

SCRAPPING OF 8 NAT'L DAYS AL slates 'bid to kill spirit of Liberation War'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League has condemned the government's decision to cancel eight national days, including the one commemorating the historic March 7 speech of Bangabandhu.

Soon after the government announced the cancellation yesterday, the party, in a post on its verified Facebook page, termed the decision an "attempt to erase the history and destroy the spirit of the national liberation struggle".

The AL alleged that the current government has been undermining the values and ideals of the Liberation War from the very beginning.

The government is taking various steps to destroy the spirit of the Liberation War and considering freedom fighters and those who uphold the war's ideals as enemies.

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Harris mocks Trump after rally turns into dance session

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dance his signature at the end of rallies for years, nearly always to his exit song -- the Village People's 1978 disco anthem "YMCA."

On Monday, however, he stayed on stage for nine songs, ranging from opera to Guns N' Roses and Elvis, with the ex-president alternating his dance moves with standing in place and staring into the crowd. "Hope he's okay," Harris opined dryly on X.

Trump has not released a recent comprehensive report on his state of health, prompting fierce criticism from Harris, 59, who has increasingly been homing in on Trump's age and physical and mental condition.

It was the topic of her closing argument as she sat down with popular radio host Charlamagne tha God in an effort to boost her messaging to Black male voters -- a part of the electorate where Trump has made gains.

After setting out her policies for improving the lives of African American men, she turned to Trump's rallies and repeated a claim that riled him during their September debate -- that bored supporters were leaving his rallies early.

"This man is weak and he is unfit," Harris said.

A widow gets Tk 550 a month!

FROM PAGE 1

"I get Tk 1,650 every three months via my mobile. It runs out instantly. What can you buy with such little money when prices of everything are so high?" she told The Daily Star by phone on Tuesday from Auliapur village.

Her son Khokon Gazi, 50, is a day labourer, who shifts between odd jobs. But even odd jobs are hard to come by in this climate-vulnerable coastal area, one of the poorest districts in southern Bangladesh. Whenever he finds work, he supports his mother with whatever little he can.

But Maleka perhaps is one of the luckiest to get the paltry amount of Tk 1,650 every three months. Many don't get even that.

Azima Bibi, 60, from Bogura's Shahjahanpur area for example has been desperately trying to have her name enlisted for elderly allowance. She has not been successful so far.

"I have gone to the local union parishad member so many times for an update. Every time, he says, 'your name is not on the list yet,'" said Azima, who works as a housemaid and whose husband has no work. "I am disappointed."

Economists and poverty experts share her disappointment, and point out that both the size and amount of the coverage need a serious revisit to make the safety net programmes useful for the poor and disadvantaged groups such as widows, the elderly, and persons with disability.

They say expansion of social safety net is more urgent at times of high inflation, which hits the poor the hardest as their purchasing power takes the heaviest blow.

An analysis by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) of the average daily prices of 34 essential food items in Dhaka from 1 January 2019 to 19 May 2024 shows that prices increased from 10 percent to 310 percent during this period. The analysis was based on data from Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB).

WHO GETS WHAT

According to the latest Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2022 data, 18.7 percent or 3.17 crore people are poor (those living above \$2.15 a day) and 5.6 percent or



Participants of a roundtable titled "Pathways to prosperity for extremely poor people" at The Daily Star centre yesterday. The Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation, European Union, and The Daily Star jointly organised the event marking the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

PHOTO: STAR

Diverse income streams needed

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Haor region.

The project also includes ethnic minority pockets in Dinajpur and Thakurgaon districts.

Since 2022, the PPEPP project has been funded by the EU and renamed PPEPP-EU, targeting 215,000 households.

It provides a carefully sequenced package of livelihoods, nutrition and primary healthcare, inclusive finance and community mobilisation interventions as the core components.

To address the multidimensional nature of poverty, the project also integrates climate resilience-building, disability inclusion and women empowerment with the core components.

"If we want to bring the issue of sustainable poverty reduction to the forefront, there needs to be a linkage between this project and a market-based linkage," said Mustafa K Mujeri, executive director at the Institute for Inclusive Finance and Development.

"If we can provide them with loans and create such enterprises, then it is possible to move them toward a sustainable livelihood. So, it is necessary to think about how we can link them with cottage, micro and small enterprises," he added.

Poverty and inequality are two different things and should not be conflated together, said Zakir Ahmed Khan, chairman of PKSF.

"What we are doing now is

dealing with poverty, not inequality. Poverty is not only a lack of money -- it means many more things."

The PPEPP should be taken as a programme and not as a project, he said.

There must be a connection between sustainability and the market, said Mohammad Muslim Chowdhury, chairman of Sonali Bank.

"Otherwise, we may go from one project to another. If we don't link it with the market and create self-employment opportunities, it won't succeed."

Different projects and programmes should be linked to central policies and aligned with the national strategy.

The programme needs to be implemented comprehensively, he said, adding that the local government should also be linked.

The primary goal of PKSF is to eradicate inequality along with poverty, aiming for zero poverty and the creation of an inclusive and equitable society, said Md Fazlul Kader, acting managing director of PKSF.

Bangladesh has witnessed remarkable growth and development, but unfortunately, extreme poverty still exists, said Michal Krejza, head of cooperation at the delegation of the EU to Bangladesh.

For example, in the southern coastal belt, the incidence of extreme poverty is quite high and is increasing in some areas due to the

impacts of climate change.

To make these people less vulnerable, better access is needed to basic public services such as education, health care, safe drinking water and sanitation, and safe and nutritional food, he said.

"They need skills development and jobs. Those for whom the need is the highest often have the poorest access."

Since the inception of the project in 2019, 72 percent of the extremely poor households covered by the project have risen above the international poverty line, he added.

Macroeconomic policies do have a significant impact on poverty reduction at the national level, said Zaidi Sattar, chairman of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

"The impact on poverty comes from the kind of macroeconomic policies we have. Macroeconomic stability is essential and macroeconomic policies for economic growth are also essential," he added.

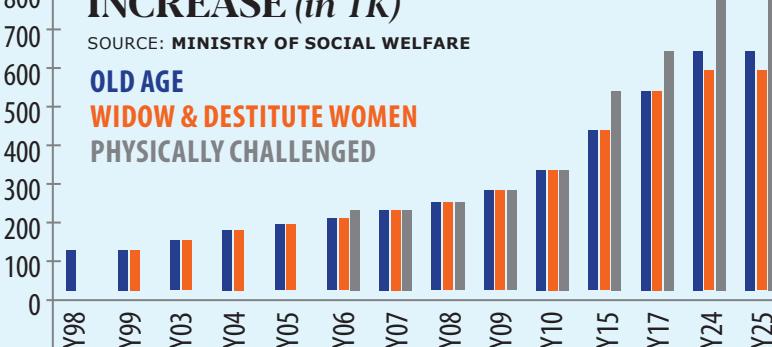
Bangladesh has done very well on many things including poverty, said Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

"But what remains is also a massive task. Let us not get into some sort of a comfort zone that we have done well."

As the most densely populated country, whatever the country achieved really stands threatened because of climate change and Bangladesh needs global support, he added.

PER CAPITA ALLOWANCE INCREASE (in TK)

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE



95 lakh people are extremely poor (those living below \$2.15 a day).

Currently, there are 140 social security programmes worth Tk 136,026 crore to provide a cushion to various groups, including the poor, extreme poor and the lower income people, according to budget data.

However, nearly half of this money is spent on retirement benefits of government employees and interest payment of savings schemes.

In the current fiscal year, for example, Tk 36,580 crore has been allocated for payment of pension for government employees and Tk 8,828.32 crore for interest payment of savings certificates.

In comparison, the poor get

data from social welfare ministry show the monthly allowance for widows, the elderly and persons with physical disabilities -- they are among the most vulnerable -- are Tk 550, Tk 600 and Tk 850.

Widow allowance was initiated in FY1999 with just Tk 100 a month for 4 lakh people. In the last 25 years, it has seen an increase of Tk 450.

Old age allowance, launched a year earlier also with Tk 100 a month for 4 lakh people, rose by Tk 500 since, the data show.

Disability allowance was initiated in FY 2006 with Tk 200 a month for 1 lakh people. It took 14 years to see a rise of Tk 650.

"We can hardly buy five kgs of rice and one kg of fish with this money. That's all," said Sames Uddin, a recipient of old age allowance from

Sirajganj's Sadar upazila.

LEFT OUT

Then there are selection errors that leave many eligible people out of the coverage.

Last year, a CPD study titled "Social Safety Net Budget of Bangladesh: Catching Some, Missing Many" found that an estimated 33 lakh elderly people and 25 lakh widows eligible for assistance are not covered by the programme.

The low allocation per beneficiary per month raises questions about the effectiveness of Bangladesh's overall social protection strategy. It remains unclear why Bangladesh has been pursuing a large number of small programmes spread out over many different ministries and divisions of the government, budget after budget," said the report, published in July this year.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Prof Selim Raibhan echoed this sentiment and said the government should rather focus on bringing the disadvantaged groups out of poverty line through solid rehabilitation programmes instead of handing out such insufficient allowance.

"Besides, there are many selection errors, meaning many ineligible people are receiving the allowance instead of eligible disadvantaged people. The social security programmes should be revisited as there are many overlaps," said Prof Selim, also executive director of South Asian Network and Economic Modeling (Sanem).

Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal,

director general of Department of Social Welfare, acknowledged that the allowance under the safety net is inadequate, but insisted that the money still provides a critical support at individual levels.

About the limited coverage, he said, "The government is expanding the coverage gradually. As part of this, nearly five lakh people have been added to the beneficiaries' list this year. Top policymakers can say more about expanding the coverage and increasing the amount."

But Khokon Gazi, Maleka Begum's son, needs an immediate respite.

"How can we survive when a kg of

"I get Tk 1,650 every three months via my mobile. It just runs out instantly. What can you buy with such little money when prices of everything are so high?"

MALEKA BEGUM, 70

"I have gone to the local union parishad many times for an update. Every time, he said, 'your name is not on the list yet.'"

AZIZA BIBI, 60

pointed gourd costs Tk 80 and an egg Tk 16?" he said.

[Mostafa Shabuj from Bogura and Sohrab Hossain from Patuakhali contributed to this report.]

Five police units get new chiefs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five police units got new chiefs as 10 additional inspectors general of police, including six recently promoted ones, were given new postings yesterday.

Additional IGP Matiur Rahman Sheikh has been made the chief of the Criminal Investigation Department since its head Mohammad Ali Mia was sent into forced retirement on August 22.

The home ministry issued a circular in this regard. As per the circular, Addl IGPs Sarder Tamiz Uddin Ahmed, Delwar Hossain Mia, Abdullah Al Mahmud, and Kusum Dewan were given the charge of the Railway Police, Highway Police, Armed Police Battalion, and River Police respectively.

It also cancelled the posting of Addl IGP of the Police Headquarters Md Tawfiq Mahbub Chowdhury to the Police Bureau of Investigation that has been without a chief since July 19 when Banaj Kumar Majumder retired as the head of the unit.

On August 13, Tawfiq was transferred to PBI, but he did not join.

Meanwhile, chief of River Police Abdul Alim Mahmud, head of Special Security and Protection Battalion Golam Kibria, Addl IGPs Alamgir Alam, and Selim Mohammad Jahangir were posted to the Police Headquarters.

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Zelensky rules out ceding Ukrainian land in Victory Plan

AFP, Kyiv

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky yesterday unveiled his long-awaited Victory Plan to end Russia's invasion, rejecting any territorial concessions and urging ramped-up Western backing, including an invitation to join Nato.

The Kremlin immediately dismissed Zelensky's roadmap to end the grinding conflict, describing it as "some ephemeral peace plan".

BNP seeks review

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ABM Khairul Haque declared the 13th amendment to the constitution (caretaker government) null and void.

After the fall of dictator Husain Mohamad Ershad in 1990, the 13th amendment introduced the caretaker government system to the constitution. Late SC lawyer M Salimullah and others filed a writ petition with the High Court in 1998 challenging the validity of that

amendment.

The HC on August 4, 2004, declared the amendment valid.

The writ petitioners in 2005 appealed before the Appellate Division against the HC verdict. The Appellate Division delivered a verdict in 2010 in favour of the appellants.