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## US stresses on fair polls again

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Washington reiterated the importance of free and fair elections in Bangladesh as Dhaka informed a bilateral dialogue about various measures taken by the Election Commission to this end.

The US was critical of the last two national elections for alleged irregularities, and top US officials again called for the next polls to be held late this year or early next year.

The US also appreciated Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's commitment to free and fair elections as well as her openness to engaging international election monitors.

The matter was discussed during the US-Bangladesh 9th Partnership Dialogue, co-chaired by US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland and Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen at the State Department in Washington, DC, on Wednesday.

The dialogue took place when Hasina is in the US to celebrate 50 years of partnership with the World Bank.

A State Department statement said, "Nuland reiterated US commitment to promoting human rights, labour rights, and freedom of expression in Bangladesh. And both sides reiterated their commitment to a growing partnership across a range of political, economic, environmental, and security issues."

Masud Bin Momen shared some developments in Bangladesh's recent human rights performance and called for lifting the sanctions on Rab and extraditing Rashed Chowdhury, the self-confessed killer of Bangabandhu.

Washington has also been critical of the Digital Security Act, and Nuland acknowledged Dhaka's announcement of reviewing the DSA by this year.

Dhaka demanded reinstatement of GSP facility, while Washington expressed concerns over the freedom of trade unions and the living wage in Bangladesh.

Nuland also assured continued humanitarian support for the Rohingyas.

Both sides agreed to further scale up the resettlement programme for some of the most vulnerable Rohingyas.

## ROHINGYAS' MAUNGDAW TRIP

### They are to see their homeland after 6 years

STAR REPORT

All preparations have been completed for a 20-member Rohingya delegation's visit to the Rakhine state in Myanmar today. This is for the first time in nearly six years the refugees will see their homeland.

Upon the return of the Rohingya delegation from Myanmar's Maungdaw, the first batch of Rohingya repatriation could start at the end of the month.

"Delegations of 20-member Rohingya and government officials will visit the Maungdaw township in Myanmar," said Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) Mohammed Mizanur Rahman.

The delegation will see the resettlement and security arrangements done by Myanmar, he added.

"We will start for Myanmar from the Teknaf jetty around 9:00am and it will be a one-day trip. We came back in the evening," he said.

Six officials, led by the RRRRC, will accompany the Rohingyas.

A Majhi (community leader), a teacher, an imam, and four women are in the Rohingya team.

"They were selected from a group of Rohingyas willing to return to Myanmar. They will share their experiences with others and hopefully this trip will encourage others to return," said a top official wishing not to be named.

Sources said Rohingyas and the officials will go to Maungdaw on boat, which has been hired. Myanmar authorities will arrange everything on their side.

Rohingyas will be first taken to a transit centre and then to villages where construction work is going on for their resettlement.

"... Their visit is significant. If they feel assured after witnessing the situation in Rakhine, it will be conducive to repatriation," said RRRRC Mizanur.



Illegal sand lifting from the Dhaleswari river at Charabari in Tangail Sadar upazila threatens a nearby bridge. People of five unions use this bridge to get to the district town. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

## BRT-3 may stretch beyond Dhaka airport

Road Transport and Highways Division to hold meeting soon

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

An extension of the Bus Rapid Transit Line-3 beyond Dhaka airport is being considered to further facilitate operations and serve city-bound passengers.

The Road Transport and Highways Division is scheduled to hold a meeting over the issue on May 18; officials from the authorities concerned, including the city corporation and other experts, are expected to join, sources said.

ABM Amin Ullah Nuri, secretary of the Division, however, won't use the word "extension". He said it is actually about finding a place beyond the area to turn away buses operated on the Airport-Gazipur corridor.

The sources, however, said the Division was considering "an extension" of the line after a study, conducted by a financier, suggested that the route be expanded till Mohakhali or another suitable nearby area.

"The meeting [on May 18] will decide whether the route would be extended or not, and, if extended, how far it would be. Our maximum limit is Mohakhali," said an official, preferring anonymity.

The development came more than around three years after the government dropped its previous

plan to extend the line up to Mohakhali with World Bank funding.

After several deadline revisions, the authority now wants to start BRT operations on the 20.50km corridor by this August.

Visiting the project site yesterday, this correspondent found that the work remained incomplete at around 10 points on roads and 25 stations.

**"People will face problems while heading further into the city after BRT buses leave them at the airport area. So it would help them if buses can go beyond that area."**

Asked, Shafiqul Islam, managing director of Dhaka BRT Company Ltd, said, "We hoped the infrastructure would be ready within two/three months and we would start operation by August."

"However, since the company will not be able to hire an operator before mid 2024, it will engage Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation to operate the buses."

Besides, all stations are unlikely to be ready to provide automated ticket sales at the beginning and 137 buses

would not be operational then.

**EXPANSION MOVE**

The project was originally planned to be completed by December 2016 at a cost of Tk 2,037.9 crore.

The delay was caused by issues relating to land acquisition, relocation of utility services, design changes, contractors running out of money, and the pandemic.

The project cost rose to Tk 4,268.3 crore and the deadline is December 2024.

The 20km line from the airport to Gazipur was actually an extension of the original plan, which was to build the BRT from the airport to Keraniganj's Jhilmil project. Experts often said the partly functional BRT will not give expected outcome.

A study by the French Development Agency, which will give a loan for the BRT operation including procurement of buses, also suggested extending the line.

"People will face problems while heading further into the city after BRT buses leave them at the airport area. So it would help them if buses can go beyond that area," said an official preferring anonymity.

He added that no new road would have to be constructed for the extension, according to a study in this regard, unlike the Airport-Gazipur section.

## Locals attack, injure UNO of Madhukhali

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

At least seven people, including a UNO, were injured in an attack by locals over a piece of land acquired for a government housing project in Faridpur's Madhukhali upazila yesterday.

Ashiqur Rahman Chowdhury, upazila nirbahi officer, suffered eye injuries in the attack that took place at Nischintapur village around 1:30pm, said police.

Locals said the upazila administration's selected land for the Ashrayan project was not khas land. They said the project was being implemented using a private property.

Around noon yesterday, the UNO along with some Ansar members went to the construction site after receiving information that some local women formed a human chain protesting construction of houses on the disputed land.

According to locals, a

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## Power line to link 4 countries

Dhaka, Delhi agree to build it thru' Dinajpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and India have primarily agreed to construct a cross-border power transmission line which would benefit four neighbouring countries -- Nepal, Bhutan, India and Bangladesh.

The proposed transmission line through Dinajpur of Bangladesh will be used by India to supply electricity between Bihar and Assam. It will also be connected to transmission lines from Nepal and Bhutan, said Power Division officials after a joint steering committee meeting between the two countries in Khulna yesterday.

"The high voltage transmission line will also be used by Bangladesh to import electricity from Nepal and Bhutan," said an official, who attended the meeting, wishing anonymity.

He said Indian previously proposed using Bangladesh only as a corridor to connect two of its states.

"A decision on importing hydropower from Nepal and Bhutan through India had been pending for a long time. Today [yesterday], we have agreed that we will build the transmission line and use it for cross-border power trade between the neighbouring countries," the official added.

The 765KV transmission line will be connected to Bihar's Katihar and Assam's Boranagar through Dinajpur's Parbatipur.

Also, a trilateral agreement between India, Bangladesh and Nepal will be signed soon to import 500MW from Nepal.

"The date will be fixed in an inter-ministerial meeting," the official said.

Indian firm GMR Karnali Hydropower Company Limited is implementing a 900MW power project in Nepal.

A press release issued by the power, energy and mineral resources ministry after the meeting said that the meeting discussed power trade between the countries and the possibility to set up solar power plants in India by the Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company Ltd, which is implementing the Rampal Power Plant project in Bagerhat.

The committee will hold its next meeting in November.

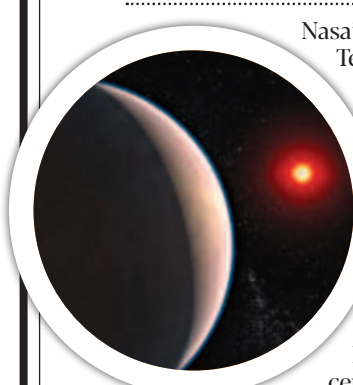
## A 'FISH FIGHT'

One Little Tern flies off with a fish freshly caught from the Padma, while another tries to chase it on a riverbank in Rajshahi. These migratory water birds breed on the coasts and inland waters of temperate and tropical Europe and Asia, and spend their winters in subtropical and tropical oceans as far south as South Africa and Australia. Like most white terns, they feed by plunge-diving for small fish. Sometimes, the males offer their catches to their female counterparts as part of courtship rituals. However, that does not seem to be the case between these two! Little Terns depend largely on water systems for their survival. Despite being categorised as "Least Concern" in IUCN's red list, a decline in their population in our country is inevitable if the current state of our dying rivers does not improve drastically.

PHOTO: MOSABBER HOSSAIN RIBON

## Webb telescope spots exoplanet with water vapour

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK



Nasa's James Webb Space Telescope has helped astronomers find a strange faraway rocky planet that shows hints of a water vapour-rich atmosphere despite its proximity to its star.

Researchers, including those from Nasa's Goddard space center, say the exoplanet

known as GJ 486 b is too close to its star to be within the habitable zone, with a surface temperature of about 800 degrees Fahrenheit.

The planet, located about 26 light-years away in the constellation Virgo, is about 30 percent larger than Earth and nearly three times as massive, meaning it is a rocky world with stronger gravity than Earth.

