



Eight youths on their way to Kuakata in Patuakhali. Members of "BD Metro Cycling Community", they started their three-day journey from the capital on Thursday, as part of their 1,000km cycle journey with the message, "Say no to drugs". Story on page 5.

PHOTO: STAR

## Biswal due

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the counterterrorism cooperation between the US and Bangladesh can be advanced further.

"We offer full support to the government of Bangladesh as they investigate the murder and bring the perpetrators to justice," said John Kerry in a statement on April 25.

Diplomatic sources said as Biswal was coming to Dhaka with a special assignment from Secretary Kerry she would be definitely carrying special messages and would want to meet Hasina, Home Minister

Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali. CONGRESSIONAL HEARING

In another development, the US is working with India on countering violent extremism in Bangladesh, a top American diplomat has said linking recent spate of attacks on secular bloggers and minorities to the rise of ISIS and al-Qaeda in the Muslim-majority country, reports PTI.

"We've seen a series of attacks, terrorist attacks, in Bangladesh over the last several months which DAESH [ISIS] or al-Qaeda have taken credit for," US Deputy Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said during a Congressional hearing on Thursday.

Blinken disagreed with the Bangladeshi government's assessment that opposition parties are responsible for these acts of violence.

"Now the government has sometimes claimed that these attacks were actually the work of the opposition in one fashion or another but what we've seen based on the evidence to date is in fact that extremist groups whether they are indigenous or whether they really are affiliated with ISIL or DAESH are responsible," he said.

"This gives us concern about the potential for ISIL, for DAESH, to take root in Bangladesh, which has been an important country in terms of having a Muslim country with a moderate orientation that can be an important player in dealing with the problem of violent extremism," PTI quoted Blinken as telling.

## Schools

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The summer vacation in schools would start on May 13, she said.

The notice also asks the authorities to ensure safe drinking water for students.

The country is experiencing a heat wave in the absence of rain, affecting normal life and activities. People, especially schoolchildren, are falling sick and some of them are getting hospitalised.

The highest temperature in the country was recorded 41 degrees Celsius in Rajshahi yesterday. It was 37.4 degrees Celsius in Dhaka, according to the Met office.

There are more than 18,500 secondary schools across the country.

## Two AL men

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had been receiving death threats from local goons -- Ripon and Sangram.

She claimed that Manik became traceless after having received the phone call from the duo.

Nasim Miah, assistant superintendent of police in Laxmipur, said they suspected that Manik and Kamrul had been killed over an internal feud of a gang of drug peddlers.

The victims stood accused in several criminal cases, including for drug peddling and robbery, he added.

## Western governments, rights groups decry China's tough new NGO law

REUTERS, Beijing

Western governments and rights groups lambasted a new Chinese law governing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) yesterday, saying it treats the groups as a criminal threat and would effectively force many out of the country.

The law, which was passed by parliament on Thursday despite months of intense criticism and lobbying by the West, brings NGOs under the Ministry of Public Security, giving police broad authority over their finances and work.

"I think this definitely gives the government the legitimate channels and the excuse to kick out civil society organizations if they want," said Shen Tingting, a China-based advocacy director for Asia Catalyst, a group that trains domestic NGOs.

Shen said a pervasive atmosphere of sensitivity for NGOs had already driven the group to move many of its training sessions for local charities to Bangkok instead of holding them in China, particularly after one of its partner organisations faced questioning by police.

The law could only make the situation worse, she said.

Chinese officials defended the law, saying only a small number of law-breaking NGOs would be punished and that there was no reason to fear the police.

But rights groups say language in the law banning activities that threaten national security interests or endanger social stability is too ambiguous and could push out groups the ruling Communist Party does not like.

The law comes amid a broad crackdown by President Xi Jinping on civil society, including rights lawyers and the press, which critics say is meant to quash dissent.

The American Chamber of Commerce in China expressed disappointment with the law, saying it would have a detrimental impact on a "huge number of NGOs" as well as the companies they collaborate with.

"Treating foreign NGOs as primarily a security threat undermines not just the ability of those organizations to benefit China, but also the ability of companies to do business here," said

James Zimmerman, the chamber's chairman.

China's state-backed Global Times defended the law, calling criticism by the Western press extreme and adding that some NGOs should be restrained by the government.

"Specific foreign NGOs actually have harmed China's national security situation," the commentary said.

"From now on, foreign NGOs may become part of the Chinese Ministry of Public Security's 'difficult to manage' work, because they will promote, to a great extent, their own rights when conflicts occur," the newspaper said.

Western governments, which lobbied Chinese authorities for months to relax restrictions outlined in drafts of the law, said they were disappointed that such changes were minor. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry expressed "deep concern" that the law would harm ties between the U.S. and China.

"The final version of the new law contains certain improvements from the original draft," he said in a statement. "It also creates a highly uncertain and potentially hostile environment for foreign non-profit, non-governmental organizations and their Chinese partners that will no doubt discourage activities and initiatives."

## Experts suggest

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After the earthquake, the CDA identified nine buildings that tilted or were damaged. Later, the number of such buildings rose to 12.

Contacted, Prof Alam said there was a probability of huge damage in Chittagong city due to earthquake. Violation of building code, unplanned development and lack of awareness, among other things, will be the reasons behind the damage, he pointed out.

He emphasised the need for constructing earthquake-resistant buildings.

Alam also asked to increase the strength of the "risky buildings" after the assessment. He urged the authorities to create awareness among the people about earthquake.

## 3 Garo men missing

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They alleged that Bibhas was interrogated and tortured before being taken away.

Bibhas' mother has become more feeble after the incident. She said the abductors told her not to worry and that they would release her son soon.

Bibhas' cousin Swapna Hajidok, 28, claimed that many of the abductors were wearing Rab uniforms. She said they were clueless about reason behind the incident.

Provata's daughter Promita Sangma said all her family members but Provata were in Dhaka on the day of the abduction. She said her mother has also fallen sick.

Talking to The Daily Star, Shikha Marak, sister of Rajesh, the third victim, said those who picked up her brother also had introduced themselves as Rab members.

She said they filed a GD with

Bhaluka Police Station on April 17.

Suchitra Sangma, a nun at Gajni Baptist Church, said they were passing their days in fear following the "abduction" of the three Garo men.

She said, "We want our children back. We call upon the government to provide us with security."

Major Naem Abdullah, commander of the Rab-14 (Sherpur-Jamalpur), said, "We are not aware of anybody being picked up in that village. We have not detained anyone."

He said the elite force was investigating the incident.

Mizanur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Jhenaigati Police Station, said a GD was lodged after the incident and a probe was underway.

Contacted, Nayek Subedar Yakub Ali, company commander of BGB Jhenaigati Naksi border outpost, said he knew nothing about the incident.

## Hackers

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a bank in Sri Lanka was returned.

The Philippines is investigating the heist. Muhith said Bangladesh is also conducting a probe, adding that "definitely some of our people must've been involved." He declined to disclose further details.

Muhith repeated criticism of the NY Fed's handling of the money transfers, saying it allowed four transactions to go through without confirmation.

"That way they become liable for that part of the fraud," Muhith said, referring to the NY Fed. "There have been security lapses and the Federal Reserve cannot be excused for some blame in this trouble."

The Fed said last month that instructions to make the payments from the Bangladesh Bank account followed standard protocols and were authenticated by the SWIFT message system used by financial institutions.

Muhith said Bangladesh's security systems are "very vulnerable" and consultants are working on improving defences. A detailed report on the investigation will be completed in about six weeks, he said.

Bangladesh's foreign reserves climbed to a record \$29 billion this year as a weaker yuan cut the cost of raw materials used in its garment industry. Exports are holding up despite the drop in global demand, Muhith said.

He called the crime "a very unusual event," adding that the world hasn't seen anything like it in recent memory.

"It's a large sum of money for Bangladesh," Muhith said. "This is a very good warning, a signal to the world to take proper security measures in respect to money transfers."

## Retirement

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even those who termed themselves unhealthy are also likely to live longer, just as long as they kept punching the clock.

"It may not apply to everybody, but we think work brings people a lot of economic and social benefits that could impact the length of their lives," said Chenkai Wu, the lead author of the study and doctoral student at Oregon State University.

Wu became interested in the effects of retirement on health because of China's mandatory laws, as the official age is 60 for men and 55 for women. "Most research in this area has focused on the economic impacts of delaying retirement," Wu said.

To conduct this investigation, Wu gathered data from 1992 through 2010 that was filed with the Healthy Retirement Study, a long-term study of US adults led by the University of Michigan and funded by the National Institute on Aging.

The team chose 2,956 individuals who began the study in 1992 and retired by the end in 2010. Wu and his colleagues divided the 2,956 retirees into groups -- unhealthy and healthy.

About two-thirds of the group fell into the healthy category, while a third was deemed unhealthy. During the study period, about 12 percent of the healthy and 25.6 percent of the unhealthy retirees died.

The team found that those who worked a year longer than the group that retired had an 11 percent lower risk of death. And interestingly enough, those termed unhealthy who also worked another year longer had a nine percent lower mortality risk.

This data proves that working a year longer had positive impact on the study participants' mortality rate regardless of their health status.

## PM to visit 3 countries

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26-27 at Ise-Shima. This will be her second trip to the island nation during her current tenure (2014-2018).

Hasina last visited Japan on May 25-28, 2014. Earlier, she had been there in 1997 and 2010.

Foreign ministry officials have been planning for the PM's meetings with her counterparts in Japan and Bulgaria as well as with some other heads of government and state.

The PM is expected to leave Dhaka for London on May 14 to meet her niece Labour MP Tulip Siddiq.

Also a granddaughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Tulip gave birth to her first child, a girl, on April 9. Tulip and her husband Chris Percy have named the baby Azalea Joy.

Hasina will fly to Bulgaria on May 17 to attend Global Women Leaders' Forum. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco), the Forum will bring together women leaders from business, politics, social and cultural areas.

The Bangladesh premier is scheduled to address the opening ceremony of the Forum on May 18. Participants at the Forum will find a platform to discuss current trends of women's empowerment and gender equality

and explore ways to support and improve the role of women in business and society.

Hasina will return home on May 20. She is likely to leave for Japan on May 25 on a four-day visit to join the outreach meeting.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has invited the heads of state and government of non-G7 countries and chairpersons of international organisations to join the meeting.

From Asia, the heads of state and government of Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Papua New Guinea have been invited.

The outreach meeting will engage in discussions to explore what is needed to sustain the well-being of Asia, which is steering economic growth as the growth center of the world.

## Probe

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last year.

Jagannath University student Nazim Uddin Samad, a secular activist who was also involved with Gonojagoron Mancha, was killed in a similar fashion earlier this month.

In February 2013, blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider, another Gonojagoron Mancha activist, was hacked to death near his home in Mirpur.

## Three burned

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activist of Ward-29 unit of the ruling party, who had injured them in Islambagh area around 2:00pm yesterday.

Khoka demanded Tk 10 lakh four days ago over the construction of a six-storey building of one of Pradhan's cousin in the area, the two said.

As Pradhan refused to pay the money, Khoka accompanied by 20 men yesterday called him out of the house and started beating him.

When Salam came to the rescue of his father, Khoka hurled boiling water at them from the kettle of a nearby tea store, leaving the two and the passerby burnt, said witnesses.

A medical officer at the DMCH said Pradhan suffered nine percent burns -- his head, face, chest, two hands and left leg were burnt. Salam and Hossain suffered two and four percent burns respectively.

The Daily Star could not reach

Khoka for comments.

Shamim-ur-Rashid Talukder, officer-in-charge of Chawk Bazar Police Station, said Khoka fled after the incident and they are trying to arrest him.

No case was filed as of 8:00pm, according to the OC.

Posters are seen in the area, highlighting images of Khoka and different local and central AL leaders and identifying him as a joint general secretary of the ward unit.

Police and local AL men say Khoka has affiliation with the party but they cannot confirm if he is a joint general secretary.

A Jubo League leader, who is also a member of Islambagh Panchayet Committee, a local arbitration body, said Khoka is a former joint general secretary of the unit. But he still flexes muscle in the locality by using that identity and there are reports that he is engaged in extortion and other criminal activities.

## Malaysia hints

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Currently, no workers are going to Malaysia due to the suspension.

Malaysian Human Resources Minister Richard Riot and Bangladesh Expatriates' Welfare Minister Nurul Islam signed a memorandum of understanding on recruiting 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers through G2G Plus mechanism over the next three years at a programme in Dhaka on February 18.

Surprisingly, Malaysia announced suspension of recruiting foreign workers from all countries the next day, putting in question the Southeast Asian labour receiving country's unusual move, which had frustrated the prospective Bangladeshi jobseekers.

Dr Ahmad Zahid, also Malaysian home minister, has now assured that his government was always open to suggestions and proposals on the matter, especially from the business communities.

But he added that he had received complaints from a few non-governmental organisations (NGOs) about hiring fresh foreign workers.

"I don't intend to blame them, but I reckon they have to be responsible for their suggestion that foreign workers not be hired, but to rehire illegal workers and local workers in their stead," he said.

The Malaysian deputy prime minister's announcement in June last year that the country would recruit 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers drew numerous controversies.

But Malaysian trade unions and rights groups decried the announcement, arguing that the country was hosting more than 2 million irregular migrants who needed to be regularised before making any fresh recruitment amid downturn of Malaysian economy.

The criticism became sharp when Malaysian media revealed some Malaysian private companies like Bestinet, Real Time Networking and Synerflux had been lobbying the Bangladesh and Malaysian governments to win contracts.

The Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) and the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur also warned that Malaysia's appointing a company -- Synerflux -- to regulate the labour recruitment would establish a monopoly.

However, the Malaysian government that time announced that the employers who needed workers would have to apply to legalise existing foreigners without work permit or whose permit had expired.

Malaysia has been conducting the legalisation process for the undocumented foreign workers including the Bangladeshis since February 15. It is set to continue until June 30 this year.

Currently, around 400,000 Bangladeshis are working legally in different sectors in Malaysia, while some 20,000 others become undocumented, according to the high commission sources.

## Shelling on Syrian

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services and treatment for chronic illnesses, AFP news agency reports.

Several people were wounded, including at least one nurse, it adds.

On Wednesday night, the al-Quds Hospital in the rebel-held Sukkari district was completely destroyed in air strikes that US Secretary of State John Kerry said appeared to have been "deliberate".

The Free Aleppo Doctors Association said yesterday that at least 50 people, including five members of staff, had been killed.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said the attack was "unacceptable" and warned that Aleppo was being "pushed further to the brink of humanitarian disaster".

The LCC said it had documented a total of 73 deaths in rebel-held Aleppo on Thursday, most of them the result of air strikes, reports BBC.

Before yesterday's mosque shelling, the official Sana news agency reported that at least 33 people had been killed

in government-controlled areas in 24 hours.

The UN human rights chief, Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini, yesterday said violence was "soaring back to the levels we saw prior to the cessation of hostilities".

"There are deeply disturbing reports of military build-ups indicating preparations for a lethal escalation," Zeid said. The reports revealed a "monstrous disregard for civilian lives by all parties to the conflict", he added.

The United Nations has called on Moscow and Washington to help restore the ceasefire to prevent the collapse of peace talks, which broke up this week in Geneva with virtually no progress after the opposition walked out, reports Reuters.

"The cessation of hostilities and the Geneva talks were the only game in town, and if they are abandoned now, I dread to think how much more horror we will see in Syria," Zeid said.

The war in Syria has killed more than 250,000 people, with the UN envoy giving a toll as high as 400,000.