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Food ration for RMG workers uncertain

Lower market price of rice puts govt in dilemma

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The food rationing programme for garment industry workers, which was scheduled to start in the first week of April, has become uncertain because of low market prices of rice, resulting in poor response to the government open market sales (OMS) of food.

The government is also in a dilemma over fixing the government purchase price of boro rice and its purchase target, as consumers are not buying the rice from OMS outlets, resulting in a huge stockpile of rice and wheat in government silos.

"We can't start the rationing programme as the garment workers are showing little interest in it due to low prices of rice on local markets," Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzaque told reporters in his secretariat.

Earlier, the government, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) decided to launch

the rationing programme for garment workers in the first week of April, fearing that the existing market price of the staple would be too high for the workers by the beginning of April. But in reality the market price of rice actually dipped since the decision had been taken.

Razzaque said they are 'reviewing the situation and will make some new decisions' regarding launching of the rationing and boro purchase.

He said prices of rice cannot be reduced more as it will have an adverse impact on local markets and farmers.

"We can't put the farmers in trouble by further reducing the price since the production cost is high," the food minister said.

He also said widespread mismanagement and irregularities were reported in the 100-day job creation programme launched by the immediate-past caretaker government.

"Some government officials were also involved in the irregularities. An investigation has been ordered and all violators will be brought to justice," the minister said.

Earlier the ministry cancelled the programme and decided to initiate a similar social safety net programme in the next fiscal to generate jobs in rural areas.

Razzaque added that Tk 900 crore from a total of Tk 2,000 crore allotted for the 100-day job creation programme was already spent in the very first year.

"We plan to implement a new project under the food security programme next year taking Tk 800 crore from the remainder of the fund," he said.

The World Bank will provide financial and technical assistance to the new project, added the minister.

The food minister also apologised for the anomalies in the distribution of vulnerable group feeding (VGF) cards, which had been reported in the media.

"Some irregularities might have taken place because of political party affiliations of some individuals involved in card distribution," Abdur Razzaque said. He however dismissed the allegation that rotten rice was being distributed through the VGF programme.

RESCUED IN LIBYA 36 identified as Bangladeshis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh mission in Tripoli has identified 36 Bangladeshis among other nationals who were rescued from a Europe-bound rickety boat off Libyan coast on March 27, said an official yesterday.

"There might be more Bangladeshis rescued, but primarily our mission in Tripoli has identified only 36," the official of expatriates' welfare and overseas employment told The Daily Star.

International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Tripoli

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HIRING SURPLUS BANGLADESHI WORKERS Brokers maintain close ties with mission in KL

PORIMOL PALMA, back from Malaysia

The labour wing of the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur has not only been lenient towards unauthorised manpower brokers but have also patronised the brokers as they hired surplus workers against fake documents, ultimately leaving thousands of Bangladeshis stranded jobless across Malaysia.

Whereas not a single worker could have entered Malaysia for work unless the labour wing attested the job approvals issued by Malaysian authorities, the section now denies

it had any responsibility to verify the documents before attesting them.

Labour Counsellor Talat Mahmud Khan who has already been recalled to the country following Malaysia's cancellation of 55,000 work visas, allegedly has 'close ties' with manpower brokers in the country. That is why he approved the

attestation of all job approvals whether they were genuine or not, it is alleged.

Influential brokers have also persuaded some Malaysian employers to get more job approvals authorised from the Malaysian

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**SHATTERED DREAMS OF
MIGRANT WORKERS - 3**

Fight for office of DG shipping

PINAKI ROY

The post of director general (DG) of shipping seems too attractive to let go for recently transferred AKM Shafiqullah as he went to court to get an order in his favour and illegally occupied the DG's office for two days.

Shafiqullah reportedly served the ship-breaking yards' interest and allowed a toxic ship blacklisted by environmentalist group Greenpeace to be dismantled in Bangladesh.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

BNP goes slow in reorganising party Fails to meet deadline for dissolving dist committees

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

BNP, the main opposition in parliament, failed to dissolve its organisational district committees within the time stipulated by the standing committee due to slow pace of the reorganising process.

Party leaders said dissolving of the committees was delayed by the by-elections and some unavoidable reasons and it will be done as soon as possible.

BNP standing committee last month decided to form convening committees in organisational districts dissolving all district committees by April 7. The party high command however failed to finalise the names of conveners and joint conveners of the convening committees, said BNP insiders.

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AUG 21 ATTACK 3 witnesses cross-examined

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday recorded statements of three prosecution witnesses in connection with the August 21, 2004 grenade attack case.

Judge Mohammad Masdar Hossain of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 recorded the statements of constable Abul Bashar, and civilians Siraj Miah and Abul Kashem.

Later the witnesses were cross-examined by defence lawyers.

After recording statements, the judge fixed April 13 for next hearing of the case and

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Journalist hurls shoe at Indian minister

AP, New Delhi

An angry journalist threw a shoe at India's top security official after a confrontational exchange during a press conference over the 1984 anti-Sikh riots that left thousands dead.

The shoe missed Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram, who continued taking questions Tuesday as officials escorted the journalist away.

He was later taken into police custody, but it was not immediately clear whether he would face charges, said police spokesman Rajan Bhagat.

Local television channels identified the journalist as Jarnail Singh, a veteran

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

RMG workers go on rampage after accident

Torch 2 vehicles, damage several others

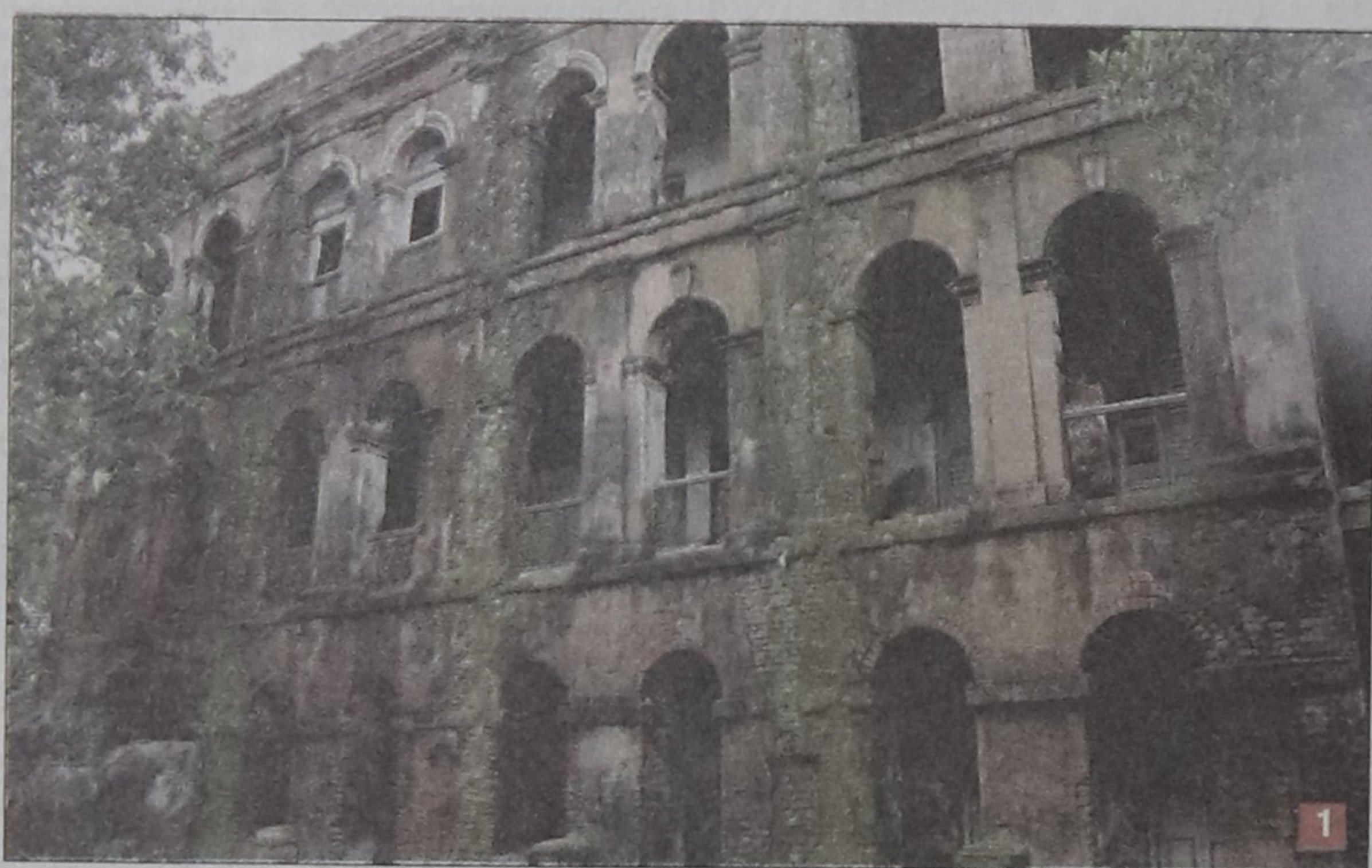
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agitating garment workers yesterday torched two trucks, damaged several vehicles and barricaded the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway following an accident that left two garment workers and a rickshaw puller dead on Boardbazar highway in Gazipur.

The deceased were Khadiza, 28, Nilima Akhter, 24 and Jewel, the rickshaw puller.

Police said Khadiza and Nilima worked in Southern Clothing Factory at Boardbazar.

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1. A part of the Baliati Jaminder Bari in Manikganj shows the state in which most of the prominent archaeological sites in the country are in. 2. An antique vault is left on the corridor of the Jaminder Bari exposed to natural elements. 3. The archaeological department has, however, installed a modern gate at the entrances to the Jaminder Bari.

PHOTO: AL-HASAN B. Noman

Heritage sites left in ruins

EMRAN HOSSAIN

Years of irregularities and neglect by the authorities concerned have led to damage, destruction and even occupation of priceless archaeological sites across the country, but such persisting loss of national heritage has failed to yield their attention.

Whenever the Department of Archaeology takes an initiative for conservation, preservation or restoration of an archaeological site, the process is inadequate, flawed, and finally wrongly done in violation of existing laws.

But the department is always turning a blind eye to the existing situation and hardly bothers to do anything.

"We don't agree we violate existing laws. We follow conservation manual and Archaeology Works Code in conservation, preservation and restoration," said former director general (DG) of the archaeology department Dr Shafiqul Alam, who has recently went on LPR.

He pinned the blame on financial crisis, human

SEE PAGE 12 COL 5



73 Tamil rebels killed in fresh fighting

Troops dig in ahead of final onslaught

PTI, AFP, Colombo

Hunting for elusive top LTTE leadership after overrunning almost all the rebel bases, Sri Lankan troops have killed at least 73 Tamil Tigers in fierce clashes near the 'no-fire zone' in Mullaitivu in the embattled north.

Sri Lankan troops Tuesday consolidated their hold on newly captured territory ahead of a planned offensive to free civilians trapped in the island's war zone, military officials said.

Security forces are preparing to advance into the last patch of land where the Tamil Tiger rebel fighters have been surrounded along with tens of thousands of civilians.

The Tigers' body count appears to be increasing every day and in the last five days over 550 have been killed, the military said yesterday.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Thaksin's supporters attack Thai PM's car Abhisit, ministers trapped inside hotel for hrs

AFP, Pattaya

Anti-government protesters attacked Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's car and trapped him inside a beach hotel Tuesday as the kingdom's political turmoil boiled over into violence.

The supporters of fugitive former premier Thaksin Shinawatra smashed the window of a vehicle carrying Abhisit as he escaped from the luxury resort in the coastal town of Pattaya, where he had been holding a cabinet meeting.

The clash stoked tensions a day before a mass rally in Bangkok, where Thaksin loyalists have besieged Abhisit's offices since March 26, and raised security fears ahead of a summit of Asian leaders in Pattaya on Friday.

"There was a little incident, that's why I was a bit late," Abhisit, who was unhurt, told a special sitting of parliament later in Bangkok.

The protesters want British-born Abhisit to dissolve parlia

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Another BDR man dies of 'cardiac arrest'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) member died of 'cardiac arrest' last night at the city's National Kidney Institute Hospital.

He was identified as painter Yasin Ali, 50.

Dhaka Central Jail authorities got him admitted to the hospital on April 5.

A total of 11 BDR men including Yasin died since the February 25-26 mutiny at their Pilkhana headquarters. Five of them died due to 'cardiac arrest' and six reportedly committed suicide.

Sources said a magistrate prepared an inquest report mentioning that Yasin died due to cardiac arrest.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

BCL men stage hunger strike to protest PM's decision

DU CORRESPONDENT

A group of Chhatra league adherents yesterday observed a one-hour symbolic hunger strike on Dhaka University campus urging Prime Minister and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina to reconsider her decision of stepping down

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Prayer Timing

April 8		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-40	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-21	6-24
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation