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FEEDING THE ULTRA POOR

Sale of rice at Tk 10 resumes next month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After suspending the Food-Friendly Programme due to dwindling food reserves last year, the government is now resuming the scheme to give rice to 2.5 crore ultra-poor people at Tk 10 a kg.

The government has been able to do this as food reserves are bouncing back following increased local procurement and imports.

Currently, the price of coarse rice is between Tk 44 and Tk 47 a kg in the market.

The ultra-poor people, about 50 lakh families, would be able to get the rice under the programme from next month and each family would get 30kg a month in March and April.

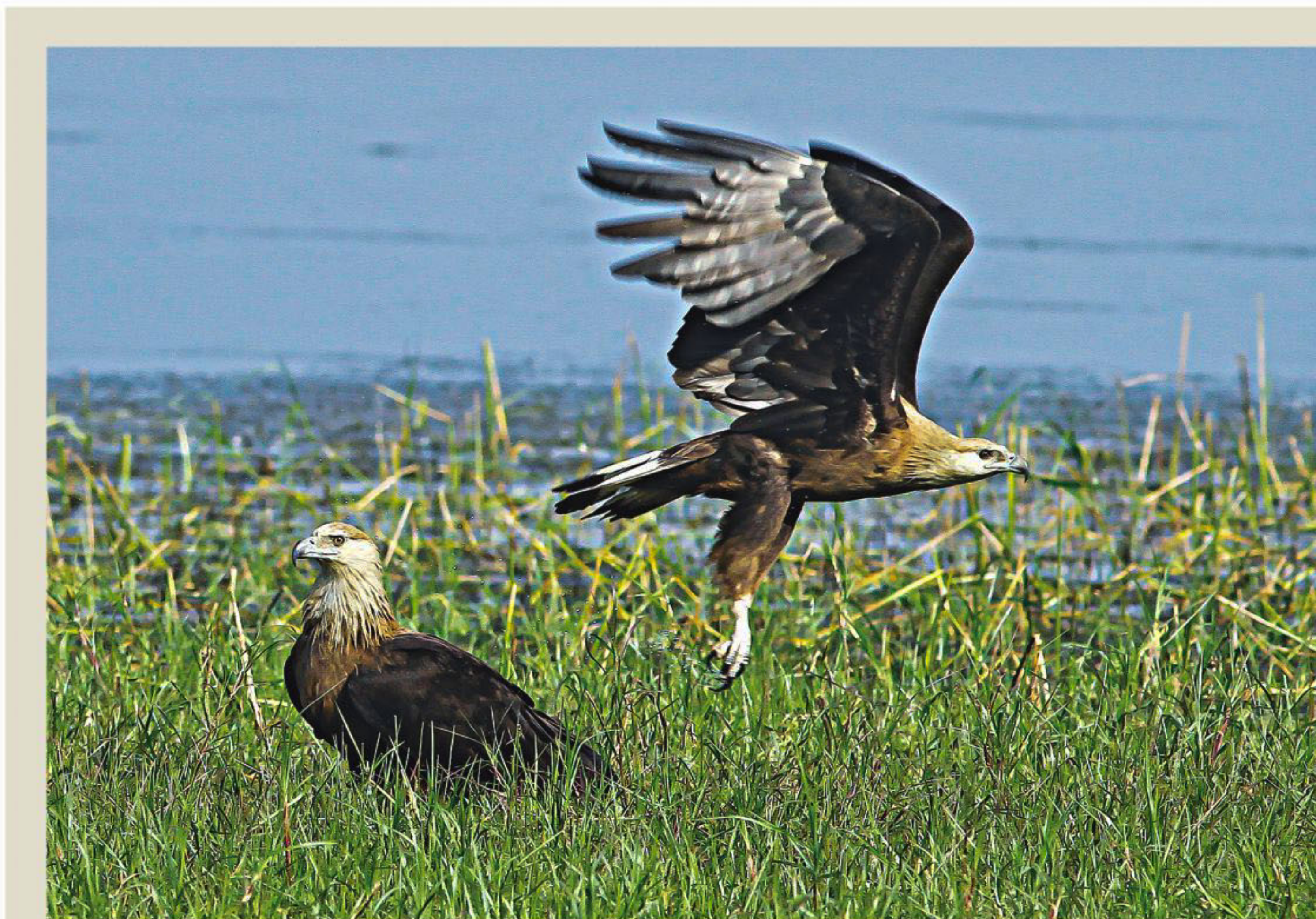
The programme was introduced in 2016 with twice-a-year sale -- September to November and March to April.

Due to severe drop in food reserves, as low as 1.3 lakh tonnes, the scheduled sale in September to November last year was suspended. The drop is widely blamed on flash floods and fungal attack that damaged boro crops.

Announcing the resumption of the programme at a press briefing at the food directorate yesterday, Food Minister Qamrul Islam said in the five months of sale this year, they would require 7.5 lakh tonnes of the staple and that they would not have any problems getting the rice.

He said they had to suspend the September-November sale last year as they could not collect the grains owing to crop loss. During the last boro season, the government

SEE PAGE 17 COL 4



A pair of Pallas' Fish eagles in a swamp in Sunamganj. The birds and the locals have always shared a unique relationship; before the advent of technology, the call of the eagles would alert the villagers as midnight fell, helping those who wanted to pray at that hour.



A quest for eagle nest

SAYAM U CHOWDHURY

Cool morning air brushed against my face as I looked at the plains where countrymen were out on their fields--plowing, irrigating, or simply standing with their hands clasped against their back. The road that we took that winter morning ran through seasonal wetlands and farmlands. Water on shallow and slender ditches gleamed in the light of the morning.

A Brahminy Kite encircled the paddy field spreading its rufous wings, while Pond Herons and Cormorants stood still

SEE PAGE 17 COL 5

Arm the teachers!

It's Trump's solution to gun violence

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump suggested arming teachers to deter mass shootings as he faced broken voices, tears and demands for action at a meeting with survivors of the gun rampage that killed 17 people at a Florida high school.

Trump also promised "very strong" background checks on gun owners during the poignant "listening session" on Wednesday, in which he heard first-hand accounts from bereaved parents and friends, and schoolchildren who narrowly escaped with their own lives.

As he sat with these people, Trump was photographed holding a piece of paper with notes suggesting questions or other things to say to them.

As seen on the photographs, these included "What would you most want me to know about your experience?" and "I hear you." Social media lit up with

SEE PAGE 17 COL 1



INDO-CHINA BORDER TENSION

Beijing upgrades air defences: report

CNN ONLINE

Border tensions between China and India could again flare-up, say analysts, following a report in Chinese state media detailing the country's build-up of air defence capabilities close to its western frontier.

According to a Global Times report, reposted on the English version of the People's Liberation Army's website Tuesday, China is upgrading air defences in its Western Theater Command -- the strategic area covering security along the country's mountainous far western border -- "in order to confront any threat from India."

The article notes that images of Chinese J-10 fighter jet and J-11 fighter jets conducting aerial combat training exercises in western China were released by the People's Liberation Army (PLA), on February 13, two days before the traditional Lunar New Year holiday.

"With India importing new jets, China will continue strengthening its fighter jets in the Western Theater Command," military expert Zhongping Song was quoted as saying.

The announcement is an important signal after last summer's territorial standoff between the two countries in Doklam, near the borders of India, China and Bhutan, analysts say.

Speaking to CNN, Kanti Prasad Bajpai, the director of the Centre on Asia and Globalization at Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, said the article could be interpreted as China signalling to India that Doklam "isn't over" and that India shouldn't "get too complacent."

"It's fairly clear they (the Chinese) are trying to send a message in the post-Doklam period about their resolve to be strong," said Bajpai.

NOT NEW

According to M Matheswaran, a retired Indian Air Force marshal who

SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

'PLOT TO KIDNAP JOY'

Charge sheet against Shafik Rehman and four others

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have charged journalist Shafik Rehman and four others with plotting to kidnap and kill prime minister's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy.

Jalal Hossain, general registering officer (GRO) of Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, told The Daily Star that the Detective Branch (DB) of police submitted the charge sheet before the court on Tuesday.

Other accused in the charge sheet are: Mahmudur Rahman, acting editor of Bangla daily Amar Desh, Mohammad Ullah Mamun, vice-president of Jatiyatabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangstha (Jasas), and his son Rizvi Ahmed Caesar, and

SEE PAGE 17 COL 4

BRITAIN'S NEOLITHIC POPULATION

90pc vanished in just 300 yrs



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Extraordinary new genetic evidence is revealing how Britain experienced a mysterious almost total change in its population in just a few centuries after the construction of Stonehenge.

It suggests that some sort of social, economic or epidemiological catastrophe unfolded.

The great 20-30 tonne stones of Stonehenge were erected by Neolithic farmers whose ancestors had lived in Britain for at least the previous 1,500 years -- and new genetic research on 51 skeletons from all over Neolithic Britain has now revealed that during the whole of the Neolithic era, the country was inhabited mainly by olive-skinned,

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

Settle rule in six weeks

SC to HC on Marma sisters' confinement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday asked the High Court to hear and settle the rule in six weeks regarding the confinement of two Marma sisters, one of whom was allegedly raped and another assaulted by security forces last month.

The Marma sisters, aged 18 and 13, were admitted to the Rangamati Sadar Hospital on January 22 after the incidents took place at Bilaichari village.

SEE PAGE 17 COL 6

PRAYER TIMING FEBRUARY 23

Fazr Juma Asr Maghrib Esha

AZAN 5-20 12-30 4-30 6-03 7-30

JAMAAT 5-55 1-15 4-45 6-07 8-00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

BOKO HARAM ATTACK

Nigeria rescues 76 schoolgirls, others missing

REUTERS, Bauchi

The Nigerian military has rescued 76 schoolgirls and recovered the bodies of two others, after the students went missing during a Boko Haram attack on a village, three parents, a resident and a local government official told Reuters.

"Everybody is celebrating their coming with songs and praises to God almighty," said Babagana Umar, one of the parents whose daughter had disappeared. "The only sad news is that two girls were dead and no explanation."

The rescued girls were returned to the village of Dapchi late on Wednesday evening, Umar and other residents said.

At least 13 students may still be missing, and Reuters was unable to determine how the two girls died.

Earlier on Wednesday, sources told Reuters that 91 people were unaccounted for after a roll-call at their school on Tuesday.

SEE PAGE 17 COL 5



A woman collecting drinking water from a large pond in the salinity-prone area of Hurka in Bagerhat's Rampal upazila. Inset, from L-R, Asif Hossain Tamim, Sabbir Rudro, Sabrina Rashid Sheonty and Mubasshir Tahmid in the grand finale of Hult Prize 2018 at Buet.

PHOTO: STAR/COLLECTED



Solving salinity

Buet students developing low-price desalination device

MD MIZANUR RAHMAN HIMADRI with ANDREW EAGLE

Water: the stuff of life. A reliable supply of fresh drinking water is one of the most fundamental requirements of any human society. In south-western Bangladesh high salinity in drinking water is a widespread and catastrophic problem that adversely affects human health.

Now, four students from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology have developed a convenient way to desalinate water using solar power. It's an innovation with the potential to improve the lives of millions of people living in salinity-affected areas.

As is not uncommon among the elderly, 84-year-old Jonaki Das suffers from high blood pressure. Jonaki lives in Bagerhat's Kachua upazila: for her, an unfortunate address. Kachua is an area with high-salinity groundwater. That makes it difficult for Jonaki to regulate salt intake in her diet, which isn't good news for a hypertension sufferer.

But it's not only those with chronic medical conditions that are affected. Pushpok Das from Bagerhat's Rampal is one of many in his area who have to travel some 2.5 kilometres from his home almost every day to collect freshwater from a large pond for his eight-member family.

Increasingly, residents rely on rainwater, pond sand filters and even river water for cooking and drinking. According to an official from the department of public health engineering, more than 50,000 people in Bagerhat alone are compelled to buy 20-litre containers of freshwater

SEE PAGE 17 COL 5