

## War veterans to get allowance

PM announces at Armed Forces Day reception

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday announced that the 1971 war veterans of different forces would get allowance from January next year.

"We've decided to provide allowance from January 2018 to those who fought for the country's independence from different forces, including the armed forces, police, Ansar-VDP and Border Guard Bangladesh [formerly known as East Pakistan Rifles]," she told a reception arranged marking the Armed Forces Day 2017.

The PM accorded the reception to gallantry award-recipient freedom fighters and their families at the Army Multipurpose Hall at Dhaka Cantonment.

Hasina said the members of the forces who had joined the Liberation War were not given allowance as they were in-service at that time. "All of them have gone into retirement by the time and their families are now in serious miseries ... we will start providing allowance to them from January next Insha Allah."

She mentioned that the demand is raised every year when she meets everybody on the Armed Forces Day. "So, we've decided to give it."

Pointing out that her government did whatever necessary for the valiant freedom fighters, the PM said, "Within our limited capacity, we're trying to recognise those who had participated in the Liberation War and those embraced martyrdom."

Principal Staff Officer of the Armed Forces Division Lt Gen Md Mahfuzur Rahman delivered the welcome address at the function.

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque, PM's Security Adviser Maj Gen (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddiqi, Chief of Army Staff General Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiqul Haque, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Nizamuddin Ahmad and Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Abu Esrar and high civil and military officials were present.

At the reception, Hasina presented honorarium cheques and gifts, including mobile phone and tabs, to the families of seven Birshreshthos as well as other gallantry award recipients. She also handed over "Shantikalin Padak" (peacetime medals) to 12 armed forces members and "Osamanya Seba Padak" (outstanding

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## Tantamount to apartheid

Says Amnesty International about oppression on Rohingyas in Myanmar

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's suffocating controls over its Rohingya population amount to "apartheid", Amnesty International said yesterday in a probe into the root causes of a crisis that has sent 620,000 refugees fleeing to Bangladesh.

Scenes of dispossessed Rohingya in Bangladeshi camps have provoked outrage around the world, as people who have escaped Rakhine state since August recount tales of murder, rape and arson at the hands of Myanmar troops.

Myanmar and Bangladesh have agreed in principle to repatriate some Rohingya but disagree over the details, with Myanmar's army chief saying last week it was impossible to accept the number of refugees proposed by Dhaka.

The Amnesty report details how years of persecution have led to the current crisis.

A years-long "state-sponsored"

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## Two 'ABT men' held in Kolkata

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

A special task force of Kolkata police yesterday arrested an arms dealer and two suspected Bangladeshis allegedly linked to militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team.

Deputy Commissioner, STE, Murlidhar Sharma said Samsad Mia, 26, alias Tushar Biswas, Riazul Islam, 25, alias Riaz alias Suman and Manotosh Dey, 46, were picked up from Kolkata Railway Station between 2:30pm and 3:00pm.

Preliminary investigation found that Samsad and Riazul were Bangladeshis and members of ABT and had come to purchase arms and chemicals used for making explosives.

"ABT is responsible for the murder of several bloggers in Bangladesh and has direct links with the Al-Qaeda network in the Indian subcontinent. Samsad occupied a higher position in the ABT hierarchy," Sharma said.

He said a fake multi-purpose

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People remove the portrait of former Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe from the wall of the International Conference Centre where parliament had their sitting in Harare yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Mugabe quits

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army takeover, with ZANU-PF urging him to go. He finally resigned moments after parliament began an impeachment process seen as the only legal way to force him out.

Wild celebrations broke out at a joint sitting of parliament when Speaker Jacob Mudenda read out Mugabe's brief resignation letter and suspended the impeachment procedure. Mugabe, who has been confined to his Harare residence, did not appear.

"I Robert Gabriel Mugabe in terms of section 96 of the constitution of Zimbabwe hereby formally tender my resignation... with immediate effect," said the letter.

"My decision to resign is voluntary on my part. It arises from my concern for the welfare of the people of Zimbabwe and my desire to ensure a smooth, peaceful and non-violent transfer of power that underpins national security, peace and stability."

In a highly symbolic scene, a man in a white shirt took down a portrait of Mugabe from the wall of a room inside the building where parliament sat for its extraordinary session. Another bystander replaced it with an image of Mnangagwa, reported AFP.

People danced and car horns blared at news that the era of Mugabe -- who had led Zimbabwe since independence in 1980 -- was finally over. Some held posters of Mnangagwa and of army chief General Constantino Chiwenga.

Despite the outpouring of joy on the streets, his downfall was as much the result of in-fighting among the political elite as a popular uprising, although thousands of people rallied against him in the days after the army intervened last week.

The army seized power after Mugabe sacked Mnangagwa, ZANU-PF's favourite to succeed him, in a bid to smooth a path to the presidency for his wife Grace, 52, known to her critics

as "Gucci Grace" for her reputed fondness for luxury shopping.

Since the crisis began, Mugabe has been mainly confined to his "Blue Roof" mansion in the capital where Grace is also believed to be.

ZANU-PF chief whip Lovemore Matuke told Reuters that Mnangagwa would be sworn in within 48 hours and that he would serve the remainder of Mugabe's term until the next general election, which must be held by September 2018.

"I am very happy with what has happened," said Maria Sabawu, a supporter of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), outside the hotel where the impeachment process was happening.

"I have suffered a lot at the hands of Mugabe's government," she said, showing her hand with a missing finger that she said was lost in violence during a presidential run-off election between Mugabe and opposition

leader Morgan Tsvangirai in 2008.

Mugabe has led Zimbabwe since a guerrilla struggle ended white-minority rule in the country formerly known as Rhodesia.

He took the once-rich country to economic ruin and kept his grip on power through repression of opponents, although he styled himself as the Grand Old Man of African politics and retained the admiration of many people across Africa.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on Zimbabweans "to maintain calm and restraint".

Zimbabwe army chief also called for "maximum restraint" and law and order to be upheld.

His grip on power was shattered last week when armoured military vehicles took to the streets, blockaded parliament and soldiers placed the president under house arrest in an operation that had all the hallmarks of a coup.

## Baby stolen from DMCH found in Narayanganj

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A three-and-a-half-month-old baby girl was rescued in Narayanganj yesterday, 17 hours after she was allegedly stolen from her parents at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Police rescued Jim from a woman at Kashipur of Fallullah around 5:30pm. They also detained the woman, Monowara Begum, in this connection, Abdul Motaleb, sub-inspector of Shahbagh police, told The Daily Star.

He said Monowara during primary interrogation claimed she and her husband Jewel visited the hospital on Monday night to adopt the child from her mother Sumaiya Akhter.

Sumaiya handed over her daughter to them after receiving a mutually agreed sum, said Motaleb quoting Monowara as saying.

He added they would further interrogate the detainee and the infant's family to solve the puzzle as the latter had filed a complaint.

According to police, Monowara's father Siddique was undergoing treatment at DMCH medicine ward.

On October 31, Sumaiya with her two daughters Jim and five-year-old Jemmy came to the hospital with her husband Jewel Mia, who was suffering from urinal and diabetic problems. Jewel used to work as a garment worker but left the job three months ago for his sickness.

Monowara, who is childless, met Sumaiya at the hospital and gave her a proposal to adopt her younger daughter after learning about their financial problem, said the police quoting the family.

She however returned home without the child as the hospital authorities discharged her father last Saturday.

Jewel yesterday told The Daily Star he was sleeping on bed no 40 and Sumaiya with the daughters on bed no 41 on Monday night. Around 12:30am, her wife went to the balcony for a while and when she came back Jim was not there.

Noor Banu, who was in the ward, said she last saw Sumaiya feeding her daughter around 10:30pm. Later, the lights were switched off and they fell asleep.

Suddenly, they woke up at midnight and found Sumaiya crying, she said, adding that Sumaiya claimed Jim was missing from the ward.

The victim's nephew Rafsan Farazi said they first called Monowara's family

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## Smart NID for all by Dec 2018

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"We are working and taking support from the armed forces division for the smooth personalisation of the NID cards," Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday.

"For the distribution, we have already procured 517 sets of IRIS scanners and the same number of fingerprint machines."

He also said, "Our target is to complete the personalisation and distribution of 90 million smart NID cards by December 2018. We are also working to produce and distribute provisional NIDs [laminated] for the 1.2 crore new voters by early 2018."

These decisions were made at the IDEA project steering committee meeting yesterday at Nirbahan Bhaban with Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda in the chair.

The EC decided to take up the state-funded project to distribute smart NID cards among voters following a failed attempt to get the work done through a joint finance with the World Bank.

The commission started the distri-

bution in October last year, long after French company Oberthur Technologies (OT) won the tender bid in January 2015 for production, personalisation, and supply of the 90 million cards up to upazila level.

The EC scrapped the deal with OT for its failure to complete the production and supply of all cards on time after extending deadline twice.

The commission has been able to distribute only 2.86 percent of the total smart NID cards. Under the around Tk 800 crore project, some 90 million voters were supposed to receive the cards by June.

Now, the commission has decided to do the job on its own under a new work plan as the World Bank will not fund the new project after unsuccessful conclusion of the previous project, said EC officials.

The EC officials said they have hired some armed forces personnel to personalise the blank cards that they had received from OT.

Contacted, Brig Gen Mohammed Saidul Islam, project director of IDEA, told The Daily Star that OT used to personalise five to six lakh cards every month but now that num-

ber has reached 40-45 lakh.

"The IDEA project had stagnated but gone are those days. We are hopeful that we will be able to deliver all the cards within the stipulated timeframe," he said adding that the work was going on in full swing with the Bangladeshi resources.

The meeting has discussed the extension of the project as WB funding has stopped. A project proposal with one year extension was also sought to complete the task.

Saidul said some 13 percent of the targeted NID cards have been distributed so far.

Within this June, OT could produce 77.30 million blank cards and only 12.41 million cards were personalised. It supplied 10.98 million cards to Thana and upazila election offices.

Although the target was set at distributing 90 million cards, around 1.20 crore new voters have already been included in the voter list and the number now would be 101.68 million, according to EC's latest estimates.

The EC worked out the plan to provide the smart cards to voters under the Identification System for Enhancing Access to Services (IDEA) project in 2011.

## Mistakes reign

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also on their 'critical thinking'.

For example, four options given for the question "What would happen if not the Mujibnagar govt was formed?", were: war would happen longer, war wouldn't conduct properly, help wouldn't get from India, and it would not be possible to train of freedom fighter.

It seems the authority expected fifth graders, around the age of 11, to bring out sensible meanings of the questions and then answer them.

Apart from grammatical errors, teachers and guardians said, options in some MCQ questions were confusing.

To the result of the 'divide and rule' policy of the British, students were supposed to select one of the four options -- racial discrimination, cultural discrimination, social discrimination and financial discrimination. All the answers could be correct.

The guardian said examinations are conducted to assess children's competency and knowledge but how far the assessment would be correct is based on the questions asked.

"It seemed the examiners just used Google translate to set the questions in English," said a mother, wishing not to be named.

The issue triggered a firestorm on social media.

One of the users, a teacher working at an English medium school, said, "The kind of English written in the question paper itself shows the deplorable state of education. Education is no longer in the hands of the educated. I am appalled."

Yesterday's was a blatant example for reinforcing the educationist's concerns over the quality of education.

"This is really embarrassing... and

disturbing," said Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, a renowned academic, author, and columnist.

The English version was introduced as a substitute for English-medium education without giving attention to its quality. If the level of knowledge of the examiners is such a disgrace, then one would wonder what was taught in classes and what the children had learnt, he said.

The number of students taking the terminal exam has increased over the years; they pass with good marks but it is sad that the quality of education is declining," Serajul Islam added.

"We are making them confused instead of helping them learn properly. No one has this right to subject children to this," said noted educationist Rashed K Choudhury.

Such examinations should be stopped as they create confusion in the minds of children, said Rasheda, also the executive director of Campaign for Popular Education.

Contacted, Md Shah Alam, director general of National Academy for Primary Education (Nape), the organisation that set the question paper, was surprised when this newspaper informed him about the goofs.

"Really?" was his first reaction.

He said there might be some typos or mistakes made while printing the questions at BG Press.

When given some examples of the mistakes, he said class-I officers set the questions and wondered how such mistakes were being made.

"I have to check whether there is any mistake in the manuscripts which we gave to the BG Press for printing," the DG said.

## Got spare \$71 m

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mountain-top pads -- each more than 4,000 square feet (370 square metres) -- for an eye-watering combined price of US\$149.1 million.

The smaller of the two properties closed at \$71.7 million, making it Asia's most expensive apartment by area, at a whopping \$17,000 per square foot, according to Bloomberg News.

The price smashed the previous record paid for place to sleep in Hong Kong's red-hot property market, when a duplex unit on the island topped out at \$13,439 per square foot in September.

A month later an office building in downtown Hong Kong sold for a record \$5 billion.

The surging property market has become a political issue as costs in one of the world's