

Rationing for RMG workers by May 15

PORIMOL PALMA

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) will start providing ration rice at Tk 16 a kg for garment workers in Dhaka and Chittagong by May 15.

Market price of coarse rice now is more than Tk 20 a kg while the government started procuring rice at Tk 22 per kg on May 1.

"We shall go for ration system at least on an experimental basis," BGMEA President Abdus Salam Murschedy told The Daily Star on Monday.

Besides, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) Vice President Zahidul Hoq Bhuiya said as rice price is now going up, they will also begin ration programme for their workers. He however did not give any time limit for this.

Both the BGMEA and BKMEA had earlier planned to start food rationing for their workers in the first week of April but did not do so sensing possible complexities in the process as they did not have experience in this field.

Meanwhile, the government had decided to supply ration rice for garment workers in March as part of its plan to expand safety net programmes for low-income people. It proposed to provide ration rice for workers at Tk 18 a kg.

Salam said market price of rice at that time was Tk 22-22.5 a kg, and around 600 to 700 facto-

ries wanted to get ration rice. A few days later, the government launched open market sale (OMS) office, which resulted in fall in rice price.

Leaders of the BGMEA and BKMEA then requested the government to lower price of ration rice for their workers since sale of it at Tk 18 a kg was not possible. And the government then re-fixed the price at Tk 16 a kg, which was acceptable to them (leaders).

But, Salam said, they found poor response from the workers to their plans for ration rice since the difference between its market price and ration price was small.

Asked about this, Labour leader Nazma Akhter said the BGMEA and BKMEA are quite active in demanding the government facilities for them but they do not appear to be so in the case of the rationing programme.

"They should not play with the fate of workers. The government has pledged to provide rice at lower price, and they must cooperate with it to ensure that workers are not deprived."

She said garment workers would be greatly benefited if they get rice at Tk 16 per kg.

Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzaque, when contacted on Monday, said, "Garment factories can get rice from us (government) any time for their workers at the fixed price. We want availability of food to all."



This photo taken near Mohakhali level crossing shows a number of the clips, which hold the rails to the sleepers, are missing. Locals claim addicts who spend time there at night stole the clips a few days ago. The authorities appear to be oblivious to the missing clips.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

UAE compensates Tk 10cr for camel jockeys
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The children trafficked and used as camel jockeys in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are going to get over Tk 10 crore compensation in a month.

As many as 879 juveniles who were trafficked to the UAE not before 1993 at their minor age and later brought back home will get the compensation. Each of the children would get a package ranging from \$1000 to \$10,000 depending on the medical damage they had been through.

A delegation from the UAE yesterday held a meeting with Home Minister Sahara Khatun and handed over \$1.44 million (about Tk 10.6 crore) that would be distributed through

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Govt to sign deals to bring smuggled money back
UNB, Dhaka

State Minister for Home Tanjim Ahmad Sohel Taj yesterday said the government would sign deals with the countries concerned, if necessary, to bring back the money smuggled out of the country.

Talking to newsmen after a meeting with new BDR Director General Maj General Mainul Islam at the home ministry, he said it was a regular meeting when they

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Yet another BDR man dies in city
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One more jawan of Bangladesh Rifles died in the city last night.

Havildar Mahiuddin, 48, was declared dead on arrival at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) at around 11:30pm.

He was brought there by Rabiu, an employee of BDR Sadar Hospital at Pilkhana.

Mahiuddin was attached to Battalion-28 in Chittagong.

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Swat peace deal nears collapse

Panicked residents flee; suicide attack kills 5 in N-E Pakistan

AFP, AP, Peshawar

A suicide bomber rammed a car into troops in northwest Pakistan killing five people as panicked residents fled a key town under gunfire yesterday, fearing that a peace deal would collapse.

Panicked residents fled suburban areas of a key northwest Pakistan town yesterday after the army issued an evacuation order, which they immediately withdrew, witnesses said.

The military ordered four neighbourhoods on the edge of Mingora, the main town in the Taliban-infested Swat valley, to evacuate and announced a break in an indefinite curfew for the displaced to flee to a special camp.

A Pakistani minister says the government

expects up to 500,000 people to flee fighting between the army and the Taliban in a northwestern valley.

Information minister for the northwest, Mian Iftikhar Hussain, says authorities are preparing six camps to accommodate those expected to flee the Swat Valley in the coming days.

Witness and officials say fighting between troops and militants broke out in Swat on Tuesday and that hundreds were fleeing.

Overnight clashes in Mingora and gunfire after daybreak has imperilled an increasingly shaky peace deal in Swat, where the Taliban focused on a terrifying insurgency for nearly two years until a ceasefire was brokered in February.

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Boy killed in Khulna gas explosion
UNB, Khulna

A minor boy was killed and 16 other people were wounded in an explosion caused by fire in a gas and oil godown in Khalishpur area yesterday evening.

Four nearby shops and two thatched houses were also gutted in the fire.

Fire service sources said a barrel containing oil exploded resulting in fire in the godown of Quayum Enterprise and adjacent shops and houses at about 7:00 pm, leaving 17 people wounded.

Severely burnt Touhid, 9, died on the way to Dhaka while others were admitted to Khulna Medical College Hospital and local clinics.

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Govt reaches out to China for second Padma bridge

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

The Bangladesh government is expecting 2 to 3 billion US dollars in Chinese government assistance in the coming months for implementing some of its priority projects including construction of a second Padma Bridge or a tunnel at Patura-Doulatdia river crossing point, said officials.

"We want to start construction of both bridges simultaneously once we get the fund," Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain told The Daily Star.

He added that the government already got money from different donor agencies for the construction of the first Padma Bridge, and currently mobilising donors for funding the second Padma Bridge.

He however said, "Getting the assistance will depend on the Chinese premier's next visit to Bangladesh or the Bangladesh premier's visit to China."

Highly placed government sources said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina might visit China sometime in the coming months to discuss the assistance with the Chinese government.

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CTG ARMS HAUL
Sahab Uddin discloses more names
CU CORRESPONDENT

Former director (security) of National Security Intelligence (NSI) Mohammad Sahab Uddin disclosed names of high officials of NSI and other government agencies during interrogation in connection with the Chittagong arms haul case.

Sahab Uddin claimed himself fair and said the erstwhile NSI director Brig Gen Abdur Rahim was aware of the hiring of the trucks and a crane, said sources in the CID seeking anonymity.

He also mentioned that the then Chairman of Bangladesh Chemical Industries

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Only a few days back there was one billboard on the estuary of Chittagong port. Besides, another large-sized billboard is being set up at the same place. Now billboards grab half of the port estuary!

PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDER

War tribunals, probe teams by June

Law minister says delay is to ensure fairness

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed yesterday said the government would complete formation of tribunals and appointment of investigators and prosecutors by the end of June for holding trial of 1971 war criminals maintaining international standards.

The government is delaying the trial for ensuring international standard that no chance is left to doubt its fairness and transparency, he said, adding that the government was moving cautiously in taking steps for holding the trial.

He however said, the appointment of prosecutors will be made within this month.

Talking to newsmen at his secretariat office yesterday afternoon, the law minister said time is needed for designating courts, recruiting manpower and setting up offices of prosecu-

tors.

He said the government is gathering experience of holding trial of the war criminals from Nuremberg and Cambodia that held trial of war criminals.

Asked about the government's move to amend the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Act 2004, Shafique said this law was misused to harass politicians in most cases in the past and therefore the government is bringing the amendment to this law for avoiding its further misuse.

He said the ACC will continue to take legal steps on corruption allegations against government and semi-government officials and employees under section 409 of the Penal Code.

Responding to a proposal of the ACC, section 408 of the Penal Code that was used to deal with

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LTTE chief trapped

Lankan troops surround him in small strip of coastline, claims govt

AFP, AP, Colombo

arsenal of weapons that they had stockpiled.

Prabhakaran has not been seen for more than 18 months, and speculation has been rife that he may have been killed or already fled the island.

Sri Lanka's navy has increased patrols off the Mullaitivu coast to stop him escaping, and Malaysia and India have been alerted to be on the lookout.

Sri Lankan soldiers broke through rebel defences and advanced further into the Tamil Tigers' last remaining territory, inflicting heavy damage on the beleaguered insurgents, the military said yesterday.

Troops and Tamil Tiger fighters battled back against government troops with a large

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World warned of next wave of swine flu
AFP, Paris

Even as the swine flu's global progression slows, experts said yesterday the world must brace for a second wave of infection that, previous pandemics have shown, could be far more virulent.

All three of the major flu pandemics of the 20th century -- including the Spanish Flu of 1918, which left at least 40 million dead -- started with a milder outbreak in the northern hemisphere's late spring, they point out.

Pandemics typically begin with a "herald wave" --

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Congress turns to Left to form govt after polls

4th round of voting tomorrow

AFP, New Delhi

Rahul Gandhi, heir to India's powerful Congress dynasty, reached out to the communists yesterday to help form a new government if his party wins marathon general elections.

The olive branch came two days before the penultimate round of voting in the elections, which are being staggered across the country of more than 1.1 billion people over a month.

Analysts say Congress is unlikely to be able to form a new coalition without the communists, who are a powerful force in the eastern state of West Bengal and the southern state of Kerala.

"The field is open to post-polls alliances," Rahul Gandhi,

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Convicted Babar gets interim bail in arms case
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted three months' ad interim bail to former state minister for home Lutfuzzaman Babar in an arms case in which he was earlier sentenced to 17 years' rigorous imprisonment.

Justice Syed Muhammad Dastagir Husain and Justice Md Rais Uddin granted the bail after hearing Babar's appeal against his conviction.

Babar's lawyer advocate

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