



Farmers try to salvage whatever is left in their melon fields in Champapur of Kalapara upazila in Patuakhali yesterday. The rains over the last couple of days have inundated their fields threatening crop loss. PHOTO: STAR

## Police arrest

FROM PAGE 2  
Metropolitan Police (CMP) ABM Faizul Islam.

Of the 17, five belong to Jamaat-Shibir, two to Hizbut Tahrir and the rest to Ahle Hadith.

The arrestees are Rasel, 25, Ripon, 26, Farzan, 23, Mehedi Hasan, 24, Shahnewaz, 22, Minhaz Uddin Riad, 26, Akhter Hossain, 35, Maruf, 38, advocate Md Ibrahim, 35, KM Mannan alias Shakil, 43, Alauddin, 30, Shamim, 31, Saiful, 23, Masum, 21, Minhazul Arefin, 24, Khorshed, 31 and Alamin Shuvo, 22.

Of the detainees, Farzat and Ibrahim are two activists of Hizbut Tahrir, said the police.

Ibrahim was previously accused in an explosive substance case in Halishahar, said Sahabuddin, assistant commissioner (prosecution). Police filed a case under Anti-Terrorism Act, 2013 against them.

The detainees were produced before the Court of Metropolitan Magistrate Nazmul Hossain in the afternoon. The court rejected their bail prayer and sent them to jail.

In Thakurgaon, three Jamaat activists and a local Shibir leader were held in Dholahaat Dharmapur village in Sadar upazila for planning subversive activities.

The Jamaat activists -- Yunus Ali, 39, Tofakul Islam, 48, and Shah Alam, 24, -- were instigating people using Islam against the government at a waz mahfil. Shibir leader Alal Uddin, 25, is the acting secretary of Ruhea thana unit.

The Counter Terrorism Unit in Lalmonirhat arrested another JMB activist at Tangbhanga village of Hatibandha upazila on Saturday night.

He was identified as Mehedy Hasan Mizan, 22, son of Dulal Hossain of Pashchim Belgram village in Tangbhanga union.

OC Rezaul Karim of Hatibandha police confirmed it and said a case was filed under the Special Tribunal Act against him on August 2 last year.

## 2 killed

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team came to know that some robbers were in a mango orchard in Rahimabad village for committing a robbery.

When the law enforcers reached near the spot around 3:15am, the criminals opened fire. Police then returned fire, triggering the "gunfight".

After the "gunbattle", police found the bodies of Bidyut and Talha lying on the spot. The others managed to flee, the police official said.

Police also claimed to have recovered two pistols, four cocktails, two bullets and several sharp weapons from the spot.

Bidyut, a former leader of outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-ML), was involved in robbery, the OC said.

He stood accused in 14 cases, including five for robbery and two for arms. Talha was accused in a violence case, the police official said.

Talking to this correspondent, Bidyut's sister Kalyani Bachhar said her brother was in Satkhira jail for a long time. She did not know when he was freed from prison.

On Saturday evening, she said she heard that police arrested her brother from Sujanshah area. Yesterday morning, she heard that he was shot dead.

Talha's uncle Monirul Islam said his nephew was a drug addict. He was released from Satkhira jail some days ago.

He came to know that police detained Talha and Bidyut from a house in Rishipara village on Wednesday night. Yesterday morning, he heard that Talha was killed in a "gunfight", he said.

Asked, OC Hafizur dismissed the allegation of arresting Bidyut and Talha and said the two were killed in a "gunfight".

SI Mozaffar Hossain filed three cases in connection with attack on police.

## A crucial battle lost

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Discussions on the evils of child marriage began at the beginning of the last century. But the Indian political class woke up to the social threats only after Census 1921 reported that there were 600 brides between one and 12 months.

That was followed by vigorous campaigns demanding a law to restrain child marriages. Subsequently, the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 was enacted.

It was the first time, women in India stood against a social issue together and met success.

The law set minimum marriageable age for women and men at 15 and 18 respectively without any exception, and it was the time of the British rule in the whole Indian subcontinent.

After independence from West Pakistan in 1971, Bangladesh inherited the British act. The law was then amended in 1984, raising the minimum marriageable age again to 18 and 21 for women and men.

Now after all these years, Bangladeshis face different reality; not a way forward. Rather, the government made an attempt and stuck to it to lower the permissible age for marriage.

In fact, the provision allowing child marriages doesn't specify age and "special circumstances" to be considered. This leaves scope for a girl or boy to be married off at any age -- be it 12, 10 or further below.

Different women organisations protested against the provision when it was first approved by the cabinet a few months ago. They even took to the streets and appealed to the government not to go ahead with the provision.

Their predecessors during the British rule were listened to by the then political class and the government. But this time the plea of the rights groups fell on deaf ears.

After the bill was passed in parliament on February 26, many appealed as a last resort to the president not to give his consent to it. But President Abdul Hamid signed it into law.

The law, as many fear, would give rise to child marriages in Bangladesh.

Early marriage leads to early preg-

## BNP protests

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Hasina and demanded withdrawal of her comment.

BNP standing committee member Gayeshwar Chandra Roy said the PM's relations with India soured after the procurement of submarines from China.

"But her [Hasina's] relation with India will soon become normal," he said while speaking at a discussion organised by Bangladesh National Awami Party at Photojournalists Association auditorium in the city.

The programme was organised to mark 38th death anniversary of Moshir Rahman Jadu Mia. Jadu was a close aide to late president and BNP founder Ziaur Rahman.

Gayeshwar at the discussion said, "Sheikh Hasina procured submarines from China and signed various deals with it. India wanted to know against whom the submarines would be used. That's why there might be some huff between you [Hasina] and them [India]."

"As a result, Sheikh Hasina is now talking against India. But she will speak in the right track soon..."

The BNP leader also said the government has "masters" in foreign countries but does not have any "friend" there. "But the BNP has friends abroad, not masters."

Another BNP senior leader Shamsuzzaman Dudu urged the PM either to prove that the BNP assumed power by giving an undertaking to India in 2001 or apologise to the nation for making a "false" statement.

Speaking at a human chain programme, the BNP vice-chairman said, "Sheikh Hasina loves to talk. But sometimes when she speaks, she does not know where to stop. She said yesterday [Saturday] that the BNP had come to power by giving an undertaking to sell gas to India. Usually, undertaking is given in police stations. Had the BNP given any undertaking, it would have done it by signing on any paper."

nancy. One third of teenage girls aged 15 to 19 in Bangladesh are mothers or are already pregnant, according to Unicef.

"Adolescent mothers are more likely to suffer from birthing complications than adult women."

Prior to the enactment of anti-child marriage law in 1929, pro-reform politicians such as Motilal Nehru were caught off-guard when women's associations met them asking for their support to their cause.

They put pressure on politicians, shouting slogans like "if you oppose the bill, the world will laugh at you". The women's groups also succeeded in having by their side Mahatma Gandhi who spoke of the evils of child marriages in his speeches.

As the 1929 law was passed, victory was credited to the women's associations that portrayed it as India's meeting its commitment to modernisation.

For the last 45 years, Bangladesh lived with this law. We have no idea what made it necessary to replace the law.

But one thing stands clear, the women of Bangladesh lost a battle in 2017, which they had won in 1929.

## Two kids die

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and great-grandmother Jamila Begum, 60, are still undergoing treatment.

Sabina's aunt Safura Begum, 34, and Safura's daughter Sadia, 5, were shifted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital as their condition deteriorated.

Sabina and her husband Moinul Hossain of Hariharpur Mathurapur village had gone to visit her parents with the children and the tea was consumed around noon, family members told The Daily Star.

A bottle of pesticide was found in the kitchen and it was granular, very much like tea, they added.

Additional District Magistrate Abu Rafa Mohammad Arif and Medical Officer at the Thakurgaon hospital Md Rokonul Haque confirmed it was pesticide poisoning.

Dudu asked the PM to produce the paper as evidence. "Otherwise," he said, "apologise to the nation for telling lies."

Bangladesh Islamic Party, a component in the BNP-led 20-party alliance, organised the programme in front of the Jatiya Press Club, protesting the recent gas price hike and demanding removal of Greek Goddess' statue from the Supreme Court's premises.

Taking a swipe at the BNP for its recent anti-Indian remarks, Hasina on Saturday alleged that the party came to power in 2001 through giving an undertaking to sell gas to India.

## Witness testifies

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On the way to the camp, they tortured him inside the vehicle and broke a bone of his chest. Afterwards, assuming him to be dead, they left him in Langurpur area, said Kader.

After seven to eight days, he came to know from one Soyab Ali that the Pakistan army killed his brother and Najabat Ali along with other detainees.

He said they had found the bodies few days later but could not bury those as they were badly decomposed.

Defence counsels completed his cross-examination before the tribunal adjourned the case proceedings until March 15.

Meanwhile, the tribunal fixed April 12 to decide whether it will take the charges into cognisance brought against five Gaibandha men for allegedly committing crimes during the Liberation War.

On Thursday, the prosecution pressed five charges against Abdul Jabbar Mondal, Jachijar Rahman alias Khoka, Abdul Wahed Mondal, Montaz Alia Bepari alias Momtaz, and Ranju Miah.

All the accused are from Gaibandha Sadar upazila. Of them, Ranju is now in jail while the rest are on the run.

## Guatemala shelter fire death toll climbs to 39

AFP, Guatemala City

The death toll in a horrific fire at a government-run shelter for Guatemalan teens has climbed to 39, officials said on Saturday.

Hundreds of protesters rallied outside the residence of President Jimmy Morales, alleging that government negligence at the overcrowded facility where staffers were accused of sexual and other abuse allowed the tragedy to happen.

Some of the protesters carried blue and white Guatemalan flags stained with red to symbolize blood and death.

Three more adolescent girls succumbed to their injuries while being treated in intensive care, according to hospital officials, who said 14 girls are still in their care, including eight in critical condition.

The girls perished in a blaze Wednesday at the co-ed Virgin of the Assumption Safe Home for children in San Jose Pinula, a village just east of the capital.

## No bad deal

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Sramik League President Sukkur Mahmud presided over the rally that was also addressed by AL leaders Jahangir Kabir Nanak, AFM Bahauddin Nasim and Habibur Rahman Siraj, among others.

MEETING OF 14-PARTY  
Members of the ruling Awami League-led 14-party alliance yesterday decided to support AL-backed candidates Anjum Sultana Shima in the Comilla City Corporation polls and Joya Sengupta, wife of recently deceased senior leader Suranjit Sengupta, in the Sunamganj-2 by-polls.

The decision came at a meeting of the alliance in the AL president's Dhanmondi office, presided over by Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal General Secretary Shirin Akter.

Shirin assured AL leaders that a member of her party, who was scheduled to contest in the Sunamganj by-polls, would withdraw candidature.

## BGMEA

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its office building, Barrister Imtiaz Moinul Islam, representing BGMEA, told The Daily Star.

On March 5, the SC dismissed a petition filed by the BGMEA seeking review of its judgement upholding a 2011 High Court order for demolishing the structure. It had also asked for the time petition.

Imtiaz said they sought three years as the offices there were dealing with many important issues, including export and import of garment items and accessories and those needed to be preserved.

The HC verdict had ordered the government to demolish the building within three months, saying it was built on land acquired through forgery and filled with earth illegally.

Later, the SC stayed the HC verdict following a petition by the BGMEA.

On June 2 last year, the SC gave a short order, dismissing the BGMEA appeal and upholding the HC verdict.

The SC released the full verdict on November 8, asking the BGMEA to immediately demolish the building with its own money. Otherwise, Rajuk would do it within 90 days of receiving the order and realise the cost from the BGMEA.

The BGMEA submitted the review petition on December 8.

## 'Ghosts'

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But Temer, 76, and his 33-year-old wife Marcela, find the cavernous, glass-fronted building spooky.

"I felt something strange there. I wasn't able to sleep right from the first night. The energy wasn't good," Temer was quoted as saying by Veja.

"Marcela felt the same thing. Only (their son) Michelzinho, who went running from one end to the other, liked it."

"We even started to wonder: could there be ghosts?" he reportedly quipped to Veja.

According to a report in Globo newspaper, Marcela Temer brought in a priest to attempt to drive out any evil spirits, but to no avail.

The Temers then moved to the still luxurious but smaller Jaburu Palace nearby.

Temer knows it well: this was his residence when he served as vice president until last year when then president Dilma Rousseff was impeached for breaking budget accounting laws.

That automatically put Temer in the top job and in the Alvorada. No one filled his vacant vice presidential post, however, meaning he can now take his pick of palaces.

The house moving comes in the middle of a severe political crisis for Brazil, with many of Temer's allies face potential corruption probes.

The president himself is battling a case in the electoral court where he is accused of having benefited from illegal donations when he and Rousseff ran together in 2014.

## Merkel to meet Trump amid tense ties

AFP, Berlin

Europe's most powerful leader, Angela Merkel, meets for the first time next week America's flamboyant President Donald Trump whose arrival in the White House has sent shockwaves across the Atlantic.

While former US president Barack Obama had labelled Merkel his "closest international partner", there has been little known contact between the German leader and Trump since he took office.

Trump's criticism of Germany over issues ranging from its record trade surplus to Merkel's liberal refugee stance, as well as his backing for Britain to leave the European Union, have not gone unnoticed in Berlin.

A month after US Vice President Mike Pence delivered a message to Europe underscoring the importance of transatlantic ties, Tuesday's meeting will be scrutinised for clues on whether Trump fully endorses that message.

The reserved German leader herself underlined that she is travelling to Washington not only as Germany's leader, but also as an envoy of the EU.

"I will of course point out that for us, our country and our membership in the European Union are two sides of the same coin," Merkel said in Brussels ahead of the visit.

The Washington meeting would also allow for "an exchange of bilateral and international topics, and transatlantic ties, as we have always stressed, are very important," added Merkel's spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer.

As in other similar tours, Merkel will be accompanied by an army of business leaders, but this time the delegation faces an uncertain reception as Trump preaches an "America First" policy.

Siemens boss Joe Kaeser and BMW's Harald Krueger will be part of the group, according to news weekly Der Spiegel, and both will likely be trumpeting the thousands of jobs linked to their investments in the US.

Krueger will also be keen to per-

suaude Trump, who has singled out BMW for hefty tariffs if it built a factory in Mexico, to reconsider the threat.

But "if the government is serious about its new tax, the chancellery has already prepared a series of retaliatory measures," said Der Spiegel.

LEADER OF THE FREE WORLD?  
The meeting will also be closely watched for the dynamics between the two leaders who appear to stand far apart on content and style.

While Merkel is a firm believer in the European Union and globalisation, Trump cheers Britain's departure from the EU and scrapped the TPP free trade deal in his first day in office.

The two also differ on immigration policies -- she slammed his ban on citizens from mainly-Muslim countries, while he criticised as "catastrophic" her liberal refugee stance that led more than a million asylum-seekers into Germany.

And while Merkel, a trained physicist, rarely makes public statements deviating from a thoroughly researched text, Trump does not hold back on announcing US policy upheavals in 140-character Twitter messages.

Merkel had already set the tone from the beginning, when in their first phone conversation, she reminded Trump of democratic values while offering cooperation.

That phone call had led some to speculate that she may have taken on the mantle of the "leader of the free world", a title usually reserved for US presidents.

With Trump's latest bid to temporarily close US borders to refugees and citizens from six mainly-Muslim countries, expectations will be high for Merkel to raise human rights issues.

Asked if that is on the German leader's list, Demmer refused to be drawn.

Washington meanwhile suggested that the meeting will be focused on what both sides have in common than their differences.

## 'Share info with partners'

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nature. It requires all the countries around the globe to stand together and find a common strategy in fighting this kind of crime."

He also underscored the importance of training officials for developing their capacity and technological means to exchange information and successfully fight the phenomenon of international crimes.

He said of the support provided by Interpol in member countries, "the most important [task] today is building a strong network in policing against the network of terrorism, against the network of organised crime and against the cyber network."

He explained Interpol's global alert system. "[It's] a system of notices where we support the members countries in international fugitives operation. All the requests from member countries go through a complex set of legal review, to make sure the notices are compliant with the Interpol rules and regulations.

"For instance, we stay away from any activity if there is a political component and that is the reason for Interpol not taking any action [in some cases]."

He congratulated Bangladesh Police for successfully dismantling terrorist networks in the country.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) AKM Shahidul Hoque stated that militants use social media to spread propaganda.

He said, "As the social media is playing a vital role, we invited the authorities of Facebook to have a bilateral meeting, where we will discuss how we can

get its cooperation to curb the spread of propaganda in social media."

He also said the issues of bringing back militants hiding in other countries and cross-border crimes, like arms and drug trafficking, would also be discussed in the conference.

Cyber crime, money laundering, counterfeiting of currencies, and terror financing were new threats, besides terrorism, for all nations, said the Bangladesh police chief.

"... in our ongoing fight against violent extremism, we have got all-out support and cooperation from India, Singapore, Australia, Canada, the Interpol and the FBI. Our special thanks are for India as they always spontaneously cooperate with us in every way by sharing real-time information, exchanging expertise, providing training and other support," he added.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan officially inaugurated the conference where representatives of law enforcers from Afghanistan, Australia, Bhutan, Brunei, China, India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, South Korea, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam are participating.

"Fighting terrorism is not the sole responsibility of the government. So we work in partnership with religious scholars to discourage faith-based radicalisation and urge community leaders to guide young people towards more constructive beliefs and ideas," the minister said.

"Today our responsibility is not only to ensure the security of our own country but also of neighbouring countries," he said.

## Big boost for Navy

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journey with a new shape and strength," she said.

She said a few countries of the world operate submarines, and Bangladesh now made it to the list. "It's a matter of honour and dignity for us."

The submarines reached the Chittagong Port on December 22. These types of diesel electric submarines -- 76 metres long and 7.6 metres wide -- are equipped with torpedoes and mines and are capable of attacking enemy warships and submarines.

"The two submarines have added an unprecedented capability to strengthen the defence system to protect the country from aggression of external enemies," she said.

The government has already taken various short- and long-term plans to build Bangladesh Navy as a three-dimensional force by 2030, said Hasina.

More maritime patrol aircraft, and most modern helicopters will be inducted in the Naval Aviation, and with the induction of more aircraft the patrolling capability of Bangladesh Navy in the vast maritime areas will be enhanced.

She said Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave "naval ensign" to Bangladesh Navy in 1974 as he real-

ised the importance of the navy for the just independent Bangladesh.

"Following the guidelines of the Father of the Nation, we have been able to induct submarines to strengthen our navy," she said.

Hasina said that after assuming office in 1996, her government took various realistic measures for infrastructural development, procurement of warships and raising operational capability of the existing ships.

"Bangladesh Navy has been gradually turned into a dignified force on the world stage by implementing a far-reaching vision for the navy," she said.

The PM later witnessed an introduction exhibition with the participation of BN Ship Bangabandhu, two helicopters, two Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) and an all-round naval commando team.

A documentary on the long work for the acquisition of the two submarines was screened at the function.

She also inaugurated various base support facilities constructed for the submarines and laid the foundation stone of BNS Sheikh Hasina, a full-fledged base for the submarines.

Ministers, parliament members, chiefs of the three services, diplomats and top civil and military officials were present.