

# Four JMB men held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Rapid Action Battalion early today arrested four operatives of banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh in the capital's Dakhkhin Khan area.

The arrests were made following up a tip-off. The raid started around 1:00am and was still going on, Major Maqsubul Alam of Rab media wing told The Daily Star around 2:45am.

An Arges grenade, some petrol bombs and bomb-making materials were recovered during the raid, he claimed.

# China wants to control South China Sea: Philippines

AFP, Manila

The Philippines accused China yesterday of seeking to take control of nearly the entire South China Sea with an expansionist agenda dominated by "massive reclamation" works.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert del Rosario said China's efforts were aimed at undermining a United Nations tribunal that is due to rule early next year on a Philippine challenge to its claims to the disputed waters.

"China is accelerating its expansionist agenda and changing the status quo to actualise its nine-dash line claim and to control nearly the entire South China Sea before... the handing down of a decision of the arbitral tribunal on the Philippine submission," del Rosario told reporters.

# Accused not

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Commission will decide on the legality of his candidature. The DMP will just follow the law and directives of the EC, he mentioned.

The Dhaka north and south city corporations will go to polls on April 28. The deadline for filing nominations expires on Sunday.

Talking to The Daily Star, Election Commissioner Abdul Mobarak said the EC had nothing to do with the DMP's announcement as police could arrest any accused anytime.

Monirul also said people who are on bail but have criminal records will be under watch so that they cannot influence electioneering illegally.

Necessary steps will be taken to ensure that voters can exercise their franchise in a congenial atmosphere, he noted.

# Ctg city

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completely isolated from the grass-roots, it will send a wrong message among the activists."

The followers of city BNP General Secretary Shahadat Hossain, who was absent from the meeting, have already declared that they would resist Manjil.

Meanwhile, the Awami League camp is finalising its campaign strategies, keeping the BNP moves in mind.

Ishak Miah, convener of the campaign committee of AL-blessed mayor aspirant AZM Nasir Uddin, said: "We are the pro-liberation force and they are anti-liberation ... People know everybody very well. They will never make a mistake."

# Khaleda skips

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Insiders in the BNP told The Daily Star that the party high-ups, including Khaleda, believe that she will not be allowed to enter the Gulshan office, once she steps out it.

On January 5, Khaleda announced the ongoing indefinite nationwide blockade, demanding an interim election under a "non-party" government, the moment she was barred from leaving the office.

More than two weeks after their deployment, additional policemen were withdrawn from near the office. However, the BNP chief did not come out of it for a single time.

Yesterday, after paying tribute to the martyrs, the BNP leaders and activists went to the grave of Zia in the capital and paid him homage on the Independence Day.

There, Mahbubur Rahman said even though City Corporation elections was a local government poll, the BNP took it "quite seriously".

"If the government ensures level-playing field for every candidate, releases the possible BNP-back aspirants from jail and gives permission for holding meetings and conducting campaigns, the party may consider participating in the city corporation polls," he said.

# A tale of tall trees and good men

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where the climbers are so long that one can swing from one tree to another and where the treetops are so close that night descends in the afternoon! This serenity and the sense of escape always attracted me towards this remoteness.

My quest for the last couple of years has been to explore the last natural forests of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in order to learn more about its human and non-human inhabitants. I was fortunate to be able to make several expeditions into the heart of Bandarban, into a remote area called the Sangu-Matamuhuri Reserve Forest and its surroundings. Here, travelling with naturalist friends, I discovered many fascinating stories these remote hills carry and more than that I gained insight into the lives of the hill men, the people who call this wondrous place home.

In one of those visits, we walked through miles of forest patches, on hilltops where the canopies of the trees closed over our heads. There were no roads, no people, nothing to infringe on the peace, where leaf-filtered yellow-green sunlight touched my bare skin. The chattering of hill birds soothed my mind; infrequent tender breezes washed my face through the gaps in the wall of vegetation. I focused on the elements around me and void of all digital complexities, the intensity of my surroundings heightened even more. *"Beneath high hills, in the valley of compassion, In the murmurs of joy from the giant trees and the curious wind, Where rain ran in rivulets down the hills, through the obsolete roofs, Here, in the bamboo huts, built with great affection, The good men, the hill farmers dwell."*

Entirety is a part of our hills. There, all things are isolated yet connected. The vastness of the land is always absorbing, whether you see one hill or one tree or one farmer. I looked upon that landscape every morning, with the sun on my back, - losing the sense of being a dominating human, only submitting myself to nature. My imagination came to life, and that, I thought, is where creation began and yet

remains unclaimed by our will.

We looked for wildlife all day, especially seeking hill birds that were not seen anywhere else in Bangladesh. At night we stayed in the bamboo-huts of our Mro friends, different nights in different villages. More days were spent in these villages surrounded by thick forests, located in the highest elevations of Bangladesh.

One of those villages was on top of a hill, surrounded by several streams and slopes. Only a few families lived in this Mro village, where my friend Mongkheo had his own little bamboo hut. Often I would observe him from distance and sometimes it felt like his mystic eyes fed on the vastness of the hills, his narrow and angular face drank the last drop of monsoon and his strong-built body carried all signs of goodness.

Almost everything in his house was made of bamboo: the thatch, the frame of the roof, the poles, the floor and even the pillows! The Mros live very simply, and are possibly the lowest users of resources in our country - they have no electricity, no bricks or concrete, and no means of transport but their own legs.

At night I lay down on a bamboo platform over the slope facing the dark hills. In a few moments I found myself being observed by a thousand stars or more. Fireflies joined the symphony of sparkling lights, and insignificant night creatures made their sharp calls. A Mountain Scopes Owl shrilled infrequently from the nearby slope. I saw the dark line of the distant hill more prominently as the stars blazed over it. Neither the sound of streetcar horns, nor any signal on my mobile phone interrupted the night.

During the day I often sat on an oval-shaped stone along the stream and watched the water meandering by working its force on the stones, changing them, morphing the landscape over a thousand years. Sun beams filtered through the overhanging branches of trees and soil-tipped roots of old trees on the slope above me, making the shallow parts of the stream seem like pools of boiling water embedded with gravel. A curious Streaked Spiderhunter came by a few times to greet me. My friend

Mongkheo would also sit with me. He would help me spot the wildlife in the valley below us as we shared stories of love, joy and sorrow.

It is fascinating to know people like Mongkheo, his family and other villagers who live so close to us, yet are so different from us. He is so easy to understand, yet so difficult to relate to. Everyday in his forest village I learned something new from him, not only about the hills but also about life. I have travelled all over Bangladesh for the last ten years chasing rare birds and the rare beauty of our land. I have met people from all different walks of life, but never have I met anyone as welcoming and warm as my friends in the hills. They gave more than I asked for - food, shelter, security and comfort - and most importantly their trust, without ever expecting anything in return.

We blindly blame poverty and population for the destruction of our forests, wetlands and every single wild place we have. Neither poverty nor population is responsible for the recent oil spill in the Sundarbans, or the coal-based power plant on the edge of the last mangrove forest, or the deep-sea port on Sonadia Island where thousands of migratory birds still fly freely, or the cross dam in the Ganges delta where the poor fishermen find their livelihood. It is our policy that is recklessly overlooking the value of nature and people, exhausting our last remaining wildernesses and distressing the relationship with good people like Mongkheo.

To truly feel the freedom that we claim to have in this country, perhaps it is about time we reconnected with nature and people living close to nature. Our poets did not speak about birds or nature or jotsna raat living in cities and we would genuinely agree that their words reflected true love for this country. If we remain disconnected from nature and let our children live in concrete insanity, how can we expect them to love the country and its people? How can we expect them to lead us differently than our current politicians? Did we ever think about it?

*The writer is a Bangladesh-based Conservation Biologist, currently studying at the University of Cambridge, UK.*

# Japan FM eyes visit to Cuba: report

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida could visit Cuba next month, a report said yesterday, becoming one of the highest-profile visitors to the isolated island since a thaw began between Washington and Havana.

If the visit goes ahead, Kishida is expected to call for closer ties with Cuba, where Japanese companies can invest in infrastructure projects and mineral resource development, Japan's public broadcaster NHK said.

Kishida may make the visit in late April when he travels to the United States for a meeting on the UN nuclear non-proliferation treaty and to hold security talks with the US side there, it said.

It would make him the first Japanese foreign minister to visit the communist island, the broadcaster added.

The move comes after Washington and Havana in December announced they would set aside their Cold War enmity and renew diplomatic ties.

# Anxious wait

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Unknown militants had abducted Anowar and Helal along with four Filipinos, an Austrian, a Czech and a Ghanaian from Al-Ghani oil field, south of Sirte, on March 6.

On Tuesday night, the Bangladesh foreign ministry issued a press release saying the two Bangladeshis had been released and they were staying at a Sirte hospital over the night.

# Teenage boy

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from the district town.

Quoting witnesses, Abdul Halim Sarker, chairman of Daudpur Union Parishad, said two bikers left a shopping bag near the CCD office at Daudpur village around 5:00pm when Monirul was returning to his shop from home.

As the boy touched the bag out of curiosity, the bomb blasted, killing him on the spot.

Police recovered the body around 6:30pm and took it to Nawabganj Police Station.

The body will be sent today to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital for an autopsy, said Md Amirul Islam, officer-in-charge of the police station.

# N Korea denies hacking nuclear plants in South

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday denied involvement in cyber-attacks on South Korea's nuclear power plant operator, accusing Seoul of fabricating a story to shift the blame for high cross-border tensions.

Last December hackers published designs, manuals and other information about South Korean reactors on Twitter, along with personal information about workers at their operating company.

The leaks prompted the South to heighten cyber-security and launch an investigation involving experts, government officials and state prosecutors.

Last week Seoul blasted Pyongyang for seeking to throw South Korea into "social chaos" with cyber-attacks on the reactors, describing them as a threat to people's lives and safety.

Pyongyang's state Internet research institute yesterday insisted North Korea had never been involved in any cyber-attacks on the South.

"We never think about a bad act

against the interests of our brethren under any circumstances," it said in a statement published by the official KCNA news agency, dismissing the South's claims as "sheer fabrication".

The charges that North Korea was behind the reactor hack reflect South Korea's "sinister" scheme to shift responsibility for strained inter-Korean relations, it said.

Tensions between the neighbours are running high after the South this month held joint military drills with the United States -- condemned by the North as provocative rehearsals for invasion.

Seoul has blamed North Korean hackers for a series of cyber-attacks on military institutions, banks, government agencies, TV broadcasters and media websites in recent years.

The United States also said the North was behind a cyber-attack on Sony over its controversial North Korea-themed satirical film "The Interview" last year.

# Saudi Arabia

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On the eve of the Egypt summit, Arab League chief Nabil al-Arabi also declared full support for the strikes following a "coup".

But Iran reacted furiously, condemning the intervention as "a dangerous step" that violated "international responsibilities and national sovereignty".

President Hassan Rohani said it amounted to "military aggression" and "condemned all military intervention in the internal affairs of independent nations".

After hitting targets overnight in Sanaa and elsewhere, the coalition launched fresh strikes late yesterday, hitting a rebel-held base in third city Ta'ez and the airport and an arms depot in the Huthis' northern stronghold.

Explosions had been heard earlier in Sanaa as warplanes pounded an air base adjacent to the international airport and other locations, an AFP correspondent reported.

Families streamed out of Sanaa seeking the relative safety of the provinces.

"I am leaving with my family. Sanaa is no longer safe," said one resident, who gave his name only as Mohammed, as he piled his belongings into a minibus.

In the south, residents reported hearing explosions at the huge Al-Anad air base, north of Aden, which anti-government forces seized on Wednesday.

Saudi television said the kingdom had deployed 100 fighter jets to the operation, while the United Arab Emirates had committed 30, Kuwait 15 each and Qatar 10. Bahrain said it had committed 12 fighters.

Saudi Arabia had also mobilised 150,000 troops near the border.

Riyadh said it was boosting security on its borders and across the kingdom, including at the OPEC kingpin's crucial oil facilities.

Washington said President Barack Obama had authorised the "provision of logistical and intelligence support" for the campaign. US officials told AFP Washington was looking at providing refuelling and early warning radar aircraft in support of the operation.

A Saudi adviser said the strikes had taken out Huthi air defences and destroyed numerous fighter planes, adding that the air force "has pretty

much secured most of the Yemeni air space".

Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan said they were joining the campaign.

Like Iran, Shia-majority Iraq said it opposed the Saudi intervention, with Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari calling for a peaceful settlement, and Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah accused Riyadh of "aggression".

US Secretary of State John Kerry held a conference call with Gulf ministers to discuss the operation and "commended the work of the coalition taking military action against the Huthis," a senior US official said.

Yemen has been gripped by growing turmoil since the Huthis launched a power takeover in Sanaa in February.

The Saudi-led intervention triggered a sharp rise in world oil prices on fears the conflict could threaten supplies.

# Haji Salim

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Sources close to Salim also said that he was still waiting for the party's nod and he would return on March 29, the last day of submission of nomination papers for DCC polls.

Salim wrote in his Facebook page yesterday that he was traveling to Madras (Chennai) for treatment and he would visit Ajmer Sharif before he came back.

"I became sick as I tortured my health for the last few days due to the mayoral election. Along with me, thousands of my supporters and well-wishers worked hard for me and I am grateful to them," read his Facebook post.

Talking with the Daily Star, Mohiuddin Belal, personal aide to the independent lawmaker, said Salim was waiting for the Speaker's decision.

Salim tendered his resignation to the Speaker on Tuesday and if the resignation is not accepted by the Speaker, he will not be able to contest the polls.

On Wednesday, Hasina, also the AL chief, met City Unit AL leaders and officially informed them that the party would back Sayeed Khokon, son of former city mayor Mohammad Hanif for Dhaka south and former FBCCI president Annisul Huq for Dhaka north city corporation polls.

# Richard III gets

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over the coffin.

The story of the king in the car park has captivated Britain and caused people to reevaluate a man long caricatured as a villainous tyrant.

"King Richard has stepped from the pages of history into the fullest glare of the world's attention," the Bishop of Leicester, Tim Stevens, said in his sermon.

"The search has laid to rest half a millennium of mystery surrounding his burial place and revealed that Richard belongs not just to the archaeologists, the chroniclers and the curators -- but to all of us."

Many people among the thousands gathered outside the cathedral were clutching white roses, the symbol of Richard's House of York dynasty.

"I feel he was badly treated at the time of his death and all through history," said May Doherty, 62, from Coleraine in Northern Ireland, who wore medieval black costume.

"We believe he was innocent and this is the burial he deserved. This is a once in a lifetime occasion. It's brilliant to be here and be part of history."

The last of the Plantagenet dynasty, Richard ruled from 1483 until his death at the Battle of Bosworth near Leicester in 1485, aged 32.

It was the last major conflict in the Wars of the Roses and changed the course of English history as the Tudor dynasty captured the crown.

Richard was hastily buried without fanfare by monks, with the site destroyed in 1538.

Queen Elizabeth II sent a written message for the service, saying Richard would at last "lie in peace".

Her daughter-in-law Sophie, the Countess of Wessex, attended the ceremony on her behalf, along with the queen's cousin Prince Richard, patron of the Richard III Society and a blood relative of the last English king to die in battle.

Packed in with wool, Richard's battle-scarred bones were sealed in a lead ossuary contained within an oak coffin made by Canadian carpenter Michael Ibsen, one of his closest living relatives.

After Richard's coffin was lowered into his grave by six soldiers, Oscar-nominated actor Benedict Cumberbatch read a specially-commissioned work by the Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy.

Cumberbatch, due to play Richard in a BBC television series, is coincidentally the king's third cousin 16 times removed.

Some shed tears during the reinterment, which referenced Richard's proclaimed title as king of England and France and lord of Ireland.

Richard was identified by his distinctive curved spine, radiocarbon dating and conclusively by DNA from his closest living relatives.