



A worker at a factory in Anderkilla area of Chittagong binds ledger books known as Halkhata. These books are still in demand with businesses that are carrying on a customary event on Pahela Baishakh, the first day of Bangla New Year, when all clients and well wishers are invited for traditional sweets and snacks.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

## Losing lustre, but still not lost

SHAHADAT HOSSAIN, Ctg

One of the largest wholesale commodity markets in Bangladesh, Khatungonj used to celebrate Halkhata with much festivity even a decade ago. Clients would visit the shops and pay up their dues, and the traders would treat them to sweetmeats, renewing the relationship.

But the festival is gradually becoming a thing of the past.

Traders and shopkeepers have blamed the advancement of communications technology and banking and declining trust among people for the fading grandeur of the event.

Solaiman Badsha, director of Tayabia Traders, said trading was mainly conducted

through cash even a decade ago, and customers used to pay up their full-year outstanding credit on Pahela Baishakh, the first day of the Bangla calendar.

To begin a new year, a Halkhata (new ledger book) used to be opened after closing the accounts of the outgoing year, he said.

Elaborate preparations including decorating shops, sending invitations to clients, and purchasing sweets and other food items were undertaken to mark the day.

"Halkhata is still opened, credits paid up, and sweetmeats and food offered to customers. But everything is done on a small scale," Badsha said.

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## Verdict on pleas in Ershad's graft case on May 9

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court will deliver on May 9 its verdict on three appeals filed in a 25-year-old graft case against Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad.

The bench of Justice Md Ruhul Quddus and Justice Bishmadev Chakraborty fixed the date after concluding hearing on the appeals yesterday.

Among the three appeals, one was filed by Ershad seeking acquittal as a lower court had sentenced him to three years' imprisonment in the case in 1992.

Two others were filed by the government for enhancing his punishment. Anti-Corruption Commission lawyer Advocate Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star.

On March 30, the bench allowed the ACC to become a co-appellant along with the government.

Earlier on March 27, 2017, Chief Justice SK Sinha assigned the HC bench to hear the three appeals.

The then Bureau of Anti-Corruption, which became defunct after formation of the ACC in 2004, had filed the case against Ershad with Cantonment Police Station in 1992 on the charge of misappropriating Tk 1.91 crore by misusing powers at different times when he was the president from December 11, 1983 to December 6, 1990.

## Declare haors as 'affected areas'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Farmers of different haor (a type of wetland) areas yesterday blamed a lack of proper initiatives to construct embankments and rising of riverbeds by siltation as the main reasons behind damage to the crops in early flood.

Addressing a roundtable at Dhaka Reporters Unity in the capital, they also

alleged that contractors who got the job of building embankments from Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) did not complete their work in due time and, in most cases, they were involved in corruption.

The farmers of the haor areas demanded that the authorities concerned identify the individuals involved in corruption and bring them to book.

Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) in collaboration with Water Rights Forum organised the roundtable.

"All my crops are destroyed. I don't know how I will be able to feed my children let alone continue their education," said Abdus Sobhan, a flood-affected farmer in Sunamganj haor area.

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## THREE ARSON CASES Khaleda files petitions with HC seeking stay on trial

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday filed three petitions with the High Court seeking a stay on the trial proceedings against her in three vandalism and arson cases.

Police filed the cases on January 24 and 29, and February 4 in 2015 over vandalising and setting fire to vehicles during the anti-government agitation, and submitted charge sheets implicating Khaleda Zia along with other accused, Deputy Attorney General Shaikh AKM Moniruzzaman Kabir said.

The HC may hold hearing on the petitions today, he added.

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