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Local business leaders complain

High Indian tariffs block Bangladeshi goods

The country's leading industrialists and businessmen yesterday blamed India for blocking the entrance of Bangladeshi products with a high tariff wall, reports UNB.

While Bangladesh does not have normal access to the Indian market, the Indians are talking about preferential trade arrangement with Bangladesh, they said at a meeting with a visiting Indian delegation led by renowned industrialist RP Goenka, Chairman Emeritus of the RPG Enterprises Ltd.

"Bangladesh has become a market for Indian goods... we also need unhindered access to the Indian market," said Salman F Rahman of BEXIMCO, a leading business house of the country.

Held at the auditorium of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), the meeting was also attended by FBCCI president Mahbubur Rahman and AKM Shamsuddoha of the Bangladesh Indenting Agents Association.

Goenka, also the president of the Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CACCII), an apex body of chambers of the region, is leading a nine-member delegation.

Citing an example of Indian trade obstacles, Salman Rahman said while Bangladesh imposed a zero duty on pharmaceutical raw materials, India totally banned the import of such material.

Huge quantity fabrics are entering Bangladesh from India every year, but Delhi has imposed a higher duty on importing finished products, he added.

Shamsuddoha said during a visit to Dhaka Indian Commerce Minister Pranab Mukherjee assured the Bangladeshi industrialists that his country would consider duty relaxation on Bangladeshi products.

"But they now say everything will be under the SAPTA concept, which suggests only a 10 per cent duty relaxation," he said.

Addressing the meeting, Goenka said despite a good relationship between the two neighbouring countries, cent

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Govt may approve phase-II Rauzan plant today

By Sharier Khan

The government committee for purchase — the Council Committee — headed by the Finance Minister is scheduled to meet today (Wednesday) to approve, among many other things, the 'controversial' second phase of the Rauzan 210-mw power plant in Chittagong, sources said.

Technical engineers of the Power Development Board (PDB) had been opposing construction of the second phase of this plant by the Chinese firm — China National Machinery and Equipment Import and Export (CMEC) — because the first phase, constructed by the same firm under a Chinese turn-key agreement, had been functioning rather poorly.

Sources told The Daily Star yesterday that while the government was hurrying to approve the second phase, the

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BNP preparing to face agitations

By Asiuzzaman

The ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has started taking steps for strengthening the party's front organisation to confront the anti-government agitation of the opposition, mainly the Awami League and the Jatiya Party, party sources said.

Party Secretary General Abdus Salam Talukder, who got a two-year extension early this month, sent messages last week to all the district thana committees to reactivate organisational activities, a senior party leader said.

The ministers and central leaders will undertake tours of the districts to hold public rallies and workers' meetings, the source said requesting anonymity.

The preparations will be completed before the next session of Parliament sched-

uled for early May," the source said, adding that "At the same time the BNP high command will try its best to amicably bring back the boycotting opposition to Parliament."

The source, however, ruled out any possibility of appeasement or accepting, what he called 'illegitimate' demand of the opposition, such as elections under a care-taker government.

The BNP's standing committee and the secretariat of the national executive committee earlier this week rejected the demand of a care-taker government.

Talking to The Daily Star, a senior AL leader, however, said they reached a point of no return and had decided not to attend sessions of the Parliament. The decision, he

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Fire razes 250 shacks in city suburb

By Staff Correspondent

Some 250 shacks were gutted in a fire at Kaliganj under Keraniganj police station on the outskirts of the capital across the Buriganga river last night.

As the blaze engulfed their thatched houses, hundreds of people, men, women and children ran for safety. They became homeless as the devastating fire in a slum gutted all their belongings at about 10 last night, both police and firemen said.

Fire Service personnel, after an hour-long battle against the flames which lit up the night sky, brought the blaze under control. Firemen reached the scene with fire-extinguishing boats immediately after the flame spread. They worked to douse the smouldering debris until midnight last night.

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Sec 144 imposed in Chuadanga

From Our Correspondent

CHUADANGA, Apr 12: The local authorities today imposed a ban on any rallies, processions or gathering of more than five persons in the Chuadanga municipal areas for thirteen hours beginning at 7 am tomorrow.

The District Magistrate imposed Section 144 of the BRC following the 'all-party' committee's decision today to resist the 'controversial' religious leader Delwar Hossain Sayeedi from addressing a rally here. Sayeedi is scheduled to address a *seerat mahfil* (religious gathering) organised by the local unit of the Jamaat-e-Islami-backed Islami Samajkalyan Parishad at the Town Hall playground at 3 pm tomorrow.

Meanwhile, the local units of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Awami League (AL), the Workers Party (WP), the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), the Mukti Juddha Sangsad (Freedom Fighters Association) and the Zaker Party had unitedly decided to

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Hartals discourage investors: PM

MITHAPUKUR (Rangpur), Apr 12: The Prime Minister today said the programmes of her government were for the poor, and vowed to go ahead with them despite the obstacles being created by the opposition through hartals and destructive activities, reports UNB.

Pointing out the baneful impact of shutdowns and blockades, Begum Khaleda Zia said foreign investors felt shy to invest in Bangladesh because of the political unrest caused by frequent hartals, the damaging of vehicles, arson and destruction of public property.

She said her party's programmes and policies are aimed at serving the nation and changing the lot of the downtrodden.

The Prime Minister was addressing a mammoth public meeting at the Shukurhat High School ground in Mithapukur thana. Begum Zia said the people

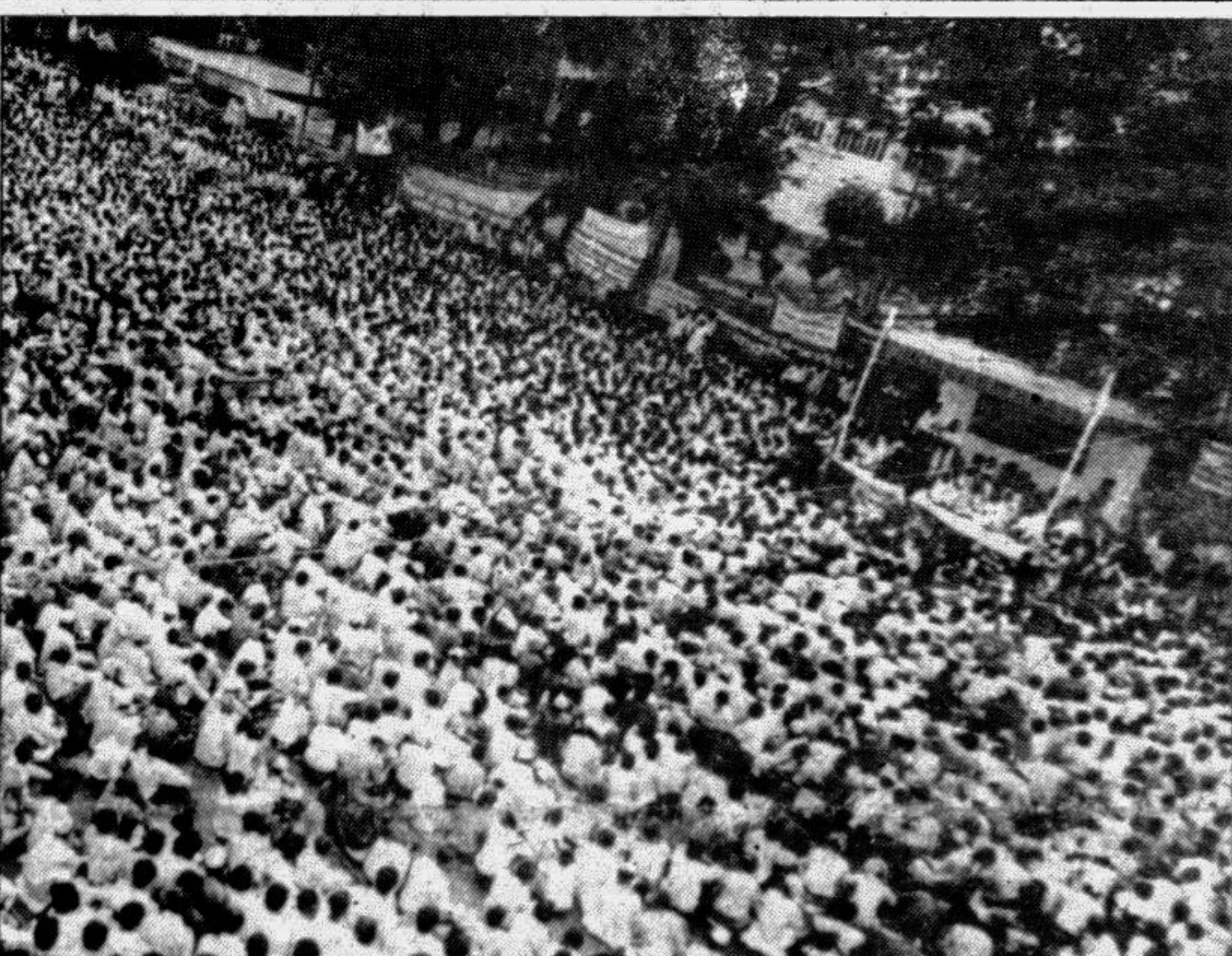
no longer have any confidence in the opposition which had become isolated from them. "Are they friends of the people? Are they patriots? Do they want development? Do they want to alleviate poverty?" she asked.

Without naming any particular party, she alleged that they were trying to push the country backward by creating indiscipline and anarchy. "They talk about poverty alleviation but do not want it. They don't want development of the country, education, economic uplift."

The Prime Minister alleged that some parties without any people-oriented programmes were indulging in 'the politics of killing, dead bodies and indiscipline... People don't support them for their anti-development activities.'

Begum Zia urged the opposition to shun the 'politics of destruction' and concentrate on nation-building activities

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A rally organised by the Shikhhak Sangram (Teachers' Movement) liaison committee in front of the National Press Club yesterday was attended by thousands of non-government secondary school and college teachers from across the country. — Star photo

Non-govt school, college teachers' ultimatum

By Staff Correspondent

Teachers of non-government schools and colleges will begin an indefinite strike on April 18 if their 15-point charter of demands was not accepted.

At a huge rally organised by six different associations of teachers and the Shikhhak Sangram Liaison Committee in the city yesterday, the teachers expressed their deep resentment at the government's 'reluctance to accept' their demands raised 26 months ago.

The rally held in front of the National Press Club and attended by some 7000 teachers from across the country was chaired by the President of the Bangladesh Shikhhak Samity, Prof Kamruzzaman. It was addressed by a member of the liaison committee, Prof Md Mansurur Rahman, convener

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WB suggests closing down of 5 more jute mills

By Staff Correspondent

The World Bank (WB) Resident Representative, CR Willoughby, on Tuesday suggested the closing down of another five jute mills and downsizing one mill under the Jute Sector Adjustment Credit (JSAC) programme.

He was speaking at a workshop on the JSAC programme in Dhaka yesterday. Emphasising the need for quick implementation of the interim financing arrangements of the mills, he said, any delay would adversely affect the viability of the jute sector.

Jute Minister ASM Hannan Shah, while inaugurating the two-day long workshop, called for exploring the possibility of developing the jute sector by diversified use of jute and jute goods like pulp, geo-jute and

specialised packing materials. "We shall have to take advantage of the growing awareness around the world about the harmful effects of synthetic products," the minister observed.

The JSAC programme, now under implementation, aims at doing away with the excess capacity of the jute industry by

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closing nine public mills, downsizing two mills, and retrenching 20000 employees of the jute mills in the public sector.

Hannan Shah expressed grave concern over the persistent decline of the jute export and said the competitive edge of jute products has also

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CHT truce extended

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Apr 12: Shantibahini leaders reportedly agreed to extend the ceasefire for another month until May 15 to facilitate the ongoing peace-talks for a political solution to the CHT issue.

The ceasefire now in force in CHT will end on April 15. However, the agreement for further extension of the ceasefire came following a proposal sent to the leaders of the Shantibahini recently, sources said.

The Shantibahini leaders also proposed to the government to set another date for holding the seventh round of dialogue.

The sixth round of dialogue between the leaders of the Shantibahini and nine-member Parliamentary Committee was held on November 24.

Serbs threaten to down allied jets

JABUKA (Bosnia), Apr 12: Bosnian Serb leaders, anticipating further NATO air strikes, warned today that their forces will shoot down allied planes if threatened again, reports Reuters.

"The supreme command has given orders to soldiers that every plane that flies at them should be downed," Bosnian Serb army commander General Ratko Mladic told his troops during a tour of a front line near the Muslim town of Gorazde.

Mladic was accompanied by Bosnian Serb leader Radovan

Karadzic on a morale-boosting visit a day after NATO launched a second air strike on Serb positions in the area.

"There will certainly be more air strikes but the morale of the Serb army is exceptional," Mladic said.

President Yeltsin told the West today that any attempt to resolve the Bosnian crisis by force would lead to 'war for ever', reports Reuters.

"I am convinced that the resolution there should be only political talks," Yeltsin told a news conference on the second day of a three-day official

visit to Spain.

"The task there cannot be resolved by force. It will be war for ever."

Yeltsin also indicated Russia could link its joining NATO's partnership for peace plan for military cooperation with the developments in Bosnia.

"We are not making a direct link but we are also in no hurry to sign," he said.

Meanwhile, the Serbs blocked UN traffic, placed observers under virtual house arrest and laid mines around UN weapons collection sites in

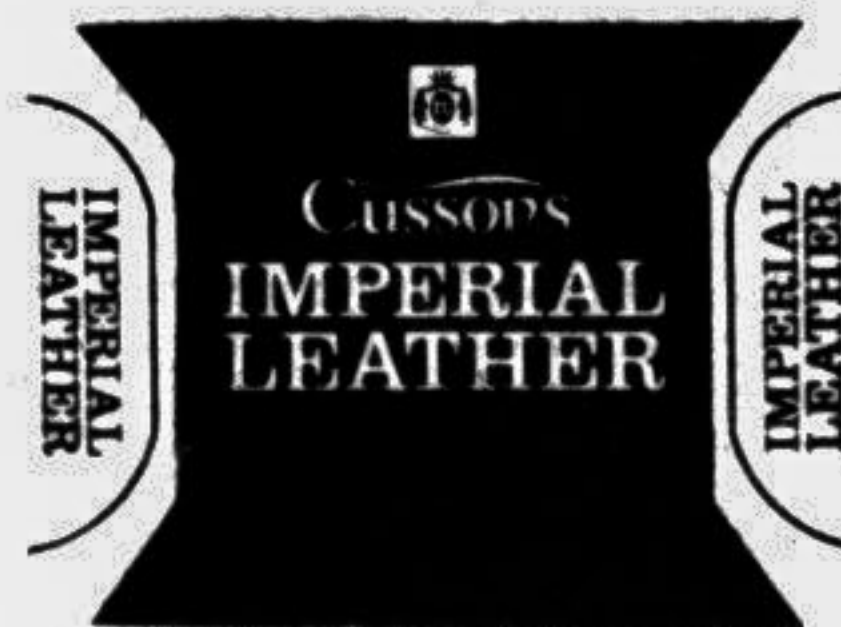
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