Army carries rice to remote Thanchi areas

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

The Bangladesh Army yesterday carried more than 3 tonnes of rice in helicopters deep inside Thanchi upazila, which will be distributed today among affected people by local representatives and government officials.

A little over seven tonnes of rice was allocated for people suffering food crisis in remote Zinna Para, Dolian Para and Madok of the upazila. But due to rough weather and technical glitch, army personnel could not carry all of it, said Thanchi Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Anowar Hossain.

boat and so it will take time, the UNO said. Brig Gen Fakrul Ahsan, Bandarban regional commander of army, said six helicopters had been used to carry the

The remaining rice will be carried by

food to the remotest areas of Tindu and Remakri unions of Thanchi. The relief and rehabilitation depart- rats and insects.

ment in Bandarban allotted 146 tonnes of rice for the people in Thanchi. But it was struggling to carry relief material to the affected people in remote areas.

City

Meanwhile, 16 tonnes of rice have already been distributed by the district administration.

Bandarban Deputy Commissioner Dilip Kumar Banik said, "The situation has improved as we already sent food to the affected areas".

The most affected areas include Jinna Para, Dolian Para, Yon Nong Karbari Para, Boro Madok Vitor Para, Japa Rong Tripura Para and Basi Aung Karbari Para of Tindu and Remakri unions, according to local people.

People in Thanchi have been facing severe shortage of food as they could not cultivate enough crops for themselves last year due to excessive rain. Adding to their misery, a large portion of the crops they grew was destroyed by



SECRET KILLINGS PM blames BNP-Jamaat

UNB, Tokyo, Japan

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday alleged that the BNP-Jamaat has resorted to a new trick -- killing selective people -- as the alliance could not gain anything after killing so many people in broad daylight last year.

"Earlier, they engaged in killings in public and broad daylight but couldn't gain anything. Now they have indulged in secret killings to destabilise the country, destroy its economy and save the war criminals," she said.

The PM was addressing a reception organised in her honour at Tokyo Imperial Hotel by the Bangladeshi community in Japan.

"Innocent people like imams, priests, fathers of churches are killed by the BNP-Jamaat to escalate tension so that the government faces questions abroad."

Hasina said even a former US embassy staff and a USAID official Xulhaz Mannan, who was a pro-Awami League person and also the cousin of former foreign minister Dipu Moni, was killed at his home so

She alleged that the BNP-Jamaat is indulging in such selective killings with an evil motive to create chaos in the country in a bid to stop the trial of war criminals.

that Americans could "raise questions".

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

Prices up on high demand

PRODUCT

Edible oil

Lentil

Chickpea

Date

Union

Garlic

Ginger

Turmeric

logic for this."

Refined sugar

FROM PAGE 1

lentils, onion, garlic, ginger, turmeric and dates, was higher than the demand.

"So there is no reason for their price hike on the occasion of Ramadan," he told reporters after the meeting.

But it seems his words didn't reach the market, where chickpea prices went up by 14 percent to Tk 85-100 a kg in the last one month alone. It rose 48 percent in the last one year. The item cost Tk 60-65 a kg a year ago. Sugar sold for Tk 60-62 a kg yester-

day against Tk 50-54 a month ago. The sweetener's price rose 48.78 percent in the last one year, according to the TCB, the state-run agency responsible for stabilising the market price of some selected essential commodities.

Traders attribute the increase in sugar prices to the imposition of value added tax and a hike in tariff on imported raw and refined sugar in December last year.

percent in the last one month and 67.86 percent in the last one year. Last week, it sold for Tk 100-135 a kg against Tk 80-100 a month ago.

Prices of local garlic rose 30.56

The prices of imported onion more than doubled in the last one year, mainly because of the price hike on the international market. Last week, it leaders assured the minister that the dishonest businesses increased prices sold for Tk 190-220 a kg from Tk 90-100 a year ago.

Date price remains stable, but it's

rises during Ramadan, which accounts for 85 percent of the annual consumption.

Apart from essentials, prices of keep the supply stable. meat, eggs and spices also went up in the last one month.

DEMAND

15 lakh tonnes

15 lakh tonnes

3.75 lakh tonnes

60,000 tonnes

22 lakh tonnes

5 lakh tonnes

3 lakh tonnes

2 lakh tonnes

At the May 17 meeting, business

market would remain stable through-

A number of wholesalers and

out the month of fasting.

in Ramadan alone)

15,000 tonnes (13,000 tonnes

certainly going to go up as its demand retailers told the meeting that the strict monitoring, prices remained government should sit with big importers and producers, instead of wholesalers and retailers, so they

"In talks with importers and producers, the government should Talking about the price increase, ensure the supply of essential com-Ghulam Rahman, president of the modities such as chickpea and sugar," Consumers Association of said Golam Mawla, general secretary

SUPPLY/PRODUCTION

18.9 lakh tonnes (as of April)

13.94 lakh tonnes (as of April)

1.46 lakh tonnes imported(as

of April); last year's domestic

production 2.6 lakh tonnes

1.49 lakh tonnes imported

27,000 tonnes imported

Domestic annual production 17.04 lakh

tonnes; the rest is imported from India

Almost all of it produced domestically

Almost all of it produced domestically

Almost all of it produced at home

so far this fiscal

so far this fiscal

who attended the meeting.

and during Ramadan.

ANNUAL DEMAND VS SUPPLY/PRODUCTION

SOURCE: COMMERCE MINISTRY

Bangladesh (CAB), said: "There is no of Moulvibazar Baboshayee Samity,

tolerable during Ramadan in the last few years, except for a few items. "But we are apprehending an

exception this year," said Ghulam,

also former chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission. The CAB chief said the country had been practising a free market economy since the 1990s. "Now only a few businesses control the import and

production of essential items. Item-

based trade association has been formed." Rahman said dishonest businessmen hiked prices of items through syndication whenever they got an opportunity, amid squeezed competi-

tion and in the absence of monitoring. Consumers, rights groups and experts blame the weak market monitoring and the absence of penalty to the wrongdoers for price hike.

Sohel Rana, a consumer, who lives in the capital's Old Dhaka, resented that the government always insisted that prices of essentials would not go up during Ramadan. But in reality they go up even before the Ramadan starts. "This [govt promise] is nothing but a political stunt."

Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the government needed to look into whether Ghulam Rahman of the CAB said to the markets on time, instead of of commodities and services ahead "going from market to market with sticks in hands." Due to efficient management and

Khaleda charged with arson in 2 cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday pressed charges against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and 26 other leaders and activists of her partyled alliance in two arson cases filed in February and March last year.

In both cases, Khaleda Zia has been shown as the mastermind even though her name was not mentioned in the first information reports.

The cases were filed with city's Darussalam Police Station accusing 27 leaders and activists of the BNP-led alliance of carrying out arson attacks on buses in Darussalam and Gabtoli during the combine's nonstop antigovernment movement last year.

Of the accused, the case's charge sheets showed Khaleda and 19 others fugitives as they did not secure bail.

The investigation officers of the cases appealed to the court to issue arrest warrants for them. Rest of the seven, including BNP leader Amanullah Aman, are on bail.

According to the charge sheets, Khaleda masterminded the arson attacks on two buses on February 14 and March 3 last year.

Sub-inspector Faruqul Alam of Darussalam Police Station, also the investigation officer of the first case, submitted imported items were being supplied | the charge sheet against Khaleda and 23 others to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka.

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Hell in Highlands

FROM PAGE 1

sums of money which he described as a "deposit" in exchange for employment and a salary.

On their arrival at the hotel, their wages were reduced to a fraction of the contracted amount and they were required to work far longer hours with their duties extended beyond the kitchen.

The men told how they had to paint the hotel, clean rooms and cut and move logs in the hotel grounds in freezing winter temperatures.

Arefin threatened his victims with termination of their employment when they complained and refused to return the money they had paid him.

"He forced us to work from morning to night, sometimes starting at 5:00am and not finishing until after midnight," says Sheikh Nasir, 38, who is from Chittagong. He arrived at the hotel in May 2010.

"We had to do everything, not only the kitchen, but housekeeping and cleaning, the toilets, outside, every-"I paid him £16,000 to bring me Hotel.

so I'm still in a lot of debt, which makes me very anxious. "Arefin barely paid me -- sometimes not at all, and I had to live in a broken

here. I borrowed it from several people

caravan with four or five men. There was no water or heating and it was damp as the window was broken.

"I complained but he didn't care. He just said he would sack me.

"I was scared of him. I was on antidepressants and now I have counselling. I don't know if I'll ever get back to

normal." Arefin no longer owns the Stewart Hotel, near Appin in Argyll. He was sentenced to three years' imprisonment in 2015 after being convicted of

trafficking the four workers. The victims now face a battle to stay in Scotland and are hoping they'll be

granted asylum.

One of the four, Azad, 31, left his wife and baby son in Bangladesh and flew to the UK in 2009, expecting to start work as a chef. His father sold family land to help

pay Arefin's "fee". Azad also went to moneylenders.

One of them has told him he will cut out his kidney if he fails to pay him back. "One of the lenders I borrowed

from has threatened to take out my

kidney if I don't pay back my loans, but I have no way of doing that. Azad had first met 47-year-old Arefin after responding to an ad in a Dhaka paper offering jobs as a chef in the UK. Azad, the eldest of six sons, was

struggling to earn a living working as a

cook in his family's small restaurant in

a suburb of Dhaka. The advert led him to Arefin. A big man with a powerful voice, Arefin exuded confidence and authority. His wife had important connections in Bangladeshi political circles and he owned a chain of businesses both there and in the UK, including the Stewart

"I was promised a salary of £18,000 but it was just like slavery. All I got was £50 or £100 here and there."

Hasan Mahmud, 44, too wanted to help his wife and child but ended up in the clutches of Arefin.

"I was terrified working for him. He was like a master and we were like the slaves. He had a terrible temper and would throw plates.

"Once, when someone was a few minutes late, he threw a pot of hot oil on the floor at our feet.

"He had control over us. He said he would send us back to Bangladesh. He has important relatives and I was very scared what would happen if we were sent back.

While working at the hotel, the said. workers were too scared to talk to locals or guests about what was hap-



Shamsul Arefin

pening. "He told us, 'You can't talk to anybody. If you do, I will cancel your visa,'" Azad says.

There was no mobile phone reception, no internet access and no transport. Arefin accompanied them whenever they went into town on hotel business. Some of the workers slept on the floor of empty rooms; others were forced to sleep in a decrepit caravan behind the hotel, with only sluginfested blankets for warmth.

In the middle of winter, they were made to go outside in the freezing rain and snow to chop logs, wearing only the sandals they'd brought with them from Bangladesh.

ficked men saw that Arefin had left the hotel. Seizing this brief window of opportunity, they took the one bus to Fort William, walked into the local Citizens Advice bureau and asked for help. They returned to work and waited. A few weeks later the hotel was raided by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) and Arefin's sponsor licence was revoked.

"After the raid I thought: God saved us. God sent someone. Something good is going to come of this," Azad

The men thought UKBA officials would force Arefin to give them their

unpaid wages and treat them as legitimate workers. Instead they were told that their visas had been cancelled and they had 60 days to find another sponsor or be deported back to Bangladesh.

was willing to sponsor them. Their desperation left them vulnerable; they say that more than one restaurant owner offered them a job, but only if they paid £10,000 for sponsorship. Alyson Smith was one of the few local people who used the Stewart hotel's bar in the evening, coming in

they began to talk to her in whispers about what was happening to them. With Smith's help, they finally made contact with Migrant Help, a migrant rights NGO. Case worker Jim Laird arranged for them to board a train to

Glasgow and met them at the station. Over the following months, then years, Laird maintained a close relationship with the men. He first helped them find a safe house and temporary jobs, then worked to get them formally recognised as victims of trafficking by the UKBA.

When the Home Office said they One day in August 2010, the traf- were allowed to stay in the UK on short-term temporary work visas if they agreed to testify as witnesses in a criminal investigation into Arefin and the Stewart Hotel, Laird agreed to support them through the process.

It took five years for a criminal case against Arefin to come to trial. During this time Azad and the other men lurched from one temporary job to another, washing dishes or stacking shelves while the interest on their loans mounted at home.

"It was terrible having to face him and relive what happened to us," Azad says. One of the other witnesses collapsed during questioning and had to

be taken away in an ambulance. "And all the time [Arefin] was sitting laughing at us."

In July 2015, Arefin was found guilty of human trafficking under the In the weeks after the raid, the men Asylum and Immigration Act and tried to find other jobs, but nobody imprisoned for three years. The case marked the first successful prosecution of trafficking for forced labour in Scotland's history and was heralded by police and politicians across the UK as a positive step towards more successful prosecutions.

conviction has offered no resolution or sanctuary. No longer witnesses in a crimiwith her husband to drink and play pool. Over time she struck up a friendnal trial, they are fighting to be able to stay ship with the four. After a month or two and work in the UK until they have tried to claim compensation, or worked to pay off the money for their visas.

Kamal Ahmed has just had his application for permanent residency turned down by the Home Office; the other three are bracing themselves for similar decisions in the coming weeks. Ahmed has been told he will have to pay £140 to appeal. All are terrified that their lives, and those of their families, will be at risk if they are forced to return, unable to pay their debts.

Azad is now in Fort William, living in a shared apartment. He has been lucky enough to find work as a chef and waiter in a restaurant, but twothirds of his wages go towards the said in his defence that he was really interest on his loans. If he is forced to return to

Bangladesh, he is convinced it will be the end for him. He says he has had to move his young family three times, because of fears for their safety.

"Arefin has powerful relatives," he explained. "If I go back to my country, I'm afraid that I'll be killed.

He also says, "The UK courts used us to testify, but we have received no compensation for the money we lost or even advice on how to go about trying to claim our unpaid wages."

"We have never wanted or taken bene-

fits from the government. All we want is the chance to work, to provide for our

That prospect is looking increasingly slim. "When I talk to my family, I cannot tell them about my life here, because it

family and recover the debt we paid."

would break them. Everything we had has been destroyed." Azad wonders what he would have made of his life if he'd never answered

that advert. [From The Guardian, BBC, But for his former workers, Arefin's dailyrecord.co.uk, pressandjournal.co.uk]

Alimony paid

FROM PAGE 16

the takeaway restaurant he managed. At this juncture, the pair's daughter

was 12-years-old. The Telegraph reported that the presiding Judge Chiara Bitozzi wrote in her ruling: "In lieu of money, the defendant offered his ex-wife the same amount of compensation in the form of take-away pizzas from his workplace, an offer promptly rejected as 'beggar's change'.'

As a result of his attempt to pay "in kind", Zuin decided to file a criminal complaint.

Toso's attorney, Sonia Della Greca, struggling financially to the extent he was forced to close his business in 2010.

She added that he had held up all other custody obligations by not missing visits and helping their daughter develop a relationship with his new wife and her half siblings. The relationship between the daugh-

ter and mother quickly deteriorated leading to her moving in with her father in 2011. As a result Zuin was then compelled to pay Toso €300 in child support.

As a result, Judge Bitozzi found there to be no evidence the father had committed a crime.