

## 2 senior US officials due tomorrow

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

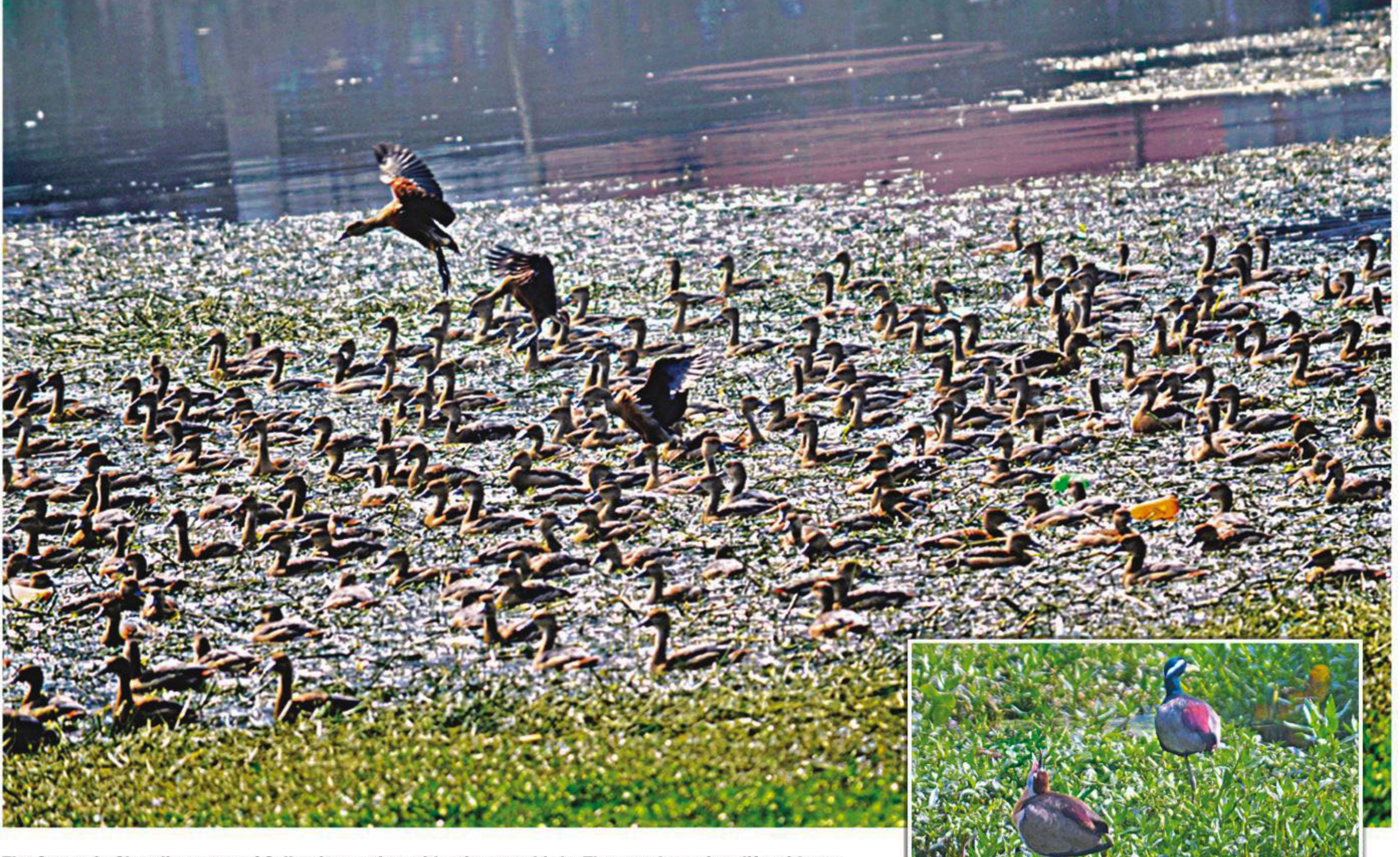
Counsellor of the US Department of State Thomas Shannon arrives here tomorrow to discuss issues like security, trade, development and counter-terrorism.

He will be accompanied by US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Nisha Desai Biswal and Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia Manpreet Singh Anand, according to a media note received from the US Department of State yesterday.

"His trip will highlight the strength and durability of the US-Bangladesh relationship and continued gains to be made in security, trade, development, the environment, and countering violent extremism," the media note reads.

Shannon, also undersecretary for political affairs, will meet senior government and parliamentary leaders, as well as media, civil society representatives, and labour representatives. He will also visit a USAID-funded healthcare clinic.

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The Surma in Chandipur area of Sylhet is teeming with migratory birds. The area leaps into life with constant chirps of hundreds of birds that migrate to the country during winter. Inset, two such birds looking for food in aquatic plants. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## "Jalaler Golpo" awarded in Kerala film festival

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Abu Shahed Emon's critically acclaimed feature film "Jalaler Golpo" (Jalal's Story) yesterday won the award for the best work by a debutant director at the 20th International Film Festival of Kerala in India.

Emon was conferred the "Rajatha Chakoram" (Silver Crow Pheasant Award), a citation and Indian rupees 1 lakh as part of the award at a function on the concluding day of the Festival in Thiruvananthapuram, capital of southern Indian state of Kerala, yesterday evening.

Emon's film was selected for the award by a four-member international jury headed by acclaimed Brazilian filmmaker Julio Bressane.

The top award (Golden Crow Pheasant) at the Kerala International Film Festival went to Malayalam feature film "Ottaal" (The Trap) by India's national award-winning director Jayaraj.

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# Climate-saving deal well on track

Says French FM despite pitfalls

AFP, Le Bourget

Sleep-starved envoys tasked with staving off catastrophic climate change are on track to seal a historic accord, the French hosts of UN talks said yesterday although the biggest pitfalls were yet to be cleared.

The 195-nation conference in Paris had been scheduled to wrap up yesterday, but was extended another day after ministers failed to bridge deep divides during a second consecutive all-night round of negotiations.

Still, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, who is presiding over the talks, voiced confidence the event would culminate with a much-awaited pact.

"We are almost at the end of the road and I am optimistic," said Fabius, whose hopes were echoed by many negotiators and observers despite potential deal-breakers still up in the air.



PARIS2015 CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE COP21-CMP11

Fabius said he would submit the deal at 9:00 (0800 GMT) and was "sure" it would be approved. "It will be a big step forward for humanity as a whole," he said.

World leaders have billed the Paris talks as the last chance to avert disastrous climate change: increasingly severe drought, floods and storms, as well as rising seas that would engulf islands and populated coasts.

Highlighting the urgency of the moment, US President Barack Obama and his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, spoke by phone yesterday about the Paris negotiations, according to China's foreign ministry.

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## No arrest yet in N'ganj mob beating

STAR REPORT

Police have yet to arrest anyone in connection with a mob beating that left eight alleged robbers killed and four others injured in Araihaazar upazila of Narayanganj on Thursday.

"We are investigating the incident but could not identify anyone," said Shakhawat Hossain, officer-in-charge of Araihaazar police, around 7:00pm yesterday.

Asked about mobile footages of the mass beating availed by different media outlets, the OC claimed they could not gather any.

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REBEL CANDIDATES

# BNP soft, AL not

PRABIR BARUA CHOWDHURY

The BNP high-ups are still maintaining a soft stance against its rebel candidates while the ruling Awami League remains firm on its decision to go tough on party dissidents.

The contrasting strategies are aimed at deterring party dissidents from withdrawing their nominations for the December 30 municipal polls, but neither party has so far been successful in this.

December 13 (tomorrow) is the last date for nomination withdrawal.

According to party sources, the BNP has around 27 rebel candidates against around 50 in the AL in different municipalities.

On Wednesday night, the AL central command gave its rebels 24 hours to quit their mayoral bids to avoid facing actions, including expulsion. However, very few



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candidates obliged, sources said.

Over the past two days, the BNP high-ups, including its acting secretary general Mirza Fakhur Islam Alamgir and Joint Secretary General Mohammad Shajahan spoke with several rebel mayor candidates and requested them to pull out.

"They told party rebels that it was a very crucial time for the party and they [leaders] took it as a challenge to restore the party strength. It will give a wrong message to the voters if multiple candidates run for one post. It will also affect the winning party candidates," said a BNP leader involved with the electoral work of the party.

As a tactic, the party does not want to upset leaders and activists at the moment because of "shortage of active party men".

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Members of many Hindu religious organisations under the banner of Bangladesh Jatiya Hindu Mahajote attend a rally in front of the capital's Jatiya Press Club yesterday, protesting the gun attack on the Iskcon mandir in Dinajpur on Thursday.

PHOTO: STAR

## 'Moja Loss' admin remanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Refayet Ahmed, admin of a Facebook page called "Moja Loss?" was placed on a two-day remand yesterday for allegedly running campaign against the government and the state through the page.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested him from the capital's Bashundhara Residential Area around 3:30pm on Thursday afternoon, two hours after the government unblocked Facebook in Bangladesh.

A Rab official filed a case against Refayet under Section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act-2006 with Bhatara Police Station yesterday, said Nurul Muttakin, officer-in-charge of the station.

Police produced him before a Dhaka court, praying for a five-day remand for interrogation.

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# 3 members of int'l trafficking gang arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three alleged human traffickers having links with an international trafficking gang were arrested in the capital on Thursday night.

Following a case filed by a victim, officials of the Criminal Investigation Department arrested Al Azad, 27, in Banani, Firoz Ahmed, 28, in Uttara and Krishna Gopal Dey, 38, in Tantibazar and seized Tk 15 lakh from them.

"The trio were working for a Romania-born Australian national named John, the ringleader of an international trafficking gang," said Mirza Abdullal Bahqui, special superintendent (organised crime) of CID at a press briefing at his office.

John visited Bangladesh around four months ago and lured a good number of people with handsomely paid jobs at his chain shops in Australia, New Zealand and Romania.

Azad and Firoz used to collect the fortune seekers from across the country through their agents, while Krishna used to deal with financial transactions, said the CID officials, adding, the gang used to take Tk 12-15 lakh from each target.

The CID officials further said the gang mainly used to take the fortune seekers to Indonesian on tourist visas and made them captive there. They were not released unless they gave them the demanded money through family members in Bangladesh.

Kowsar Ahmed, who was looking for a job in New Zealand, fell victim to this gang.

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# US-LED AIR STRIKES IN IRAQ

## IS finance chief, 350 fighters killed

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Air strikes have killed three senior IS leaders - including the group's financial minister - and an estimated 350 fighters holed up in the Iraqi city of Ramadi, a US military spokesman has said.

Colonel Steve Warren, spokesman for the US military command in Baghdad, announced the deaths of Abu Salah, known as IS' financial minister, Abu Maryam, an "enforcer and senior leader of their [IS] extortion network", and Abu Rahman al-Tunisi, an "executive officer" who handles the transfer of information, people and weapons.

Col Warren told reporters at the Pentagon: "Killing him and his predecessors exhausts the knowledge and talent needed to coordinate funding within the organisation."

He said all three were killed in late November during air strikes near the town of Tal Afar, in northern Iraq.

Acting undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, Adam Szubin, said some of IS' funds came from looting between \$500m and \$1bn from bank vaults captured in Iraq and Syria, and through extorting the local population.

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# Machine 'learns' like a human

AFP, Washington

Scientists have invented a machine that imitates the way the human brain learns new information, a step forward for artificial intelligence, researchers reported.

The system described in the journal Science is a computer model "that captures humans' unique ability to learn new concepts from a single example," the study said.

"Though the model is only capable of learning handwritten characters from alphabets, the approach underlying it could be broadened to have applications for other symbol-based systems, like gestures, dance moves, and the words of spoken and signed languages."

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