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Ration stopped for indigenous CHT refugees

Hills people irked as free supply to Bangalee settlers continues

PINAKI ROY

The government is not providing rice ration for 65,000 indigenous refugees, but giving the free supply to 26,000 Bangalee settlers in different cluster villages in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

The move drew fire from rival regional political organisations -- Parbatya Chattogram Jana Samhati Samity (PCJSS) and United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), who said the action was discriminatory and would bring further sufferings to the refugees.

Last week, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) directed the CHT affairs ministry to stop ration to the refugees and rehabilitate them with fund from the annual development programme. It, however, asked the ministry to keep the Bangalees on rations.

The PMO's directive came when the ministry asked for rations for the first quarter of the current fiscal year.

The government has yet to take any rehabilitation programme for

the indigenous people.

The government provided rations for the indigenous people who returned from the Indian state of Tripura after the signing of the CHT peace agreement in 1997 that ended decades of bush war in the hilly terrain.

About 65,000 people of 12,222 families enjoyed the rations -- five kilograms of rice for an adult and two and a half kilograms for a child a week -- upto June this year.

CHT Affairs Secretary Syed Mushtak admitted a break through the ration for the refugees this year.

"Actually, we have not stopped the ration, but could not provide as the finance ministry did not make the allocation. Now we are considering whether the rations could be provided from the emergency fund or not," he said.

He, however, mentioned that under the peace agreement, the government was to offer the rations for only a year and the period had expired long ago.

Thousands of indigenous people

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Jamal kidnap 4 suspects' movable property seized

UNB, Dhaka

Police yesterday seized the movable property of four suspects in the kidnap of businessman Jamal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury.

The Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP), following attachment orders from a magistrate, raided the houses of Yunus Babu and Mohammad Shafi of Rawzan, Mohammad Ishaq of Hathazari and Mohammad Nazim of Anwara and seized their properties.

All the four, reportedly associated with the ruling four-party alliance, remained absconding since Jamal was abducted 39 days ago.

The CMP meanwhile has transferred two more police officers to other stations for their "failure" in rescuing Jamal. They are additional assistant commissioner (SB) SA Faruqui and OC of Panchlaish police station Obaidul Huq.

Our Staff Correspondent from Chittagong reports: BNP's high command reportedly created pressure on its local parliamentarian to help rescue Jamal. Jamal's family members had been accusing Sarwar Jamal Nizam and his younger brother of masterminding the abduction.

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PM asks people to keep vigil against 'a party'



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan clap at the inauguration of a rally celebrating the party's 25th founding anniversary, left, and Khaleda, right, leads a procession at Paltan yesterday.

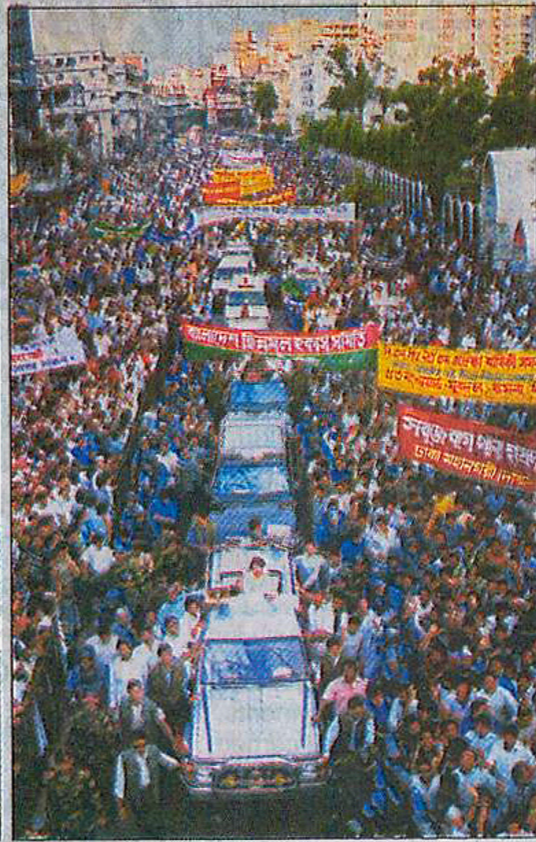


PHOTO: STAR

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has asked people to mount watch on 'deep-rooted conspiracy' against the country and a particular party that resorted to violence and asked them to politically face the 'liars and conspirators'.

Without referring to the main opposition Awami League (AL), she said a party is out to create lawlessness through killings and other criminal activities. "They (the party) are killing people and blaming others to create unrest. They do not love the country. They make malicious statements about it abroad," she said.

The BNP chairperson was addressing a mammoth rally at Paltan Maidan in the city yesterday afternoon before leading a colourful procession to mark the 25th founding anniversary of the party. Tens of thousands of people thronged the rally venue.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and city BNP President and Mayor of Dhaka Sadeque Hossain Khoka also spoke on the occasion.

Khaleda said they (a party) are engaged in anti-Bangladesh campaign abroad and have long been telling foreigners that Bangladesh is

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Hasina now thinks gas export an option

AL chief asks US to assess actual reserves

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the United States to help conduct a survey in Bangladesh to know the actual reserves of natural gas and its domestic requirement. The Awami League (AL) president gave the call when newly appointed US Ambassador in Bangladesh Harry K Thomas met her at her Dhanmondi residence.

"Our leader told the US envoy that gas export might be an option but we have to think about alternative ways to derive maximum benefit from natural gas. We prefer to meet the demand of the nation first. We have to see how to optimise benefits from our natural resources", the AL chief's Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury quoted her as saying at the meeting.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, who was present during the hour-long discussion, told reporters later, "We are not against gas export but before taking any decision in this regard, we must have to know the actual reserve of natural gas that is still unknown to us. If we have sur

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Pakistan concedes bin Laden may be hiding in tribal belt

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan conceded yesterday that al-Qaida chief and terror mastermind Osama bin Laden may be hiding in its rugged tribal belt bordering Afghanistan.

"Osama bin Laden's presence anywhere in that area cannot be ruled out," foreign ministry spokesman Masood Khan told reporters.

"But if anybody knows about the whereabouts of OBL (Osama bin Laden), they should get in touch with the intelligence agencies either here in Pakistan or in Afghanistan or with US agencies," Khan said.

He was responding to a statement by the US ambassador to Pakistan, Nancy Powell, in local newspapers last week that bin Laden might be hiding in the semi-autonomous tribal region in north-western Pakistan.

Since the terror attacks in the United States in September 2001, bin Laden and his al-Qaida network have become the face of global terrorism and are the target of a massive US military campaign.

Pakistan, a key ally in the US-led "war against terrorism" has arrested some 500 al-Qaida and Taliban fugitives in the 22-month old cam-



Osama bin Laden

paign, but conflicting reports continue to surface as to the status and location of the al-Qaida chief, who has 25-million dollar price on his head.

Xinhua adds: Four Pakistani army officers are in custody, facing investigations for links with al-Qaida, local media said yesterday.

A report of the Dawn, an Islamabad-based newspaper, said the rank of the detained officers is up to lieutenant colonel, adding that the officers were arrested after a lead was provided by some high-profiled assistants of Osama bin-Laden, who were nabbed in Pakistan earlier this year.

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Cabinet okays proposal to amend Bar Council Order '72

UNB, Dhaka

The cabinet has in principle approved the proposals to enact a new law -- "Private Medical Services Law- 2003", and amend the "Bangladesh Legal Practitioners and Bar Council Order-1972".

A meeting of the cabinet, held yesterday with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair, also approved a draft of the administrative proposals to strengthen the activities of family planning programmes.

The cabinet also directed the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to take measures for immediate appointment of nurses.

The regular weekly meeting of the cabinet also gave final approval to a draft on the proposed Bangladesh Employees Welfare Board Law-2003.

Ministers, state ministers in charge of different ministries, cabinet secretary, principal secretary to the PM and secretaries concerned were present at the meeting.

Japanese investors tell of business distresses

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Japanese investors in Bangladesh accused government officials of demanding bribes for customs clearance, visa issuance, work permit, permission for selling products and other services in a recent survey.

Pointing out poor law and order, they said they were the victims of regular robbery and theft of materials by armed mafia at construction sites mainly outside Dhaka.

The survey, presented to Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman by Japanese Ambassador in Dhaka Matushiro Horiguchi, termed the official process in Bangladesh 'very slow', saying the universal concept of 'time is money' was absent in Bangladesh.

The performance of Chittagong Port is poor, while immigration and tender process in the public and other sectors are time-consuming, the investors said.

They said they often found contents in parcels 'missing'. The Japanese companies also alleged frequent disruption in utility services like power, gas, water and telecommunications.

In the survey conducted by the Japanese Commerce and Industries Association in Dhaka, many firms

said bribe demands for the renewal of a re-export permit for construction machinery ranged between Tk 50,000 and Tk 3,00,000.

They alleged that the import duty was determined arbitrarily at the discretion of the assessing officers. The customs authorities also demanded money in clearing machinery bound for Japan for repair.

In one case, the Dhaka Export Processing Zone and Uttara customs authorities demanded Tk 10,000 and Tk 15,000 respectively as 'underhand money' for the purpose, the investors said.

The finance minister could not be reached by phone for comments yesterday.

The survey was conducted in January this year to find out various impediments to foreign investment in Bangladesh.

The decision to conduct the survey was taken at the 12th meeting of the Japan-Bangladesh Joint Committee for Commercial and Economic Cooperation in April last year.

Citing an instance of robbery and theft at construction sites, the report said one Japanese firm had experienced theft incidents for more than

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Verdict on Shazneen case today



COURT CORRESPONDENT

The much-awaited judgement in the Shazneen rape case will be delivered today.

Kazi Rahamat Ullah, judge of the Second Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka, will pronounce the verdict at 1:00pm, court sources said.

Both the prosecution and defence completed their arguments on August 24. The tribunal recorded statements of 22 out of the 74 prosecution witnesses.

The trial of the case began on July 9, 2000, and took 126 working days to finish.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, the youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, chairman of Transcom

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Playing hosts the Pakistan way!

Tigers herded into economy class, left fuming at disparity

HASAN MASOOD From Multan

The touring Bangladeshi cricketers hit out at the blatant discrimination meted out to them yesterday when they were herded into the economy class against the hosts' executive class on their flight to Multan ahead of the third and final Test against Pakistan beginning tomorrow.

The Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) flight that flew both teams from Rawalpindi to Multan, however, saw to it that the entire Pakistan squad fly in the executive class.

Only four Tigers officials, man-

ager MA Latif, coach Dav Whatmore, physio John Gloster and trainer Dean Woodford, were offered executive class seats.

No Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) officials were around to explain this strange arrangement. The Bangladesh team's liaison officer tried his best to come up with an excuse, saying that as the PCB received the list of the Bangladesh squad late, they could not put them in the executive class.

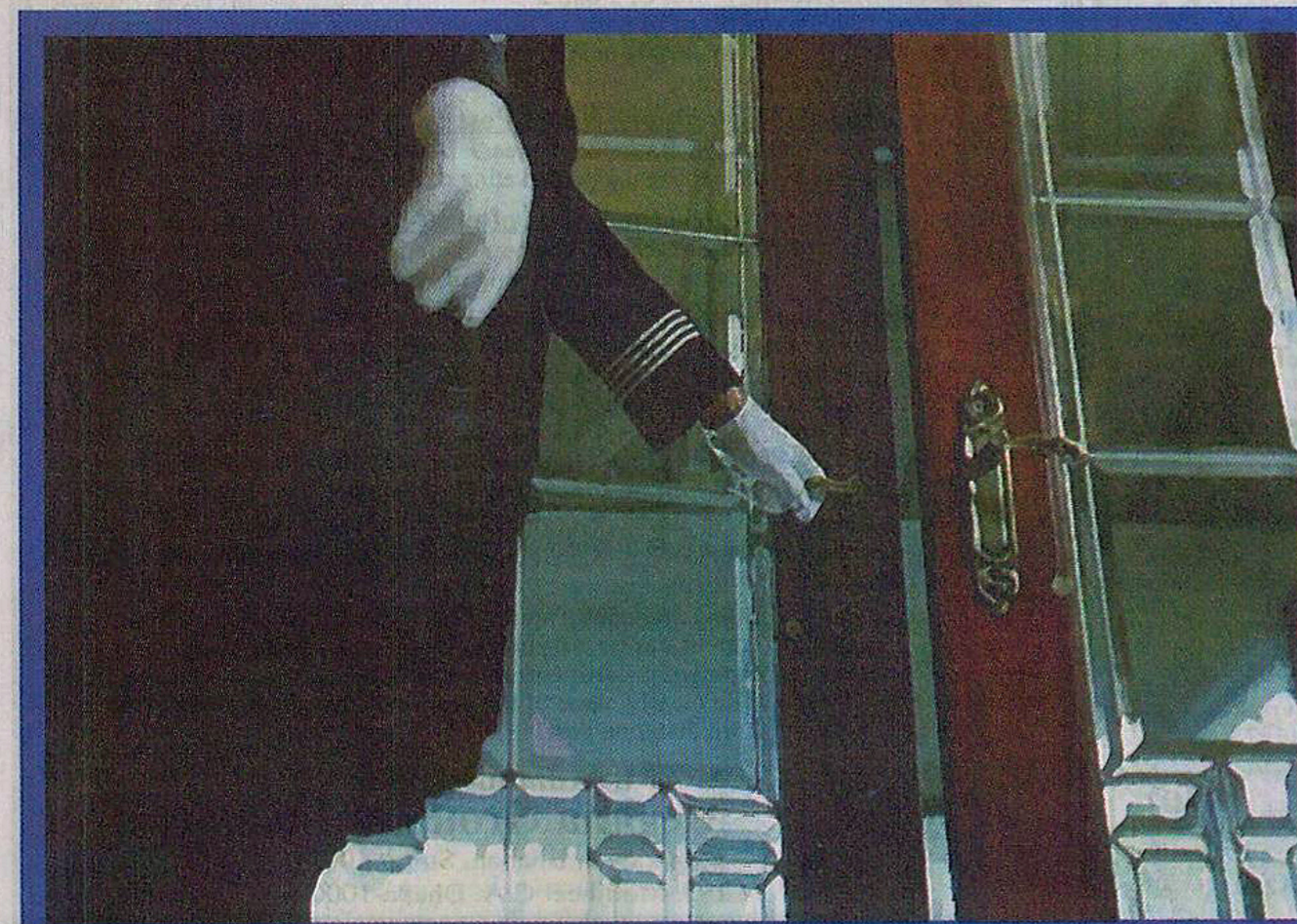
But the airy-fairy explanation was brushed aside by the furious

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