

## Comilla romp to BPL final

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A stunning batting display from Liton Das and Towhid Hridoy helped Comilla Victorians to the final of the Bangladesh Premier League with a six-wicket victory over Rangpur Riders in the first qualifier at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Liton (83) and Hridoy (64) stitched together a 143-run partnership for the second wicket as the defending champions chased down 185 with six wickets in hand and nine balls to spare.

Earlier, New Zealand all-rounder James Neesham smoked an unbeaten 97 off 49 deliveries to help Rangpur post 185 for six in 20 overs.

Comilla will face the winners of the second qualifier between Fortune Barishal and Rangpur Riders in the final on Friday.



A man buries his child who was killed in overnight Israeli air strikes on the Moammar home, at a cemetery in east Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Halt issuing licences for elephant rearing

HC asks authorities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court has issued a stay order on issuing and renewing licences for privately owning and raising elephants.

The court also issued a rule asking the authorities concerned with the government to explain why issuing new licences or renewing existing ones should continue.

The rule also questioned why it should not be illegal to torture and abuse elephants for the purpose of performing in circuses or other social events, or for the purpose of street extortion by elephant owners, trainers, and others.

In the rule, the court asked the authorities concerned to show causes as to why a direction should not be issued to prevent the torture of elephants in the name of training.

The HC bench of Justice Naima Haider and Justice Kazi Zinat Hoque came up with the order and rule on Sunday following a writ petition

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## ROHINGYA REPATRIATION Govt's negotiations lack transparency

Say experts during SANEM discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The absence of political consensus in Bangladesh is having a detrimental impact on the country's diplomatic and economic fronts, said experts on Sunday.

They, including a former ambassador, academicians and security experts, at a programme at the city's BRAC Inn Centre, raised concerns about the lack of transparency regarding government negotiations centring the Rohingya crisis.

They also pointed out the absence of parliamentary discussions on crucial matters.

The programme titled "Rifts in the Global Order and the Rise of Multipolarity: Counterbalancing Strategies for Bangladesh" was organised by the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling.

Brig Gen (ret) M Shakhawat Hossain, former election commissioner and senior fellow at the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance of North South University, in his speech, said it is unknown when the violence in Rakhine will stop.

The radical nationalism that is developing in India and Myanmar can also threaten the security of Bangladesh, he said, adding that the US-led unipolar world order is still in place but is

beginning to break down.

"We are talking about a multipolar world, but we still don't live in that world."

Brig Shakhawat also said Bangladesh's foreign policy -- friendship to all and malice to none -- is not working now.

"I am worried about what is happening in Myanmar. I am especially worried about Myanmar's Chin and Rakhine states. There is instability. We don't know where it will end. I don't know yet where we should go.

"At present, we are in a fix about what to do. We have to work on our own solution. We have to decide which way we should go."

Former ambassador M Humayun Kabir, also president of the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), outlined three layers of transformation, starting with the erosion of global norms and order.

Reflecting on past consensus, he noted, "The idea was that the international community should respect sovereignty and all the world should enjoy equity."

He expressed concerns over diminishing guarantees for sovereignty and privacy.

"Sovereignty is no longer a guarantee; privacy is no longer a guarantee. Everybody is being

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## Nawaz's daughter becomes Punjab CM

REUTERS, Lahore

Maryam Nawaz, the daughter of Pakistan's three-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif,

was elected yesterday as the head of the country's most populous province, Punjab, in a move underlining the expanding grip of the family in the South Asian nation.

Maryam, 50, her father's political heir, is the first woman to be chief minister of Punjab - a post that has long been a stepping stone to becoming the country's prime minister.

She secured 220 votes in the 371-seat provincial assembly, the Punjab assembly speaker said as he announced the results of the election that was boycotted by the opposition Sunni Ittehad Council party backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan.



Maryam

## SSC examinee hacked to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A 16-year-old Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinee was hacked to death in Sherpur's Sreebardi upazila yesterday.

The deceased, Biplob Rahman, was the son of Kabil Mia from Dariparvillage in Jamalpur's Bakshiganj upazila.

Quoting locals, Sreebardi Police Station Officer-in-Charge Kaitum Khan Siddique said Biplob was staying with his maternal uncle in Doherpar, Sreebardi. A few days ago, he had a minor argument with some local teenagers.

When Biplob was coming back to his uncle's house early yesterday, a group of teenagers stopped him and attacked him with sharp weapons.

Locals rushed to the scene and took Biplob to the Sreebardi Upazila Health Complex, from where he was referred to the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH).

Biplob died at the hospital in the morning. On information, police recovered the body and sent it to MMCH morgue for autopsy.

Three teenagers have been detained for questioning in connection with the murder. No case has been filed in this connection yet, said the OC.

## Young man found dead with stab wounds

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Police recovered the body of a young man from Kunia of the Gacha area in Gazipur Sadar upazila early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Hossain, 20, son of Md Nurunnabi, a resident of Kunia.

Ramiz Uddin, a sub-inspector of Gacha Police Station, said that the body was recovered from the Kunia Moktar Sarkar Road in the city around 1:00am.

After recovery, the body was sent to Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital for autopsy, said Suman Khan, another SI at Gacha Police Station.

The body bore stab wounds on its neck, ear, and stomach, the SI said.

However, details could be known immediately.

## 2 held over 'leaking DU entry question papers'

UNB, Dhaka

The Detective Branch Cyber and Special Crime unit arrested two individuals for cheating admission seekers by promising to leak question papers for entry tests to Dhaka University.

Annafuul Nazif Iqbal and Md Asif Talukdar were arrested on Sunday, said Additional Commissioner (DB) Mohammad Harun-Or-Rashid.

He said claiming to provide answers to the question paper, Asif uploaded posts asking for Tk 20,000 upfront, with an additional Tk 30,000 after the exam.

Meanwhile, Annafuul, a student at Mohipur Hajji Mohsin Government College, Joypurhat, embezzled Tk 10 lakh by posing as a DU "B" unit question paper provider, he said.

DU authorities and Cyber Teens Foundation filed separate cases against the two.

DU authorities also assured candidates that the question papers have not been leaked.

## Bangladesh, US look to patch up differences \$7b pledged in foreign funds

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The visit by the US delegation was the first since the January 7 polls in Bangladesh.

The delegation was led by President Biden's Special Assistant and National Security Council's Senior Director Rear Admiral Eileen Laubacher. It also included USAID Assistant Administrator Michael Schiffer and State Department Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia Afreen Akhter.

They held meetings with the Prime Minister's Private Industry and Investment Adviser Salman F Rahman, Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud, Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen, opposition BNP leaders Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Amir Khashru Mahmud Chowdhury; labour leaders and members of the civil society.

The US' sanctions against RAB in December 2021, announcing an election-related visa policy in May last year and reiterating calls for free and fair elections caused some strains in its relationship with Bangladesh.

However, analysts said Washington now wants to take forward the multidimensional relationship with Dhaka, but will not bury its concerns on democracy, labour rights, good governance, civic space and media freedom. It will, however, maintain a low profile over the issues.

"The US is a major development partner of Bangladesh. It played a big role for Bangladesh's development over the last 52 years. We discussed how we can deepen and broaden our relationship and begin a new chapter," Hasan Mahmud said after meeting the delegation on Sunday.

He said the US also expressed its willingness to improve the relationship, which was communicated in President Biden's letter to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

During the meeting, a copy of Prime Minister's letter to Biden was also handed over to Laubacher. The original copy will reach the White House through the Bangladesh embassy in Washington.

Bangladesh exports products worth about \$10 billion to the US, which has contributed over \$8 billion to in development funding and is the largest foreign direct investor. It is the largest donor for Rohingyas' humanitarian assistance.

The US also assured support to Bangladesh in forming a new fund of \$15 billion to combat climate change.

The US embassy in Dhaka termed Bangladesh an important partner to Washington in the Indo-Pacific region, adding that it supports a prosperous, secure, and democratic Bangladesh.

In a verified Facebook post, the embassy wrote, "We discussed how our two countries can work on mutual interests, including economic development, security, refugees, climate, labor, and trade."

Speaking to The Daily Star, M Humayun Kabir, president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute and former ambassador to the US, said, "The US is eager to work with Bangladesh in a larger context including for economic development, environment, geostrategy, Rohingya crisis etc."

The US wants to understand Bangladesh's position on security and the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the status of labour rights, civic and political space.

"Their engagements with the relevant stakeholders mean that the US did not move away from its position, but is instead maintaining low profile. They may not speak about everything in public but Dhaka needs to read their language and act accordingly."

Kabir added that Bangladesh's main priority is drawing foreign investment, which requires making it easier to do business here while improving governance and rule of law, and ensuring security of the businesses - aspects that US businesses want before investing.

During the meeting with Salman F Rahman, the US delegation spoke of funding Bangladesh through the US International Development

Finance Corporation (DFC), but noted several conditions, which it would communicate in detail soon.

Earlier, USAID officials had said Dhaka needs to improve labour rights in order to access DFC funding.

Meanwhile, labour leaders said the US delegation, while meeting with them, spoke about making the registration of trade unions easier, reforming labour laws, and increasing wages.

On the other hand, Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud said it is good that Dhaka and Washington exchanged views on the Myanmar situation - something that Bangladesh also needs to do with India and China, though the countries have a difference of interests in Myanmar.

"Our position is to ensure stability in Myanmar and the Rohingya repatriation. Without that, doing business and connectivity with Myanmar will be challenging," he said.

Analysts consider Laubacher's visit significant, given the security concerns created by the Myanmar crisis.

Asked about Laubacher's response to Bangladesh's concerns, Salman F Rahman said the US is keeping watch on the Myanmar situation and also asked Bangladesh to do the same.

Asked, security expert Air Cdre (Retd) Ishaq Ilahi Choudhury said it is good that Dhaka and Washington exchanged views on the Myanmar situation - something that Bangladesh also needs to do with India and China, though the countries have a difference of interests in Myanmar.

"Our position is to ensure stability in Myanmar and the Rohingya repatriation. Without that, doing business and connectivity with Myanmar will be challenging," he said.

Hasan Mahmud reiterated Bangladesh's steadfast position for peace and against any form of war and asked the US to use its leverage to achieve a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. He also expressed his hope for the Russia-Ukraine war to end.

The minister further requested Washington to extradite Bangabandhu's self-confessed killer Rashed Chowdhury from the US.

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Energy Efficiency Improvement Project" to prevent the waste of natural gas at home.

It will give \$100 million to three public universities and the University Grants Commission to create skilled manpower in the manufacturing sector and to create jobs in the industrial sector.

About \$90 million will be given to the Local Government Division's project for safe water supply and waste management in Rangamati, Bandarban, and Lama municipalities.

The Local Government Division will also get \$490 million for two projects to improve rural connectivity, urban governance, and infrastructure.

Japan's \$2.02 billion will go to two ongoing projects. One is the 1,200 megawatt coal power plant at Matarbari. The other project is for building the third terminal of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

The World Bank will provide \$300 million for the economic inclusion of the youth through support for skill development, employment, self-employment, and entrepreneurship.

SLOW IMPLEMENTATION

The authorities have utilised \$4.4 billion of foreign funds between July and January this fiscal year.

Of the amount, the ADB disbursed \$1.24 billion, Japan \$884 million, the World Bank \$763 million, Russia \$588 million, China \$361 million, and India \$169 million. Other lenders disbursed the rest.

Shahriar Kader Siddiky, secretary to the Economic Relations Division, said disbursement of foreign funds depends on project implementation.

"We are working in a coordinated way with the relevant ministries, development partners and their headquarters to increase the utilisation of the committed funds. Disbursement is increasing gradually," he told reporters on Sunday

after a meeting between Finance Minister Abdul Hassan Mahmood Ali and visiting World Bank Managing Director Anna Bjerde.

An ERD official, seeking anonymity, said they have utilised more than \$10 billion in foreign funds during each of the last two fiscal years. The official said they used to spend \$7 billion a year before that.

Replying to a question, the official said they were expecting commitments for \$3 billion to \$4 billion more during the last five months of this fiscal year.

LOAN REPAYMENT TO RISE TOO  
 The government's foreign debt repayment saw a rise of 44.54 percent over the first seven months of this fiscal year.

The government repaid \$1.85 billion, which was \$1.28 billion during the same period in the last fiscal year.

The surge in disbursement of foreign loans and interest payments against them is pushing up the debt servicing requirement, the ERD official said.

## Rohingyas given NIDs, passports

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But the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police uncovered the fraud.

The DB arrested 23 suspects, including Ansar members and Rohingyas, of a racket that helped Rohingyas and repeat offenders get passports through identity theft and forgery. DB chief Harun or Rashid told a press briefing at the DMP Media Centre yesterday.

The gang has been involved in this fraudulence since 2019, and had 143 passports issued to Rohingyas and criminals over the last three months, said the DB chief.

The racket used to take Tk 5,000-12,000 for a stolen or fake birth certificate, Tk 25,000 for an NID, and Tk 1.20 lakh for a passport.

Asked about the lapses in the verification process at the passport office, the Election Commission's NID wing and the Special Branch of police, Harun said they would investigate whether any government officers are linked.

Several teams of DB's Lalbagh Division arrested them at Agargaon, Mohammadpur, Jatrabari, and Badda in the capital, Tangail and Cox's Bazar between February 23 and 25.

The DB also seized 17 passports, 13 NIDs, five computers, three printers, and 24 mobile phones, which contain soft documents and delivery slips of hundreds of passports.

The arrestees are Rohingyas "Amira", Morijan, and Rashidul; Rohingya brokers Ayub Ali and Mostakim; Ansar members Jamsedul Islam and Raihan; brokers in Dhaka Raju Sheikh, Shaon Hossain Niloy, Feroz Hossain, Tushar Mia, Shahjahan Sheikh, Shariful Alam, Zobair Molla, Shimul Sheikh, Ahmed Hossain, Masud Alam, Abdul Alim, Masud Rana, Fazle Rabbi Shawon, Rajab Kumar Das Dipto, Al Amin, and Sohag.

They are on a five-day remand.

HOW THE GANG WORKS

A group takes Rohingyas from Cox's Bazar, Bandarban, Khagrachhari to Dhaka. Another prepares birth certificates and NIDs for them. Then another group works for getting the passports delivered and Ansar members at passport offices help them in the process, said the DB chief.

Harun said the arrestees used addresses of various districts, including Narayanganj, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Shariatpur, Gopalganj, Barishal, and

Dhaka, in their fake birth certificates and NIDs.

Raju Sheikh, one of the brokers who used to be a labourer at Karwan Bazar, now owns several flats and plots, investigators said.

Raju told investigators that every day at least 10-15 people seek passports at his shop, which helps applicants fill the forms.

He added that they file passport applications for two-three Rohingyas along with every 10 genuine applications.

They also trained the Rohingyas so that they could at least pronounce their names in Bangla properly and write at least the first letter of their names while signing documents, he added.

Another arrestee said a man named Ashraf from Dhaka's Uttara provided them with birth certificates.

The DB chief said Bangladesh has a comprehensive database on Rohingyas, digital birth certificate data, and a smart NID data bank containing various information, including biometrics and images. By ensuring a thorough cross-verification of all the data, passport offices could significantly reduce the occurrence of such fraudulent activities, he added.