

Army to be modernised despite resource constraints: PM

BSS, Dinajpur

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said despite resource constraints her government will continue its efforts to modernise the army by enhancing the efficiency and professional excellence of the soldiers.

"Despite resource constraints we are implementing programmes for modernisation and strengthening of the armed forces," she told officers and jawans of the 11 Infantry Division of Bangladesh Army at a "Darbar" after witnessing a joint winter exercise at Bhaduria of Nababganj upazila in Dinajpur district.

Khaleda, who is also holding the defence portfolio, appreciated the exercise saying it reflected the high standard of professional excellence

and efficiency.

"We feel proud for whatever you have achieved with limited resources and facilities," she told the soldiers and asked them to keep it in mind that training and exercise have no alternative.

On arrival at the exercise area, the Prime Minister was received by Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Moeen U Ahmed and General Officer Commanding of the 11 Infantry Division Major General Manjurul Alam.

The 93 Armed Brigade of the Bogra-based division, one para commando battalion, army aviation and Bangladesh Air Force took part in the joint exercise led by Brigadier General Abu M Aslam. The exercise began on December 4 and will conclude on December 29.

The round the year training

activities of armed forces are reflected in the winter exercises.

Water Resources Minister Major (Retd) Hafizuddin Ahmed, Women and Children Affairs Minister Khurshid Jahan Haque, State Minister for Finance Major General (Retd) Anwarul Kabir Talukdar, Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence Ministry and former Army Chief Lieutenant General (Retd) Mahbubur Rahman, Whip Rezaul Bari Dina and senior civil and military officials also witnessed the exercise.

The BNP government in its 1991-1996 term had established the 19 division, Khaleda said, adding "in our current tenure we have established three more infantry brigades and several units."

Referring to the current month of historic victory in the Liberation War in 1971, she paid tributes to the martyrs and valiant freedom fighters and termed the army as the symbol of national independence and sovereignty. The role of army in the War of Liberation was always a matter of national pride, she said.

Upholding that tradition, Khaleda said, the army is always discharging its duties with devotion and making significant contribution to the peace and progress of the country.

They stand by the people in calamities and work with them shoulder to shoulder, she said adding: "Their role in the UN peace-keeping missions has brightened the country's image in the world."

New Indian visa centre opens in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Indian State Minister for External Affairs E Ahamed yesterday stressed the need for modernisation of the land customs stations along the Bangladesh-India border and strengthening the trans-border transport systems.

"The two governments are working on a programme for coordinated development of the land customs station on both the side," E Ahamed said, adding, "To complement this initiative, trans-border transport arrangements need to be strengthened considerably."

He was addressing the inaugural ceremony of a new Indian visa application centre in the capital.

State Minister for Expatriate's Welfare and Overseas Employment Major (Retd) Qamrul Islam and E Ahamed jointly inaugurated the centre.

E Ahamed said, "With the full implementation of Safta, Bimstec and Free Trade Agreements next year, we can expect an inevitable upsurge in the flow of goods and people across these regions."

He said, "Our bilateral and regional trade should move through containers along the road, river and rail routes rather than the present system of open trucks and open rails."

He said the government of the two countries will review the Revised Travel Agreement, signed in 2001, in the upcoming year.

He said the Indian High Commission in Dhaka has to issue about 5 lakh visas a year. Establishment of a separate visa application centre will make the visa process easier, he added.

"Making it easier to apply for and obtain Indian visas, this centre should greatly encourage people to people contact between Bangladesh and India," Indian state minister said, adding that both Bangladesh and India are deeply committed to the success of Saarc and Bimstec.

Qamrul assured his Indian counterpart of all sorts of cooperation from his part to the Indian High Commission.

He said through setting up the visa application centre will end the unusual rush and long queues in front of the Indian High Commission.

Indian High Commissioner Veena Sikri said she should do something when she joined the high commission in Dhaka on December 11 seeing heavy rush and long queues in front of the high commission for visas.

She thanked both the ministers for their cooperation in setting up the visa application centre.

Bangladesh country head to the State Bank of India Sree AJ Bosh also spoke.

The Visa Application Centre will start functioning from today at House No-12, Lake View, Road No- 137, Gulshan-1, Dhaka 1212. Visa seekers can submit their applications in new application forms, which are available at the Centre and can also be downloaded from the website at www.hcidhaka.org between 8:00am and 2:00pm at new centre with Tk 200 per application as service charge.



Indian State Minister for External Affairs E Ahamed and State Minister for Expatriate's Welfare and Overseas Employment Major (Retd) Qamrul Islam jointly inaugurate a new Indian visa application centre in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Militancy hits Islam, Bangalee culture

Dr Kamal tells meet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Militancy in the name of Islam has hit 1400-year old Islamic tradition and 700-year old Bangalee culture of peaceful co-existence of different religious groups, said Jatiya Oikya Mancha (JOM) President Dr Kamal Hossain at a discussion yesterday.

"The militant activities were like bomb blasts on our civilisation," he said while speaking at the discussion on "Waging strong movement through national unity to resist the ill forces."

The discussion was organised jointly by Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) and JOM on the occasion of the Victory Day at the Engineers' Institution in the city.

"There is no conflict among the Bangalees with regard to religion. People of all faiths have been living on this land for years even after the advent of Islam to Bengal, but some

evil forces who have been using religion in politics are blasting bombs threatening Islam and Bangalee culture," said Dr Kamal.

"Allah will judge those who instigated the youths in becoming suicide bombers," said the eminent jurist at the discussion jointly presided over by him and BDB President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury.

Blaming the BNP-Jamaat government for the rise of militancy Dr Kamal said the ruling alliance did not take any actions when the media filed report on the activities of outlawed Bangla Bhai, rather the ministers had encouraged him.

The government is breaking its own records one after another by allowing the militants to carry out their heinous activities, said the maker of the national constitution.

Questioning the sincerity of the government's recent dialogue, he

said if the government would have really wanted a dialogue it could invite Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury whose party has a representation in parliament.

"The government has lost its capability to work. It is now walking like a lame man. I think the government will fall even before completing its tenure in next October," he added.

The BDB president in his speech said the government has destroyed all the dreams that the people had dreamt of during the Liberation War.

"Democratic rights, freedom of speech and poverty-free society were the dreams of the people, but the present government after coming to power has destroyed all of them one after another," he added.

"The countrymen are passing days under utter insecurity; they cannot sleep in peace at night. Poverty has deepened, economy has broken down and the prime minister herself admitted the failure of her government," he said, asking "What else the alliance government want to snatch away from the people?"

Drawing attention of the prime minister he said, "Some quarters around you have looted crores of taka from this country, but you have not caught them."

Praising the media's role in bringing out the militant activities he said the government had always blamed the media for it, but the government is now making laws to control them.

BDB Secretary General Major (Retd) Abdul Mannan termed the bomb blasts as a conspiracy of the government to divert peoples' attention from the reforms of caretaker government and election commission.

JOM leaders Commander Abdur Rouf, Jamaluddin Ahmed, Abdul Matin Master, BDB Joint Secretary General Dr Abdul Hakim, Organising Secretary Mahi B Chowdhury, and Sheikh Nazir Ahmed also spoke.

PM's dialogue

FROM PAGE 16 favouring those who are protecting militants.

Workers' Party of Bangladesh President Rashed Khan Menon presided over the meeting held at his party office in the capital.

The meeting in a resolution said the government did not take actions against the ministers, BNP leaders and Jamaat men with links to militant activities.

It also reviewed Saturday's consultation meeting of the alliance on "Secular democratic base of the Liberation War: militancy and national security."

As the government itself is protecting the militants, installing a secular and democratic government by ousting the ruling coalition is the only way now, it observed.

Sticking to their previous decision of not joining the dialogue in line with the main opposition Awami League, the leftist leaders said the government is yet to discuss any of the terror incidents at any of its forums - the cabinet, parliament and party.

"Rather, the government is pinning the blames of tarnishing country's image on the opposition parties and the media," the resolution said. Bimal Bishwas, Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Zahirul Islam, Pankaj Bhattacharya, Abdus Samad, Nurul Islam, Dilip Barua and Ajay Roy, among others, were present.

Gazipur court proceedings resume

BDNEWS, Gazipur

The proceedings of Gazipur court resumed yesterday after 20 days.

All the proceedings of the court remained suspended for about 20 days as the lawyers boycotted the court protesting a suicide bomb attack by Islamist militants on the court premises.

The activities at the court are yet to get back its normal pace as many lawyers and justice seekers did not attend the court.

Ten people, including four lawyers, were killed and more than hundred people were wounded in two bomb attacks on November 29 and December 1 in Gazipur.

The four lawyers, who were killed in the bomb attacks are - Amzad Hossain, former general secretary of district Bar Association, AGP Anwarul Azam, Golam Faruk and Nurul Huda.

Seven lawyers, who were injured in the blasts, are receiving treatment at different hospitals in the capital.

RU admission test question paper leaked

RU CORRESPONDENT

Admission test question paper for Department of History of Rajshahi University (RU) was leaked out in the early hours yesterday.

Admission-seekers alleged Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) leaders leaked the question paper out and sold photocopies of it among admission-seekers at residential halls.

The admission test of the history department was held yesterday at 9:00am. Sources said following the leaking of question paper RU authorities changed the question paper for the test.

RU Proctor Shamsul Islam Sarker around 8:30am raided the room of JCD Joint-convenor Ezazul Haque Miraj at Mother Bux Hall and arrested four admission-seekers in possession of the leaked question papers.

Contacted, Chairman of History Department Mohammad Shafi denied the question paper had been leaked out. An RU teacher, requesting anonymity, said there were some similarities between the leaked out question paper and the one the test was taken on.

Death anniversary

Today is the 21st death anniversary of Poet Abdul Quadir, says a press release.

On the occasion, a milad mahfil will be held at the residence of his 3rd daughter Tahmina Quadir at House no 179, Road no 2, DOHS Baridhara after Maghrib prayers today.

Nurul Islam Patwary



Today is the 21st death anniversary of Nurul Islam Patwary (Nuipa), former editor of the daily Ittefaq, weekly Bichitra and other prominent newspapers of the country, says a press release.

On the occasion, a milad mahfil will be held at his residence at 1133/A, Baitul Aman Housing Society, Road no 1/A, Shaymoly, after Maghrib prayers today.

Relatives, friends and admirers have been requested to attend.

Abdul Khaleq



Today is the 4th death anniversary of Abdul Khaleq, a freedom fighter and founding president of Agrani Bank Employees' Union (ABEU), says a press release.

On the occasion, ABEU and family members arranged doa and milad mahfil.

TOURISM FAIR 2005 ENDS

'More govt initiative needed to promote tourism'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More government initiative and support are essential for the expansion and development of tourism sector in the country, said the speakers at a press briefing yesterday.

They also called for more private investment for the growth of this potential sector.

The press briefing was organised to mark the concluding function of the four-day-long Bangladesh Tourism Fair-2005 which began on December 15 at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city.

Speaking on the occasion TOAB President Faridul Haque said if the government develops necessary infrastructure tourism sector will boom rapidly contributing significantly to the national economy.

"Immense potentials and prospects lie in Bangladesh's tourism sector as the country is blessed with its natural beauty and many archaeological sites," he said, adding that if the government pays due attention to develop the sector and co-operates with private tour operators, the per capita income

would increase 10 times in next 10 years.

He alleged that the Parjatan Corporation is not co-operating with the private tour operators and the National Tourism Council set up in 1992 held only two meetings with them during this long time.

BHGHOA President Sadique Ahsan said earnings from tourism sector have increased significantly with the increase of domestic tourists.

He termed as very poor the external publicity campaign of the government in the field of tourism.

He also criticised the government for not paying due attention to the development of tourism industry and said the government did not allocate any fund in the fiscal years 2004-05 and 2005-06 for tourism sector.

Managing Director of Universal Consultant Limited Atique Md Shamsuzzoha said the next fair will be held in Dhaka and Chittagong in September next year.

This year's fair was organised by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation to help promote tourism and encourage private companies to get involved in this sector.

The co-organisers of the fair

were Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh (TOAB) and Bangladesh Hotels and Guest House Owners' Association (BHGHOA) while the daily Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, ATN Bangla and SKYbd were the media partners.

Universal Media was the event manager. More than 20 thousand visitors came to the fair which was participated by 58 organisations. A total of 80 stalls and five pavilions were set up in the venue.

Different private tour operators and food and beverages companies including Tommy Miah's Institute of Hospitality Management, guesthouses, one stop service providers, airlines including the Kuwait Airways, boutique shops, fashion houses, leather shops, international institutions on hotel and hospitality management, and jewellery shops took part in the fair.



PHOTO: STAR

Justice Latifur Rahman, former chief adviser of a caretaker government gives away trophy of the 'Inter College Victory Day Debate Competition 2005' to the champion team Holy Cross College at the PIB auditorium in the city yesterday. Presidency University and National Debate Federation jointly organised the debate.

Ershad starts Rangpur visit today

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad will start a four-day visit to Rangpur today to participate in different political programmes.

The sources at JP said Ershad will attend the Kurigram District Committee meeting tomorrow and address a meeting at Chilmari under Kurigram on December 21.

The JP chairman also held a meeting with local Member of Parliament and other leaders, including Karimuddin Varsa, Mashur Rahman Ranga and Golam Habib Dulal on Sunday to make his party programmes a success.

The meeting also discussed the situation created by his brother Golam Kader, a presidium member.

He cancelled the meeting after he was satisfied with the statement of his brother Golam Kader.

Juba Dal leader killed in bomb attack in Meherpur

BDNEWS, Meherpur

A leader of Juba Dal, youth wing of BNP, was killed in a bomb attack by terrorists in Gangni upazila in Meherpur last night.

The deceased was identified as Kajal Mahmud, 27, organising secretary of Gangni Juba Dal.

According to police and locals, the incident took place at around 7:30pm when a band of criminals riding on a motorbike rushed to the spot and hurled three bombs targeting Kajal at Bamundi Bazar.

The Juba Dal leader received serious injuries and died on way to the Kushtia General Hospital.

Police suspect that the outlawed Sarbahara Party was behind the attack.

Obituary



Prof Nurunnahar Begum passed away yesterday at the age of 62, says a press release.

She left behind a son and a daughter. She has been teaching history for 25 years at several government colleges.

She also wrote a number of books on history, the War of Liberation and other topics.

Her qulkhani will be held at her Wari residence on Wednesday after Asr prayer.

MABashar

Journalist M A Bashar, senior sub-editor of the daily Janakantha and a freedom fighter, passed away due to lung cancer at his residence at Banasri in the city yesterday at the age of 60, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, two daughters and one son.

His qulkhani will be held at his Banasri residence after Asr prayers on Friday.

WEATHER TODAY

Light rain or drizzle likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light rain or drizzle may occur at one or two places over Khulna, Barisal and Chittagong divisions and weather may remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country in the next 12 hours till 6:00pm today.

Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country during the period, Met office said.

Highest temperature 30.0 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sylhet and lowest 12.0 degree Celsius at Dinajpur.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:15pm today and rises at 6:36am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	27.6	19.0	76	62
Chittagong	29.0	19.2	73	65
Rajshahi	26.8	15.4	78	72
Khulna	27.0	18.1	79	80
Barisal	26.5	18.2	95	91
Sylhet	30.0	18.5	59	58
Cox's Bazar	29.6	20.5	77	70