

Serve country selflessly

PM asks newly commissioned army members

UNB, Chittagong

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon the newly-commissioned army members to stand beside the people and serve the country selflessly.

"Your first and foremost vow will be to protect the country's independence and sovereignty even making the supreme sacrifice. You'll have to stand beside the people and serve the country selflessly," she said.

The premier was addressing the President Parade marking the commissioning of the cadets of 75th BMA Long Course at Bangladesh Military Academy (BMA) Parade Ground in Bhatiari here.

Hasina said the Army is now quite different from the one a decade ago in terms of infrastructure, strategy and technology.

"The present Army is much more developed, skilled and smart one due to the combination of modern training and equipment," she said adding, the government have enhanced the

Army's capacity to a large extent alongside developing its infrastructure in the last nine years.

Noting that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had framed the Defence Policy in 1974 to build the Army as a strong and trained force, the PM said the government prepared Forces Goal-2030 following the defence policy framed by the Father of the Nation.

She said it was a memorable day for BMA as the cadets were going to be commissioned as lieutenants on completion of three-year training for the first time.

Hasina urged them to show loyalty to their senior officers and sympathy to their subordinates.

She said the Army had been able to earn praises from all quarters by showing competence and professionalism while performing their duties at home and abroad.

The Bangladesh Army's role in the UN peacekeeping missions has been appreciated across the globe, she said,

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina handing "Sword of Honour" to Battalion Senior Under Officer Sadmanur Rahman, who was adjudged the best all-round cadet in the 75th BMA Long Course, yesterday during the President Parade marking the commissioning of the cadets of 75th BMA Long Course at Chittagong's Bangladesh Military Academy Parade Ground in Bhatiari.

PHOTO: PTD

RAPE OF ROHINGYA WOMEN

Suu Kyi avoided talking about it with UN envoy

STAR DESK

Myanmar State Counsellor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi reportedly skirted around reports of Rohingya women and girls being raped by Myanmar security forces when she recently met a senior United Nations official.

Pramila Patten, the special envoy on sexual violence in conflict, was sent on a four-day visit during mid-December to discuss the crisis with Myanmar government officials. But she was unable to engage in "any substantive discussion" about such reports with Aung San Suu Kyi, The Guardian reported.

"The meeting with the state counsellor was a cordial courtesy call of approximately 45 minutes that was, unfortunately, not substantive in nature," Patten wrote to United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

She said that Suu Kyi did not discuss the alleged incidents of rape and instead told her that she would enjoy "a number of good meetings" with senior Myanmar officials.

At these meetings, Patten was allegedly informed by top officials from the military and the civilian government

that reports of atrocities were "exaggerated and fabricated by the international community".

An estimated 655,000 forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals fled to Bangladesh amid persecution since violence began in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State on August 25.

Doctors Without Borders believes at least 6,700 Rohingyas were killed during "clearance operations" ostensibly targeting militants, while many survivors say women and girls were gang-raped.

"Moreover, a belief was expressed that those who fled did so due to an affiliation with terrorist groups, and did so to evade law enforcement," Patten wrote.

In November, Patten had said that Myanmar soldiers had systematically targeted and gang-raped Rohingya women during the violence against the Muslim community in August.

The UN envoy had also said that many women and girls had died because of the assault, and that this sexual violence was one of the reasons for the mass exodus of Rohingyas from Myanmar.

Patten also expressed concerns about plans to send Rohingya who have fled

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US to cut its UN budget

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ways to increase the UN's efficiency while protecting our interests."

The UN's two-year budget is roughly \$5.5 billion, and the total US contribution to the UN is more than any other nation. Haley's statement did not mention how or if the US contribution will be altered.

Stephane Dujarric, a spokesman for Guterres, confirmed in a statement that the UN General Assembly on Sunday morning had approved cuts for the 2018-2019 period that would total about \$286 million below the level for the last two years and touted support for a trial proposal to move to annual budgets.

A US official told CNN that the UN's administrative and budget committee "agreed on a range of issues related to the UN's regular budget, peacekeeping budget, oversight and management matters and reform initiatives."

Among the points of agreement, the official said, included cuts with a focus on bloated management and support functions and rationalizing services," and adjusting budget levels for Darfur and Haiti. Earlier in the year, the UN reduced its peacekeeping role in Darfur, which caused concern among some human rights activists.

The US official said the agreement secured funding for political missions in Libya, Yemen, Colombia, Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, as well as creating a special envoy for Myanmar. US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson last month said actions by Myanmar's government against the Asian nation's Rohingya Muslim minority amounted to "ethnic cleansing."

Haley's Christmas Eve announce-

ment on cuts to the UN budget for 2018-2019 came days after the US exercised its first veto in years at the UN Security Council. Every other member of the body, including US allies, voted in favor of a proposal affirming international opposition to recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, days after President Donald Trump did so and declared the US would one day move its embassy from Tel Aviv to the contested holy city.

The UN General Assembly went on to vote on the same issue, passing a non-binding resolution disapproving of the Trump administration's decision.

Ahead of the general assembly vote, Haley announced the US was "taking names" of those voting against the US, and afterward, she held a party where the only countries invited were nations that did not support the resolution on Jerusalem.

Trump praised Haley's actions before he left the White House for Christmas.

"Let them vote against us. We'll save a lot. We don't care," Trump said.

Trump campaigned in part on a pledge to reduce US commitments abroad, and Haley entered her post questioning the value of the US' funding of the UN, reported AFP.

Earlier this year, Haley cheered cuts to the UN's peacekeeping budget, and Sunday's announcement on further reductions to the UN's overall budget included a vow by the ambassador for the "America First" administration to seek further reductions for the UN budget.

"You can be sure we'll continue to look at ways to increase the UN's efficiency while protecting our interests," Haley said Sunday.ss

Country's first biotech rice released

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immature pollens are made to divide and grow into tissues either on solid and liquid medium.

The scientists at the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) have also developed a new rice variety with the highest ever zinc (27.6 mg/kg) content. BRRI dhan-84 also got approval along with three more new rice varieties yesterday.

In 2013, Bangladesh released the world's first biofortified zinc-rich rice variety BRRI dhan-62 with 19 mg/kg of the micronutrient. Since then countries scientists at BRRI and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University (BSMRAU) have, so far, developed six zinc-rich rice varieties with the yesterday's one richest in zinc content.

BRRI scientists told UNB that BRRI dhan-84 is also moderately enriched with another key micronutrient, iron.

Zinc deficiency causes stunting, while iron deficiency is a leading cause of anaemia. More than one-third of under-five children in Bangladesh are stunted, while more than 43 percent women of reproductive age are anaemic.

A meeting of the National Seed Board (NSB) held in the city yesterday with the agriculture ministry secretary in the chair also gave nods to short-duration transplanted Aus variety BRRI dhan-82, broadcast Aus variety BRRI dhan-83 and a rice variety that

can withstand stagnant water BRRI dhan-85.

Talking to UNB, BRRI Research Director Tamal Lata Aditya said both the biotech rice and the zinc-rich rice would be good supplements to Boro-season mega variety BRRI dhan-28. Both of the new ones have higher yield potentials of varying degrees compared to BRRI dhan-28.

The new varieties come at a time when two of the country's most common rice varieties -- BRRI dhan-28 and BRRI dhan-29 released in 1994 -- are losing potential due to ageing.

The prospect of higher rice yield through the release of the new varieties also comes against the backdrop of diminishing returns from the country's rice fields.

A recent International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) report says Bangladesh's rice production growth slowed down to just 0.7 percent in five years (2012-16), whereas the growth was as high as 4.8 percent in the preceding five years (2007-11).

Akhter Ahmed, the country head of the Washington-based food research think tank IFPRI, said, "Rice production more than tripled since the country's liberation [in 1971], but the [agricultural] growth is slowing down."

He observed that the most popular rice varieties in Bangladesh are old and they require better replacements so that farmers could reap more yield from less land and go for agricultural diversity by

growing other high-value crops.

Akhter put emphasis on the agricultural extension service's role in demonstrating and popularising the new potential rice varieties among farmers. As a third of Bangladesh's total farm households are of pure tenants, who work on land owned by others, it is very crucial for the state to take extension services to them, he added.

Sazzadur Rahman, a prominent young rice scientist, explained to UNB that application of biotech tool helped the BRRI scientists to come up with a potential rice variety, which otherwise could have taken longer.

With the five varieties that got approved yesterday, the number of BRRI-developed rice varieties now stands at 91. Among them, one is biotech rice, six are hybrids while the rest are high-yielding inbred varieties (HYVs).

BRRI-developed rice varieties are cultivated on more than 80 percent of the country's land where paddy is grown. These varieties account for more than 91 percent of the country's total 35 million tonnes of rice production.

The farm sector contributes about 17 percent to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs more than 45 percent of the total labour force.

Currently, nearly 75 percent of the total 7.84 million hectares of arable land is being used for producing rice, thanks to land scarcity and people's rice-centric dietary habit.

Khaleda has no links

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"I have made an extensive submission to you [judge] showing that the BNP chairperson is innocent. I hope she will be honourably acquitted of all the charges as the prosecution failed to prove any allegation against her."

About the Zia Orphanage Trust, Rezak Khan said actually it was late foreign minister Mustafizur Rahman who took an initiative to contact the then Kuwaiti ameer to get a donation to preserve the memory of late president Ziaur Rahman.

"Mustafizur Rahman received the donation from the then Kuwaiti ameer. He took part of the donation and set up an orphanage in his village in Bagerhat. The orphanage is running well. But nothing has been mentioned about it in the first information report," argued the lawyer.

The allegations that Khaleda received the donation, formed the trust fund and disbursed the money

were raised like "a bolt from the blue". The allegations were "totally uncalled for and untrue", he said.

He also claimed that none of the 32 prosecution witnesses could tell the court that the former prime minister was involved in any of the processes.

Rezak Khan said Khaleda can't be accused in a case as a public servant as she was the country's prime minister at that time.

"Khaleda Zia was not personally involved in any of the processes of Zia Orphanage Trust. None of the documents of the trust contains her signature," the lawyer added.

Making his arguments for the defence, senior lawyer Khandker Mahbub Hossain told the makeshift court in the city's Bakshibazar that it was a "politically motivated case aimed at harassing Khaleda and remove her from politics".

"The whole intent of the case is to identify Khaleda Zia as a thief," he said.

Nahid clarifies his bribe statement

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carried my speech, some newspapers and online media published my speech partially, creating confusion among people."

Opinions of some eminent citizens and political personalities based on those spread more confusion.

During the DIA's laptops and certificates distribution ceremony on Sunday, the minister claimed that corruption had come down significantly in the education sector, thanks to measures taken by his ministry.

Then he referred to a situation eight years ago and said, "When I sat with EED [Education and Engineering Department], I told them that please do good work. My request to you [is] 'you take bribe, but you must keep it within a tolerable limit'. [I said that] because I did not have the courage to tell them not to take any bribe. It would have been a meaningless remark. But

now we have made tremendous efforts and brought many changes here."

The education ministry on Monday clarified its position on the media reports, saying that the reports created scope for misunderstandings.

At yesterday's briefing, the minister said, of all the directorates and departments of the education ministry, the image of DIA was not up to the mark in 2009 when the AL-led alliance assumed power.

"Unbridled corruption, mismanagement and weakness in monitoring were evident. The officials were involved in corruption and irregularities. All those were the fallout of misrule of the past BNP-Jamaat government," he alleged.

"I didn't mention the BNP-Jamaat part in my speech [on Sunday]. The situation was created during their rule and they should explain their misdeeds," Nahid added.

He said they had been able to bring the DIA out of that anarchy.

"The zero-tolerance policy on corruption and bribe has been intensified," he said, adding that, "Now, the DIA is a lot more transparent and accountable institution. We keep our efforts on to make it a graft-free institution."

The minister also said some eminent personalities raised different questions regarding him on the basis of "partial and baseless" news.

"I would like to tell them humbly that you are aware of my struggle for honesty, ideals and sense of responsibility. I would have been happier if you had contacted me before making any comments based on partial and baseless news," Nahid said.

Asked about ITB's statement over his resignation for his comments, the minister said he gave an explanation of his speech and did not want to say anything more.

It's murder after rape

Say police after DNA result; woman was killed nine months back

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

It was the fingerprint that helped police identify an unclaimed body of a woman and eventually arrest her killer nine months ago.

Yesterday, a DNA test result found evidence that the suspected killer Enamul Haque, 30, who was arrested a week into the body recovery, raped the woman before killing her in March.

Enamul claimed him innocent during interrogation in police custody following his arrest but his DNA samples matched with DNA samples found in the victim's vaginal swab, Ezaz Shafi inspector (investigation) of Airport Police Station, told The Daily Star.

The beheaded body of Kulsum Akter, 28, was found on March 22 in the capital's Airport area in a sack with hands and legs tied up.

Police were clueless for days and the body remained unknown until police identified her by going through the national identity card database of the Election Commission (EC).

According to the EC database, Kulsum is the daughter of Azhar Hawlader of Kalkini upazila in Madaripur district.

Ezaz told The Daily Star that after identifying the victim, they collected Kulsum's cell phone number from her family members and tracked down the call list, helping them arrest Enamul.

Kulsum had an affair with Enamul, said Ezaz.

Enamul suspected that Kulsum had

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8-yr-old girl 'raped' in B'baria

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

An eight-year-old girl of Ibrahimpur village in Brahmanbaria's Nasirnagar was allegedly raped yesterday.

Abu Zafar, officer-in-charge of Nasirnagar Police Station, said the girl's mother filed a case against Bachhu Mia, of Kunda village and imam of Ibrahimpur mosque, in connection with this incident. Police were trying to arrest him, the OC said.

The girl was first taken to Nasirnagar Upazila Health Complex. She was later moved to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital for better treatment.

Woman stunned

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Horomanski checked her account statement online earlier this month and saw that she was being zapped for \$284,460,000,000 by Penelec, her electric provider.

She was told she had until November 2018 to pay the entire amount. Her first payment for December was only \$28,156.

After a call from Horomanski's son, Penelec fixed the statement to show that the actual balance was \$284.46, the paper reported.

Penelec spokesman Mark Durbin said somehow the decimal point was in the wrong spot.

"I can't recall ever seeing a bill for billions of dollars," Durbin told the paper. "We appreciate the customer's willingness to reach out to us about the mistake."

Horomanski told her son she had a better idea for a Christmas gift after she saw the \$284 billion bill, according to the paper.