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HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mass awareness teams unaware

Over 5,000 committees hibernating since birth in 2012

SHAKHAWAT LITON and RASHIDUL HASAN

In 2012, the government formed more than 5,000 committees in efforts to fight human trafficking. That was about three years before the horrific extent of people-smuggling from Bangladesh and Myanmar into Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia came to light, particularly in the last one month.

But the move has come to naught, as the committees exist only on paper and have done nothing at all in the last three years.

The committees -- one each in all the 64 districts, 482 upazilas and around 4,500 unions -- involve more than 1 lakh people, including members of parliament, deputy commissioners, Upazila Nirbahi Officers, upazila and union chairmen and law enforcers.

Last week, The Daily Star spoke to six DCs, six UNOs, six upazila chairmen, six union chairmen and two MPs to know what they have done to prevent human traffick-

ing. Shockingly, none of them except for one UNO is aware that the committees even exist, leave alone the fact that they were their members.

Among other activities, the committees were to hold rallies, meetings and campaigns at local levels to create mass awareness against human trafficking and also take necessary measures to fight the menace.

The committees' ineffectiveness seems to have served as a blessing for the middlemen and people smugglers.

In the wake of the recent developments over the South Asian migrant crisis, the home ministry has made fresh moves to make the committees functional.

EVERYBODY'S IN THE DARK
The home ministry is the key player in coordinating and supervising the functions of all the committees formed under the National Plan of Action (NPA) 2012-14.

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2014 Nobel Laureate for Peace Kailash Satyarthi made a courtesy call on Nobel peace prize winner Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday at the Yunus Centre in Dhaka. PHOTO COURTESY: NASIR ALI MAMUN

TRAFFICKING TRAP

Families await calls for ransom

REUTERS, Teknaf

In Bangladesh's southernmost tip, families cling to scraps of paper with Malaysian and Thai hand phone numbers scribbled on them as their only links to loved ones missing after boarding fishing boats, lured by hopes of a brighter future overseas.

Some of the families have received calls from those numbers, from people claiming to be holding their husbands or sons and asking for ransom to get them home.

Sometimes the captives have phoned themselves

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Khaleda Banu

MIGRANT BOAT HELD IN LIMBO

Myanmar denies journo access

REUTERS, Off Leik Island

Myanmar's navy briefly detained and turned back journalists on Sunday near a migrant boat being held off the country's southern coast, according to Reuters witnesses, as officials remained guarded over what would be done with the people on board.

Before being turned away, Reuters reporters saw hundreds of migrants - some rickety thin - crammed on the deck of the converted Thai fishing boat that had been intercepted in the Andaman Sea on Friday and held in the waters off Leik island.

Some were sat on two of the four Myanmar navy vessels standing off the fishing boat, which had been discovered

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Teesta deal not now

Delhi ends speculations ahead of Modi's Dhaka visit

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA and REZAUL KARIM

Putting an end to all speculations, India yesterday made it clear that the Teesta water-sharing deal will not be signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's June 6-7 Dhaka visit, as West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is yet to give consent to it.

"There will be no deal on Teesta during the coming visit because we have to take the state [West Bengal] government on board for this," India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj told a press conference at the Jawaharlal Nehru Bhavan in New Delhi.

She said this in response to a query about the possibility of signing the Teesta deal during the Indian PM's visit to Dhaka.

"We have not reached a position for signing of the Teesta pact. Any understanding between governments of India and Bangladesh will not be enough as no decision is possible without consulting the state government," Swaraj said.

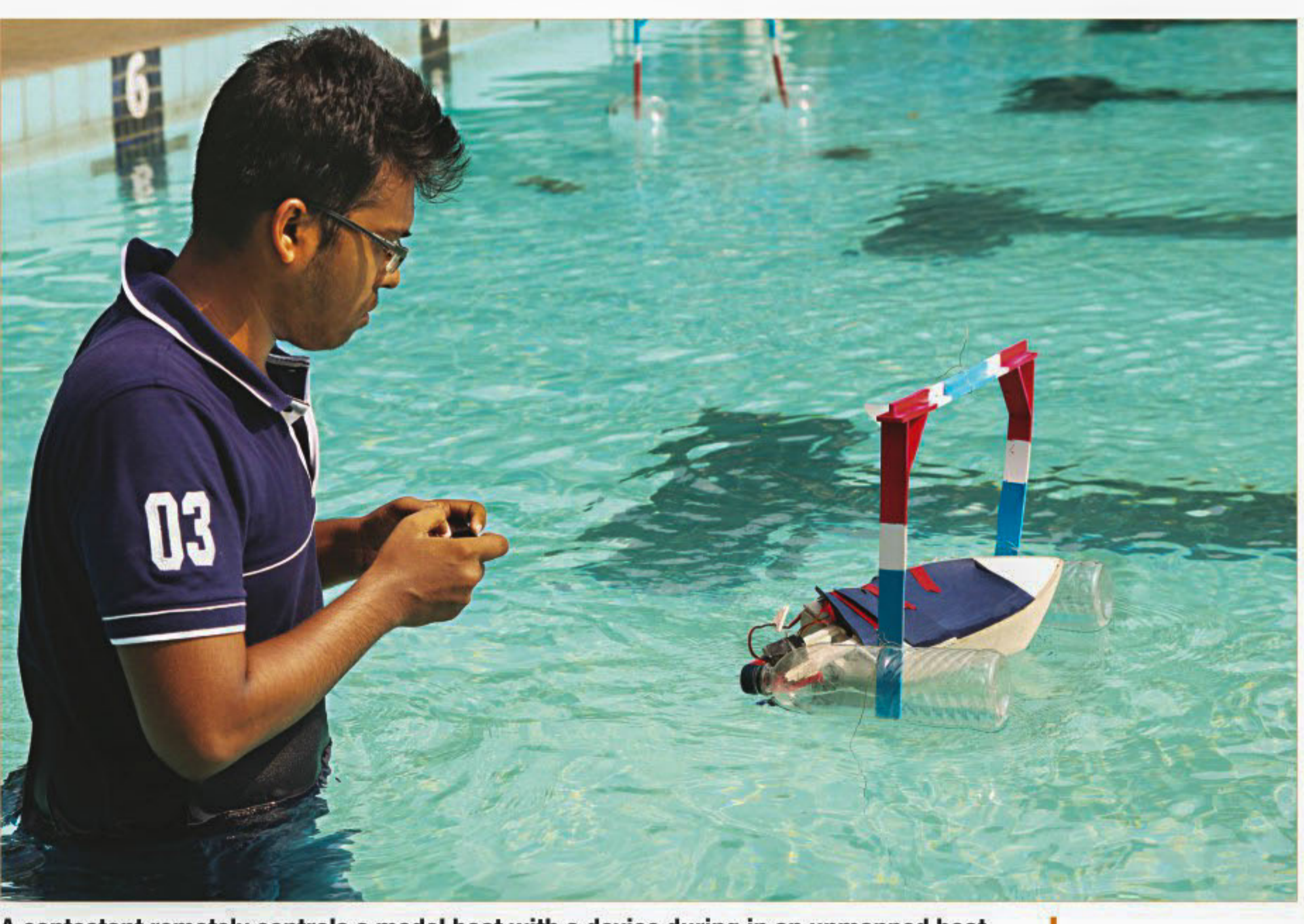
Asked if there was any possibility of Mamata dropping out at the last minute like she did in 2011, the minister said, "This time there is no such possibility. Mamata Banerjee is definitely going there."

Swaraj, however, said the process of taking the

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Sushma Swaraj



A contestant remotely controls a model boat with a device during in an unmanned boat race arranged by the Department of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering of Buet in the swimming pool of Dhaka University on May 14. PHOTO COURTESY: RAKIBUL HAQ PRINCE

Unmanned boats hold new hope

MD MIZANUR RAHMAN HIMADRI

Seeing the small boats navigating through the course marked in the pool apparently on their own, one has to wonder how it was happening.

The tiny boats were being maneuvered by a remote control device developed by Rakibul Haq alias Prince, a fourth year student at Buet's Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering (NAME) department.

On May 14, the department arranged the country's first unmanned boat race in the swimming pool of Dhaka University.

Over 90 contestants took part in the event with boats of different models.

Prince's classmates Tariq Wazed Akash was the designer of the models and Shadman Sakib Siam assembled other equipment during the competition.

Prince said the controlling device was installed in mobile phones and other wireless equipment during the programme sponsored by Khulna Shipyard, an enterprise of Bangladesh Navy.

Asked how they came up with such an idea, Akash said, "It was over a year ago after we three as a team won a competition styled Innovation of Mobile Apps Challenge organised by the Computer Science and Engineering department of the Buet."

"After that, we started thinking about doing something new that could help locate and rescue sunken vessels, and the unmanned boats are the first step towards achieving our aim.

"If we really can develop a device for locating sunken vessels and install it in such boats or ships of larger size, it

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HOPE BEARERS

'IS operative' held in Dhaka

STAR REPORT

A week after the arrest of two suspected Islamic State (IS) operatives, detectives have caught another person in the capital's Baridhara area, claiming he is an "assistant coordinator" of the terror outfit in Bangladesh.

The 27-year-old detainee, Abdullah Al Galib, son of an ex-army official, also has launched a

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Galib

NEWS ANALYSIS

Has BNP forgotten its anti-India past?

SHAKHAWAT LITON

BNP spokesperson Asaduzzaman Ripon's claim that their party has never done anti-Indian politics is a complete denial of the truth.

BNP's anti-Indian politics has been evident in numerous ways. Prominent political scientists see the party's traditional anti-Indian stance as one of its foundational positions.

So, when the BNP spokesperson on Wednesday at a press conference denied this historic truth, it surprised us. What does the BNP exactly seek to achieve by denying the facts? Will a mere denial without acknowledging their wrong political strategy pave the way for correcting BNP's politics?

In independent Bangladesh, the anti-Indian politics started getting momentum after the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the overthrow

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MG!

"Launch a military operation against women wearing jeans all over Pakistan."

JAMIAT ULEMA-E-ISLAMI FAZL CHIEF
MAULANA FAZLUR RAHMAN
REQUESTING PAK PM AND ARMY CHIEF TO
DECLARE WAR AGAINST 'IMMODEST WOMEN
WHO ARE THE CAUSE BEHIND EARTHQUAKES'

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