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City markets remain closed despite govt security assurance

Star Business Report

Most city markets remained virtually shut despite the government commitment to help keep these open during yesterday's hartal hours.

There were government plans to set up police and BDR camps at market installations so that businessmen could keep their shops open.

But in reality, the leading market points in the city remained tightly shut and there were no presence of BDR or police personnel at the installations.

Even the Pallwell Market at city's Paltan, police's own cooperative market, also remained closed during yesterday's hartal hours.

However, many shops at Ramna Bhaban were opened at around 9 am. But many of the owners pulled down the shutters around noon as there was hardly any customer for them.

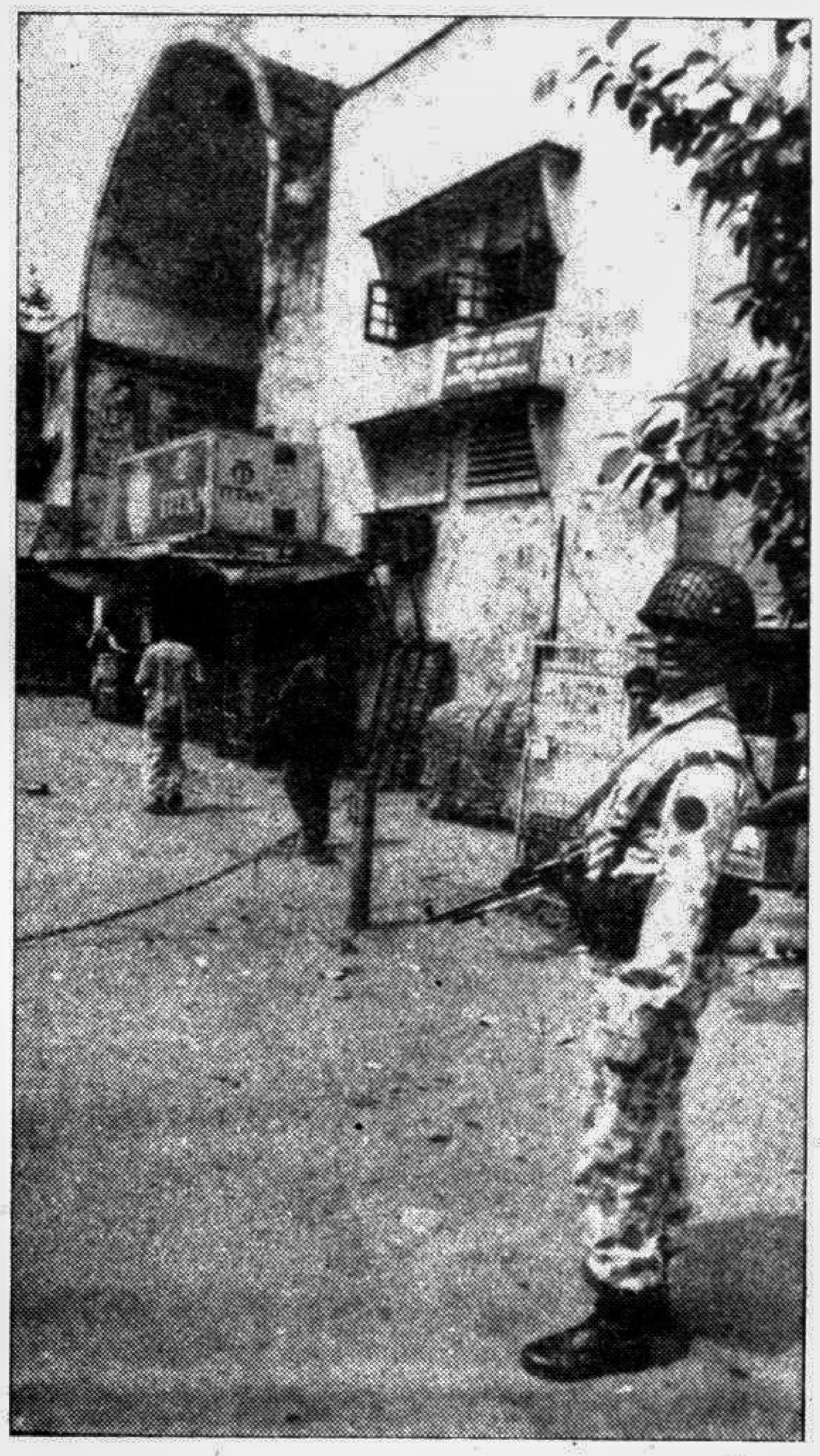
There were some police presence near some markets at Farmgate, Mirpur, Paltan and other places. But even those arrangements seemed like usual security measures taken generally on hartal days and no additional measures were observed.

BDR personnel were seen only in front of New Market. But that was not encouraging enough for the shopowners to lift their shutters.

Earlier, city police chief AK Shamsuddin told UNB that police would be deployed in front of markets to foil possible attacks by unruly agitators to force the shutters down. The government had also made appeals to the businessmen on television and radio to keep their concerns open.

"We can not risk to keep our shops open because we are not insured," said a shopkeeper at Farmgate's Farmview Supermarket, who was cleaning his shop with one of the shutters half-raised. "Besides, there were no special measures against pickets. We are here to do business, not to become the victims of political bickering."

Most private offices at Motijheel, the city's business hub, remained open during hartal hours, with their entry doors under lock and key.



A BDR man stands guard over an entrance of the city's New Market during yesterday's hartal (R), policemen sit inside the market, where shops remained closed (top) and a number of shops keep their shutters open at Ramna Bhaban (bottom).

—Star photos by AKM Mohsin and Sheikh Enamul Huq

Official talks take place today

Myanmar trade team seeks Bangladeshi investment

Myanmar Commerce Minister Major General Kyaw Than yesterday urged Bangladesh entrepreneurs to invest in his country in agro-related sectors and help boost bilateral trade for mutual benefits, reports BSS.

"There is a huge potential for bilateral trade and we offer big business prospects in agro-related fields," said the Myanmar minister during a meeting with State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury.

The meeting held at the conference room of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a cordial atmosphere on official who attended the meeting said.

General Than who is leading six-members delegation on a four-day visit to Bangladesh was received by Syed Alamgir Faruque Chowdhury, Secretary Ministry of Commerce as Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed remained locked in an official function in Khulna.

The Myanmar minister said though bilateral trade was increasing, it was still much lower than what is expected.

He said Myanmar leaders, specially Senior General Than Shew, Chairman of State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), are very eager to develop relations with the regional countries including the neighbours. "We want strengthening of existing relations," he said.

Abul Hasan Chowdhury, who stressed the need for greater interactions between Bangladesh and Myanmar, said: "we did not explore the tremendous potential between us."

Chowdhury said Myanmar can work as a bridge between South Asia and South East Asia and also between ASEAN and SAARC. He said because of geographical proximity there is natural advantage for the two countries to cooperate in mutually advantageous fields.

The State Minister, who proposed for building up a bridge over the River Naf flowing between the two countries for promotion of trade and commerce and make the movement of people easier, reiterated the invitation given by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Senior General Than Shew to visit Bangladesh. He also drew the attention of the Myanmar minister in repatriating their citizens (Rohingyas) to their home.

The delegation during their stay where will go to Chittagong and see some enterprises in the port city. Besides, they will also visit some industries adjoining to the capital city.

Official talks between the two countries is scheduled to be held today.

General Than, the second Myanmar minister to visit Bangladesh in four months, is scheduled to call on Prime Minister before he leaves here on Thursday.

DCCI ex-president M Yunus distributes certificates among the participants of the training course on 'Rules and Procedures of Income Tax and Value Added Tax (VAT)' organised by the Human Resources Development Programme (HRDP) of DCCI in cooperation with the Business Advisory Service (BAS) Project of DCCI-GTZ Partnership Programme on Thursday. Concerned officials were also present on the occasion — DCCI photo

DCCI course on income tax, VAT rules ends

A 5-day training course on 'Rules and Procedures of Income Tax and Value Added Tax (VAT)' was concluded on Thursday at the DCCI Training Centre, says a press release.

The course was organised by the Human Resources Development Programme (HRDP) of DCCI in cooperation with the Business Advisory Service (BAS) Project of DCCI-GTZ Partnership Programme.

DCCI past president M Yunus distributed certificates among the participants.

In his speech, Yunus underscored the need for professional skills and knowledge on income tax and value added tax (VAT) and its application. He advised the participants to apply their advanced knowledge for efficient management of their business operations. He said that Dhaka Chamber was always helping the entrepreneurs to become professionals through training services.

Resource person Md Humayn Kabir Bhuiyan, Commissioner of Taxes, BAS Project Manager Md Embadul Haque, Deputy Secretaries (Training) Shahazada Basunia and Hasanur Rahman Chowdhury were also present on the occasion.

Indian workers in Qatar send home $27m a month

DOHA, Oct 3: Qatar's 120,000-strong Indian community sends home remittances of almost 100 million riyals (27.4 million dollars) a month, an Indian investment agency official said, reports AFP.

"This is a very substantial amount," said Pradip Kumar Banerji, chairman of the New Delhi-based Indian Investment Centre, quoted in the newspaper Gulf Times today.

'Unfettered globalisation to lead to exploitation'

WASHINGTON, Oct 3: Libya yesterday warned that unfettered economic globalisation will subject developing nations to corporate control and turn them into mere consumer markets for rich countries, reports AP.

Mohammad Bait Elmal, secretary of the Libyan general people's committee for finance, told the annual assembly here of the World Bank and IMF that the free flow of goods, services and capital across international borders "will lead to the monopolisation by a few countries of international trade."

His remarks sharply contrasted with speeches from other delegates here, many of whom adhere to the World Bank-IMF argument that free flowing capital can invigorate developing economies and raise living standards.

But without "regulatory arrangements and controls," Elmal insisted, giant international corporations will come to dominate the global economy.

"Developing countries will pay an exorbitant price due to the lack of ability to compete with developed nations," he said.

"Developing countries will then be transformed into consumer markets for the products of advanced countries."

Elmal also denounced the use of sanctions by certain governments "in a coercive and arbitrary manner to achieve political objectives."

"Besides being devoid of any moral justification such methods are not in agreement with the requirements of economic freedom in the world."

The United Nations imposed sanctions on Libya in April 1992 after Tripoli refused to surrender two of its nationals for trial in Scotland or the United States in connection with the 1988 bombing of a US airliner.

But Libya last April handed the pair over to the United Nations for trial in a Scottish court in the Netherlands, leading to a suspension in the sanctions.

US warns on LatAm woes

MIAMI, Oct 3: The Asian economic turmoil that cascaded into Latin America hit it at a particularly inopportune time and could even generate political unrest, a US government expert on the region said yesterday, reports Reuters.

"The financial crisis ... hit Latin America at a very bad time. There were a lot of transnational issues at stake. There was governability at stake," Peter Romero, acting US assistant secretary of Western Hemisphere affairs, told a Miami Herald conference.

Looking ahead, he said the economic instability could produce other problems.

"With zero growth, and in some cases negative growth ... it will sorely test the governments of their ability to be able to provide a minimal social safety net the way they have over the last couple of years, and perhaps even provoke some political instability," he said.

"But I don't see that there is any alternative to maintaining market-based reform to ensure that the economies are poised for growth," he said.

Romero warned Ecuador, which is facing its worst financial crisis in decades, to pay its debt. "In the final analysis, Ecuador needs to understand that if it defaults it will be a long way coming back. Unfortunately, the body politic does not yet realise that," he said.

Cash-strapped Ecuador suspended payment of $40 million in interest due on Thursday on its discount Brady bonds, which are themselves restructured debt for nations having trouble with payments, and is seeking to restructure $6.5 billion in bonds with private investors.

If disgruntled investors gather the support of 25 per cent of holders, they could demand an acceleration of the bond payments, which would force Ecuador to pay back interest and principal in full. That would derail a voluntary debt renegotiation and deepen Ecuador's financial crisis.

The embattled government of President Jamil Mahuad, facing Ecuador's worst recession since the 1930s and political resistance to austerity measures, has appealed to creditors to renegotiate the Brady bonds.

The bonds are named after former US Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady and are backed by US Treasury bonds.

Four Bangladeshi cos take part in HK leather exhibition

HONG KONG, Oct 3: The Hong Kong Leather Fair, the annual extravaganza of fashion and finish products of leather, begins at the Convention and Exhibition Centre here tomorrow with the participation of 40 countries including Bangladesh, reports BSS.

Bangladesh is participating in the three-day leather fair where products exporting and importing countries will attend either to get fresh export offers or give new orders for their consumption.

Four Bangladeshi companies — Apex Leathercraft Limited, Hara Leather Products, Haroon Leathers Ltd. and Universal Leather Products Ltd are taking part in the exhibition under the auspices of EPB and German Technical Cooperation Organisation (GTZ). Some other companies are also participating in the fair, a gathering of giant exporters and importers of the world, on their own.

Bangladesh entrepreneurs participate in about 26 international leather fairs a year.

3-day workshop on agri ecology begins Wednesday

Star Business Report

A 3-day international workshop on 'Economics of Ecological Agriculture' will begin in Tangail from Wednesday, says a press release.

The workshop is being organised by South Asia Network on Food, Ecology and Culture (SANFEC). Ubinig will host the workshop.

The workshop will discuss the experience of SANFEC members and others on the crucial connections between economy and ecology.

Khatami vows to speed up economic reforms

TEHRAN, Oct 3: Iranian President Mohammad Khatami vowed yesterday to heal the country's "ailing" economy by speeding up market reforms and striving for political detente with other countries, especially those in the region, reports Reuters.

"We want to create a safe atmosphere for economic activities, especially for the private sector and for foreign investment and production," he said in a speech inaugurating the annual Tehran International Trade Fair.

"Our aim is to make the government smaller and develop the private sector, to remove obstacles in the way of investment," he added.

"To achieve progress and development, we must cure two historically chronic illnesses: the ill economy and the ill management in the country."

Khatami said his government was aiming for an average annual growth rate of six per cent during the 2000-2005 development plan, to be debated soon by parliament.

Iran's economy achieved little growth last year but, with the recent rise in oil prices, it was expected to rebound to two per cent in the current Iranian year, ending on March 19.

The President said "a giant leap" in non-oil exports made up the centrepiece of his economic recovery programme.

"We are hoping to earn $41 billion dollars from the exports of non-oil goods and services during the next plan. To achieve this, we will remove legal and administrative barriers in the way of exports," he said.

Iran's non-oil exports are still suffering from tough regulations imposed by the previous government in 1995 as part of attempts to check the flight of hard currency.

Last year, non-oil exports reached $3 billion, nearly half of what the country had earlier expected to earn. But they rose by 31.5 per cent in the first five months of this year. The government plans to increase non-oil exports by 18 per cent annually to $8.6 billion by 2005.

Khatami said he hoped improved relations with the outside world would help his country's economic future.

"Our fundamental policy is to rid the world of tension, to have good relations with all countries, mainly those in the region," he said.

Japanese forex reserves hit record high

TOKYO, Oct 3: Japan's foreign exchange reserves rose to a record high 272.3 billion dollars at the end of September, increasing for the seventh straight month, the finance minister said today, reports AFP.

The reserves went up 11.0 billion dollars from the previous record of 261.3 billion dollars at the end of August, the minister said.

Metal: Weekly Roundup

Gold rediscovers its lost lustre in style

LONDON, Oct 3: Gold finally rediscovered its lost lustre in spectacular style as a central bankers' pact to curb sales and leasing sparked a once-in-a-generation buying frenzy that drove prices up some 20 per cent in less than three days, reports AFP.

The spot gold price touched a 22-month high above 320 dollars an ounce on Wednesday as investors waxed euphoric over the agreement by 15 European central banks to limit annual gold sales to just 400 tonnes for the next five years.

The pact served to ease investor fears over large-scale central bank sales that were anticipated after Britain and Switzerland indicated their intention to sell large portions of their gold reserves.

"The announcement has taken out the uncertainty of market for the next five years," said Gillian Moncur, a consultant with the CRU International metals research agency.

The price surge was widely believed to have been exaggerated by short sellers rushing to square their positions, and prices duly settled back towards the weekend at 303.80 dollars an ounce.

The gold rush drove other commodities higher, particularly the base metals complex and some of the soft commodities such as cocoa.

The price surge was the highest in percentage terms for a generation, the decision by the central bank qualifying as one of the most important in decades, analysts said.

"This is a sea change, as important as anything in the past 40 years," said Tim Green, a gold expert who has written several books on the precious metal.

At the peak on Wednesday, prices had gained about 60 dollars in seven days, a boom not seen since gold was in universal demand at the end of the 1970s when the global economy was suffering from inflation and high oil prices.

The central banks' decision was aimed at breaking the vicious circle where by banks, to get a better return on gold, had been lending to the market and increasing supply.

That encouraged forward selling of gold, which in turn increased the supply to the market and brought prices down.

Analysts said that in place of a bear market that was highly jittery over the prospect of gold dumping by central banks led by Britain and Switzerland, a new scenario had emerged where demand would actually outstrip the limited supply on offer, leading to rising prices.

Confirmation from the International Monetary Fund board that it will not sell gold on the open market came as another source of relief to traders.

The IMF instead approved plans to revalue up to 14 million ounces of its gold reserves to fund debt relief for the world's poorest countries.

Silver: Soft. Silver prices followed happily in gold's wake before slipping back towards the end of the week.

At one point on Wednesday, prices had gained 45 cents on the week to stand at 5.71 dollars an ounce but a substantial correction dragged the metal back to 5.22 dollars by Friday afternoon.

Platinum and Palladium: Twin peaks. The two metals also prospered from the gold rush and managed to hold on to their gains as the bullion rally and subsequent small correction dominated all other market factors.

Palladium prices on the London Palladium and Platinum Market gained 14 dollars to 377 dollars an ounce while platinum prices added 17 dollars to 393 dollars an ounce.

Base Metals: Golden. Nickel led the base metals complex higher in the slipstream of gold and the latest signs of economic rejuvenation in Japan, which prior to its deep recession was a hungry market for metals.

The London Metal Exchange gained from figures showing that Japan enjoyed its sharpest rise in industrial output since January 1997 in August, when factories produced 4.6 per cent more goods than in July.

Copper prices gained from the takeover by the biggest US producer Phelps Dodge of Cyprus Amax mining group for some 1.8 billion dollars.

Nickel was supported by the continued lockout of workers from Inco's Thompson mine in Manitoba, central Canada. Aluminium, in contrast, fell victim to speculative selling.

Three-month copper prices rose by 19 dollars to 1,802 dollars per tonne.

Nickel gained 165 dollars per tonne to 7,180 dollars per tonne.

Zinc rose by 8.5 dollars to 2,202.5 dollars per tonne in spite of a rise of 7,300 tonnes in LME stocks to 289,600 tonnes.