



"If the ceasefire is violated, we'll know, and we will hold violators accountable through our sanctions and other tools at our disposal."

US Secretary of State **Antony Blinken** on Sudan conflict



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Interbank dollar rate hits record high



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'I realised my mistakes and worked on them'



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Australia fetes Modi as 'the boss'



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Purnima hits quarter century in showbiz

RAGING INFLATION

Not much help on the way for the poor

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

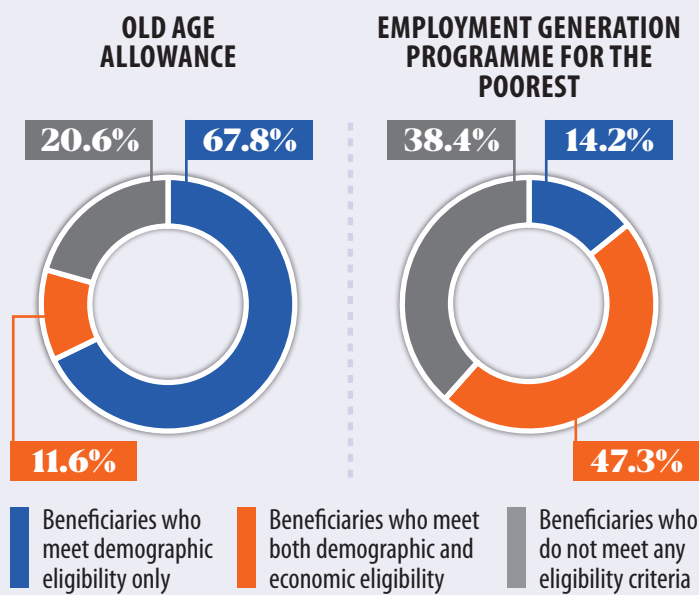
Even though poor people are struggling to make ends meet amid runaway inflation, the government allocation for social safety net programmes may not increase much in the next fiscal year.

According to a finance ministry draft plan, social security programmes are likely to get almost Tk 1.2 lakh crore, which may end up being around 15.76 percent of the Tk 7.61 lakh crore budget for 2023-24, officials of the ministry said, requesting anonymity.

The planned allocation is slightly higher than the current fiscal's Tk 1.13 lakh crore. But in the current fiscal year, the allocation was 16.75 percent of the total budget of over Tk 6.78 lakh crore, they added.

Besides, the current social safety net allocation is 2.55 percent of the GDP (gross domestic product) while the one planned for next fiscal year

SHARE OF BENEFICIARIES WHO MEET DIFFERENT ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA



is only 1.4 percent.

The first eight months of this fiscal year saw an average inflation of 8.74 percent, way above the budgetary target of 5.6 percent, according to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

The runaway inflation, which pushed many people into poverty, is mainly the result of international supply chain disruptions caused by the war in Ukraine.

The government has 141 social safety net programmes. The plan for the next fiscal year is to increase the allocation for the elderly people, widows, and deserted and destitute women. The number of people who receive these allowances will also be increased.

As per the draft plan, the allowance for the elderly will be raised to Tk 600 from Tk 500, and there will be about 58 lakh beneficiaries, which is almost 1 lakh more than the current number.

This will cost the government an additional Tk 761.42 crore, taking the allocation Tk 4,305 crore.

The widowed, deserted and destitute women's allowance will be raised to Tk 550 from Tk 500, and with the inclusion of around 1 lakh names, there will be 25.75 lakh beneficiaries. The additional Tk 216 crore needed

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BNP activists clash with police in the capital's Science Laboratory area. The clash broke out after a road march of the party reached the area yesterday afternoon. The BNP staged the demonstration to press home its 10-point demand, including resignation of the government.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

351 'important' polling centres to get extra law enforcers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Election Commissioner Md Alamgir has said 351 out of the total 480 polling centres in the Gazipur city polls have been identified as "important", and additional law enforcers will be deployed at those centres.

Speaking to reporters at his Election Commission office yesterday, Alamgir said the overall election atmosphere in Gazipur city has been "really good" and "peaceful" so far.

"There is no [security] threat. But it is an industrial area. Additional measures have been taken so that criminals or those who have ulterior motives cannot create any untoward situation," he said.

The polls to Gazipur City Corporation will be held tomorrow.

Alamgir said different types of people live in

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Blue-collar voters may hold the key

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA and ASHIK ABDULLAH APU from Gazipur

The time for electioneering in the Gazipur City Corporation election ended at midnight with very little campaigning done by candidates running for the mayor's office.

Enthusiasm is largely absent among voters. They are concerned about the election-day atmosphere.

Voter turnout and the huge number of blue-collar workers who live in this city could decide who would be the next mayor, said voters and workers' leaders.

On the last day of the electioneering yesterday, Awami League mayor candidate Azmat Ullah Khan was not seen campaigning while his key rival independent Zaida Khatun, also mother of former mayor Zahangir Alam, unveiled her election manifesto with a pledge to complete the unfinished work of her son.

She yesterday campaigned in Bason, Chowrasta, Kashimpur, Konabari and Joydebpur areas.

Azmat was busy holding meetings with his campaign employees, supporters, and polling agents. Around 1:00pm, he met the returning officer and after that he had a views-exchange

meeting with AL leaders of Gazipur.

Gazipur civil society members said apart from the attacks on Zaida, the polls atmosphere appears to be good. But voters lack enthusiasm.

Anil Chandra Mondal, a freedom fighter and a teacher in Joydebpur, said, "There is nothing to be worried about as the BNP boycotted the polls and Zahangir is not running ... but enthusiasm is missing."

He, however, said there might be some fear of violence, but the voters must braving all odds and difficulties to choose their mayor.

Explaining the reason for the lack of enthusiasm, Mohammad Jalal Uddin, president of Gazipur District Nagorik Forum, said intra-party feud in the AL and the absence of BNP in the race are the reasons behind poor enthusiasm among voters.

"Moreover, those who had been elected mayor so far could not complete their full terms," he said.

These correspondents talked to locals in Tongi area, known to be a stronghold of Azmat.

Farhad Hossen Babu, a tea vendor and

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BUSINESS

Progressive tax can cut inequality

Progressive taxation on high-income people can work well to reduce the income inequality that has been deepening in Bangladesh for years, analysts said yesterday.

"If the government can impose a progressive tax on high-income people, it will be helpful to reduce inequality," said MM Akash, chairman of the Department of Economics at the University of Dhaka. Income inequality has deepened in Bangladesh in the past six years.

STORY ON B1

ACC IO endorses suing Wasa MD Taqsem

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN and DIPAN NANDY

Investigation officer of the Anti-Corruption Commission has recommended filing a case against Wasa Managing Director Taqsem A Khan and nine others for indulging in irregularities in appointment of two directors.

The ACC's legal wing recommended lodging a case against the directors Abul Kashem and AKM Shahid Uddin and then seven Wasa board members in 2018, document shows.

On Taqsem's recommendations, then Wasa board appointed them as "directors" in 2018, with each drawing Tk 1.5 lakh monthly as salary, even though the post did not exist in the organisation.

In August that year, the Local Government Division, Wasa's supervising authority, asked Wasa to cancel the appointments and stop paying them salaries and allowances since their appointments were "in violation of the Dhaka Wasa Act-1996 and Dhaka Wasa Service Rule-2010".

Not only was the LGD letter ignored, Taqsem extended Kashem and Shahid's contractual appointments several times. Of the two, Shahid is now a deputy managing director of Wasa.

Since 2016, former Wasa chief

RELATED STORY ON PAGE 12 SEE PAGE 2 COL 4



Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority conducts a drive to evict river grabbers along the Turag in the capital's Sinnirtek area yesterday. The BIWTA cleared a truck stand and knocked down 17 makeshift shops during the drive to recover 0.4 acres.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Trial of Khaleda, 7 others starts in Niko graft case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The trial of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and seven others in the Niko graft case began yesterday at a Dhaka court with the deposition of the complainant.



Before the start of the trial, Judge Sheikh Hafizur Rahman of the Special Judge's Court-9 of Dhaka rejected a petition submitted by Khaleda's lawyer Masud Ahmed Talukder, seeking adjournment of the hearing.

Recording of the statement of the complainant, Muhammad Mahbubul Alam, also an ACC deputy director, was not completed yesterday.

The court fixed June 20 for recording his incomplete statement.

In the application, Masud mentioned that Khaleda had earlier filed a writ petition with the High Court, challenging the legality of the order on framing charges against her.

The matter is now pending hearing, so the recording of statements should be adjourned until the petition is disposed of, the lawyer argued.

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