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7-party calls countrywide hartal on April 13

By Staff Correspondent
The BNP-led seven-party alliance has called a dawn-to-dusk hartal across the country on April 13 to protest what it said the government move to give legal coverage to the CHT agreement.
A decision to this effect was taken at a meeting of the alliance with BNP chief and Leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad Begum Khaleda Zia in the chair at her Minto Road official residence yesterday evening.
The alliance also decided to hold a grand rally in the capital on April 27 to register the See Page 12 Col 6

BNP criticises 'sudden move' to place bill on CHT accord

Opposition BNP has criticised the government for its "sudden move" to place a bill on the CHT accord in parliament, reports UNB.
It observed that following the signing of the accord thousands of Indian nationals intruded on the hill tracts region identifying themselves as refugees to get the facilities offered to tribal returnees.
A resolution adopted at an emergency meeting of the party's National Standing Committee on Friday said the government took the move to bring the bill concerning CHT accord despite its assurance of dis- See Page 12 Col 1

BNP procession in support of today's hartal

By Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Apr 4: Hundreds of BNP activists and supporters marched in the city streets this afternoon protesting the police action on their processions on Thursday and Friday and demanding release of arrested party leaders.
A strong contingent of police followed the procession while the marchers chanted slogans demanding justice for the action.
The procession was brought out in support of tomorrow's half-day hartal in the port city, called by the city BNP protesting the police action. President of the Chittagong city unit of BNP Mir Md Nasiruddin was injured in the action.
BNP also organised a protest See Page 12 Col 3

Embezzlement

Police looking for an account holder of Islami Bank
By Staff Correspondent
The Vice-President of Islami Bank Ltd who was arrested Friday night was placed on a one-day remand for further interrogation yesterday.

Besides, police were looking for one KMZ Alam, an account holder at the branch, for his alleged involvement in the embezzlement of about Tk 1.39 crore from Motijheel branch of the bank.
Police arrested Sirajul Islam, the vice president, after a senior vice-president of the bank filed a case on Wednesday against Sirajul and Alam on charges of misappropriating about Tk 1.39 crore through fake vouchers.

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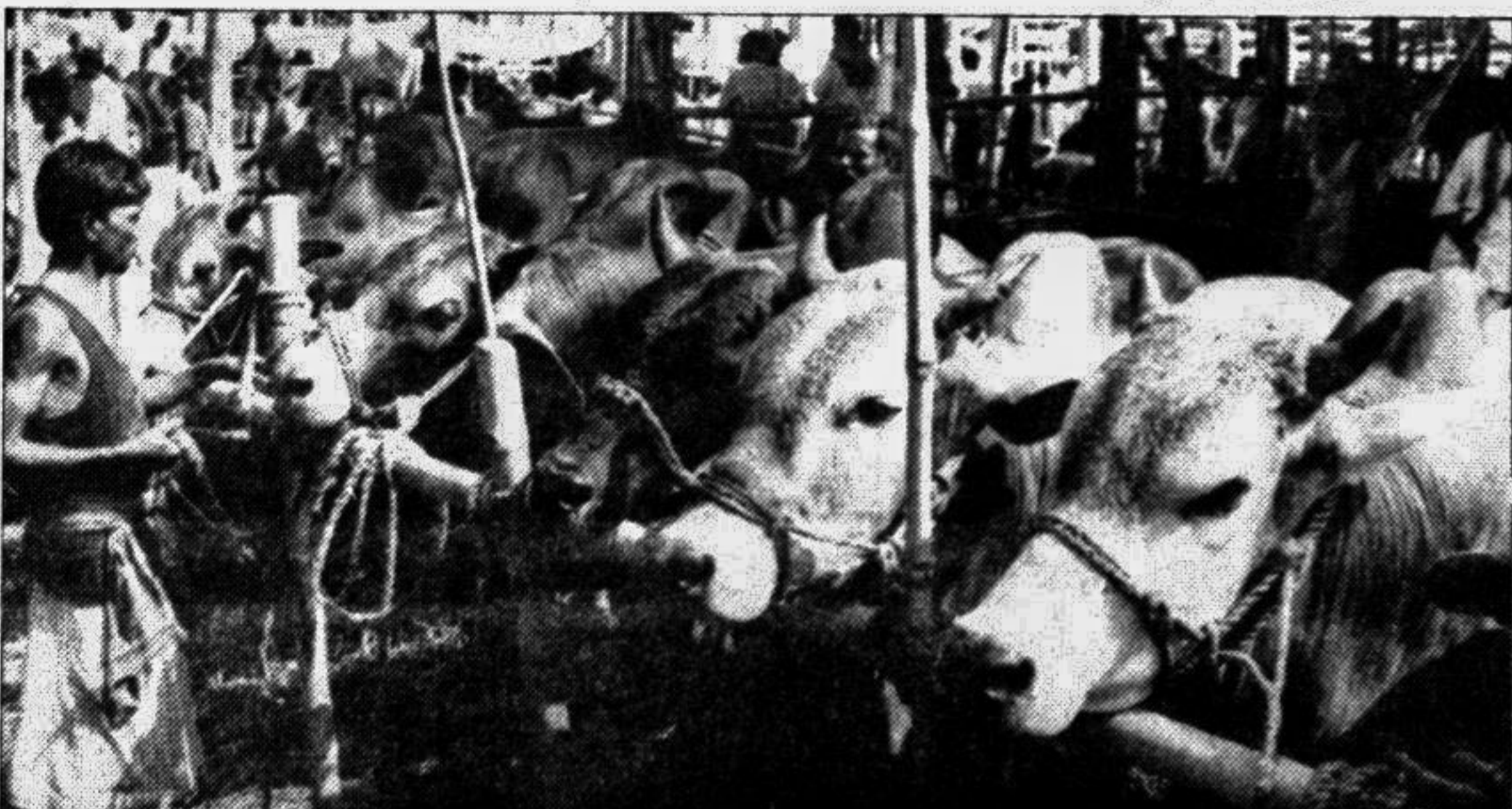


Demand for different kind of spices has increased ahead of Eid-ul-Azha. —Star photo

Extortion on way by local musclemen

Truckloads of cattle arriving in city: 19 markets open

By Staff Correspondent
With only three days left for the Eid-ul-Azha, sale in 19 cattle markets in the city picked up yesterday amid miking in all areas to attract buyers.
Truckloads of cattle from the northern districts were seen arriving in the city yesterday. Many of the trucks were stopped at Amin Bazar by local musclemen and forced to unload cattle at the city's largest cattle market at Gabtoli.
Traders there said many trucks from the northern region avoided Gabtoli by using Tongi road and reached the markets in the inner city.
As usual, farmers and traders bringing cattle from different parts of the country complained about "systematic" extortion on their way to Dhaka. Many others coming by large boats with their cattle also complained about extortion on their way.
Many traders chose to sell their cattle on the city streets rather than in designated markets. Till yesterday, most of the markets were yet to get crowded with buyers but organisers said they were expecting a boost in rates in the next two days.
Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) sources said they had taken adequate measures to maintain law and order during this period. But other sources said that only one team led by a magistrate would patrol the city streets and cattle markets.
At Naya Bazar cattle market, organisers used several loudspeakers, promising a trouble-free purchase and sale. They deployed their security personnel and provided fodder. Prices of cattle at Gabtoli till yesterday were mostly at last year's level. Asked whether there could be any shortage in supply, an organiser said, he did not think so.
Many city dwellers said they were observing the market situation and would purchase the sacrificial animals on the last day because they did not have space to keep those for long.
DCC sources said, the designated cattle markets in the city are at Golapbagh Field, Postogola Shashan Ghat, Banani Field, Dhupkhola Field, Dhanmudi Playground, Bangladesh Bank Colony, Rahmatganj Field, Hosni Dalan Road, Dholakhal Road, Azimpur Road, Khikher Tanpara, Dayaganj Truck Terminal, Rayer Bazar Field, Merul Kutcha Bazar, Nayabazar, Kawran Bazar, Zigaola, Hazaribagh Field, Azimpur Primary School Field and Mugdapara Field.



With only three days left for the Eid-ul-Azha, sale at the city's biggest cattle market at Gabtoli is picking up. —Star photo

BNP conspiring to disrupt power supply: PM

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon her partymen to work with a deep sense of dedication and sacrifice to change the lot of the common people, reports BSS.
"You have to work with the same spirit as you did during the Liberation War, she said while addressing the leaders and workers of Manikganj district Awami League and other front organisations at her Gonobhaban official residence in the evening.
The Prime Minister said her government had taken a number of steps for creating self-employment opportunity in the country.
She also listed some of the achievements of her government like Parakka Treaty and CHT Peace Accord. "But the vested quarters were hatching conspiracies against the developments of the country. Through conspiracy and propaganda, they are trying to create chaos and confusion among the people," she said.
Sheikh Hasina said the BNP government during its period spent thousands of crores of taka in power sector, but they are now conspiring to disrupt the process, she said, adding that it was an ominous sign that BNP MPs entered parliament with candles immediately after the disruption of power supply.
The Prime Minister said that BNP had resorted to such destructive design to take revenge on the people who forced them out of power due to their indulgence in massive corruption and looting of property See Page 12 Col 8

3 hacked to death in Khulna

From Staff Correspondent
KHULNA, Apr 4: Three persons were hacked to death allegedly by a group belonging to an outlawed party late Friday night at Hadda Primary School ground under Koira thana of the district.
The dead were identified as ex-UP member Tapash Sarder, 30, Proshanto Mondal, 28, and his younger brother Gopal Mondal, 25.
Another man, Shashi Bhushan, 60, was severely injured when he tried to resist the alleged killers from kidnapping the victims from their houses at gun-point.
The Police Super of Khulna, Khan Akramuzzaman, suspected that the activists of an outlawed organisation committed See Page 12 Col 3

New deptt, independent of CID, suggested

Economic Crime cell

By Mizan Ali
As per the original proposal of the Home Ministry prepared in January last, ECC was to work under the direct supervision of the CID and investigate economic crimes like currency forgery, product counterfeiting and banking frauds.
When the proposal was sent to the ministries of finance and law, they suggested that the ECC should be formed as a separate department, independent of police and the CID in particular.
As per the suggestion of the ministries of finance and law, the Home Ministry is now working on a new idea to create the ECC as a separate department, independent of CID, the sources said.
Officials of law and finance ministries argued that the Cell would require expertise of highly qualified and experienced people to detect manipulation and misappropriation in specialised areas like finance and business. They, however, did not explain what should be

1500 vehicles stranded at Aricha

By Staff Correspondent
About 1500 passenger buses, trucks and private vehicles remained stranded at three ferry ghats on Aricha route yesterday.
According to Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) sources, about 750 vehicles were waiting to be ferried across the river Padma and Jamuna from Aricha ferry ghat while 490 vehicles were waiting to cross the river from Natakholia and 280 vehicles were waiting to cross over to Aricha from Daulatdia ferry ghat till 9 last night.
A BIWTC official said, "Traffic congestion started since Friday evening as increasing number of vehicles mostly extra passenger buses and trucks came See Page 12 Col 2

Scuffle at ferry ghat

By Staff Correspondent
An untoward incident took place between police and army personnel over priority crossing at the Aricha ghat yesterday.

According to sources, the incident occurred when an army officer in a convoy heading for Rangpur Cantonment, wanted to board the ferries bypassing the queue of stranded vehicles at Aricha ghat. He said that the army had sent a message earlier about the crossing and, as such, demanded priority.
The on-duty traffic police raised objection to the army officer's demand which created a tense situation at the ghat, leading to a scuffle at one stage.
The Deputy Commissioner of Manikganj was informed about the incident immediately. He then visited the spot and settled the matter.
While talking to The Daily Star over telephone last night, the DC said, "I have formed an inquiry committee to investigate the incident."
The committee is scheduled to submit its report by tomorrow or day after.
The army convoy crossed the ghat later in the afternoon.

Proposal for pvt power plant at Baghabari awaits clearance

Star Report
A financial and technical offer by a British company to set up a 100 mw gas-based power plant at Baghabari is lying with the Energy Ministry for clearance for the last three months.
Sources said that a high level meeting of the Energy Ministry to decide on the Baghabari private power scheme has been rescheduled three times recently.
The Power cell opened financial offers by two foreign power companies participating in the bid for the project in early January and forwarded the bid documents of Midland Powers, the lowest bidder, to the Energy Ministry at that time.
Midland Powers offered a levelised tariff of Tk 1.95 (US 4.35 cents) per unit for 22 years and has proposed to set up the gas-based power plant within a year of signing the final agreement. The project will cost about 200 million US dollars.
The government opened the 'request for proposal' for this plant in mid-July last year and initially five companies had participated.

Bengal Group Chairman's rejoinder

The following rejoinder was sent by Abul Khair Litur, Chairman, Bengal Group Limited, related to the news item "Arrest warrant against Bengal Group Chairman" printed in The Daily Star issue of April 3, 1998.
"The news is motivated and false. In summons case the Magistrate issued warrant most illegally. So on the next date I surrendered before the High Court Division and obtained anticipatory bail. I was granted anticipatory bail on 1st April, 1998. Your Staff Correspondent's report that I did not surrender before court is not correct."

Fund shortage worries leather exporters as Eid nears

By Govinda Shil
Export of finished leather may not attain the target in the current financial year if hides and skin can not be procured adequately during the Eid-ul-Azha due to shortage of funds, leather exporters said.
The target, set by the Export Promotion Bureau, is Tk 945 crore.
About 40 per cent of the total collection of hides and skin in a year is made during the Eid-ul-Azha, exporters said. There had been less export of finished leather during the last couple of years mainly because of poor procurement of raw hides and skin during the Eid, they added.
Talking to this correspondent some leather exporters said they may not be able to collect sufficient quantities of raw hides and skin during the Eid if commercial banks do not sanction them loans.
Owners of leather industries had defaulted loans of Tk 772 crore with 8 different commercial banks till February this year. Their total debt stood at Tk 1,220 crore, sources in the banks said.
The banks gave loans of Tk 184.59 crore to primary processors for purchase of raw hides and skin. Of this amount, Tk 113.13 crore was defaulted by them till February.
Leather traders were given Tk 483 crore loans during the first seven months of the current financial year against an EPB set target of Tk 547.50 crore.
Finance Minister SAMS Kibria said on Wednesday last that no fresh loans would be given to the defaulters during the Eid-ul-Azha.
Talking to this correspondent Abdul Sattar Bhuiyan, President of Bangladesh Finished Leather and Leather Goods Exports Association, however, pleaded for fresh loans to genuine exporters who fell victim to circumstances.
"We appreciate the government's legal action against the willful defaulters in the sector. But there are some circumstantial defaulters for whom the government should take a lenient view," Sattar said.
He said there are some entrepreneurs who failed to run their business in early 1990s mainly due to lack of modern technology in their factories. "The nature of demand in the international market has changed but some of us could not cope with it and became sick," Bhuiyan added.
He said some nationalised banks will hold Board meetings today to discuss the position of exporters. "We hope it will be outcome from the meetings."
Export Promotion Bureau Vice-chairman Faisal Ahmed Chowdhury, when contacted said that export earnings from leather products were increasing but those from finished leather were declining. Lack of technological development and training and absence of a See Page 12 Col 8

Record wheat output likely this year

By Reaz Ahmad
Wheat production in the country is likely to hit a record 1.7 million metric tons or more this year, due to a big leap in acreage.
According to estimates by the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT) and US Agency for International Development (USAID), the country will have a bumper harvest of wheat this year. Total production of wheat was 1.46 million MT in fiscal 1996-97.
"Following a production shortfall of Aman paddy this year, hints of big increase in wheat production came as blessing to growers", commented an official. According to official statistics, Aman production in fiscal 1997-98 was estimated to be 8.8 million MT as against bumper harvest of 9.55 million MT in 1996-97.
In a recent report on status of wheat production, CIMMYT assessed that there had been a 26 per cent increase in hectare in the country, from 6.35 lakh hectares last season to eight lakh hectares this season.
Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, CIMMYT agronomist Dr Craig A. Meisner said, "Weather, if favourable, can cause the wheat production to live up to its potential of 1.92 million MT". Dr Meisner explained that "over 70 per cent wheat was sown much after the last optimum date of December 1, due to late rainfall." But, he hoped, with an extended winter season, yield level would be 2.3 tonnes per hectare, if not last year's estimated level of 2.4 tonnes per hectare.
He said, "There are rumours that even this area is too conservative. I have heard Department of Agriculture Extension people saying that it might be upto nine lakh hectares." See Page 12 Col 4

Home minister worried as terrorists getting bail

By Staff Correspondent
Home Minister Rafiqul Islam yesterday expressed his worry about terrorists getting bail from courts.
"We are worried to see the trend," he said while hearing complaints from some people that they were "losing confidence" and had "lost interest" in volunteering information leading to arrest of terrorists as the arrested persons get bail.
He was attending the ministers' "meet-the-people" programme at the Awami League central office in the city last night.
"Initially, many people volunteered with information in tracing out terrorists but, now none feel encouraged seeing the trend of bail," a leader of the city unit of AL told the minister.
When a newswoman drew his attention to the fact that alleged See Page 12 Col 2

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