

PM: 4 BNP leaders

From Page 1
on fire, tracks were uprooted soon after the country was liberated.

"It will be a wrong assessment if one finds our magnanimity as a sign of weakness," said Hasina.

She claimed that her government was an unique one in the sense that unlike all other previous governments, it did not arrest opponents for political reasons. "Governments of Zia, Ershad and Khaleda did arrest their political opponents soon after assuming power," she said.

Bangladesh's assets lying with Pakistan and repatriation of stranded Pakistanis (Biharis). "We discussed creation of fund for early repatriation of Biharis."

About the OIC summit, Sheikh Hasina said, "We discussed the progress of Islamic Ummah in the context of the coming 21st century. Our discussion focused on united advancement of the Muslim World."

She said that she had talks with some of the OIC leaders on the sidelines of the summit. The leaders, she talked to included President Faruq Ahmed Leghari, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and former prime minister Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Irani President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, Crown Princes of Oman and Saudi Arabia, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia and Kuwait. She said that she pursued her government's policy of 'economic diplomacy' during talks with them.

She replied in the negative when a newsman asked if her Pakistan visit was aimed at balancing her government's relationship with India. "Soon after we came to power, we began to explore scopes for developing relationship with all our neighbouring countries as well as other countries because Bangladesh had become almost friendless in the international arena."

About reported attacks on mosques in Myanmar, Sheikh Hasina said she mill comment on it after checking the information with Bangladesh ambassador in that country.

To another question, Sheikh Hasina said, her government is yet to take any decision regarding recent demands by some quarters for making Sunday the weekly holiday instead of Friday.

Sheikh Hasina ruled out any link between the hartal call and the arrest of four BNP leaders recently. She said that the government had "enough information" that those BNP leaders were involved in "destructive activities." It is true that they themselves did not participate in such activities but, they might have organised the same. She referred to the recent collapse of two towers of the East-West Interconnector Line and strike call at Chittagong port and said, "They tried to create a situation in the country."

When a newsman said that so far police could not produce any evidence of destructive activity against the arrested BNP leaders, Sheikh Hasina said, "We have information, law will take its own course." Prime Minister, however, brushed aside any possibility of enacting new laws to check destructive activities saying, "existing laws are enough."

Replying to another question, the Prime Minister said that Pakistan had no objection about the proposed sub-regional grouping as formation of such grouping is permitted under the SAARC Charter.

She also said that during her talks with Pakistani leaders she raised the issues of

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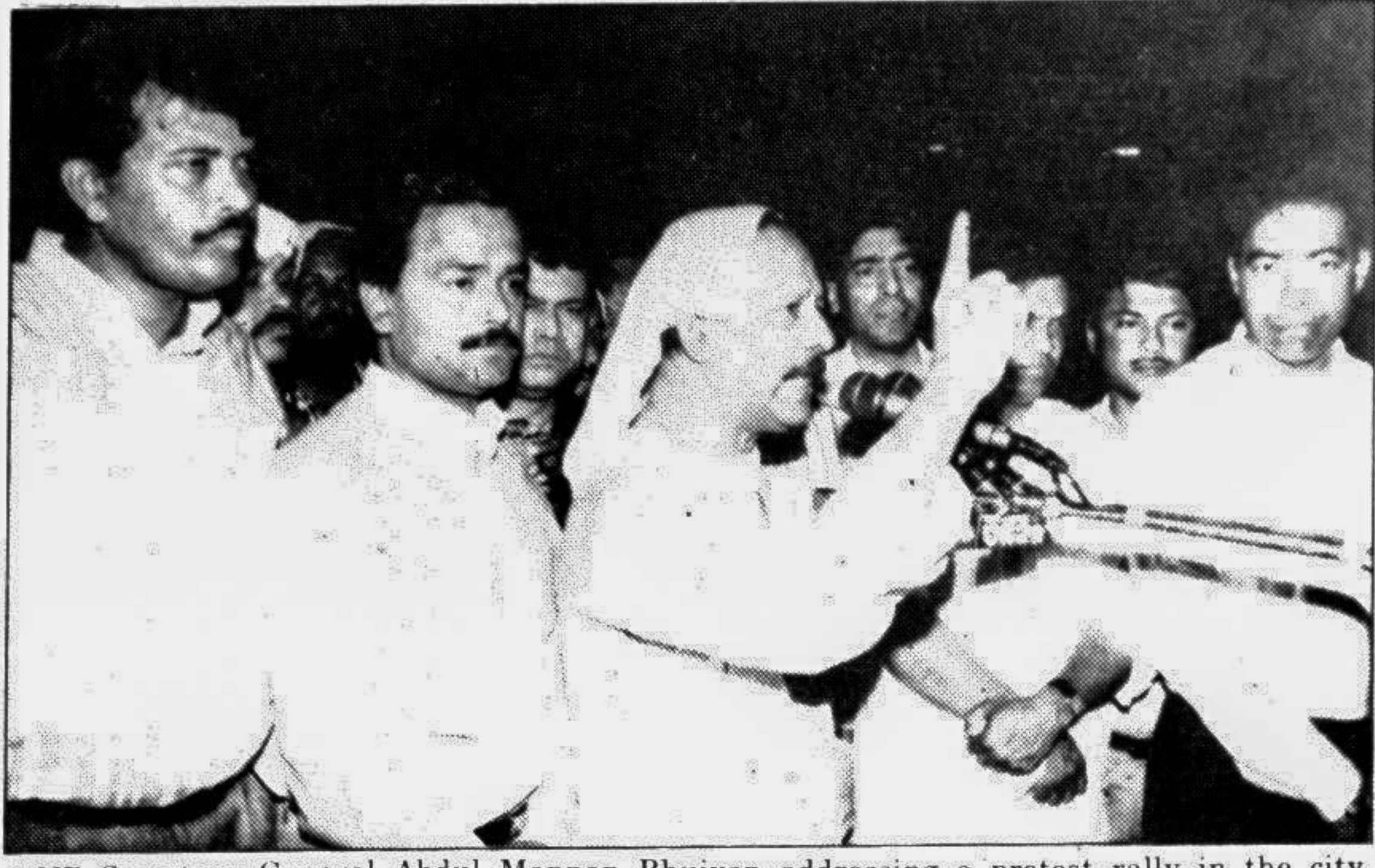
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BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan addressing a protest rally in the city yesterday. —Star photo

Bangabandhu murder

From Page 1
ceedings. The permission was given by his lawyer TM Akbar.

The accused were also seen talking to their legal counsels for some time after the proceedings.

Unlike on past occasions, no processionists were seen around the court premises yesterday when the accused were brought to the court or taken back to the jail.

At one stage of the proceedings when one of the accused, Shahriar Rashid Khan, was submitting before the court, a lawyer drew the attention of the court, suggesting not to hear the accused for a long time.

He was identified as Shaiful Alam. He said that he was one of the lawyers appointed as state defence. The court ordered him out of the court saying, "how could such a person be appointed a defence lawyer?"

The public prosecutor, however, informed the court he was not listed among the 14 lawyers appointed by the government for the absconders.

During yesterday's proceedings, the defence counsels also sought the copies of confessional statements and retraction statements.

Shifting of the district judge's court for this particular case was also challenged by Khan Saifur Rahman, defence lawyer for one of the accused.

The six accused were put on the dock with hand cuffs which were later removed by the order of the judge following appeal by Mahbubur Rahman, defence

counsel of Begum Zobaïda Rashid, wife of an absconding accused, former military officer Abdur Rashid Khandaker.

At the dock, the accused were also given chairs to sit during the three-hour proceedings which began at around 11:10 am.

The accused include former military officers Sayed Farookur Rahman, Shahriar Rashid Khan, Mohiuddin Ahmed, Wahab Joarder, former minister Taheruddin Thakur and Begum Zobaïda Rashid.

Begum Zobaïda was represented by Advocate Mahbubur Rahman while Taheruddin Thakur, Farook, Shariar, Mohiuddin and Joarder were represented by S M Mukul, Saifur Rahman, Habibur Rahman, Mandal TM Akbar and Anwar Zahid Miah respectively.

The prosecution side led by Special Public Prosecutor Serajul Huq was assisted by Anisul Huq, Towfika Karim, Mosharraf Hossain Kajol.

Anisul Huq later talking to The Daily Star said that the court had given order to the defence side to inspect the confessional statements on March 22 from 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm.

According to Anis, defence lawyers of only three of the accused had turned up on that day.

One killed while making bomb

One person was killed and another injured in an explosion when they were making bomb at Kamalapur in the city on Sunday night, Sabujbagh police said, reports BSS.

Shubhash Chandra Das, 25, son of Shudrshan Chandra Das and Mohammad Ali, 26, son of Chan Mia received serious injuries when the bombs they were making exploded at a Kamalapur slum on Sunday night, police said.

They were rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where Shubhash Chandra died. The right limb of Mohammad Ali was blown up.

City BNP

From Page 1
organisations and pro-BNP DCC commissioners to attend the meeting, said a press release yesterday.

Meanwhile, Sadeq Hossain said countrymen through Sunday's hartal proved that they had no more confidence in the present government which 'endangered' independence, democracy and public life and property.

Spontaneously responding to the BNP's hartal call to protect those, the people expressed their desire to get rid of concerns and despair created during its (Awami League's) nine-month reign," he said in a statement yesterday.

The BNP leader demanded release of party workers arrested prior to and during the hartal and withdrawal of all 'false' cases filed against them.

Otherwise, he warned, the government will have to bear the consequence.

3 world leaders due in city today

From Page 1
be given guard of honour at the airport and taken in ceremonial motorcades to the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel where they would be staying.

Official talks between the three leaders and the Bangladesh side would be held separately at the International Conference Centre today.

The first round of official talks will take place with President Demirel and his delegation. The talks will begin at 5:30 pm and may last for one and a half hours.

Talks with President Nelson Mandela is scheduled to take place between 7 and 8 pm and with President Yasser Arafat from 8.15 to 9 pm.

The Bangladesh side at the bilateral talks will be led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who will be aided by the Foreign Minister, State Minister of Foreign Affairs and some top officials.

Expansion of bilateral economic cooperation and exchange of cultural programmes will be the main focus of the official talks between the Dhaka and Ankara, according to official sources. The two countries will chart out areas to expand the existing volume of trade. Last year, Dhaka exported 20 million dollars worth of goods

BNP rally

From Page 1
people's support to BNP's demands and their no confidence against the government's anti-people acts, he told the rally held amid a drizzle.

Condemning the arrests of four top-ranking BNP leaders, Bhuiyan noted that while in power his party did not arrest any leader of the AL that observed hartal for 170 days. "But they (the AL government) have arrested four of our top leaders shortly after we announced the first hartal against them."

He further alleged, "they also attacked our processions and attempted to kill the former home minister during the hartal. This is the way they practice democracy."

The BNP leader also demanded immediate release of all leaders and workers of his party and withdrawal of 'false' cases against them, punishment to those responsible for attacks on the partymen during the hartal, giving autonomy to radio and TV and meeting other demands of the party.

Mannan Bhuiyan urged the party workers to organise demonstrations at all the thanas on March 30 when the next programme would be announced.

Chaired by Abul Hasnat, the rally was also addressed, among others, by Mir Shawqat Ali, Amanullah Aman, MP, Najimuddin Alam, MP, Barqatullah Bhulu, MP, Khurshid Jahan Haq, MP, Khairul Kabir Khokon, Ilias Ali and Habibur Rahman.

EUCSU polls

From Page 1
the JCD panel were declared unofficially elected.

Forty-nine candidates from seven panels, including an independent panel contested for seven posts in the EUCSU.

SSC exams

From Page 1
Replying to a question, he said a small but organised group might be involved in the question-leakage scandal.

He also did not rule out the involvement of political interests to undermine the government. This vested quarters tried to play up the situation and reap political benefit out of it, he said.

"The question of corruption and political motive both might be behind this scandal," he observed.

Sadeque said necessary departmental measures would be taken against the officials and teachers for wrong distribution of question papers at Chokoria in Cox's Bazar and Halaughat in Mymensingh.

Betar, BTW

From Page 1
shan (India) and PTV (Pakistan).

Giving autonomy to Betar and BTW is a political commitment of the present government. It was also a commitment of the previous BNP government. A similar commission was also formed back in 1991, headed by a former cabinet secretary M Mujibul Haque. But the recommendations put forward by the previous commission was not implemented.

A source in the present Commission told The Daily Star that it had already studied the report of the previous commission.

Other members of the Commission are, Dr Anisuzzaman, Dr BK Jahangir, KG Mostafa, Sayed Hasan Imam, Kalim Sharafi, Dr Arefin Siddique, Jamaluddin Hussain, Ramendu Majumder, Asaduzzaman Noor, Additional Secretary and a joint secretary of the Information Ministry, a joint secretary each from the Ministries of Finance and Establishment and DGs of Bangladesh Betar and BTW.

US immigration law

From Page 1
earn at least 125 per cent of the official poverty level in the US, or 19,500 US dollar.

A new Federal study, disclosed last week by the New York Times, said three out of every 10 immigrants taking part in a survey said their income level was below the poverty level.

Like their Indian counterparts, at least one fourth of all Bangladeshi immigrant families have their annual income well below the poverty level.

Many potential sponsors will also be discouraged by a provision of the new law which requires that they remain responsible for supporting the sponsored persons until they become US citizens or pay taxes for ten years.

Human rights activists worry that many immigrants, unable to secure a legal status, may choose to become illegal and thus greatly diminish their value in the job market.

Murshed Alam, who holds an elected office and is active in New York City's Democratic Party, told UNB that there was an urgent need for the immigrant groups to join hands and put pressure on the Government.

Antiques worth Tk 10 cr recovered

KHULNA, Mar 24: Khulna sector Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) recovered six pieces of 'shiblinga' made of touchstone (koshi pathar) worth about Taka ten crore and weighing about 96 kg today from a village under Ab-hoyanagar police station of Jessore district, BDR sources said, reports BSS.

A contingent of BDR raided Baikara village at about 10:30 am and recovered the shiblinga from the house of one Amir Uddin, the sources said.

Repatriation

From Page 1
ceived by the head and the members of the national committee and the officials concerned.

They will be sent to their respective homes soon after their return.

Meanwhile, UNB Khagrachhari correspondent said chairman of the National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts Abul Hasnat Abdullah yesterday visited reception camps set up for the tribal refugees.

A six-member Indian team will visit Khagrachhari today to see the arrangements for the repatriation of the refugees.

The Indian officials will visit transit points at Ramgarh and Tabalchhari and reception camps.

They will also see villages in Dighinala and Panchari thanas where returnees will be rehabilitated and villages where refugees who returned in 1994 have been resettled.

The Indian officials will hold talks with CHT officials.

40 shanties gutted in city

By Staff Correspondent
At least 40 shanties were gutted and a foam industry was partially damaged in a fire at a slum at Kunipara under Tejgaon police station late Sunday night, according to Fire Service sources.

However, no casualty has been reported.

Officials of the Fire Service and Civil Defence said nine fire tenders rushed to the spot and brought the blaze under control in the early hours of yesterday. The cause of the fire or the extent of damage could not be known.

Armed Forces play last post

From Page 1
7:30 am.

On the occasion, a rally of students, scouts, girls guides and juveniles will be held at 9 am at National Stadium number 1 in the city.

Similar rallies, games, and boat races will be held at the district and thana levels.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will receive the Shikha Anirban, which returns to the capital after running round the country, at Suhrawardy Uddyan and conclude the torch procession at 11 am.

She will also address the nation from the historic ground from where Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib had announced the independence on March 7, 1971.

South African President Nelson Mandela, Palestine President Yasser Arafat and Turkish President Suleyman Demirel will attend the historic function.

On the occasion, an attractive mobile exhibition, mounted on motor vehicles, on the Liberation War and culture will go around the city.

Army, navy, air force, rifles, police and ansars-VDP bands will play at different places. Cultural Ministry will organise functions on patriotic songs.

Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar will put up special programmes while newspapers bring out supplements highlighting the occasion's importance.

Special prayers will be offered at mosques and other

Sharif, Gayoom meet Hasina

ISLAMABAD, Mar 24: Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif made a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Sindh House here this afternoon, reports BSS.

The two prime ministers discussed bilateral issues including enhancement of trade between the two countries.

Later Sharif gave a hearty send-off to his Bangladeshi counterpart at Chaklala Airport when Sheikh Hasina left from home winding up her three-day visit to Pakistan.

Sheikh Hasina arrived in Islamabad on Saturday leading a 27-member delegation to attend the extraordinary session of OIC summit.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Hasina held a meeting with Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom at the national convention centre last night.

They discussed matters relating to bilateral, regional and international issues of common concern.

Besides, Kuwait Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Nasser Al-Rawadhan also called on Sheikh Hasina at the same venue last night.

During the brief discussions, the two leaders agreed to increase trade and economic relations between the two friendly countries. The Kuwait minister expressed eagerness to take more Bangladeshi manpower for the national development of his country.

BNP denies any involvement in removal of rly fishplates

CHITTAGONG, Mar 24: BNP has denied any involvement in the removal of fishplates from railtracks in Chittagong-Dohajari section and demanded immediate formation of an impartial parliamentary committee to probe into the matter, reports UNB.

In a statement today, Chittagong south district BNP president Prof Anwarul Haq Quader and general secretary M A Rahim said no activist of the BNP or its front organisations was involved in the fish-plate removal on Sunday morning.

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