

# DEVELOPMENT PM seeks everyone's cooperation

UNB, Dhaka  
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Wednesday sought cooperation from all, irrespective of their party affiliations, in establishing Bangladesh as a developed and prosperous country. "We want to establish Bangladesh as a developed and prosperous country in the world by ensuring the economic emancipation of people and freeing the country from hunger, poverty and the curse of illiteracy. For that, I want cooperation from all, irrespective of their party affiliation and views," she said.

She said was responding to a question from ruling party MP Mohammad Shahiduzzaman (Meherpur-2) in Parliament during the PM's question-answer session. In the eyes of the government all people, irrespective of their party affiliation and opinion, are equal, she said adding. The Awami League does not believe in the politics of vendetta, she said. "We believe in equality, brotherhood and unity. That's why we called for national unity on various occasions."

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# Hero Alam held over domestic violence

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Police in Bogura detained actor Ashraf Alam, popularly known as Hero Alam, yesterday, hours after a complaint was filed that he physically tortured his wife.

Sonaton Chakraborty, additional superintendent of police in the district, said Alam allegedly beat up his wife for dowry. He was held as he came to Bogura Sadar Police Station to "settle" the issue.

Rahim Uddin, sub-inspector of the police station, said the complaint was filed by Alam's father-in-law Saiful Islam Khokon yesterday.

He said the actor also filed a complaint against Khokon and some of his associate that they beat him up. SM Bodiuzzaman, officer-in-charge

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# There's an attack

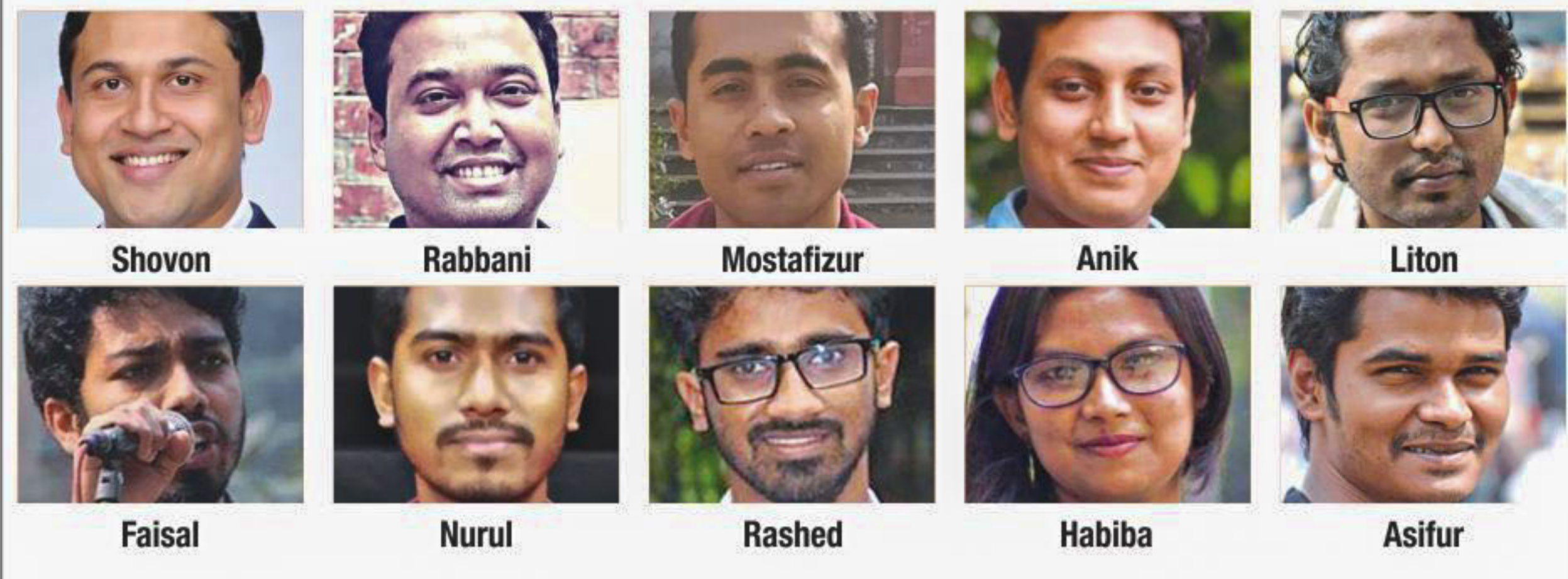
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Therefore it was a shocking thing that my mother married outside, that she got divorced, and she came back—much like in *The God of Small Things*. So one was always outside of this grid—it's an iron grid of hierarchy and community in India. I mean every society in the world has it, but I would say India is an exception because caste is added to class. I grew up watching my mother being humiliated in some ways, although she is the most spirited person I know. A lot of her anger about what was happening to her used to be taken out on us. Even the family was not a safe space. So as a very young person you were trying to understand why all this was happening.

That's not an explanation of why one is a writer—my brother went through the same, and he is not a writer. For a writer, or somebody who is going to be a writer, it is an interesting and strange background—because you don't really fit into anything, and therefore you are watching everything, trying to understand what's going on. I am not saying "oh, I was so oppressed"—no. But, I had my own upbringing. I wasn't indoctrinated because the required governing body to indoctrinate me wasn't there.

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# DUCSU ELECTION 2019



# BCL faces tough challenges

SAYYED MOHMUD ULLAH

Candidates from Chhatra League for the posts of vice-president and general secretary are set to have a tight race with quota reformists and other student leaders in Monday's Ducus polls, say campus sources.

All the contenders are campaigning in full swing and trying to woo voters with their pledges of making the Dhaka University campus a better place.

BCL President Rezwanul Haque Chowdhury Shovon is vying for the VP position while General Secretary

They said the leaders from the pro-Awami League student organisation appear to have a "comparatively cleaner image" than other BCL leaders.

However, many voters criticised the two for the BCL's role in the quota reforms and road safety movements.

"BCL activists beat up many protesters and we still cover away from them," said a master's student of English department, wishing not to be named.

Bangladesh Sadharan Chhatra Odhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad, the platform that spearheaded the quota

of the general students" said Anik, who is the joint-convenor of JCD in Shaheed Sergeant Zahurul Haque Hall.

Mostafizur said if voted to the VP post, he would work to ensure "freedom of speech" and stop "torture on students" on campus.

Progressive Leftist Alliance chose Liton Nandi as its VP contender and anti-Imperialist Students platform's coordinator Faisal Mahmud as the GS candidate.

Liton, general secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra Union's DU chapter, actively participated in the



With Ducus election just days away, Dhaka University campus is abuzz with campaigners. The picture of posters and banners near Kabi Jasimuddin Hall was taken yesterday. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Golam Rabbani for the GS post. Shovon has been active in BCL politics since his college days. Apart from having a reputation for being an active student leader, he is also known for his stance against violence on the campus.

Rabbani often engages in humanitarian work, including blood donation, and has authored five books -- one with the title "Bhalobashi Chhatra League". He said if he won, he would work for the welfare of the students by solving seat crisis and ensuring good food in the dormitories.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of voters praised the two BCL leaders for raising voice against the leak of DU Gha Unit entry test question papers last year.

reform movement, picked its joint conveners Nurul Haq Nuru and Rashed Khan as the VP and the GS contenders.

These leaders rose to the fame for steering the movement that sought reforms to the quota system in civil service jobs. In face of the demonstration, the government scrapped the system.

Nur said he believed their panel has a good chance of victory. "If I win, I will work to improve Dhaka University's political culture," he said.

Pro-BNP Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal's Mostafizur Rahman is running for the VP while Anisur Rahman Khandaker Anik for the GS.

"I was active in the quota reforms and road safety movements, in support

protests that called for punishment of those who sexually harassed women on DU campus during Pahela Baishakh celebrations in 2015.

"If all students cast their votes in a free and fair election, I think I have a good chance of winning," he told The Daily Star.

A faction of Chhatra Federation has come up with a separate panel and the organisation's DU unit president Umme Habiba Benojir is the GS candidate.

Habiba, one of the three female GS candidates, was a campaigner of Shikharthi Odhikar Mancha, a platform that conducted several movements in 2012 and 2013 demanding Ducus election. She said she would especially work for ensuring women's rights.

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# No toy gun this time!

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However, he remembered about the pistol moments later and was shocked that it did not raise any alarm.

"Miscreants could take advantage of the lax security for evil purposes," Kanchan said.

Kanchan, also chairman of Nirapod Sarak Chai (we want safe roads), said after he remembered about the gun he immediately informed the airport officials about it.

"I showed them my licence and handed them the gun following the proper procedure," he said.

He added that he received the gun after reaching Chattogram.

Aviation experts said there were serious security loopholes at the country's prime airport and such incidents

would earn the airport a bad reputation.

"Repeated security breaches at the country's prime airport would have an adverse impact on the country's growing aviation industry," said MA Momen, former managing director of Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

He believes that the scanner was not purchased as per the requirement or its sensor was not working.

An Hsia security official said the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab) had formed a three-member probe committee yesterday to investigate the incident.

The committee will look at CCTV footage and records to find out how the incident took place.

The CAAB suspended the Hsia employee who was operating the scanning machine and served two others with show-cause notices, officials said.

Beni Madhab, Hsia deputy director, claimed that Kanchan's gun was "detected at the second checkpoint".

"I came to know that he passed the first checkpoint undetected," he told The Daily Star.

On February 24, a young man was killed in a commando action after he attempted to hijack a Boeing after boarding it with a toy gun from the Hsia.

After a primary investigation, five CAAB employees were suspended and one was withdrawn.

# Dragged down

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Its share price dropped 56 percent in the last two years, coming down close to face value at Tk 10.

The year 2018 was no different, as the bank could not close its account even in January this year. All the financial indicators such as liquidity, loan deposit-ratio and non-performing loan were blinking red.

At the core of its trouble stood two things -- Tk 350 crore loan guarantee given to a telecom company, Citycell, and around Tk 500 crore illegally siphoned abroad by two directors of the bank between 2008 and 2014.

Faced with liquidity crisis and rise in non-performing loan that stood at 7.2 percent in December last year from 4.47 in December 2016, AB Bank management seemed to have learned nothing from their past mistakes.

In December last year, the bank offered special privileges to Citycell, the country's first mobile operator, that damaged the health of the bank as much as the illegal money laundered abroad did.

In both scams, M Morshed Khan, owner of Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited (PBITL) which used the brand name Citycell and also founder chairman of AB Bank, was involved, according to Anti-Corruption Commission investigation.

Citycell had taken Tk 350 crore from eight banks and financial institutions with guarantee from AB Bank in 2011. And as Citycell failed to pay back the loan, the liability fell on AB Bank.

Citycell's outstanding loan with AB stood at Tk 705 crore as of October last year.

Finally, in December last year, the bank's board decided to waive interest of around Tk 229 crore on the loan and rescheduled the telecom's Tk 476.39 crore loan for 10 years.

Citycell made only 0.21 percent of the down payment instead of the Bangladesh Bank rule for 5 percent. It got a three-year grace period on the next repayment.

Incidentally, Morshed Khan, former foreign minister and BNP vice-chairman, has two nominated directors on the bank's board that made the decision.

When the proposal for loan rescheduling was sent to the BB, the central bank also took a lenient view, allowing a 3 percent down payment, deviating from its own rule for 10 percent. The company was also allowed interest waiver.

Interestingly, all this was done with the knowledge that Citycell has no capacity to pay off its loans.

"The Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited has no income generating sources to pay off the bank's liabilities," AB itself wrote in its letter to the BB at the time.

Asked to comment on the privileges given to Citycell, Tarique Afzal, acting managing director of the bank, remained tight-lipped, claiming it was a "confidential information".

But he admitted the bank was in poor health, saying some financial indicators deteriorated due to mismanagement.

"We are trying to improve its health by intensifying loan recovery from the defaulters," he added.

Morshed Khan said all his properties remained mortgaged against the loan.

He added they would continue the instalment against the rescheduled loan by selling the mortgaged assets.

"We have no plan to revive Citycell because a huge amount of revenue remained due with the government," he said, replying to a question.

Citycell is now facing an embezzlement case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission, which says Citycell took Tk 350 crore from eight banks and financial institutions with AB's guarantee between 2011 and 2015 for "dishonest purposes for financial benefit through fraud, corruption and misuse of power".

The ACC arrested Citycell CEO Mehboob Chowdhury in July 2017 in the case filed with Banani Police Station in June that year. The Commission also framed charges against Morshed Khan, his wife Nasrin Khan and AB Bank's former managing director Moshirur Rahman Chowdhury in the same case. All of them are on bail.

Citycell's operations closed in October 2016 after the telecom regulator cancelled the spectrum of Bangladesh's first mobile operator that served users for more than two decades.

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission shut down the company as it failed to pay its dues of Tk 477.69

crore in time.

PROFIT FALLS

AB Bank's profit drastically fell in 2017 after two big scams. The profit tumbled to Tk 2.96 crore in 2017, 44 times lower than Tk 130.46 crore the previous year, according to the bank's statement.

In 2009, when share market boomed, the net profit of AB Bank was Tk 342 crore, which was the highest among all the listed banks, according to Dhaka Stock Exchange.

MANAGEMENT CRISIS

The bank has been running without a managing director since Moshirur resigned from the post in October last year, when he was just 17 months into his three-year term.

The bank having a huge size of exposure above Tk 23,000 crore is running with only two deputy managing directors. Other banks with the same portfolio have six to seven top executives, including additional and deputy managing directors.

The bank has been going through a management crisis since 2017 after the ACC filed a case against its three former managing directors -- Kaiser Ahmed Chowdhury, Shamim Ahmed Chowdhury, M Fazlur Rahman -- and then incumbent managing director Moshirur Rahman Chowdhury over the Citycell loan scam.

AN AILING BANK

AB Bank is experiencing a severe liquidity crisis, which is reflected in daily inter-bank borrowing. In January, every day inter-bank dependency of the bank was between Tk 944 crore and Tk 2,200 crore, according to the bank's statement.

The advance deposit ratio of the bank remained above 90 percent since last year, in violation of the approved limit of 85 percent. The ratio stood at 91 percent at the end of January this year.

Aggressive lending and erosion of deposits led the bank in such a fund crisis.

The bank's deposit declined by Tk 132 crore to Tk 23,221 crore in September last year from Tk 23,353 crore in December 2017, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

On the other hand, the size of exposure increased by more than Tk 1,000 crore during the same period.

The bank saw a sharp rise in non-performing loan by Tk 697 crore in the first nine months of last year and stood at Tk 1,664 crore in December, central bank data show.

The NPL rate stood at 7.2 percent in December last year from 4.47 in December 2016.

Moreover, the bank has defaulted loan of Tk 274 crore in its Offshore Banking Unit as of December last year, according to BB data.

# Condition

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which is supervising Quader's treatment in Singapore.

The road transport and bridges ministry, whose minister is Quader, shared a video of Rizvi's speech with journalists.

"His kidneys are now stable. Infection rate has also come down. His heart condition and pressure is now also good," said Rizvi, who accompanied Quader to Singapore.

If Quader's condition keeps improving, the physicians may remove the devices attached to him within a day or two, he added.

The AL leader was flown to Singapore on Monday for better treatment as per advice of renowned Indian cardiologist Dr Devi Shetty.

Quader, 69, was admitted to the BSMMU on Sunday morning following breathing complications. Later, doctors conducted an angiogram and found three blockages in his coronary arteries.

Meanwhile, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif yesterday said Quader would return home in a week or two.

Talking to journalists at the AL President's Dhanmondi office, Hanif said, "Doctors at Singapore's Mount Elizabeth Hospital have been observing Quader's condition and we have come to know about his condition from them.

"He will recover completely and return in a week or two."

About the BNP's allegation of discrimination in providing treatment to Quader and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, he said, "Obaidul Quader is a brave freedom fighter. He is one of the best citizens in the country. It's sad and shameful to compare the Awami League leader with Khaleda Zia."

Advertisement for 'Ayan' (আয়না) by Abul Mansur Ahmed. It features a portrait of the author and text describing the book as a collection of 100 years of his life (1928-2018). The book is available at various bookstores and online platforms.

# Massive snow maze sets world record

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experience of finding one's way through the network of paths and hedges by several months.

And despite temperatures plunging to a low of -40 degrees Celsius (-40 Fahrenheit) in January, people kept coming in droves.

But it was no easy feat, Clint Masse told AFP. He said building the maze required weeks of planning, tens of thousands of dollars and 370 truckloads of snow to supplement the relatively thin powder on their fields.

"Making snow is really expensive," he said, pointing to the cost of renting generators, tractors and other equipment, fuel and weeks of labor.

"You're not designing a path, what you are is designing walls and every wall has a double duty: it's got a path on this side and a path on that side," Masse said.

"I wanna say it took me a better part of a week. The corn maze I think I could do in a day and a half so it's a lot of more work to design."

The couple used commercial computer-aided design and drafting software.

Inside the labyrinth, visitors walk between walls of snow that are 1.8 meters (six feet) high, and atop a layer of snow packed tightly to prevent it from melting too soon into slush under the pedestrian traffic.

allow visitors to warm up before continuing on and trying to solve the puzzle.

The fire pits also act as markers, which first-timers Jillian Crooks and Cassidy Wegner said were indispensable for finding their way.

"It was fun," Crooks said. "We just kept turning every which way. It took us a while. We didn't time it, we should have. Maybe like half an hour? Yep!"

That bested the posted average of 30-45 minutes. If cold temperatures hold, the labyrinth could stay open for a few more weeks, by which time Clint Masse said he hopes to have had more than 10,000 visitors and turn a small profit.