from the top educational institutions. We want to live on our own. Please help us by giving a chance to prove ourselves."

This post disheartened a lot of people, drawing many 'sad' Facebook reacts. But is their current state really a surprise in a country that has consistently failed to envision them as productive members of society? Despite their abilities, efforts and qualifications, the state and society-at-large continue to pity them and treat them as dependants rather than create enabling environments for them—a fact that is apparent if we take a look at this year's proposed budget.

According to nine organisations working for persons with disabilities in Bangladesh, the allocations for disabled people is inadequate and limited only to the social safety net. They are still excluded from the development budgets of the government, with little to no investment in the creation of accessible environments in which they can function and flourish.

According to the latest budget, the allocation for the disabled is 2.19 percent of the budget for social safety nets, and only 0.31 percent of the total budget. Allowances make up a whopping 85.3 percent of the total allocation for the disabled. As per the latest budget, 15.45 lakh insolvent persons with disabilities are going to receive a monthly allowance of Tk 700, which was given to 10 lakh persons with disability

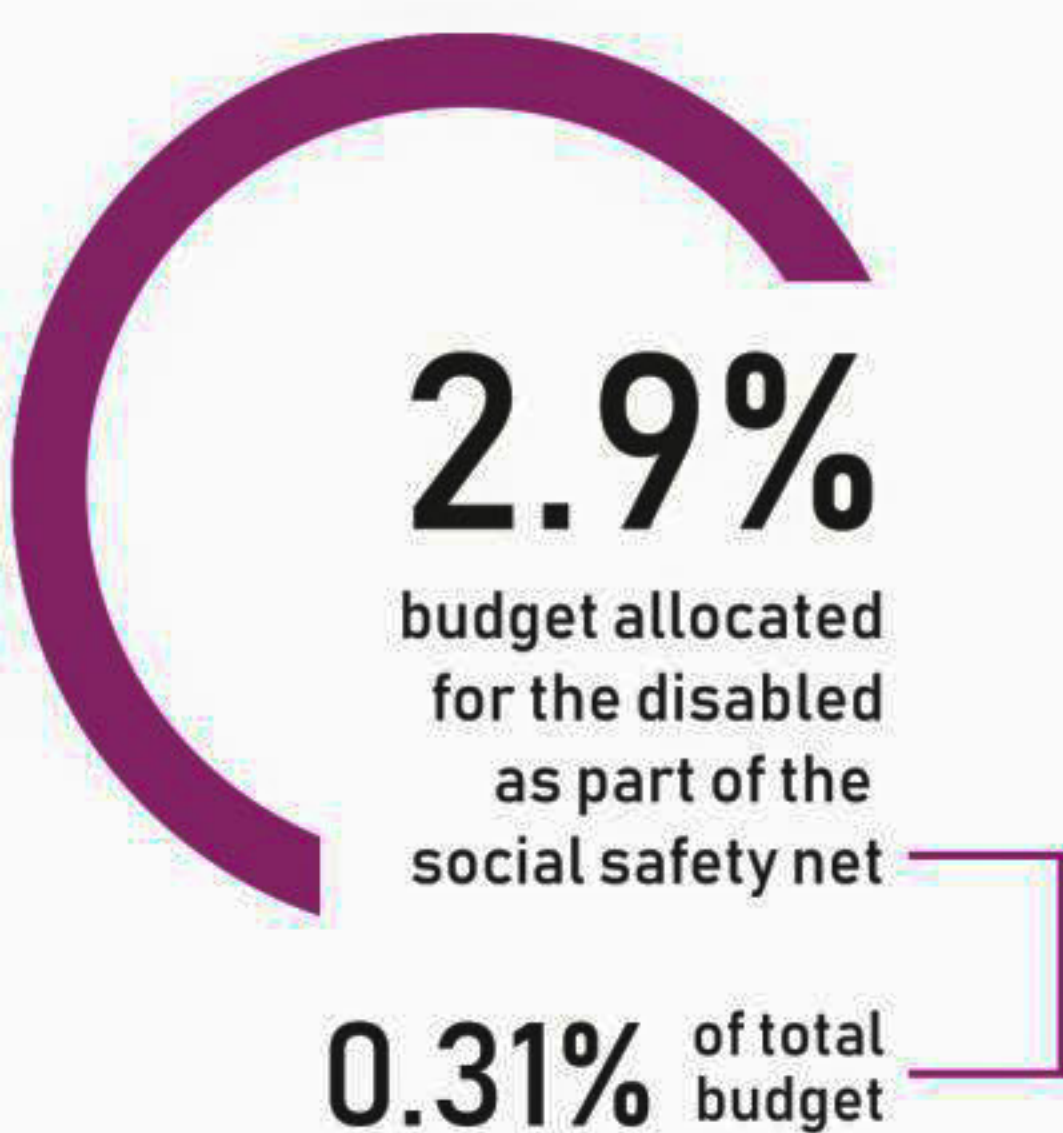
previously.

In addition, this year, the number of recipients of stipends for disabled students is going to be increased to one lakh from 90,000 and the rate of the stipends increased from Tk 700 to Tk 750 for primary students, from Tk 750 to Tk 800 for secondary students, and from Tk 850 to Tk 900 for higher secondary students. Disability rights organisations, however, point out that this allocation is simply not enough to cover the significant number of disabled students studying in different schools, colleges, and universities.

Ashrafun Nahar Misti, executive director of Women with Disabilities Development Foundation (WDDF), shares her disappointment with this year's budget, adding that WDDF has been advocating for years to keep allocation for the disabled in the development budget of the government, including education, infrastructure, employment, and the communication sector. "We did not want a budget that would make us dependent on just allowances; rather we wanted an employment-based budget to improve the lives of persons with disabilities, and investments in creation of accessible environments. We hoped this year would be different because we got many positive responses in the last few years while working with different bodies of the government," she says.

The finance minister proposed a five percent rebate on the total tax of a taxpayer, if 10 percent of the total workforce from physically challenged people. Misti, however, is sceptical of this proposal being implemented. "This is just an oral statement and the prime minister made a similar commitment 10 years ago during a programme on International Day of Disabled Persons. But the statement was never published as a notice or circular, and the National Board of Revenue (NBR) were not officially asked to give a tax rebate. So, neither the organisation, nor the disabled people, will get the benefits until it is published as a notice," says Misti.

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15,45,000

insolvent persons with disabilities going to receive a monthly allowance of **TK 700**

1,00,000

disabled student recipients as opposed to **90,000** from last year.

MONTHLY STIPEND INCREASES:

TK 700 ➡ TK 750 primary students
TK 750 ➡ TK 800 secondary students
TK 850 ➡ TK 900 higher-secondary students



No allocation for the disabled in the development budget of the government.

1. No allocation for accessible transport (no portable ramps in bus/train/launch)
2. Only a few infrastructure/buildings are designed accessible to the disabled. Not even all the ministry offices.
3. No significant initiative to train and employ them.



Infographic: Shaer Reaz



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