

Electronic passport from January 22

BSS, Dhaka

Distribution of e-passports (electronic passports) is set to start from January 22 as the authorities have completed their preparation.

"We are working to launch the e-passport on January 22," Maj Gen Shakil Ahmed, director general of department of immigration and passports (DIP), told the BSS yesterday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to launch the e-passport at a programme to be held at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre on the day, said Shakil.

He said the DIP would initially distribute e-passports from its Agargaon, Jatrabari, and Uttara offices and later from its offices across the country.

German company Veridos GmbH has been working on the e-passport, he said, adding that efforts were underway to make the immigration process flawless.

According to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), there are more than 100 states and non-state entities (ie United Nations) currently issuing the e-passport, and over 490 million e-passports are in circulation.

The e-passport adds a layer of security to traditional non-electronic passport by embedding an electronic chip in the passport booklet that stores the biographical information visible on page 2 of the passport, as well as a digital security feature.

The digital security feature is a country specific "digital signature". These digital signatures are unique to each country and can be verified using their respective certificates, the ICAO said.

The project "Introduction of Bangladesh e-Passport and Automated Border Control Management" is being implemented at a cost of Tk 4,569 crore.

The DIP is implementing the project from July 2018 to June 2028, with full government funding. Some 30 million passports will be delivered in 10 years.

The DIP said two million e-passports would be prepared in Germany. The passports of those who apply first will be prepared there.

The validity of the passports will be for five and 10 years.

The DIP and Veridos signed an agreement on July 19, 2018, for the electronic passports alongside machine-readable ones.

Arrest order

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The other accused are: the bank's former managing director AKM Shamim, Senior Executive Vice-President and former head of Credit Division Gazi Salahuddin, First Vice-President of Credit Division Swapan Kumar Roy, First Vice-President Shafiqul Askary, former chairman of the bank's audit committee Mahbulul Haque Chisty and Vice-President Lutful Haque.

One Shahjahan of Tangail's Sreehoripur village, Ranjit Chandra Saha of the district's Jodunathpur village, Sinha's wife Santri Roy and nephew Niranjan Chandra Saha were also made accused.

The investigation officer of the case dropped the name of Senior Vice President and former branch manager Zia Uddin Ahmed as his involvement was not found while former chairman of the bank's audit committee Mahbulul Haque Chisty's name was included in the charge-sheet after his involvement was found.

The ACC in October last year said it found evidence of fraud involving transactions of Tk 4 crore borrowed with fake documents by two businessmen, Shahjahan and Niranjan, from the bank. It said the money was deposited in Justice Sinha's account.

Later on July 10, the ACC filed a case against Sinha and 10 others for their alleged involvement with misappropriating and laundering the money.

DU student raped

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her and brought her to the DMCH, he said.

As she was taken inside the hospital, she told her friends that she felt severe pain in her left leg, according to her fellow students.

Kazi Shahan, officer-in-charge of Cantonment Police Station, said that police were investigating the incident.

'Serious' cyber attack hits

Austrian ministry

AFP, Vienna

Austria's foreign ministry has been targeted by "serious cyber attack", officials said, warning another country could be responsible.

The attack, which began Saturday, was continuing yesterday and "experts say it could last several days," a foreign ministry spokesman told AFP.

The interior and foreign ministries issued a statement about the attack which started shortly before 11.00 pm (2200 GMT) on Saturday.



Prime Minister Shiekh Hasina decorating a police officer at the inauguration ceremony of Police Week 2020 at Rajarbagh Police Lines yesterday. The officer was injured while performing his duty.

PHOTO: PID

Be a people-friendly force

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pro-people force.

Hasina said the government never treats expenditures for law-and-order as expenses, rather investment for people's welfare and interests. "Keeping this in mind, we're taking steps to provide policemen with modern training and equipment so that they can provide better services to the people," she said. She also mentioned that there are huge qualitative changes among the police personnel and they have been able to attain people's confidence and trust.

The PM said police are the people's

servants and they are always quick to provide services whenever needed.

She said the government is firmly committed to rooting out terrorism, militancy, drugs and corruption from Bangladesh and it is conducting drives against these social menaces. "We've declared zero tolerance against these menaces. We want the country to go forward," she said.

Hasina said investments are coming and this trend must not be disturbed. "Our aim is to maintain the economic advancement of the country, and we're working keeping that aim in mind," she said.

She briefly described various

development programmes taken for the development of the police force, saying the government is considering lifetime rationing system for the retired police personnel.

The prime minister inspected the parade and took salute of different police units riding an open jeep.

She also handed over awards to police personnel for their outstanding performance, including heroic activities in cracking important cases, combating crimes, efficiency, dutifulness, honesty and discipline.

Fourteen police personnel received the Bangladesh Police Medal (BPM-gallantry) while 20 President Police

Medal (PPM-gallantry), 28 Bangladesh Police Medal (BPM-Service) and 56 President Police Medal (PPM-Service) for their outstanding performance last year.

Hasina also visited different stalls installed by Bangladesh Police Nari Kalyan Samity (Bangladesh Women Police Welfare Association).

On her arrival at the venue, she was received by Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan and Inspector General of Police Mohammad Javed Patwary.

Ministers, MPs and senior government officials were at the programme.

Trump threatens

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Britain and Oman urged them to make diplomatic efforts to defuse the crisis.

Parliamentary resolutions, unlike laws, are non-binding to the government. But this one is likely to be heeded: Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, who heads a Shia-led government in Iraq, had earlier called on parliament to end foreign troop presence as soon as possible.

In a saber-rattling tweet that defended the Friday's assassination, Trump said 52 represents the number of Americans held hostage at the US embassy in Tehran for more than a year starting in late 1979.

Trump said some of these sites are "at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture, and those targets, and Iran itself, WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD. The USA wants no more threats!"

The military adviser to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei hit back saying the Islamic republic's response to the killing of Soleimani will be military, CNN reported.

"The response for sure will be military and against military sites," Brigadier General Hossein Dehghan told CNN in Farsi, according to a translation by the US news network.

Dehghan said: "It was America that has started the war. Therefore, they should accept appropriate reactions to

their actions."

"The only thing that can end this period of war is for the Americans to receive a blow that is equal to the blow they have inflicted," said the former Iranian defence minister.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo acknowledged the possibility.

"We think there is a real likelihood Iran will make a mistake and make a decision to go after some of our forces, military forces in Iraq or soldiers in northeast Syria," he told Fox News in remarks aired yesterday.

On Saturday, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said Washington had asked Tehran to respond "in proportion" over Soleimani's killing. Tehran has vowed to avenge his death in the "right time and place".

Iran-US tensions have escalated sharply since 2018 when Trump withdrew America from a landmark nuclear agreement and reimposed crippling sanctions on the Islamic republic.

Trump spoke out after pro-Iran factions ramped up pressure on US installations across Iraq with missiles and warnings to Iraqi troops -- part of an outburst of fury over the killing of Soleimani, described as the second most-powerful man in Iran.

His killing was the most dramatic escalation yet in spiraling tensions between Washington and Tehran and has prompted fears of a major conflagration in the Middle East.

Local TV channels lose 20pc viewers

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are pay television channels yet, so they cannot get them through their direct-to-home operators either.

The episode is representative of the poor planning that went behind the execution of the country's passion project, which cost the exchequer Tk 2,702 crore.

Zahiruddin Mahmud Mamun, a director of Channel i, one of the popular television stations among the Bangladeshi diaspora, said they have 60 to 70 lakh viewers in the Middle East countries.

"They have now been cast out," he told The Daily Star last week.

Still, the expatriates have the option to enjoy Channel i's programmes as well as other TV stations' through their websites. But not all expatriate Bangladeshis have high-speed data connection at all times.

"And enjoying television programmes on smartphone is not a pleasant experience," he added.

Salauddin Salim, head of broadcast and IT at Somoy TV, echoed the same as Mamun.

About 10 percent of Bangladeshi TV channels' viewers are in the Middle East, 5-7 percent in Malaysia and about 2 percent in Australia, he said.

"We also have viewers in the African countries. They are now being deprived of our news and programmes."

Salim, however, said Somoy TV is reaching their viewers in the US and Canada through a workaround: by way of an internet protocol they are sending their content to another

satellite, which is then beaming the programme to the viewers in North America.

Contacted, Telecom Minister Mustafa Jabbar said the government did promise the TV channels that an alternative arrangement would be made for them to telecast to those regions.

"I am not sure why that has not been done until now."

To run a successful satellite business at least three satellites are required, according to Jabbar.

Since Bangladesh Communication Satellite Company (BCSCL) do not have that yet, they had planned to team up with other satellites to reach all parts of the globe.

"As far I know BCSCL was in talks with two satellite companies to cover the regions where most Bangladeshis reside," he added.

BCSCL Chairman Shahjahan Mahmood said they are in discussions to enable the television owners to run their business in those markets smoothly.

He, however, declined to elaborate further.

"You will get good news soon," Mahmood added.

Bangabandhu-1 satellite is located at the 119.1 east geostationary slot and it can barely reach Uzbekistan, where there is hardly any presence of Bangladeshis.

It could have easily covered Malaysia and Australia had cost-cutting not dominated the planning.

When the satellite's design was finalised the entire right side of the atlas

was dropped, a move that saved the government Tk 30 to Tk 40 crore, said an official of BCSCL requesting anonymity due to sensitivity of the matter.

Apstar 7 is on the 76.5 east geostationary slot and can reach up to Munich, Germany other than Singapore, Malaysia and Australia.

Though the Bangabandhu-1 satellite's quality is quite good, the broadcasters have to send their content to the ground station in Gazipur first through fibre optic cable -- a system they are not comfortable with.

"The bandwidth quality is not always the same. Besides, we cannot be entirely reliant on fibre optic cable," said MM Sayem, head of broadcast and IT at Maasranga TV.

Between October 1 and December 23, all the TV channels experienced blackouts of 58 to 62 minutes for technical problems with the fibre cable, according to broadcasters.

"As we cannot show ads during that time advertisers are refusing to pay us for that," said a broadcaster requesting not to be named.

Some television stations wrote to the BCSCL to inform them of the challenges, but they got no response.

To mitigate the challenges all the television stations are planning to set up their own ground stations, which cost \$90,000. Already, Maasranga TV, Somoy TV and Channel 24 have placed orders for the equipment.

Gradually, all the channels will import their own ground station facilities, Salim said.

targeting US diplomats and troops stationed across Iraq.

"This is no longer a proxy war," said Erica Gaston, a non-resident fellow at the New America Foundation.

"What you have is America attacking an Iranian general directly, and groups are now openly fighting for Iran to avenge him. This is a direct war," she told AFP.

The US strike on Baghdad international airport early Friday killed a total of five Iranian Revolutionary Guards and five members of Iraq's Hashed. Among the dead was Hashed's deputy head Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, a top adviser and personal friend to Soleimani.

As head of the Guards' foreign operations arm, the Quds Force, Soleimani was a powerful figure domestically and oversaw Iran's wide-ranging interventions in regional power struggles.

Hundreds of thousands of mourners, many chanting, beating their chests and wailing in grief, turned out across Iran to show their respects after Soleimani's body was returned home to a hero's welcome.

Trump has said Soleimani was planning an "imminent" attack on US personnel in Baghdad and should have been killed "many years ago".

Tehran has slammed the strike as an "act of war" and Abdel Mahdi said it could bring "devastating" violence to Iraq.

MILITARY SCHOOL RAID 28 killed in Tripoli

AFP, Tripoli

At least 28 people were killed and dozens injured on Saturday in an air strike on a military school in the Libyan capital Tripoli, a ministry spokesman said.

"An air raid on the military school of Tripoli killed 28 cadets and injured dozens more," Amin al-Hashemi, spokesman for the health ministry of the Government of National Accord (GNA) said.

At the time of the strike the cadets were gathered on a parade ground before going to their dormitories, he added.

The military school is in al-Hadba al-Khadra, a residential sector of the Libyan capital.

The GNA health ministry called for blood donors to go to hospitals and blood banks to help those injured.

The southern part of Tripoli has seen fierce fighting since last April, when military strongman Khalifa Haftar began an offensive against the GNA.

Libya was plunged into chaos with the toppling and killing of longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi in a 2011 Nato-backed uprising. It has since become divided between the GNA and rival authorities based in the country's east.

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Demands

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lakh each and an additional Tk 30,000 each for burial or cremation.

And if any of them suffers grievous injuries while in service, he or she gets Tk 4 lakh, added the official.

In response, the PM said, "Why police will not get the benefit if others get it. Rather, police should get priority."

"I want to know why my directive to raise the compensations is still lying with the ministry," an official quoted Hasina as saying.

At the parade, several other police members demanded 30 percent of the basic salary as special allowances for the officials and employees working at training centres.

Now officials of the rank of ASP and above get the benefit at Police Staff College in the capital's Mirpur or Bangladesh Police Academy in Rajshahi's Sardah.

Another police official demanded an increase in their monthly "trade allowances" for nursing, cleaning and other purposes. They now get Tk 15-30 a month in each category.

The official proposed increasing the allowances to Tk 150-300 a month in each category.

Like last year, a policeman sought lifelong rations for two family members of each police member after retirement.

The PM, as in the previous year, agreed to implement the demands.

Another policeman demanded 2.5 percent of the total price of the seized illegal goods as incentive for police personnel.

The PM, however, didn't respond to the demand.

DEMANDS TO BE PLACED

As per the Police Week schedule, police high-ups will hold a meeting with the PM at International Conference Centre at the Prime Minister's Office today.

Seeking anonymity, a high police official said they would put forward a demand for reforming the police's organisational structure and creating posts to recruit 50,000 members in phases.

The police now have a workforce of 212,721.

The officials will also propose setting up an investigation directorate.

As in the previous year, they are likely to place before the PM the demand for posting police officials in Bangladesh missions abroad on deputation.

The Police Headquarters last year sent a proposal to the home ministry, seeking appointment of officials of the rank of SP in 40 Bangladeshi missions abroad as liaison officers. They are to perform duties such as verification of expatriates' passports, curbing transnational crimes and bringing back fugitive criminals to Bangladesh.

But the foreign ministry already gave negative feedback on the proposal after the home ministry sought its comment on the matter, said sources.

This time, the police high-ups will also demand "interest-free advance" for officials of the rank of SP and above for purchasing personal vehicles.

Besides, they are to place a proposal before the PM today for setting up Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman specialised police training complex and separate training centres for women police personnel.

Several officials yesterday told this newspaper that they will sit with several ministers on January 8, the fourth day of the Police Week, and seek approval of 98 new high-level posts, 71 new grade-III posts, 17 new grade-II posts and 10 new grade-I posts.

At present, the force has 67 posts of DIG (Grade-III), 15 posts of additional IG (grade-II), two posts of additional IG (grade-I) and one post of inspector general.

At the upcoming meeting with ministers, the police high-ups will demand special residential facilities for officials of the rank of DIG and above in Dhaka, business or executive class air tickets for additional IGs (grade-I and II) during official tours abroad, added the officials.

Pay Tk 138cr

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the carrier was willing to pay as adjustable deposit, to the telecom regulator.

Earlier, the BTRC separately audited Grameenphone and Robi from their inception until December 2014 and claimed Tk 12,579.95 crore from Grameenphone and Tk 867.24 crore from Robi.