A bizarre

office around 10:30pm.

FROM PAGE 16 vehicle had mesh-doors closed just to ward off any untoward people to enter inside. I took my Samsung Galaxy S4 out of my pocket as soon as the vehicle started rolling past my

Tired of daylong work, I wanted to refresh myself and so sank in the virtual world of social media. I was tweeting and all went well until I reached Banani.

After the vehicle crossed the Banani intersection, I saw my mobile literally take a flight from my hand. Dumbfounded, I looked around, trying to make sense of what just happened. I was so confused and panicked that I told the driver to stop. As he stopped instantly, I started searching the phone inside the vehicle.

But the phone was nowhere. To our utter shock, the driver discovered a hole in the thin sheet covering the vehicle's roof.

"Certainly a snatcher took away the phone by cutting a hole," the driver said, adding that this kind of snatching had been going on for quite some time now. But we were shocked and started

wondering how the thief got onto the running vehicle and did all these so meticulously. "It is a unique way to snatch

mobile phones," the driver said, adding that sometimes they injure passengers with knives with which they make the hole.

I was terrified and thanked God that we were spared of bodily harm. The rest of the way, I couldn't rid myself of the thought how the snatcher made it possible. Even after I reached home, I couldn't get a wink of sleep.

So beware. Try not to work on your mobile phone while riding such vehicles especially at night unless the use of phone is very, very urgent.

Auto driver

FROM PAGE 16

daughter's birth and went out for work on that fateful day.

"What was my fault? Why is Allah so cruel to us?" howled Kamrunnesa, mother of two, as she fainted frequently. "His [Saber's] parents are aged and

we don't know how the family will survive," said Md Panshu Miyan, a relative. "We do not know about politics. We come out of home for our liveli-

hood. Is it our fault?" he asked. Except the death, no significant incident of violence took place in the

country yesterday. The BNP-led combine relaxed its hartal for 12 hours. It has been enforcing continuous spell of strike since February 1 with a break on the weekends.

The education ministry has meanwhile postponed today's Dakhil examinations following the extension of hartal.

The revised schedule for the exam would be announced later, a press release of the ministry said.

The postponed SSC and equivalent exams of March 3 and 4 would be held from 9:00am to 12:00noon on March 20 and from 10:00am to 1:00pm on March 21 respectively.

On the other side, the other postponed exams of February 12 and March 1 would be held from 9:00am to 12:00noon on March 13 and from 10:00am to 1:00pm on March 14 respectively, the release added.

In police drives, arrest of BNP and Jamaat activists and recovery of explosives continued in some dis-

tricts yesterday. The police arrested 82 people including 19 BNP-Jamaat activists in Satkhira, 12 BNP-Jamaat men at

Rangpur town and adjacent Pirgachha upazila and 10 Jamaat-Shibir men at Daudkandi. The Border Guard Bangladesh

(BGB) personnel detained a Jamaat rokon, Mohammad Imran alias Mithu, 40, with "four crude bombs and five petrol bombs" from KB Aman Ali Road under Chandgaon Police Station in Chittagong city on Monday night.

Rejoinder

FROM PAGE 16 NCP commended GCM for the work it has done on the Phulbari Coal Project Environmental and Social Impact Assessment."

The rejoinder, signed by the Chief Operating Officer of GCM Resources PLC, Gary N Lye, quoted the report as saying, "The NCP finds that GCM did not breach its obligations under Chapter II, Paragraph 2 (which provides that enterprises should respect the human rights of those affected by their activities), and did not breach its obligations under Chapter IV, Paragraphs 1 (which provides that enterprises should avoid infringing human rights and address human rights impacts with which they are involved) or Paragraph 5 (which

provides that enterprise should carry

out appropriate human rights due diligence)". It further claimed, "Our plans

place the highest priority on catering for the needs of the local communities and our teams are today still working to ensure the people remain fully informed. The detailed studies supporting the Feasibility Study and Scheme of Development given to the Government have stood the test of international scrutiny."

With help from his allies, Syria's Assad looks set to stay

REUTERS, Beirut

As the United States and Iran negotiate the final stages of a nuclear deal, they are still oceans apart on another area of conflict: the future of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Assad seems more likely to survive the Syrian crisis than at any point since it began four years ago. Iran's support is as solid as ever to its confidentlooking ally in Damascus.

The days when Assad was largely absent from view and his mere appearance was news have given way to almost daily reports on his activities; recent visitors included four French members of parliament who defied their government's policy to see him.

The civil war has no doubt left Assad weakened, but he is stronger than the groups fighting to topple him. Powerful states still want to see him gone, but they have shown less resolve than allies who are standing by him.

As the crisis approaches its fourth anniversary, the demand for Assad's departure is heard less often from his Western foes. Their attention has instead switched to fighting Islamic State, an enemy they share with him.

While the United States and his Arab enemies bomb the jihadists in the north and east, Assad and his allies have launched a major offensive against mainstream rebels and Islamists in an area of greater importance to them, the southern border zone near Israel and Jordan, In Damascus, observers close to

the government see this as the start of a phase that will end the conflict on Assad's terms.

Iranian-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah is backing the southern campaign and Iranian advisers are in the field - mirroring the situation in Iraq, where they are helping to oversee operations against Islamic State, said a senior Middle Eastern official familiar with Syrian and Iranian policy.

"The battle in Syria is still a very long one, but without existential threats for the government," he said.

The continued support for Assad has defied the hopes of Western governments that it might wane as a slump in oil prices makes it more expensive for Tehran to prop up the devastated Syrian economy, or as Iran negotiates with world powers for a deal over its disputed nuclear programme.

"The Iranians still view Assad as the top man," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity because his assessment was based on private conversations. "He is the focal point of their relationship with Syria."

Russia, too, shows no sign of abandoning a leader who finds himself at the centre of two struggles: between Moscow and the West, and between Sunni Muslim Saudi Arabia and Shi'ite Islamist Iran.

A senior U.S. State Department official said support provided to Assad by backers including Iran had allowed him to avoid a negotiated end to the conflict, and described Iran's role as "destructive".

Poor show in BNP's march

BNP and its associate bodies and some pro-BNP journalists brought out a brief procession in the Jatiya Press Club area. BNP chairperson's Adviser Shawkat

Mahmood, party Assistant Office Secretary Asadul Karim Shahin and acting convener of the Peshajibi Parishad Ruhul Amin Gazi, among others, were present. Police, however, stopped them

when the procession tried to go towards the High Court area, witnesses said. Thus barred, they held a rally near

the second gate of the press club and congratulated the Bangladesh team on Khaleda Zia's behalf. The party also organised proces-

sions in Indira Road, Tejgaon and Malibagh areas. But everywhere, participation of the party men was poor and no senior leaders were seen in any of these processions. Abu Syed Khan Khokon, joint con-

vener of Dhaka city BNP, said they tried to gather in large numbers but could not do so for fear of police harassment. Police detained five BNP men,

including Raihan Amin Rony, assistant sports secretary of the party's central committee.

Detectives picked up Rony and another BNP leader from in front of Khaleda's Gulshan office while they were hanging a banner congratulating

the Bangladesh team. Gulshan police

later released the two.

The three others, picked up near Aziz Super Market on suspicion, were held by Shahbagh police till last night. Outside the capital, the 20-party alliance held processions in different districts, including Khulna, Bogra, Mymensingh, Gaibandha and Kushtia.

Asked why party men's presence was thin in all these processions, Ebaidul Haq Khan, president of Barisal district BNP, said many of the party leaders and activists are either behind bars or on the run.

Also, they could not gather in big numbers fearing police action.

Meanwhile, the ruling Awami League and its different associated bodies yesterday brought out processions in the capital and elsewhere in the country to celebrate Tigers' victory. Carrying placards, festoons, ban-

ners, and musical instrument in their hands, the AL men in the processions sang songs, performed dances and sprinkled coloured water on each

Hundreds of AL men gathered in front of the party central office on Bangabandhu Avenue around 10:00am. City AL General Secretary Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya led a procession around noon.

The AL men chanted slogans and lauded the members of the Bangladesh cricket team for their exciting win against England.

Bring the killers to justice

FROM PAGE 16

"My husband, Avijit Roy, wrote about science and rationalism and critiqued religious fundamentalism. Because of this, he was murdered," she said, adding, "While Avijit and I were being ruthlessly attacked, the local police stood close by and did not act."

Condemning the gruesome act of terror, Bonya, also a blogger and a freethinker, said they were "attacked in a crowded area on the Dhaka University campus", a place which she said "has historically been a space for progressive movements", and where "Avijit grew up".

"Despite the death threat, we could not fathom that such a heinous crime could take place in such an area -- a crime not only against a person, but against freedom of speech and humanity," she said.

"We are deeply grateful that Bonya is recovering from her ordeal, and we're honoured to help her share her story and her call for action," said Michael De Dora, CFI's representative to the United Nations, and a friend of Avijit.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday ordered the Detective Branch (DB) of police to conduct a test of evidences of the killing of Avijit by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

The court also asked the director of Dhaka Medical College Hospital to take an initiative to conduct the DNA test of Avijit's body by the forensic department head of the hospital.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Bikash Kumar Saha came up with the order following two separate petitions submitted by DB Inspector Fazlur

Rahman, who is also the investigation officer of the case. Soon after the killing, DB men seized a number of evidences from the

place of occurrence. Of them, the FBI will test twelve items, including a sharp weapon, a black school bag and two three-quarter trousers, DB officials in their prayers said.

In the petitions, the IO said the FBI showed interest in assisting the DB by testing the evidences seized in connection with the killing of Avijit. He also appealed to the court to conduct a DNA test of Avijit's body.

Contacted, Avijit's father Prof Ajoy Roy expressed dissatisfaction over the slow progress in the investigation of his son's murder. "I don't find any progress so far other than the arrest of

Farabi," he told The Daily Star. Krishna Pada Roy, deputy commissioner of DB (South), told BBC Bangla that the initiative to test the evidences in the advanced laboratory of the FBI would play an important role in unravelling the mystery behind the incident and identifying the suspects.

Nizami appeal

FROM PAGE 16

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam yesterday told the SC his office had not prepared the concise statement, but he did not mention any reason.

He, however, told The Daily Star his office would submit the concise statement once the defence placed theirs to the SC. The International Crimes Tribunal-

1 on October 29 last year sentenced Nizami to death on four charges of war crimes including murdering intellectuals. The 72-year-old was also awarded life imprisonment on four other charges. The Jamaat-e-Islami ameer on

November 23 last year filed the appeal with the SC challenging the verdict.

Libya oilfield attack blow to UN peace talks

REUTERS, Cairo

An attack by Islamist militants on a Libyan oilfield where they beheaded security guards and kidnapped foreign workers underlines the difficulties facing UN-sponsored peace talks due to resume this week.

Libyans have become accustomed to chaos, with their country split between two rival governments each allied to heavily armed groups that have been fighting for control of the oil-producing nation since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. But last week's attack on the al-Ghani

armed groups often do. Instead, they mounted a show of force that appeared in line with warnings that they are seeking to expand their influence. "They came to burn the facilities and kidnap or kill the workers and

oilfield in central Libya marks a new

departure. The attackers did not seize it

to make financial or political demands as

guards," said Ali al-Hassi, a spokesman for an oilfield security force. "Then they left." The militants have not yet made a

statement on the attack but officials

have blamed Islamic State, which has in the past boasted of its ability to kill soldiers or civilians in Libya. The UN special envoy for a Libya, Bernardino Leon, said last week that Islamic State militants would "stop at

nothing" to strengthen their presence in the country. The violence illustrates the challenge facing the United Nations, which today plans to host a new round of talks between rival parties with the aim of forming a national

Libya is divided between the internationally recognised government, which has been based in the east since a faction called Libya Dawn seized the capital in August, reinstated the old assembly and set up a rival administration.

unity government.

The UN has invited moderate leaders to join the talks, which have been going on since September. But analysts see little chance of success as the country is fracturing, with small armed groups increasingly calling the shots, as in the oilfield attack. "There are too many players -- and

their respective leaderships," Richard Cochrane, Senior Analyst, MENA, at consultancy IHS Country Risk, told the Reuters Global Oil Forum. Both governments represent loose alliances of former rebel groups who

the fighters don't necessarily answer to

helped topple Gaddafi but have since fallen out along political and regional lines. Libya Dawn draws support form from western cities such as Misrata, and includes Islamists, the Amazigh

minority, and business people. In the east, an umbrella of tribes, federalists campaigning for autonomy, and military figures such as Khalifa Haftar, a former Gaddafi

general, dominate the scene. Both sides have been fighting each other on several fronts, creating a vacuum exploited by militants loyal to Islamic State, the group that has seized large parts of Syria and Iraq.

The militants have drawn support from Libyan jihadists who fought in Syria and returned to cities such as Derna or Sirte. While the Islamic State alliance seems to have split into small groups, it attracts fighters from other factions, such as Ansar al-Sharia, by conducting spectacular attacks.

A big problem for peace efforts is that neither the United Nations nor Western powers backing the talks have a presence in Libya -- they evacuated their Tripoli missions in the

summer for security reasons. Having relocated to Malta or Tunis, diplomats try to stay in contact with moderate Libyan figures by phone or when they travel abroad.

Manna

FROM PAGE 16 is in custody of the Detective Branch of police, was placed on a 10-day remand for the second time in a

sedition case. Earlier, he was remanded for 10 days in another case filed for "trying to instigate revolt in the armed forces".

EC prepares

FROM PAGE 16

2010.

told reporters that they had started taking logistic preparations for holding the long overdue Dhaka city corporation (DCC) polls by yesterday.

The last election to the undivided DCC was held on April 2002, and its tenure expired in May 2007. But the DCC election could not be

held in time for various reasons, including the then state of emergency and complexities regarding boundary demarcation. The LGRD ministry last month

had removed the complexity regarding boundary demarcation and requested the EC to take necessary steps for holding the DCC polls. The last election to the Chittagong

City Corporation (CCC) was held in

Jordan's King Abdullah urges EU to fight 'Islamophobia'

REUTERS, Strasbourg

King Abdullah of Jordan urged Europeans yesterday to fight hostility toward Islam that he said was fuelling extremism among Muslims, including those drawn from Europe to fight in the Middle East.

Addressing the European Parliament in Strasbourg, Abdullah praised Europe's "unbeatable courage" in responding to attacks such as those in Paris in January and likened Islamic State to Nazism -- "an expansionist ideology based on hatred". But in calling for cooperation to

combat Islamist violence, the king, who attended commemorations for the slain French satirists of Charlie Hebdo but criticized the paper's use of cartoons of the Prophet Mohmmad, said that European governments must promote "mutual respect" and an "inclusive society". "Insulting other peoples and their

faiths and their convictions, this is no

way forward," he told a chamber that

includes dozens of far-right members critical of Muslim immigration. "Europe is an important partner in this effort, especially in helping to stop

the global rise in Islamophobia."

scrapping the act's Section 12 that says

no excuses like war situation, threat of

Amnesty Int'l

FROM PAGE 16 justice police officers involved in torture.

"Reject the proposal outright and publically declare that no one against whom sufficient and admissible evidence of involvement in torture exists will be shielded from prosecution," added Amnesty.

It called upon the government to take decisive action to investigate all complaints and reports of torture without exception and bring those responsible to justice. According to a report run by this

newspaper on Monday, police have sought cancellation of a legal provision that bars them from justifying torture and inhuman treatment of anyone in custody even in circumstances like war and political unrest. The Jatiya Sangsad passed the

Torture and Custodial Death (Preven-

tion) Act in 2013, making torture in the hands of law enforcers or government officials a punishable offence.

The police headquarters proposed

war, political instability, state of emergency, or orders of senior official or the government authorities will be acceptable for any crime under this law. The rights watchdog said, "With this proposal, the police force appears to be admitting that its officers are using torture to extract information from

detainees, a practice that Bangladesh is legally bound to prevent, stop, punish and provide reparations for under the UN Convention against Torture and other international treaties." For decades, the Bangladeshi police have in practice remained immune from prosecution for torture, including in

many cases where the evidence has been extremely strong, read the statement. "Victims of torture have told the AI

that officers in police stations are reluctant to accept complaints of torture under this act. Only on occasions when there has been a public outcry, has a prosecution followed," mentioned Amnesty.

French sports stars killed

FROM PAGE 16

still unclear what caused the accident in the rugged western province of La Rioja, near the Andes Mountains. French media citing Argentinian

sources said the helicopters were flying

through clear skies at an altitude of about 100 meters when they hit each other around 5.15 p.m. local time (2015 GMT). Amateur footage showed dozens of

people rushing through heavy undergrowth toward the helicopters' burning wreckage. "The sudden death of our fellow French nationals is a cause of immense

sadness," French President Francois Hollande's office said in a statement. Preparations were being made to recover the bodies from the mangled wreckage, said local mayor Andres

Navarrete. He described flying condi-

tions at the time of the accident as

"ideal". "Some of the bodies can be seen and others are buried under the charred mass of metal," Navarrete said, speaking by telephone from the crash

Two pilots and several members of the ALP-TV production company involved in filming the adventure show "Dropped" for private TV station TF1 were among the dead, officials said.

As part of the show, other contestants were standing blindfolded on the ground a few hundred meters from the helicopters' flight path, French media reported. They ran to the crash site but could not extinguish the fire, a contestant's assistant told French broadcaster RFI.

"The whole of French sport is in mourning because we have lost three huge champions," Thierry Braillard, junior minister for sports, town and youth affairs, told RTL radio.

"Florence Arthaud - we all knew her as the 'Fiancee of the Atlantic'," he said, referring to a nickname she earned through her many daring voyages

including a 1990 record for the fastest solitary crossing of that body of water. TF1 issued a statement expressing

solidarity for the victims' families.

French media said filming had been suspended and the crew and other contestants were heading back to "We have no details on the exact circumstances at the moment," TF1

Chief Executive Nonce Paolini said "All I can say at the moment is that we are in a state of complete shock." "Dropped" involves contestants

being left in the wilderness and using their skills to find their way back to civilization. The collision was the second time in

two years that a reality show produced by ALP for TF1 had been hit by tragedy. In April 2013 the doctor charged with looking after contestants in the long-running "Koh-Lanta" endurance show committed suicide after one of

the competitors died following one of the tests, complaining of heart pains. Arthaud, 57, was one of the first women to carve a place for herself in

the top levels of sailing. She had a brush with death in 2011 when she fell off her boat into the Mediterranean. Rescuers whisked her out after she called her mother by

mobile phone. Muffat, 25, won 400 meters freestyle gold at the 2012 London Olympics. Vastine, 28, won bronze at the Beijing 2008 Olympics.

"I am sad for my friends, I'm shaking, I'm horrified, I can't find the words," Sylvain Wiltord, an exfootballer for English Premier League club Arsenal and fellow cast member

tweeted. The victims included the helicopters' two pilots, both of whom were military-trained, according to

Argentine daily La Nacion. "There were no survivors," La Rioja's security chief, Cesar Angulo,

No moratorium

FROM PAGE 16

civilians, arguing that the country's civilian courts were too intimidated and inept to convict militants and murderers.

Human rights groups warned that convictions were highly unreliable and the Pakistan criminal justice system barely functioned. But the government promised only those convicted of militant attacks would be executed and regular convicts on death row would be spared.

Since then, 24 people have been executed, including two men who were not involved in a militant attack, according to legal aid group Justice Project Pakistan.

The group produced research in conjunction with U.S. university Yale Law School documenting nearly 2,000 cases of torture in the eastern Pakistani district of Faisalabad. Interviewees said police routinely manufactured evidence, tortured suspects and botched

investigations.

Torture is recognised as such a widespread problem that any confession a suspect gives to a policeman is inadmissible in court.

Lawyers are often also inept or corrupt, witnesses are frequently bribed or murdered and judges are threatened, the group says.

Police say that although torture used to be common, it is rarer these days.

Many of those on death row were children when they were arrested and say they were tortured into confessing, the group said, citing the case of a man who was 14 years old when he was sentenced to death ten years ago. "We've seen time and time again

that there is immeasurable injustice in Pakistan's criminal justice system, with a rampant culture of police torture, inadequate counsel and unfair trials," Sarah Belal, the executive director of Justice Project Pakistan, said in a statement.