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## 7-party shifts hartal date to Apr 15

**By Staff Correspondent**

The BNP-led seven-party alliance has shifted the date of its dawn-to-dusk hartal from April 13 to April 15, said a BNP press release last night.

It did not give any reason for this.

Sources close to BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia, however, said the decision was taken in view of US Ambassador in Dhaka John C. Holzman's request to her to shift the hartal date.

Holzman, who met Begum Zia at the Minto Road official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad yesterday evening, made the request as US Ambassador to the UN Bill Richardson is due to arrive in Dhaka on April 13, the sources added.

The countrywide hartal in protest against the government move to pass four bills seeking legal coverage to the CHT agreement was called by the alliance on Saturday.

The BNP press release said demonstrations would be organised at the thana and district levels on April 13.

## Govt urges BNP Discuss CHT accord in JS instead of calling hartal

**By Staff Correspondent**

Post and Telecommunication Minister Mohammad Nasim has urged the main opposition BNP to discuss the bills on CHT peace accord on the floor of the Jatiya Sangsad, instead of enforcing hartal.

"This is for the third time, Begum Khaleda Zia gave hartal call on the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) issue. Why don't you (BNP lawmakers) discuss the bills when those would be placed before the House for implementation of CHT peace accord", Nasim said.

Nasim along with Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare M Amanullah were taking part in ministers' "meet-the-people" programme at

## BNP team meets Speaker, conveys its 'grievances'

**By Staff Correspondent**

The main opposition party in Parliament, BNP, has communicated to Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury its grievances over the "undesirable" behaviour of the ruling Awami League on certain issues.

A BNP delegation headed by Deputy leader of the opposition in Parliament Prof. AGM Badruddoza Chowdhury, which met the Speaker on Saturday also made queries about the fate of its petition seeking cancellation of parliament membership of two party lawmakers who were inducted into the Council of Ministers of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

A member of the BNP delegation told this correspondent Saturday night that during the discussion, they found the Speaker's response to be 'positive' in resolving the 'contentious issues'.

"We found the Speaker to be positive, although he may have some constraints" said MK Anwar. Other members of the BNP team included Chief Whip of the

**Inside Today**

**Article**

**Problematics of Asian Miracle**  
Column: Perspectives  
by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz  
Page 4

**Focus**

Migrant workers from developing countries and global strategy  
Page 5

**International**

King Hussein urges Israel to return all Arab land  
Page 8

**Business**

DSE wants tax incentives to stabilise share market  
Both DSE and CSE indices fall  
Pages 6, 7

## Hajj today: Massive safety measures

MEENA (Saudi Arabia), Apr 5: In cars and on foot the two million Muslims performing this year's Hajj in Saudi Arabia started a mass journey from Makkah to the plain of Meena today, one day before the climax of the sacred pilgrimage, reports Reuter.

The slow-moving convoys, including more than 15,000 buses, and the thousands of pilgrims on foot proceeded peacefully in the so far trouble-free pilgrimage. Saudi officials said, "Some of the pilgrims — men swathed in two pieces of white cloth and women in long black or white robes and headscarves as well as children — carried umbrellas to shelter from the desert sun. Many said today's temperature of 35 Celsius were milder than during Hajj last year.

Some reached Meena by mid-morning while others were still on their way. The 10-km trip took those in cars and buses two hours as crowds and vehicles swelled by the minute.

Police and security officers deployed at all main roads and junctions and helicopters flew overhead to ensure a smooth flow of traffic amid massive measures to avoid a repeat of previous tragedies such as fires and stampedes.

At Meena, a plain surrounded by hills, pilgrims found row after row of white tents, including nearly 11,000 fire-resistant tents that Saudi Arabia put up for about half a million pilgrims. The tents are part of a huge project to eventually give all pilgrims such tents.

Saudi Arabia has also banned cooking in tents and the use of gas cylinders after a fire swept through a tent camp at Meena last year killing 343 people. Saudi officials said it was caused by a pilgrim trying to cook a meal on a gas stove in his tent.

"We feel a lot safer in these tents," said Dawood from Nigeria, echoing remarks made by many pilgrims. "It is a 100 per cent improvement to last year," said Salem from Oman.

The pilgrims on Saturday performed the first ritual of

## Medicare facilities inadequate: President

President Shahabuddin Ahmed yesterday called for concerted efforts to reduce the child and maternal mortality rate, reports UNB.

"In Bangladesh, nearly 19,000 mothers die every year due to pregnancy complications while 5.85 lakh across the globe," he said.

The President was addressing the inaugural function of the World Health Day and the 50th founding anniversary of the World Health Organisation (WHO) at the auditorium of National Museum in the morning.

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and World Bank jointly organised the programme.

Appreciating the theme of the year, "Pregnancy is Special: Let's Make it Safe," Shahabuddin said.

## Malaysia to deport 1029 Bangladeshis

KUALA LUMPUR, Apr 5: The 1,029 Bangladeshi illegal immigrants detained by Malaysian authorities in eight holding camps will be repatriated by Malaysia's flag carrier, the Sun newspaper said today, reports AP.

Malaysia Airlines will fly them back to Bangladesh at a special rate of 182 dollar per ticket, a discount from the normal cost of 325 dollars, the paper said. The Bangladeshi citizens will be responsible for paying their own fares.

The repatriation effort is part of a widespread crackdown on illegal aliens working in Malaysia. The move comes as the Southeast Asian country struggles to recover from an economic crisis which has hit many countries in the region.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian government reportedly has plans to rebuild a detention camp which was partially destroyed by fire when illegal immigrants from Indonesia rioted last month.

The remaining 1,029 inmates at the facility — mostly from Bangladesh, India and Myanmar — will be moved to other detention centres.

Eight illegal immigrants and a policeman were killed in the riot at the camp which was triggered when the government began deporting Indonesians held at the detention centre.

In a bid to curtail employment of illegal aliens, Malaysian sector-General of Immigration Aseh Che Mat has told businessmen that they could face charges for recruiting foreign workers through improper channels.

## Setting up of pvt power plants upto 10 mw allowed

The government will encourage setting up of area-based small power plants of up to 10 megawatt in the private sector all over the country, including Dhaka city, reports UNB.

Any individual or organisation can take the advantage of setting up such plants, said a government handout yesterday.

Interested persons or organisations have been requested to contact the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources directly.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the officials concerned to expedite the work of 132 KV power line from Chittagong to Comilla.

She has the directive at a meeting that reviewed country's



Sacrificial cattle being brought to the city markets by boats. — Star photo

## ADP likely to be cut by Tk 1000cr

Like previous years, the size of the Annual Development Programme (ADP) of the current fiscal year is being reduced because of slow implementation of projects, deficit in revenue earning and low disbursement of foreign assistance, reports UNB.

The cabinet meeting is expected to evaluate the performance of ADP today.

However, the ADP is likely to be downsized by at least Tk 1000 crore this year (1997-98) from the original Tk 12,800 crore.

The ADP fund was envisaged a domestic component of Tk 7,483 crore and foreign aid Tk 5,317 crore. Some 1240 projects have been planned to be implemented under the ADP.

According to sources in the finance ministry, barely 42 per cent of ADP was achieved during the first eight months of the current fiscal year as against the target of 66.66 per cent.

Sources said, performance in implementing the projects

## Stray incidents during hartal in Chittagong

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Apr 5: A half-day hartal in the port city, called by opposition BNP, was observed today.

BNP had called the hartal protesting police action on party processionists on Thursday and Friday in which the party's city unit president Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin and some activists were injured.

Police arrested 14 pickets from different parts of the city during the hartal.

The authorities have deployed special force in all important points as the two days' clashes between police and BNP activists, followed by the hartal, created tension in the city.

UNB adds: A bank employee was injured and a BRTC bus was damaged during the hartal amidst chase and counter chase between police and pro-hartal activists.

Pro-hartal pickets attacked a private bank at Chhaktai in the morning when attempt was taken to open the bank by the employees. A bank employee was injured in the attack.

## Cattle sale yet to pick up

**By Staff Correspondent**

Herds of cattle kept on flooding the city markets yesterday with only two days left for the Eid-ul-Azha.

But fewer buyers were seen in three of the markets visited by this correspondent. Cattle prices showed an upward trend in the afternoon yesterday but market organisers said it was too early to expect a stable price range.

"The prices will settle down a day before the Eid when more cattle come in with more buyers around," said Sheikh Ali at the Gabtoli market. On-duty policemen there said that thousands of cattle were on way to Dhaka from different parts of the country.

They said, unlike previous years, the traders were using waterways to bring cattle to the city. But traders and farmers alleged that musclemen as well as police realised toll from them at all check points both in waterways and land routes.

"There is no way to escape. At every check point you have to pay depending on how many cattle you are carrying," said a trader at the Rayer Bazar cattle market.

Cattle traders also complained about the hassle they were facing from the market organisers and their hired musclemen. One Rahim from Faridpur said at the Dhan-

At the market we had to buy our way out for 500 taka," he said.

In the city markets, supply of cattle from across the border until yesterday was much less than last year's. Traders coming from Rajshahi said a large number of Indian cattle was waiting across the river at Aricha to flood the city soon.

Most of the bulls for sale in those markets bore tags of large farms around Dhaka and in Faridpur, Kushtia, Rangpur, Rajshahi and other places. Traders said these farming houses bought the bulls about six months before the Eid and fattened those to earn profit.

## Panchhari UP Chairman, his companion murdered

**By Special Correspondent**

Police recovered the body of Pradip Lal Chakma, a companion of the UP chairman who was hacked to death Saturday, from Latibara area of Khagrachhari district yesterday, according to reports received here.

He had been missing since unidentified men, some wearing masks, dragged Kusum Priyo Chakma, 35, the Union Parishad chairman of Panchhari, from a passenger bus on Saturday.

Kusum Priyo Chakma was hacked to death with machetes at Latibara.

The attackers also kidnapped Pradip. Police said his body bore marks of torture with

## Occidental's PSC extended

**Star Report**

Petrobangla has signed a supplementary contract letter late last week to extend the expired Production Sharing Contract (PSC) of US company Occidental.

Occidental's PSC for blocks 13 and 14 expired on January 11 for its failure to fulfil its minimum work obligations.

It did not apply for an extension of the PSC six months before the expiry as per the contract's provisions. But it had started lobbying and putting diplomatic pressure on the government to extend the contract for a full three-year term from late last year.

The government, on the other hand, wanted Occidental to pay full compensation for the damages caused by the explosion at the Magurchara gas well on June 14 last year.

When Occidental agreed to pay the full compensation in principle, the government agreed to extend the contract a month ago. But it had also decided to modify the PSC in favour of Bangladesh's by increasing the country's share by 5 per cent and including BAPEX as a partner of Occidental among other issues.

But last week, instead of increasing the country's share or tagging BAPEX with Occidental, Petrobangla agreed to a proposal of the US company to provide 5 per cent more share to Bangladesh only if gas is found in the damaged Magurchara gas structure.

"This means that Occidental gains nothing from the modification. Damage has already been done in the

## 2 mill officials mugged in Demra area

**By Staff Correspondent**

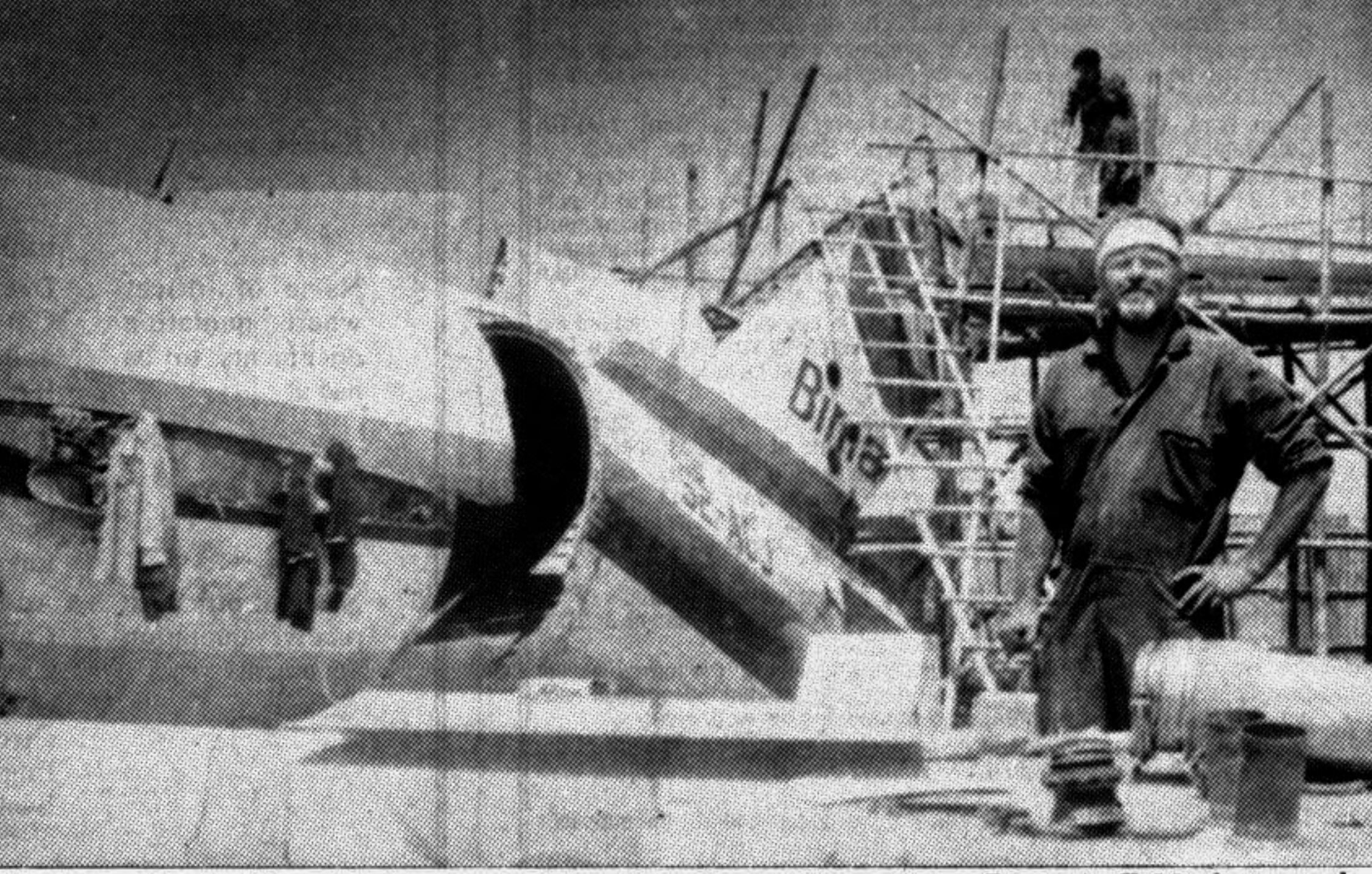
Muggers robbed Tk 4.5 lakh from two officials of a spinning mill on Dhaka-Chittagong highway in city's Demra thana area yesterday afternoon.

Later, police recovered Tk 3.5 lakh but failed to arrest any of the muggers.

The incident took place when a general manager and a manager of Kohinoor Spinning Mill in Narayanganj were coming towards Dhaka on board a car towards Demra. Police chased the muggers on board the car.

The attackers managed to escape but dropped a packet containing Tk 3.5 lakh in cash and a mobile telephone set at roadside in Sonir Akhra area.

Lutfar Rahman, the general manager, filed a case with Demra thana in this regard.



Lloyds engineer Devy Cater supervising the dismantling of Biman's F-28 that crash-landed near Sylhet Airport. — Star photo by Iqbal Siddiquee

## Wife stabbed to death allegedly by husband

**By Staff Correspondent**

A young housewife was stabbed to death allegedly by her husband at their house in Karimabad village under Homna thana in Comilla district on Wednesday night.

The dead was identified as Rekha Akter, 22, wife of Golam Faruk, Homna police said when contacted last night.

Police said Rekha's relatives alleged that Faruk killed her as she tried to stop his extra-marital affairs with a teenaged neighbour. Rekha was mother of two children.

Police said Rekha was found dead at her room with stab injuries on her body Wednesday night. But Faruk claimed that Rekha was killed by dacoits who attacked his house that night.

Police arrested Faruk and his cousin Azal Hossain under Section 54.

Rekha's brother Obayedullah filed a murder case with Homna thana accusing Faruk.

## Canada to give Tk 77cr for three projects

Bangladesh and Canada yesterday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for three projects involving Canadian dollar 23.8 million (approximately Tk 77 crore, following a successful bilateral development cooperation meeting held at the Economic Relations Division here, reports BBS.

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria led the Bangladesh side while the visiting Canadian Minister for International Cooperation, Diane Marleau, headed her country's team at the meeting.

External Relations Division Secretary Dr Mashur Rahman and the Canadian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Nicholas Etheridge, signed the MOU on behalf of their respective governments.

The projects are: Bangladesh Environment Management Project, Infrastructure Invest-

## Young man shot dead in Khulna

**From Staff Correspondent**

KHULNA, Apr 5: A young man was shot dead by unidentified assailants today at Gobarchaka area under Sonadanga thana.

A night guard, he was identified as Anu, 18.

Police quoting the FIR said that the assailants had murdered him about 200 yards from his house.

Police arrested three persons suspecting their involvement in the murder. The arrested persons are Kalam, 20, Mohiuddin, 24, and Madhu, 22. A case has been lodged with Sonadanga thana.

## Dhaka's debt under PL-480 likely to be waived

The US House of Representatives has passed a resolution to pave the way for relief of Bangladesh's debt under PL-480, reports UNB.

The resolution No 2870 (Tropical Forest Conservation Act, 1998) is expected to provide debt relief after it is adopted by the US Senate and signed by the President, according to a fax message received in Dhaka yesterday.

The bill is poised to provide authority to the US President to give debt relief to Bangladesh against conservation programme for the country's tropical forests.

It has been stated in the bill that Bangladesh has significant tropical forests at a regional scale and would be an ideal condition for debt relief.

The commendable bipartisan move was steered in the House primarily by Congressmen Benjamin Gilman, Chairman, House International Relations Committee, Dough Bereuter, Chairman, House Sub-Committee on Asia and Pacific, and Lee Hamilton, Ranking Minority Leader of the House International Relations Committee.

Concerned quarters in Washington believe that passage of the bill in the House was the result of the personal initiative and efforts of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

During her visit to Washington in early February last year, Hasina personally requested President Bill Clinton and the US Congress for relief of the debt under PL-480.

An important role played by the Bengalee community in the USA in this regard is also praiseworthy. Intense lobbying of the community with the US Congressmen helped the passage of the bill in the House.

The Bengalee community now has to approach the US Senators to have it passed in the Senate in the next few months at the latest by September this year.

Bangladesh Embassy in Washington, the Bengalee community and the Bengali press rigorously followed up the Bangladesh Prime Minister's request to the US President and worked together to achieve what has been accomplished so far.

"Though the passage of the bill in the House is itself an achievement, we shall have to go a long way to get concrete results," said Bangladesh Ambassador KM Shehabuddin.

The Senate has to pass the bill before it goes to the President for signature. The process includes passing of an appropriation bill before the end of the current fiscal year.

Bangladesh Embassy is vigorously pursuing the matter with the US administration and Senate with the active help and support from the Bangladesh community in the US, the fax message said.

## Some rules of Shops Act '65 suspended

The government has suspended some rules of the Shops and Establishments Act 1965 for two weeks prior to the Eid-ul-Azha, reports UNB.

The suspension will allow the owners to let the employees work during the weekly holidays.

The employees will, however, be entitled to compensatory leave and overtime allowances for their work during the weekly holidays, said an official handout.