A date with destiny

FROM PAGE 1 in their life -- the grim faced skinny black figures hunched against the wind; their

Kalashnikov rifles held high. Immediately, the captain gave the order and the fire alarm rang. It sent a chill up the spines of the crew. There was a quick discus-

sion about what to do now.

Somewhere they had heard

people on board, they get

deterred. So everyone rushed

to the starboard with iron

rods and whatever they could

find and brandished their

"weapons" at the pirates who

kept coming closer and

zigzag path at full speed.

they wanted to believe it.

behind.

The captain, Farid Ahmed,

Jahan Moni moved ahead

out distress signal that his

hour later when the pirate

skiff reappeared on the hori-

zon. This time it was coming

the waves but by their failed

engine. They have restarted

As they closed in, sud-

denly the pirates started

shooting with their AK47s.

Bullets started hitting the

ship. Some were hissing

bridge. Now. Now. Now," the

Quickly all ducts and

portholes were locked and

the crew gathered on the

bridge, which is the highest

an Indian naval ship that was

around the area would reach

them before the pirates could

But the pirates were now

beside their ship. They

brought out a long ladder and

tried to hook it to the railing

of the ship's deck. But the

ladder was too long. It took

them a while to adjust the

ladder. Within minutes, the

They forced their way

six pirates climbed up.

Their only hope was that

captain ordered.

point of the ship.

capture the ship.

in a more determined away.

But all hopes shattered an

ship is under pirate attack.

"On the floor! Everybody!" orders flowed.

fuming with rage.

fear. One of them opened the

in with their guns. They were

the bridge door violently.

screamed.

"Open or we'll fire!" they

The crew members that if the pirates find a lot of obliged. They all crammed on the small space. It was now clear that the ship had been taken over and they had been taken hostage.

A little later, the Indian naval ship arrived.

"Ask the ship to go back or we'll shoot you all," the pirate leader ordered.

thought of another trick. He The captain knew it was started coursing the ship on a too late for the navy to do anything. So he passed the This might have worked as instruction. Slowly the high waves were created and Indian ship disappeared into the pirate skiff stopped. MV the vastness of the sea.

It was now only the pirates fast, leaving the pirates and the crew. Pirates and despair.

Everybody thought the "As if, a black curtain trick had worked. At least suddenly fell on us. We knew we had started a new life and The captain did not we did not know what slacken the speed. He wanted awaited us," Fakhrul Islam, a to get out of this goddamn greaser, said. territory. He had already sent The Somalis produced a

crude Global Positioning System (GPS) and showed a

"Go there. Straight," the leader ordered.

Five days later, MV Jahan Moni anchored at a place It was now clear that the slightly below Puntland, a pirates were not repelled by heaven for Somali pirates. Around were many other ships, all captured and held hostage.

For the crew members of Jahan Moni, days of uncertainty began.

Immediately after they reached there, a heavy gunfight began.

"Everybody get to the "We didn't have any clue at first about what was going on. But we learnt later that other groups of pirates tried to take control of the ship," said Rukshana Gulzer, a supernumerary and wife of Matiul Mawla, chief engineer of the ship.

The fight continued for the rest of the night.

"Seeing no other groups in the morning, we knew our captors have won the fight," Rukhsana added.

THE FIRST CONTACT

Around 2:30pm on December 12, the pirates made the first phone call to MV Jahan Moni's operator, Brave Royal Ship Management (BD) Limited.

"They just called us to say through fire channels to the that they have taken MV top and started knocking at Jahan in their control, and

hung up," Meherul Karim, general manager of Brave Royal, told The Daily Star.

Inside the room, the crew-The chief engineer and his men were trembling with wife were allowed to describe the situation to Mohammed door and the pirates gushed Shahjahan, managing director of SR Shipping, owner of the ship.

The same day they again contacted Chittagong at 7:00pm.

Later in the night, the pirates told the crew members that they could release them in exchange of \$9 million. They also let some crew members to talk with their relatives.

Meherul Karim later stepped in to start negotiation with the pirates for the release of the hijacked ship. ACLOSESHAVE

A whole week of despair and terror had passed. The pirates would keep watchful guards on the crew. They would not even let the crew go out together to perform any emergency duty.

broken down one day. It needed three men to fix. But they would not let more than two to go.

chew a kind of leaves to get intoxicated. One morning, the gang leader, Abdur Rashid, barged into the bridge. He was intoxicated, and was laughing like a mad

Suddenly, he raised his AK47, fixed a new magazine and cocked the gun. Then he aimed its muzzle at the hostages. His finger was on the trigger.

was clear that this man wanted to kill them just out of turn. Death was staring at them.

another pirate appeared. He quickly took in the scene and pushed the barrel of the gun up in a zippy. Then he snatched away the AK47 from Rashid and took him

was imposed on the pirates that they cannot drink or chew the leaves.

tied to a pole, beaten up and

One of the crew also faced this punishment when he climbed down to the deck from the bridge without the pirates' permission. His legs

and whatever they had.

skipper Farid Ahmed.

started moving.

way out.

the anchor.

leaving and asked him to lift

"We are going. You also

Ruhul Amin, the man in

charge of the anchor, started

the motor and the anchor

started rolling in. By that

time, the pirates had left the

ship. Immediately, the ship

nothingness on the bridge.

For a few seconds nobody

could say anything. They

were all blank. It took time to

seep in the reality that they

were free, at long last. The

hostages started hugging

each other. Tears found their

But it was still too much to

"We were happy but at the

same time afraid that

another group of pirates

two hours later when a

British naval ship

approached. It supplied

came with food and water.

Later, a Kenyan tugboat

The ship was now at full

Ah freedom! Sweet free-

speed. Sailing out of the

them with fuel.

That fear was finally over

might attack us," said Farid.

First, there was a sense of

Hours would not pass for them. They kept looking at their watches. Finally, a false dawn appeared on the horispecial about us!" Entering the VIP lounge, zon. The dark sea caught the first glint of the sun.

Mohammad Idris, a deck The pirates were also busy. They were collecting their his two daughters. articles. Guns, ammunition Farzana, the eldest daugh-

At 5 in the morning, the tightly. pirates came and informed the skipper that they were

wiped the teardrops rolling down his cheeks. go," pirate leader Rashid told

in Chittagong, the crew members said they had forgotten all those haunting moments. Their endurance laughed after all the miseries.

FROM PAGE 20

Moina's younger sister Laboni Akhter told reporters at DMCH that Sajid beat up her sister throughout the night and stabbed her in the morning.

but failed, as I could not open the door", said Laboni, aged about 12, who came to visit her sister five days ago.

"I went to my home [in the added.

mother, said ever since her daughter was married to Sajid has been torturing her mentally over their poor family

Gaddafi bases bombed

FROM PAGE 20 Libyan officials to the com-

City

was beaten up.

pasts.

Most of the pirates had

multiple wounds on their

bodies. Some of them had

their limbs missing. This all

showed they had violent

vail a strange kind of disci-

pline among them. They had

very high respect for the only

female hostage of the ship,

the wife of the chief engineer.

any of their possessions, even

A precarious condition arose

So the crew got an innova-

tive idea. They put the vent

pipe of the air coolers into

small drums and collected

the water that was con-

and this posed another prob-

lem. So they shut down one

generator and with it the

freezer. But this caused the

food to go off, which had to

began. They were served Ruti

and sugar in breakfast and

lunch as the pirates brought

in lambs and asked the crew

Rahman, had to cook curry.

After the pirates had their

meals, the leftover meat was

Herded in the tiny Bridge

When one needed to use

"Sometimes, they would

the washroom, they had to

raise their hands and request

force the male hostages to

pee in bottles," said

Mainuddin, the second

Farzana Akhter heard from

her husband Abu Naser

Abdullah Mazumder, the

chief officer, on the fourth

feeling over the previous few

days. He called me and asked

me not to worry," she said

"I didn't think they would

"I can't express how I was

Room, the 26 hostages had to

use the lone washroom.

A severe food rationing

Often luck was better for

The chief cook, Moshiur

be thrown in the sea.

to slaughter them.

served to the crew.

the pirates.

engineer.

yesterday.

ANXIOUSWAIT

Fuel was also running low

away their mobiles only.

SURVIVAL

densed out.

dinner.

And they never touched

Yet there seemed to pre-

pound were shown a ruined three or four-storey building. It is not clear whether Col Gaddafi was there at the time of the bombing. An official from one of

the coalition countries, who asked not to be named, told journalists the strike had destroyed Col Gaddafi's "command and control capability".

Earlier at the Pentagon, US Navy Vice Adm William ornaments. They had taken Gortney said the coalition had control of the air space between Tripoli and the main rebel stronghold, when the ship's water tanks Benghazi in the east. "The no-fly zone is effectively in place," he said. First, the crew tried to

He added that ground forces moving on rebel positions were also open to attack.

In Misrata, a city west of Benghazi that has been coalition strikes.

Connolly, in the rebel-held city of Tobruk, says it is not clear if the allies can attack Col Gaddafi's troops operating in the centre of Misrata without harming the very civilians they have come to save.

Reuters news agency that pro-Gaddafi forces were bringing civilians to Misrata from outlying areas to deter further allied strikes. Yesterday Britain said it

had called off an air raid during the night because civilians were spotted near the target area. The UK defence ministry did not say where the planned target had been. Arab League Secretary

General Amr Moussa, who supported the UN resolution, on Sunday criticised the severity of the bombardment. "What is happening in

Libya differs from the aim of imposing a no-fly zone, and what we want is the protection of civilians and not the bombardment of more civilians," he said. But yesterday, in a joint

news conference with visiting UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in Cairo, Mr Moussa played down any differences within the coalition. "We are all united on the issue of protecting civilians," he

stressed that Arab League support was a key factor in securing Security Council backing for the UN resolu-

QATAR PLANES

In Benghazi, heavy gunfire and sporadic explosions were heard on Sunday night, a witness told Reuters news agency. "Benghazi is not com-

pletely safe from attack but it is certainly under less threat than it was yesterday," he said.

government claim that armed forces were observing a ceasefire "isn't true or has been immediately

The action against Col Gaddafi's military began on Saturday afternoon with French air strikes in the east. A barrage of cruise missiles, launched from US and UK ships and subma-

rines followed. US Defence Secretary Robert Gates has said that while the US will continue to play a part in operations against Col Gaddafi's forces, it "will not have the pre-eminent role".

Meanwhile, the buildup of forces to enforce the no-fly zone continues. Qatar is to send four

planes to join the coalition enforcing the UNmandated no-fly zone, the US and France have said. The move would make

Qatar the first Arab country to play an active part in the campaign against Col Gaddafi. Other Arab countries are

also preparing to join the Both he and Mr Ban campaign against Col Gaddafi, Adm Gortney The French aircraft

carrier Charles de Gaulle has left the Mediterranean port of Toulon for Libya while Denmark and Norway are each sending six planes. Spain has sent at least three planes, while Italy also has jets ready to deploy. Canada has deployed six jets to Sicily and is preparing them for action.

Col Gaddafi has ruled The US says a Libyan Libya for more than 40 years. An uprising against him began after the longtime leaders of neighbouring Tunisia and Egypt were

39 workers

FROM PAGE 20

Bangladeshis came to Ras Jdir border on March 20, and now 2,037 people are waiting there for returning to Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the government has arranged Biman flights to fly home 1200 Bangladeshis who have taken shelter in Tunisia from the Libyan uprising.

Biman flights will operate on March 21, 23, 24, and 27 to expedite the repatriation process of the remaining Bangladeshi nationals in Tunisia, said the press release. It said the overall situa-

tion of the camps has improved. IOM is also arranging to bring back Bangladeshis from Djerba of Tunisia. In Algeria, some 48 Bangladeshis are still await-

ing repatriation in Ain-Amenas. They will be sent home tomorrow by IOM on a commercial flight. Khandaker Mosharraf

Hossain, minister for expa-

triates' welfare and overseas employment, visited the Tunisia camps and met the Bangladeshi nationals. He explained the steps taken by the Bangladesh government in collaboration

with IOM and reassured

them that everyone would be taken home soon as more flights will start operating. He also had a meeting with operational heads of different international organisations stationed at

the camps. Biman flights will arrive in Dhaka on March 22, 24, 25 and 28, and each day they will carry 300 Bangladeshis from Djerba. Today another 264 Bangladeshis will be sent home by IOM.

According to the press release, a total of 30,059 Bangladeshis, who were employed in Libya, have been repatriated to Bangladesh so far. Of them, 3,287 people returned on their employers' arrangement or their own, and 25,335 have been brought back by IOM. And some 1,437 have come home by Bangladesh Biman flights.

Caretaker

FROM PAGE 20 13th amendment to the constitution allowing elections under the caretaker govern-

ment. A seven-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque yesterday held the hearing for the third day.

Following a controversial election on February 15, 1996, demand for the caretaker government was pressed and the system was introduced through the 13th amend-

Dr Kamal said the court has to evaluate the circumstances under which the

Several elections have been held under the caretaker government, and some ques-

said the senior counsel.

the hearing today. Dr Kamal is

Nearly 30 to 35 thousand people get overseas employture.

the amendment.

on fire around 2:00pm on Friday at their Ershad Nagar residence in Tongi, as the family failed to pay Shaheen Tk 1 lakh in dowry.

The two married five months ago without the consent of the families fol-

caretaker government system was introduced in the coun-

tions arose at different times over its credibility, he contin-The SC has to protect the country's charter, not the

interest of any political party, The apex court will resume

expected to continue making submissions. Upon a writ petition, the HC on August 4, 2004

declared the 13th amendment legal and observed that the changes did not distort the constitution's basic struc-Advocate M Salimullah,

then general secretary of Association for Democratic and Constitutional Advancement of Bangladesh (ADCAB), filed the petition on January 25, 2000 challenging After Salimullah died,

advocate Abdul Mannan Khan, acting general secretary of ADCAB, appealed to the Appellate Division against the HC verdict.

Biman

over the last four weeks. Of

Bangladeshi nationals have been repatriated. If there is no more new arrival, IOM officials are hope-

ful that all Bangladeshis will be repatriated within this week. The remaining

Bangladeshis at Choucha camp were packing for home yesterday with whatever they managed to save from the Libyan armed forces on their

\$4.62m ransom

"We haven't paid them [Somali pirates] anything, but I don't know whether our insurance company did," he

Back in the ship, the crew knew the negotiation was coming to a final stage as a small aeroplane came and hovered over the ship for a couple of times two days ago. It just came and circled over

their ship and left. The spirit on the bridge of the ship lifted.

"They are coming. They will come with money," said a crew. "We will be free soon." But all they could do is

keeping their fingers crossed. They were dog tired, more mentally than physically. The continuous stress of one hundred days was too much. Their lives hung on the thin string of "civility" of about 40 rag-tag pirates, most in tattered jeans and T-shirts faded by the sun and salt water. All of them had deadly weapons

like salt-rusted AK-47s and rocket launchers. But now, the end seemed o be in view.

March 13 dawned with a difference. There was a palpable change in the mood of the pirates. They were tense. They were looking out to the sky frequently. A tone of urgency was in their voices. The crew also noticed a pirate skiff floating close to Jahan Moni with a few pirates in it.

aeroplane. The same Cessna came and did two low passes over the ship. Suddenly its door opened and out came two boxes with parachutes attached. The boxes dropped on the sea and the pirates scooped them on the skiff.

Then came the drone of an

The boxes, actually suitcases, were hauled up on the ship and taken to the bridge. In presence of the hostages, the lids were lifted and

money counted. A few pirates took out some Somali currency they were carrying and threw them in the air. Who cares about some worthless Somali currency when you have millions in dollars?

There were a lot of talks among the pirates and hours of tension began again. What would they do now? Would they really let them go? Or would they just betray all

promises? Finally, came the golden hour. The leader of the gang came on to the bridge after lunch and told skipper Farid Ahmed, "We are leaving tomorrow morning. We got what we wanted. Once we leave, you too can go. You are

Nothing sounded sweeter to the hostages in the last 100

The night came. It was then the pirates divided the booty among themselves. The crew could hear the excited exchange of words down below on the deck.

"It was an unbelievable

night. We could not believe it. Have we really heard them right?" said Rukhsana Gulzar, wife of Chief Engineer Matiul Mawla. "The pirates said they would have to wait the night out because they feared if they left in the dark, other pirate groups might attack them. They had their own

enemies." tiger's lair. As fast as possible. It was the longest night for As far as possible. the 26 hostages. Sleep would not visit their tired eyes. dom! Dear freedom!

left in the sun.

went empty after about 15 days of capture. ration it but still there was no water, and the chance of getting it was thin.

The water purifier had

The pirates would also

The crew were terrified. It

Just at that moment,

From then on, a strict rule

THE PIRATES'WAY OF LAW The pirates acted in a very professional manner. Anyone breaking their rule would be punished severely. The rule breaker would be

leave us alive," Kibria Ahmed, a young greaser whose wife, and hands were tied, and he Sharmin Akhter, was weeping continuously sitting beside him at the VIP lounge of the Shah Amanat International Airport in

> Chittagong yesterday. To Mainuddin, it was a new life. "We had heard that they by that time killed a number of people. What was

fitter, burst into tears seeing

ter aged 10, was holding him "Can you imagine I'm talking with my kids for the first time since the hijack?" he

On meeting their relatives

Wife stabbed

Abul Kalam, sub-inspector of Gendaria Police Station, said they detained Moina's husband Abu Sajid Ali from his Dinonath Sen Road house.

same area] in the morning and told my brother who rescued my sister," she Ambia Begum, Moina's

three years ago, Sajid's family condition.

vention by the G7 group of TAPWATER rich nations to stabilize Japan's health ministry has

under siege by government troops, residents say bombardments by pro-Gaddafi forces are continuing. A nearby air base was targeted in the first night of The BBC's Kevin

A rebel spokesman told

Smoke was also seen at

The March 11 earth-

quake and tsunami left

FROM PAGE 20

at the No. 3 reactor.

the No 2 reactor.

not dangerous. The govern-

ment has prohibited the

economy some \$250 billion, making it the world's costliest ever natural disas-The head of the UN atomic agency said the nuclear situation remained

very serious but it would be resolved. "I have no doubt that this crisis will be effectively overcome," Yukiya Amano, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), told an emergency board meet-

ting out of the crisis," a Japanese government official quoted Prime Minister Naoto Kan as saying. But news of progress at the nuclear plant was overshadowed by mounting

particles already released

into the atmosphere have contaminated food and water supplies. "Quite clearly it's a serious situation," Peter Cordingley, Manila-based spokesman for the World Health Organization's (WHO) regional office for the Western Pacific, told

Reuters in a telephone interview. "It's a lot more serious than anybody thought in the early days when we thought that this kind of problem can be limited to 20 to 30 kilometres ... It's safe to suppose that some contaminated produce got out of the contamination

However, he said there was no evidence of contaminated food from Fukushima reaching other countries. Fukushima is the world's worst nuclear accident

zone.'

than the Ukrainian disaster. "The few measurements "I tried to rescue my sister of radiation reported in The prospects of a nuclear food so far are much lower than around Chernobyl in 1986, but the full picture is still emerging," Malcolm Crick, secretary of the UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, told Reuters.

> urged some residents near the plant to stop drinking tap water after high levels of radioactive iodine were detected. Cases of contaminated

Severe radiation in food vegetables and milk have banking, insurance and already stoked anxiety despite assurances from officials that the levels are

more than 21,000 people sale of spinach from all four dead or missing and will prefectures near the plant cost an already beleaguered and also banned selling of raw milk from Fukushima prefecture. There were no major reports of contaminated food in Tokyo, a city of about 13 million people.

levels of iodine were found in an edible form of chrysanthemum. "From reports I have heard so far, it seems that the levels of radioactive iodine and caesium in milk and some foodstuffs are significantly higher than 'We see a light for getgovernment limits," said Jim Smith, a specialist in

sciences at Britain's Portsmouth University. "This doesn't mean that consumption of these products is necessarily an immeconcern that radioactive diate threat, as limits are set so that foodstuffs can be safely consumed over a fairly long period of time. Nevertheless, for foodstuffs which are found to be above limits, bans on sale and consumption will have

to be put in place in the affected areas. Japan is a net importer of food, but has substantial exports -- mainly fruit, vegetables, dairy products and seafood -- with its biggest markets in Hong Kong, China and the United States.

China will monitor food imported from Japan, the Xinhua news agency said, citing the country's quality control watchdog. South Korea will expand radioactivity inspection to processed and dried agricultural Japanese food, from just fresh produce.

since Chernobyl, but signs use of a radiation gauge in are that it is far less severe case they were nervous about the food. MELTDOWN power plant meltdown in the world's third-biggest economy and its key position in global supply chains rattled investors worldwide last week and prompted

> Moody's Investors Service said in a report that the downside risks from the crisis had increased over the past week for the economy, sovereign credit,

rare joint currency inter-

non-financial corporate Tokyo's markets were closed for a holiday on

shed 10 percent last week

wiping \$350 billion of market capitalization, and at one point had lost as much as 20 percent in value. In a much-needed boost for the battered market,

billionaire investor Warren City officials however said Buffett said the earthquake higher-than-standard and tsunami were an enormous blow but should not prompt the selling of Japanese shares. Instead, he called events a "buying opportunity" "It will take some time to rebuild. But it will not

change the economic future of Japan. If I owned Japanese stocks, I would certainly not be selling them," Buffett said earth and environmental during a visit to a South Korean factory run by a company that is owned by one of his funds.

Govt to seek FROM PAGE 1 support to rehabilitate the returnees.

The ministry is preparing

specific lists and database of

returnees from Libya under

different categories, he added. Mosharraf apprehended unrest in the Middle Eastern and African countries might have a negative impact on the country's manpower sector if the returnees could

ment in every month through the ministry, noted the minister adding, 10 percent quota will be reserved for the returnees from Libya.

not be sent back there.

In Taipei, one of the top Japanese restaurants in the Burnt victim city is offering diners the

FROM PAGE 20 Her husband Mohammad Shaheen, 25, a bus driver, is

on the run.

Victim's mother Momtaz Begum said Shaheen set her

lowing an affair, she added. "Following a quarrel, Shaheen set fire to Ismat and

went to the bathroom to mislead the locals," said Momtaz quoting her daughter.

He said loan facility will be offered to returnee workers to help them meet migration expenses.

FROM PAGE 1 them, more than 18,000

way to Tunisian border.

Monday. The Nikkei index