



Awami League chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina addressing a press conference at the Sangsad Bhavan yesterday. Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdus Samad Azad is seen on her left - Star photo

Russia to buy jute

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month from the date of delivery of the exported goods. However, he pointed out, if the repayment falls overdue then it would be adjusted against the power sector loans earlier made by the former USSR. The loans were mostly given to Bangladesh in the 70s and the repaid amount is currently being held with the Sonali Bank as legal complications are yet to be straightened out following the break-up of the USSR, the minister said.

Replying to a question he, however, said he did not know the exact amount of the outstanding loan owed to the former USSR, but added the amount was substantial.

On his visit to the Euro-parliament in Strasbourg, France the Jute Minister said, the purpose was to lobby for amending a bill - EC packaging directive - introduced recently which went against jute goods.

The bill contained certain clauses which went against the use of jute. The Bangladesh delegation, however, was able to convince EC officials to introduce an amendment to exclude jute from the directive by clearly labelling it as a biodegradable and environment-friendly natural fibre, the minister said.

The Jute Minister said the direct exports by BJMC mills increased by 19 per cent in value to Tk 171 crore during the July-October period of the current fiscal compared to the corresponding period of 1993-94. The total sale of jute goods of BJMC also jumped by 62 per cent during the same period. Steps have been taken to increase overall production because of the increased volume of foreign sale and exports, he added.

Responding to another question, the minister said that due to the continuing load-shedding in electric supply, the 27 BJMC mills suffered a production loss of 4,918 tonnes worth about Tk 11 crore during the July-October period of 1994-95.

He attributed the improved performance of the public sector jute mills to the reform measures initiated under the World Bank-aided 250 million-dollar jute sector restructuring project (JSRP) started last year.

Asked about the progress of the JSRP, he said, four BJMC jute mills have already been closed down in a bid to reduce excess capacity, but further planned reduction of another 1200-1500 looms before December is being stalled because of increasing demand and the lack of private sector initiatives to meet the demand.

When his attention was drawn towards the possibility that the World Bank may not release the second tranche of the credit, due in December, if the agreed programmes are not implemented, the Jute Minister said: 'If we are pressured, then we will reconsider it.'

He noted that 20,000 workers and employees of BJMC have already been retrained while a training programme is also being initiated for the others.

About the progress of privatising 14 of the public sector jute mills, the minister said, it is up to the Privatisation Board under the Prime Minister's Secretariat.

Drought in Kurigram

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days' foodstuff," said Balajan, who has three children.

Nazrul Haq, Abed Ali and Jamaluddin all from char areas who used to work as labourers were now jobless.

A good number of people of Manushmar char, Amtola char, Shakhilhat char and Bultibondar Khata char of Chilmari had left their homes for different places in search of jobs. The Thana Cooperative Officer, engaged in relief operation there, told this correspondent.

The worst victim are the people of Manushmar char where a newspaper reported, one person had died from starvation," he said. The report resulted in a special sanction of relief for the area, he added. Some 8,000 people of the area relief materials were distributed thrice in the last three months, the latest on October 19.

"To keep the vulnerable people alive, relief operations are needed every week," he said.

Amiruddin, 35, of Kurantani village of Rajarhat thana, is jobless for the last few months. None hired Amir, a day labourer, during this time. He used to work in farm lands for Taka 12 a day.

Amir said he did not get any VGD card for relief and alleged at least Tk 200 was needed to bribe those concerned to get a card.

"I'm now planning to go to Rangpur or Dhaka to make a living by pulling rickshaw. But I am yet to collect transport fare to go there," he said.

Aleef of the same village said he had received relief wheat four times, four kg each time, in the last two months.

At Panga of Rajarhat, Sukhlal Rabi Das, a cobbler, said he had no work and failed to manage any alternate job. "I went to the UP office several times for relief but they claimed having received no sanction," Rabi alleged.

"Even the well off farmers are now trouble as the drought has claimed their crops," said Abdul Hakim, a college student.

A number of people of Najim Khan union of Ulipur thana alleged that the local authorities concerned were misappropriating relief items and were distributing those only among people of their choice. False cases were filed against persons who protested this, they added.

Monzur Morshed, a JCD leader, said that they had boycotted the JCD conference at Rangpur protesting the such corrupt practices. He further said they had informed the BNP leaders about this but no measure was taken as yet.

We found long queues for buying rice and wheat at fair price at Ulipur bazar. Rice was being sold at Tk 10.50 per kg and wheat at Tk 7 per kg and the per head allocation of both rice and wheat is 3 kg.

Majid, an Awami League leader, said the daily allocation of one ton of rice and 500 kg of wheat was inadequate to meet the growing demand.

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Hasina

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the path of confrontation by avoiding a settlement through dialogue, she said.

"This attitude will not bring any good for the country," she said adding, "We hope good sense will prevail upon the government and they will accept the people's demand."

Questioning the government's negative attitude to the proposed neutral caretaker government, Hasina said BNP is opposed to caretaker government as it lost the confidence of the people for its corruption and misrule.

She alleged that BNP wanted to continue in power by rigging the elections and using black money, musclemen and the administration.

Asked if she had received any proposal from Commonwealth envoy Sir Ninian Stephen, she replied in negative. "We have put forward our demand. It now depends on the government."

Earlier, Hasina had a meeting with other opposition leaders at her Parliament office.

Abdus Samad Azad, Tofael Ahmed, Mohammad Nasim and Suranjit Sengupta of the AL, Anwar Hossain Monju and Advocate Fazle Rabbi of the Jatiya Party, Maulana Abdus Sobhan of the Jamaat and Obaidul Huq of the Islami Oikya Jote were present at the meeting.

The opposition parties yesterday separately announced identical programmes of fresh agitation to realise their demand for a caretaker government.

AL rally

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going Commonwealth-brokered talks, he said, and blamed the ruling party for making things complicated.

Referring to the dropping of Nazmul Huda from the cabinet, the AL leader commented such action would fail to suppress the BNP leaders who support the Opposition's legitimate demand. "Fall of this government is inevitable."

"We demand polls under a neutral government because it has been proved that none can vote freely with the BNP in power," he repeated.

Admitting that hartals caused suffering to the rich-shawpullers, small traders and others, Razzak said, "Your sacrifice will be rewarded when your right to vote is established."

Chaired by city AL vice-president Reazuddin Ahmed, the rally, held an hour before yesterday's dawn-to-dusk hartal ended, was also addressed by Advocate Shahara Khatun, Nurul Islam Nahid, Dr. Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Akhterul Alam, Kamrul Islam, Siddique Rouf Khan, Kamal Chowdhury, Nasibat Ahmed and others.

Nurul Islam, in his speech, said the BNP leaders, including some ministers, were now supporting the Opposition demand just to save themselves from the public wrath. "They have understood it very well that they have no option but to accept the demand."

Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya alleged that "terrorists" from the residence of Mirza Abbas, MP attacked an AL procession during yesterday's hartal in the city injuring Humayun, Azhar and others.

48-hr hartal

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The AL will observe December 6 as 'Democracy Day', the JP as 'Constitution Protection Day' and the Jamaat as 'Liberate Democracy Day'.

Incidentally, Dec 6 coincides with the fourth anniversary of the stepping down of H M Ershad as president in the face of an unprecedented mass uprising against the then Jatiya Party government.

Reception to British MP

By Staff Correspondent

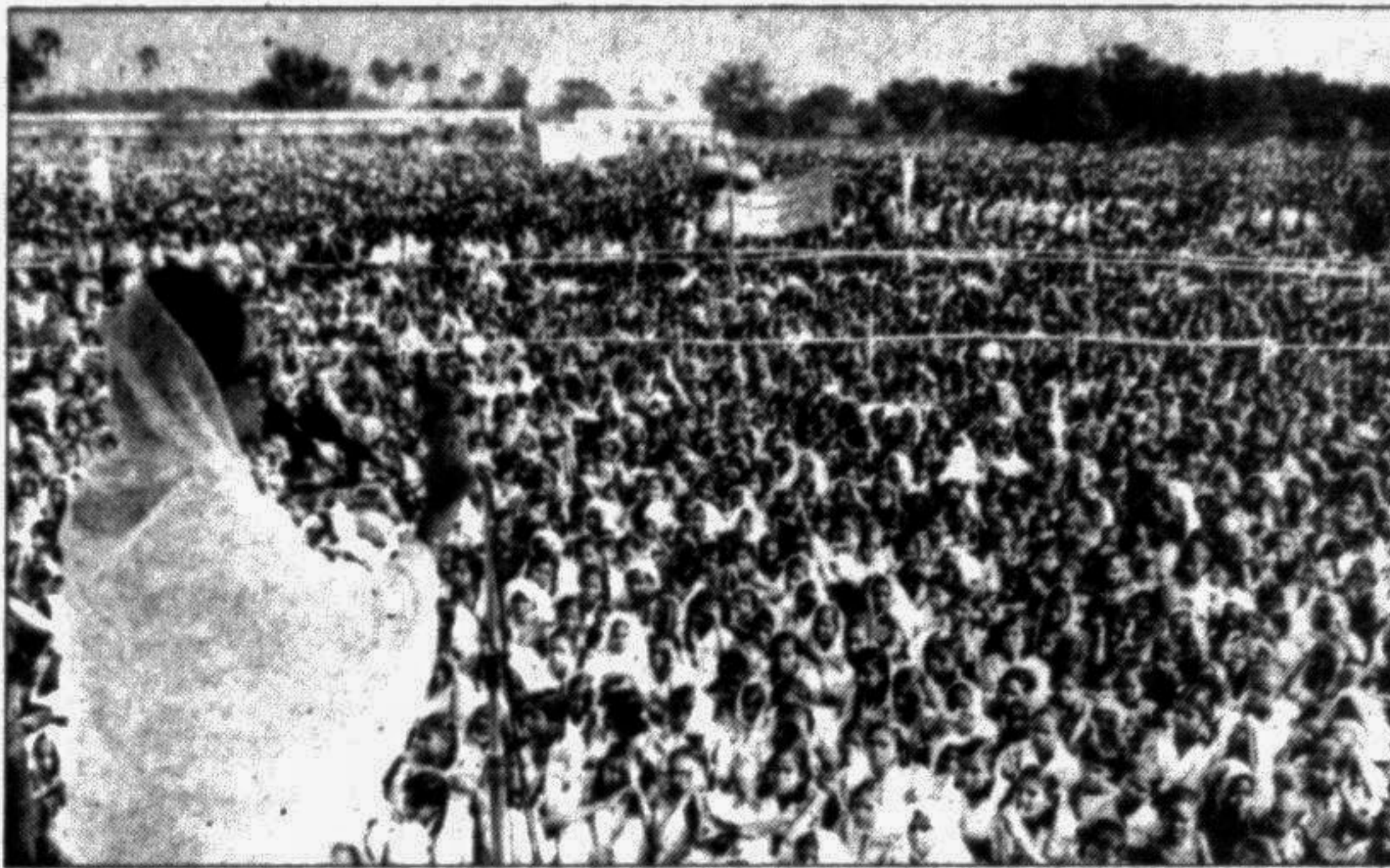
Tony Baldry, MP and British Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, yesterday said the influx of foreign goods was forcing Bangladesh's industries to consider how to compete, which "can only benefit Dhaka in the long term."

Speaking at a reception hosted by the Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Baldry felt that the signs show that Bangladesh is keen to meet the challenge by calling for increased participation in the economy.

"In doing so, they are echoing a call which we in Britain have been making for some years now."

Baldry said that British companies are keen to make 'the most of Bangladesh's new freer market' and forty-five companies have already invested in Bangladesh.

The visiting Under Secretary of State for the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office mentioned a catalogue of activities in which British companies were involved 'in Bangladesh's economic growth in several ways.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia addressing a huge public meeting at the Porsha College ground in Naogaon district yesterday - PID photo

Indo-Bangla border confce ends Both sides agree to curb cross-border crimes

The annual border co-ordination conference between Bangladesh and India concluded in the city yesterday with both sides agreeing to co-operate in containing cross-border crimes and smuggling, reports UNB.

The conference, held in a cordial atmosphere, decided to exchange information between the two countries about smuggling and smugglers, said a BDR press release.

Trans-border crimes figured as the key issue at the conference where both sides agreed to identify and take effective measures to curb them, the release said.

Issues including push-in, smuggling, killings, dacoity, kidnapping, trespassing, violation of border lines, disputed land, cattle lifting, maintenance of border pillars, law and order situation in the border areas and allied matters came up for discussion at the meeting.

The Director General of Bangladesh Rifles Major General Mohammad Anwar Hossain BP Psc led the Bangladesh delegation while the Indian side was led by D K Arya IPS, the Director General of Border Security Force (BSF).

They also decided to hold regular meetings between the two forces to resolve the matters requiring immediate attention.

Sharif's father arrested

LAHORE (Pakistan), Nov 13: Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) arrested the father of national opposition leader Nawaz Sharif here today, a move likely to intensify political tension in the country, reports AFP.

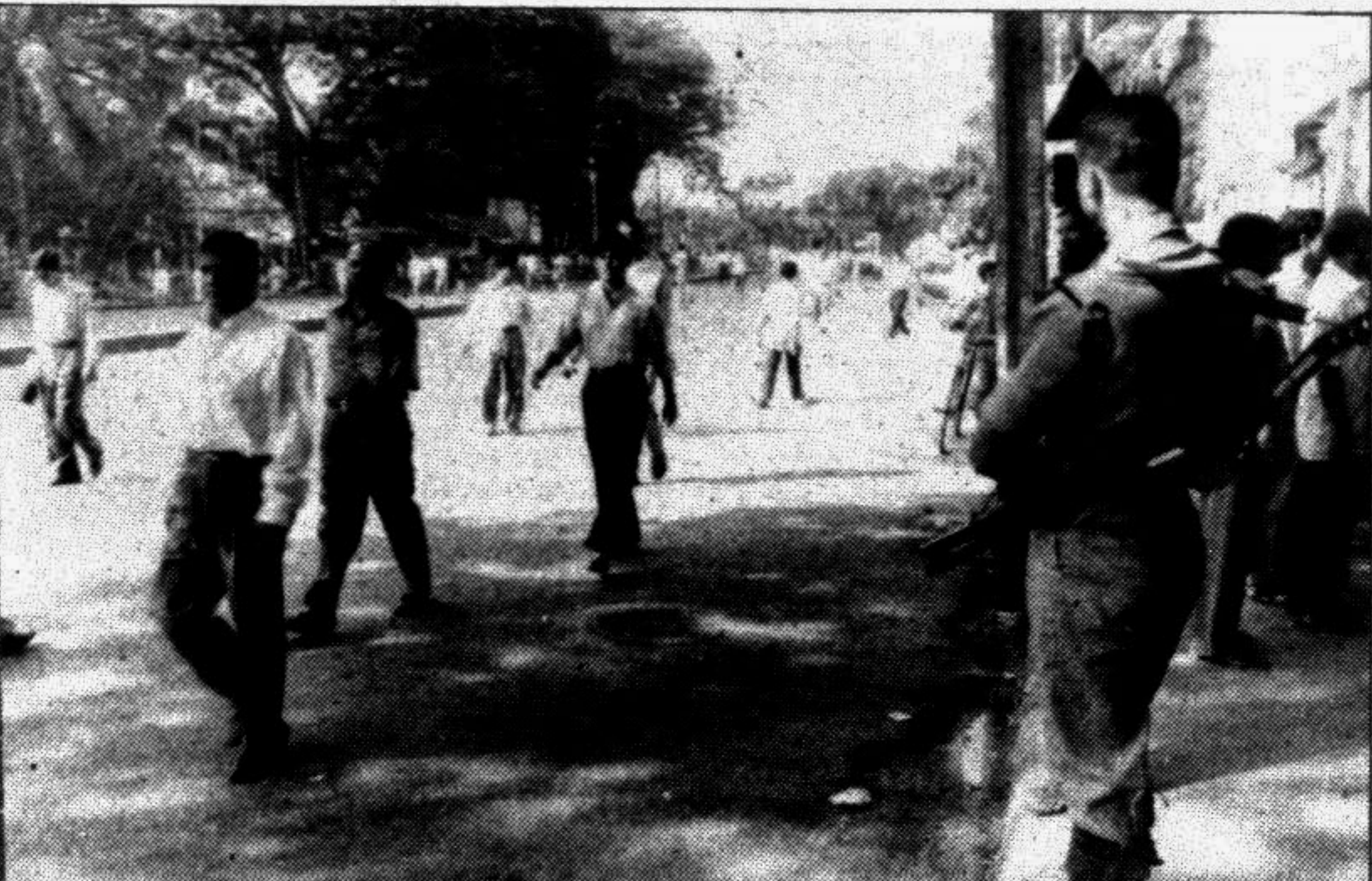
The charges against Mian Mohammad Sharif, a leading industrialist, were not immediately known.

Ninian conveys

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Senior leaders from both camps expressed their optimism that the process may take a concrete shape within a couple of days.

Meanwhile, two of Sir Ninian's aides, Dr Anafu and Christopher Childs, had the validity of their visas extended up to December 9, diplomatic sources said.



The Topkhana Road in front of the Press Club during the countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal yesterday - Star photo

Countrywide hartal observed

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near the Farmgate prevented the delegation from heading towards the old airport. Security personnel escorting the delegation dispersed the activists.

Our Staff Correspondent in Barisal reports: Ten persons including a police constable were injured when a group of BNP activists allegedly attacked the JP office in Bhola at 10 am yesterday, witnesses said, clashes, marked by cocktail blasts and chase and counter chase left two persons seriously injured. The two - Madan and Abdur Rab - were admitted to Bhola Hospital.

At least 17 persons were injured in clashes between activists of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and Bangladesh Chhatra League in Khepupara under Patuakhali district at noon.

Of the injured, five were admitted to Khepupara thana health complex. They are Khalil, Kamal, Bullet, Masud and Joj.

In Pirozpur district, 13 persons including a police sub-inspector were injured in clashes between activists of the BNP and the AL in Kalkhali thana, Swarupkathi, Mathbari and Hularhat thana. Three of them, Selim, Kamal and Lutfor, were admitted to different health complexes.

In Dhaka, the AL, the JP and the Jamaat-e-Islami held separate rallies.

In front of the Jatiya Press Club, Kotwali thana AL held a rally at about 11.30 am, Jatiya Juba Sanghati and Secchasebak Party at 11.45 am, Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) at noon, city AL also at noon and JP at 12.45 pm.

Shops, offices, banks and educational institutions including schools and colleges remained closed and all vehicles except rickshaws remained off the streets during the hartal hours yesterday.

Rickshaws and a small number of auto rickshaws started plying after 12 noon.

Railway sources said, some inter-city trains faced barricades at some points in different parts of the country. A Dhaka-bound train from Chittagong was delayed for two and a half hours due to barricades at three points between Feni and Chittagong. A Sylhet-bound train from Dhaka was also delayed on its way similarly, the sources added.

No inter-district buses and coaches arrived in or left the capital until evening. River communication with Dhaka was also disrupted although some launches were seen leaving the Sadarghat terminal in the evening.

According to Biman sources, out of the 10 domestic flights, four were cancelled while international flights of the Biman and other foreign airlines were rescheduled due to hartal.

Our Staff Correspondent in Chittagong reports: A dawn-to-dusk hartal paralysed normal life in this port city. No untoward incident was reported. The hartal passed off almost peacefully.

Activities at the country's major port came to a standstill. Loading and unloading of cargo and delivery of goods to and from the port were hampered during the hartal period, port sources said.

All kinds of vehicles stayed off the roads and highways while rickshaws began plying from noon.

Shopping centres and business houses remained closed. Offices - both private and public - were mostly closed.

Mills and factories at the industrial belts here could not operate normally due to thin attendance of workers.

Our Correspondent in Khulna adds: Life was paralysed due to a day-long hartal. Picketings and small processions by AL and BCL supporters marked the hartal.

Security forces were deployed at all important points in the city to face any eventuality.

Our Staff Correspondent in Sylhet reports: A dawn-to-dusk hartal was observed in all the four districts of greater Sylhet region. Government and private offices, educational institutions and commercial banks mostly remained closed.

In Sylhet town, Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat brought out separate processions and held rallies.

Peaceful hartal was also observed in Hobiganj, Sunamganj, and Moulvibazar districts.

Oil exploration

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and Holland Sea Search arrived in the city Saturday with a high-level British trade delegation.

Petrobangla source added that representatives of the British Gas Company and Lasmo Ltd, two oil giants of the UK, have also arrived with the delegation and met high officials of the Energy Ministry and Petrobangla.

The Midnight File

Algerian plane hijackers surrender

PALMA DE MALLORCA, Spain, Nov 13: Three men who hijacked an Algerian airliner today freed all 31 passengers and four crew members in Palma de Mallorca and gave themselves up, a spokesman for the airport on the Balearic island said. The hijackers seized the plane during a domestic flight in Algeria and forced it to fly to the Spanish island of Mallorca in the Mediterranean, reports AFP.

GCC to beef up jt military force

RIYADH, Nov 13: Gulf Arab defence ministers agreed on the need to beef up their joint military force, the Peninsula Shield, during a meeting which ended here today. Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz said. He denied reports of "differences of opinion" on the issue among the defence ministers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman, reports UNB.

Musician

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he had come to his (Khaleda's) shop with Tk 45,000 at around 3:30 pm Thursday.

Khaleda did not inform anyone of the incident until he was picked up and detained by Dhanmondi police for questioning Friday evening.



Noni Gopal Hawladar

Noni Gopal's elder sister, Chhabi Roy, lodged a general diary with the Dhanmondi police Friday morning as her brother did not return home the previous night.

Following Khaleda's statement, police arrested four persons for alleged involvement in the killing. They are: Mostafa, Mohammad Ali alias Selim, Sharif and Khaleda's brother Hossain.

Permanent haji camp to be set up in Ashkona

A permanent haji camp will be set up at Ashkona, eastward of the Zia International Airport, to meet the long-felt demand of the people, reports UNB.

The government has undertaken comprehensive measures to set up the haji camp, said an official announcement yesterday.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is expected to formally lay the foundation stone of the camp Wednesday morning.

The permanent haji camp will be constructed in an area of five acres of land.

Raphel, Benazir talk Kashmir issue

ISLAMABAD, Nov 13: US Assistant Secretary of State Robin Raphel held talks with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto here today on relations with Pakistan and nuclear non-proliferation, Pakistani officials said, reports AFP.

The situation in the Indian controlled part of Kashmir where security forces have been battling a Muslim separatist movement also came up for discussion, they said.

15 Shibir activists held at Sitakunda

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Nov 13: Police in a crackdown Saturday midnight (last night) recovered 18 pigeons, 6 swords and some ammunition from Alia Madrasah at Sitakunda Bazar.

Fifteen activists of the Islami Chhatra Shibir were arrested from the madrasah for allegedly possessing these illegal weapons.

Police raided Alia Madrasah immediately after a four-hour long clash between the supporters of Chhatra Dal and Chhatra Shibir that left at least 20 persons injured.

Industrial park

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The agreement was signed by the Prestabina Sdn Bhd, an investment company of Malaysia and Sigma Group of Associates and Companies of South Korea. Haji Arifen Bin Kendut, Chairman and Park Dong, Group Managing Director signed it on behalf of their respective companies.

Bangladesh high commissioner Mahboob Alam, who attended the function highlighted the attractive incentives offered by the government for foreign investors.

Toxic gas

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300 people, mostly the old and children, were admitted to two hospitals nearby.

A police spokesman said some residents had set fire to sacks which contained plastic bags carrying traces of an unidentified chemical in order to warm themselves.

"When the flames began leaping up, someone threw water on the fire," the spokesman said. "Immediately, it formed into a gas and let out toxic fumes that spread very fast."

Govt employees call off strike

The non-gazetted government employees (Class III and IV) yesterday decided to call off strike after 'fruitful discussion' with Labour and Manpower Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, reports UNB.

The decision was reached around midnight after hectic discussion that began at 5 pm at the residence of the minister, Labour Ministry sources said.

The employees were represented at the talks by the leaders of the Liaison Committee of Sarkari Karmachari Samannay Parishad and Sarkari Karmachari Sanghati Parishad.

SMCH non-gazetted employees begin indefinite strike

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Nov 13: The non-gazetted employees of the Sylhet MAG Osmany Medical College Hospital began a strike for an indefinite period this morning demanding the transfer of the director of the hospital, Colonel Fahim Ahmed Chowdhury, for his alleged misbehaviour with employees.

They alleged that the director manhandled a ward boy this morning during the five-hour work abstention.

The employees also held a rally to press their demand for transfer of the director of the hospital.

A hospital official when contacted, confirmed the work abstention by the non-gazetted staff.

Govt urged to start functioning of Sylhet Division

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Nov 13: The Sylhet Division Implementation and Greater Sylhet Development Council has called upon the government to take steps for functioning of the newly formed administrative division.

A meeting of the committee was held Saturday night with Syed Abu Nosor in the chair. The meeting was also attended by the leaders of all four districts of the region. The meeting noted with regret that although the Prime Minister had declared the creation of Sylhet division on September 24 this year, no effective step has been taken so far in this regard.

They called upon the government to start functioning of the division by November 30 otherwise, a bigger agitation would be launched, they declared.

Syed Mohsin Ali, chairman, Moulvibazar Pourashava, Shahid Chowdhury, chairman, Habiganj Pourashava, Iqbal Ahmed Chowdhury, advocate, Syed Jainal Abedin, advocate, and Golam Rabbani Chowdhury addressed the meeting.

Barapukuria coal mine project to begin by July '95

Energy Minister Dr Khondker Mosharraf Hossain told the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday that the implementation of the core project of Barapukuria coal mine would begin by July, 1995, reports BSS.

Replying to a question from ruling party member Sirajul Islam (Pabna-4), the minister said that the total stock of coal in the country so far discovered, would be 2100 million tons. He said the estimated stock of peat coal would be 170 million tons while that of lime stone 300 million tons. The stock of China clay discovered so far would be 28 million tons, he stated.

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