



Twenty containers of hydrogen peroxide, other bomb-making materials, three suicide vests, 100 packets of splinters and a machete on display by police at Porahati village of Jhenidah Sadar. Counter terrorism unit of the police claimed it recovered these items in a raid on a militant hideout in the village that ended around 2:00pm yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

'Neo JMB'

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Sanowar added the chemical is locally available at low price. It is mainly used at laboratories at colleges or universities or big industries. With the help of local police, the CITC unit cordoned off the hideout around 5:30pm on Friday and declared suspension of the operation codenamed "Southpaw" around 8:00pm after recovery of the materials. The operation resumed around 9:15am yesterday and the bomb disposal unit defused the explosive. It continued for about four hours and 45 minutes. Didar Ahmed, deputy inspector general (DIG) of Khulna Range, said the house was owned by Abdullah, a human haulier driver who converted to Islam in 2012 from Hinduism and married a Muslim girl later. "Abdullah lived with his wife in the house but some other people used to visit it." According to police, Abdullah's previous name was Provat Kumar. He is the son of one Chaiti Baul of Porahati village. Police are now looking for Abdullah. Last month, CITC officials busted five hideouts of "Neo JMB" -- two in Chittagong, one in Sylhet and two others in Moulvibazar. Nineteen people, including five children and five women, were killed in those incidents. According to police, 16 of them died in suicidal blasts.

Australia, New Zealand kick off global science rallies

AFP, Sydney
Thousands of people rallied in Australia and New Zealand Saturday in support of science, the first of more than 500 marches globally triggered by concern over the rise of "alternative facts". The March for Science demonstrations come amid growing anxiety over what many see as a mounting political assault on facts and evidence and fears that research is being excluded from policy-making. Vocal protesters in Sydney wearing white lab coats called on politicians to support the scientific community, carrying banners reading "without science, it's just fiction" and "we need thinkers not deniers". Others held up slogans such as, "What do we want? Evidence-based science. When do we want it? After peer review." The protests came as US Vice President Mike Pence was completing a three-day visit to Australia. While American organisers have said the marches planned there are non-partisan, they admit the Republican administration under Donald Trump -- who has vowed to slash the research budgets of top US agencies -- "catalysed" the movement. Fears that science is under political assault in Australia have likewise grown under its current conservative government and demonstrators also turned out in Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and other cities as well as Wellington and Auckland in New Zealand. "In this day and age, there's so much fake news and alternate facts going around that it's important to remember that science is what has built the society we know today," Parissa Zand, who was at the Sydney march with her molecular biologist mother, told AFP. High-school science teacher Byrne La Ginestra said science had been getting a "bum-rap", adding that "we need to... teach people that science isn't a political agenda, it's just facts". Canberra last year reversed a decision to cut hundreds of jobs from the national science body CSIRO after a public outcry. Others worry that the government is not doing enough to protect the Great Barrier Reef, which is under threat from climate change. Brazil, Canada, many European nations, Japan, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria and South Korea are all also planning science marches.

France votes today

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The 48-year-old leader of the anti-immigration National Front (FN) called for France to "immediately" take back control of its borders from the European Union and deport all foreigners on a terror watchlist. "This war against us is ceaseless and merciless," she said, accusing the Socialist government of a "cowardly" response to the threat. Centrist Emmanuel Macron and conservative Francois Fillon also hastily convened televised briefings in which they vowed to protect the country. "Some haven't taken the full measure of the evil," 63-year-old Fillon said, promising an "iron-fisted" approach. Macron, a 39-year-old moderate whom Fillon has portrayed as too inexperienced for the top job, said France was paying for the intelligence jobs cuts made when Fillon was prime minister between 2007 and 2012. Describing the Champs Elysees shooting as an attack on democracy, he urged voters: "Do not give in to fear." Communist-backed firebrand Jean-Luc Melenchon, 65, was the only one of the four to stick to his schedule. "Several Europes are possible, it doesn't have to be just their Europe," said Melenchon, a eurosceptic who has pledged to renegotiate treaties with the bloc. A BVA poll conducted on Thursday and Friday showed Le Pen and Macron

led on 23 percent, ahead of Melenchon with 19.5 percent and Fillon on 19 percent. Though the race has four main contenders, a total of 11 are in the running, most of whom are polling in single digits. Police continued Saturday their probe as a clearer picture has emerged of Cheurfi's violent past. A serial offender, he spent nearly 14 years in prison for a range of crimes including attacks on the police. He had shown "no signs of radicalisation" while in custody, said France's anti-terrorism prosecutor Francois Molins. Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve accused Le Pen of attempting to make political hay out of the killing, saying she was "seeking, as she does after every tragedy, to take advantage of it". Adelaide Zulfikarpas of BVA pollsters said: "If it were to benefit someone that would clearly be Marine Le Pen who has dominated this issue throughout the campaign, or Francois Fillon." US President Donald Trump tweeted that he thought the attack in Paris "will have a big effect" on the election. Some voters, though undecided, were unmoved by the latest attack on French soil. "I don't like any of them, they're all disappointing, said 73-year-old Ghislaine Pincont of Lille. "At worst, I'll cast a blank vote. In any case the attack on the Champs Elysees won't have any impact on my choice."

Smiles at Halda

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Khaled said most of the boats collected a bucket of eggs on an average. Kamal Uddin Sawdagor engaged five boats to collect eggs. He said he invested Tk 10,000 for each boat. "Each boat collected one and a half buckets of eggs." Like Khaled, he too was not satisfied with the collection of eggs. "I'm not fully satisfied with the collection... My expectation was high." "I think the fish will release eggs once again this season," he observed. Halda researcher Manzoorul Kibria, an associate professor of zoology department at Chittagong University, said a total of 1,680kg of spawn was collected by 105 boats yesterday. A total of 28kg fish fry could be obtained from the spawn (1kg fry from 60kg spawn). Spawn collectors went back almost empty-handed last year, while in 2015, a total of 47kg of fry was collected. Kibria said the collection of fry was 275kg in 2014, 70kg in 2013, 354kg in 2012 and 210 kg in 2011. "Although it's a good sign that indigenous fish have started releasing spawn in this river, yet it remains a matter of worry as the fish have not released eggs on a large scale," he said. He emphasised on saving the river from pollution and stopping man-made hazards like rubber dam, manual dredgers, sluice gates, tobacco farming and brick kilns on the bank of the river.

Don't exhume her body

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"I'm feeling so helpless. A mother's feelings have no value." Aminath told The Daily Star yesterday she firmly believed that Raudha, a second-year student of MBBS at Islami Bank Medical College, didn't commit suicide. Aminath flew to Rajshahi with the Maldivian ambassador in Dhaka a day after her daughter, who had appeared on the October 2016 cover of Vogue India, was found dead at her dormitory room on March 29. She stayed in Rajshahi for seven days until an autopsy on the body and its burial. Aminath said she flew back home in the Maldives without filing a murder case because, she thought, it might require a second autopsy. "I knew it [proving that it was a murder] was not possible without an independent autopsy. "I didn't want to cause harm to her anymore. The truth is my daughter is not coming back. I left everything to God," Aminath said. Raudha's father Mohamed Athif, who filed the murder case against a student of the college, said many pieces of circumstantial evidence were there to prove that Raudha was murdered without exhuming her body.

He, a physician himself, however, said police should do whatever they thought necessary for a proper investigation. "It is the duty of police to identify her killers," Mohamed said. Raudha's brother Rayyan Athif, 18, said religious extremists might have killed her. He wondered why she would commit suicide without leaving a note. Rayyan earlier told UK's The Sun Online that Raudha had been targeted for defending those bullied over religious controversies. "Her style of clothing was branded as 'immodest' and 'un-Islamic' even though she adhered to the dress code of her college by wearing a scarf [to cover her head]." Rayyan said he lost hope for justice for lack of evidence. "Murder staged as a suicide. There is no proof of suicide either." Raudha's brother also pointed out that the initial investigation was weak and investigators let the evidence be destroyed after receiving reports of suicide. Meanwhile, CID police yesterday called in 22 students and staff of Raudha's dormitory at Rajshahi CID office for interrogation.

4 held

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abducted from Tangail on April 15, she said, adding that he was kept in Jakaria's rented room. The gang demanded Tk 5 lakh for his release from his father, who then informed Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), she added. Apart from the kidnapping technique, the gang also took possession of their clients' mark-sheets and certificates well in advance to bargain for unpaid dues, said the Rab commander. The gang paid meritorious students of renowned universities from Tk 1-1.5 lakh to take each admission exam in place of their clients, she said. One such "examinee", Mohammad Ashraful, a DU student, was jailed for 19 days after a mobile court caught him in the act during a recent admission test at the Hajee university, said Bina. She said Anwar confessed to have got 10 clients enrolled in universities in the 2016-17 academic session and that there were four more gangs like theirs active. An abduction case was filed against the four with Tangail Model Police Station.

Confusion

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He added the allegation of torture on him by the army was false. But Officer-in-charge of Naniarchar Police Station Abdul Latif told The Daily Star that no one handed Romel over to them. When this newspaper informed the ISPR director what the police officer said, his response was, "Oh, is that so?" Abdul Latif also said, "We have information that Romel was admitted to Naniarchar Health Complex after he was injured in a road accident. Documents at the facility also show that he was referred to Chittagong Medical College Hospital." The Daily Star, however, couldn't independently verify this. About Romel's funeral, his family members, wishing anonymity, said when they went to take his body from the army on Friday, they were told that the body was already cremated. Asked, the ISPR director in a text message said the cremation took place between 1:30pm and 4:00pm in presence of Naniarchar OC and Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Kawkhali. The OC, however, said he was not present at the cremation. He added Romel was from Purba Hatimara village. When he heard that the body was brought there, he worked with his force to ensure security in the area. About the presence of Romel's family at the funeral, the ISPR official said, "I'd have to check. My common sense tells me that it's only natural that the family members were there." Romel's father Kanti Chakma, in a letter addressed to the National Human Rights Commission on April 6, the day after his son was picked up, expressed concern that his son was critically injured in the beatings by army men inside their camp. He also said his son fell unconscious at the beating by the army men, who later tried to hand him over to the police. But police refused to accept his unconscious body.

PROTESTS
The United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) announced a road block in Rangamati today to protest Romel's death. Protesters will stage a sit-in before the office of deputy commissioner on April 25, said a press release issued by Greater Chittagong Hill Tracts Hill Student's Council. Student bodies of different leftist parties at Dhaka University will continue their demonstration that started yesterday. Bangladesh Chhatra Union yesterday held a rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club demanding justice for Romel. Progotishil Chhatra Jote, a platform of different student bodies yesterday announced demonstrations on the Dhaka University campus today. Meanwhile, a group of locals vandalised a bus in Kidukchhari area of Rangamati Friday afternoon, Moinuddin Selim, president of a local bus owners' association, said. Owners of inter district buses observed a half-day strike in the district yesterday demanding arrest of the vandals.

TRUMP'S TRAVEL BAN

US states realign in legal battle

REUTERS, San Francisco/ New York
President Donald Trump's travel ban on citizens of six Muslim-majority nations faces its second challenge at a US appeals court next month, and this time more Republican states are backing the measure, while one Democratic state attorney general dropped out of the legal fight this week. Some legal experts say the states' realignment could signal that the changes made last month to Trump's original executive order have strengthened the government's case. Sixteen Democratic state attorneys general and the District of Columbia on Thursday filed a "friend of the court" brief backing Hawaii in its bid to block the March 6 executive order, which two federal judges put on hold before it could be implemented.

Fish dying further down

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from the Department of Environment led by Director Mostafizur Rahman will also go to Sunamganj today to find out why the Haor waters were "contaminated". Yesterday, while addressing a citizens' rally at Sylhet's Central Shaheed Minar, speakers raised concern at uranium exploration in Sunamganj's upstream in Meghalaya and demanded a proper investigation to see whether "contaminated water" from upstream caused the loss of aquatics. Prof Md Mehedy Hasan Khan of Sylhet Agriculture University said it was needed to be determined whether water contaminated by uranium pits reached down to the Sylhet region. Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa), an environment rights group, leader Abdul Karim referred to some India media reports about contamination of rivers upstream of Sunamganj. An unusually early flash flood struck the haor belt late last month damaging half a metric tonne of Boro crops in primary government estimation. The question of radioactive tests, however, came when three weeks after the flash flood authorities could not provide any scientific explanation on what caused deaths of 900 metric tons (MT) of fish, several thousand ducks, frogs and leeches. Addressing a press brief in Moulvibazar yesterday afternoon, the district's Fishery Officer AKM Shafiquzzaman said 25 MT of fish died due to Hakaluki Haor's water getting contaminated owing to submerged "rotten paddies". But it was never explained how they drew the conclusion that uncut paddies gone under water caused the contamination. Fisheries and Livestock Ministry Joint Secretary Syed Mehdi Hasan, who has been visiting the affected districts for the past five days, told The Daily Star that "fishermen told us that fish died due to rotten paddies." Quoting district fishery office, Mehdi said in primary estimate 50MT of fish died in Sunamganj. From his experience of flash flood-induced losses in the haors, Director General of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) Md Manzurul Hannan, however, finds it hard to subscribe to the reason. He insisted on more exhaustive tests for finding out the real reason behind the deaths of the aquatics. Meanwhile, Syed Mehdi Hasan, the joint secretary, who was talking over phone from Sunamganj, acknowledged that the team from the atomic energy commission reached the district yesterday.

He said, "If there is any issue of uranium or any other radioactive materials' presence in the water, the atomic energy commission can determine that through tests." Against what apparently very conservative estimates of fish lost in Sunamganj and Moulvibazar, the district fisheries officer of Netrakona, Ashraf Uddin, told The Daily Star that 800 MT of fish died in haors of the district. He said that the loss estimation was made by taking reports from fishermen of different upazilas with

No thanks

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Tanvir Hasan Zoha, a cyber security researcher working with Crime Research and Analysis Foundation, an NGO, said the number of secret Facebook groups patronising religious extremism will be over 100. International security expert Prof Rohan Gunaranta says more than 20,000 websites are run by extremists and Bangladeshi militants can access many of those. But there are only 100 sites to counter radical websites. APPS FOR KILLING, PLANNING
Officials say they can watch radical activities on Facebook on a limited scale but monitoring communications over Telegram and ProtectedText is not possible as these apps are heavily encrypted and restricted. Telegram has a special feature that automatically destroys the text once shared among group members. Bara Abdullah, a suspected militant arrested from the capital's Gabtoli in February last year, told investigators regarding a plan shared in Telegram to attack a senior lawyer who filed a writ petition challenging the legality of a constitutional provision giving Islam the status of state religion. ProtectedText is known as the safest platform in virtual world for storing texts. None, not even the admin, can identify the users or their locations, and the messages can be accessed only by authorised persons. Notes here are not self-destructive but once deleted, they cannot be recovered. On March 30, 2013, militants hacked to death blogger Oyasiquir Rahman Babu in the city's Tejgaon. Two attackers, including Hathazari madrasa student Zikrullah, were caught while fleeing. "During interrogation, Zikrullah told us that the killing plan was executed through communications over ProtectedText," a senior police official of Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTC) unit of the DMP told The Daily Star recently. On Facebook, he said, texts can be recovered even after they are deleted but that is not possible on Telegram or ProtectedText. "That's why we are yet to have any success in intercepting

Khalijuri the worst hit.

Moniruzzaman Khandker, who teaches Botany at the University of Dhaka, is leading a five-member student-faculty team from his department to Tanguar Haor in Sunamganj. He yesterday told The Daily Star that by lab tests of the water they've collected as samples from the haor, they would be able to say on certain parameters like oxygen, acidity levels etc. He emphasised of tests by the atomic energy commission to see whether uranium or any other radioactive materials had got anything to do with the recent loss of aquatics. NETRAKONA FISH DEATHS
Fisheries department in Netrakona said, district's fish-rich haor belt in Khalijuri, Mohanganj and Madanupazilas suffered a blow after the recent flash flood that left 800 MT of fish dead and some 16,000 fishermen in deep crisis. Ashraf Uddin Ahammed, district fisheries officer, said they poured lime water and other medicines like, Oxy-A, Oxy-Flow and Oxy-Max in the contaminated water of haors, mainly in Khalijuri and Mohanganj, to help improve the quality of water that has gone acidic and lacks oxygen. He, however, added that after taking these steps the oxygen level had increased and no fresh news of fish dying was reported yesterday. On the miserable condition of thousands of poor fishermen, he said, they made a list of the affected fishermen and requested the higher authorities to bring them under government relief programmes at least for six months. DUCKS DEATHS
Livestock department's Sylhet division Deputy Director Mohammad Giasuddin told The Daily Star yesterday that following lab test on duck samples collected from Sylhet's Fenchuganj, it was found out that the ducks died there of cholera. He said ducks feeding on death fish floating in Hakaluki haor triggered the cholera outbreak. The livestock official said tests on dead duck samples from Sunamganj had not been completed yet.

Court dismisses

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"We normally prepare an appeal in two days' time. However, in this case I took more than a week because the facts of the case were unclear," the landlord's lawyer, EC Agrawala, told the Hindustan Times. The property dispute dates back to 1999 when the landlord filed a petition to evict his tenant for not paying rent. In a nearly two-decade struggle, the landlord finally took his matter to the country's top court after the Himachal Pradesh High Court favoured the tenant. But even that much would be hard to glean from the original order. "(The)...tenant in the demised premises stands aggrieved by the pronouncement made by the learned Executing Court upon his objections constituted theretofore... wherewithin the apposite unfoldments qua his resistance to the execution of the decree stood discounted by the learned Executing Court," it read.

FACEBOOK RADICALS

The Daily Star has learnt about a dozen secret Facebook groups including Banglay Khelafat Chai, Eso Tawhider Pothey, Arakaner Pothey, Jerusalem Pothey, Islamic State: Dawla al Islamia, Kaler Sakhhi and Salahuddin Hara. Write-ups on al-Qaeda and IS, their leaders, operation methodology and success stories are regularly posted in those groups. Despite limited vigilance capacity, law enforcers have arrested some extremists active online. Their forums were shut but dozens more popped up in no time. One Nahid Hasan used to run Islamic State: Dawla al-Islamia using the pseudonym Jihad John before being arrested in the capital's Badda on November 24, 2015. Police, however, did not shut this group to track down other members. Investigators say madrasa goes and students from private universities are among the group's around 500 members scattered in Dhaka, Narsingdi, Kishoreganj, Comilla and some northern districts. On the night of January 2 this year, one Ehsan Islam in that group claimed credit for the killing of a Hindu man for "betrayal". The next day, police recovered the body of a Hindu doctor from the capital's Aziz Super Market. Police suspect the doctor might have been killed for helping an intelligence agency arrest another doctor, who was suspected to be involved in extremism and went missing from the city's Science Laboratory area on October 15 last year. DMP Deputy Commissioner Md Alimuzzaman, who is assigned to CTC's Cyber Security and Crime Division, said they began tracking militants on Facebook but that is no big-scale operation. "Recently, we closed down some IDs and groups for sponsoring extremism." Counterterrorism experts say fighting extremism online has become a big challenge for law enforcers worldwide. A global consensus among the websites and apps companies is needed to fight the evil force.