

Army to be modernised further: PM

Asks new officers to work for country's welfare



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina handing "Sword of Honour" to Battalion Senior Under Officer Sabir Nawaz Shaon, who was adjudged the best all-round cadet in the 77th BMA Long Course. Chief of Army Staff General Aziz Ahmed was also present at the event -- marking commissioning of the cadets -- at Bangladesh Military Academy in Chattogram yesterday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the government is working to transform Bangladesh Army into a time-befitting, technologically well-equipped and modern force.

She said after assuming office her government established military units including the new infantry divisions, brigade unit and training institutes for overall development of the army, reports BSS.

The prime minister said this while addressing a programme as chief guest at the parade ground of Bangladesh Military Academy (BMA) in Chattogram, marking the President Parade 2019 of the 77th BMA Long Course.

The premier said army should always be well-trained and equipped with modern technologies. In addition, she said, her government has ensured inclusion of women in the force.

Sheikh Hasina asked cadets to respect their seniors and take special care of subordinates. "You have to remain alert while discharging duties," she said.

"Our armed forces have been working at various UN missions with due competence and their role is lauded everywhere," she added.

Noting that the day was a memorable one for the academy, the prime minister said in her speech that trainees from Bangladesh as well as friendly countries such as Saudi Arabia, Palestine and Sri Lanka were commissioned yesterday as lieutenants after completing the three-year course.

Greeting the cadets, Hasina said, "Necessity of army for an independent and sovereign country is immensely

needed and inevitable." Therefore, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman inaugurated the BMA at Cumilla Cantonment in 1974 to develop the army as a trained, strong and efficient force.

She said it is the duty of all to take the country forward. "Let's work for a developed and prosperous Bangladesh," she told the cadets, reports UNB.

The PM continued, "We have adopted the 'Forces Goal 2030' in accordance with the 'Defence Policy' adopted by the Father of the Nation." In line with that, the Awami League government has been taking necessary measures, including setting up a new infantry division.

She mentioned that today's Bangladesh Army is much more developed, self-reliant, efficient and professional in terms of infrastructure, strategy and technology.

The premier said Bangabandhu Complex has been built with all kinds of modern facilities in the academy. Besides, four-year honours and engineering degrees have been introduced in the academy whereas the duration for cadets to be commissioned has also been increased to three years from two years, she said.

Earlier, the prime minister handed out prizes among 265 promising young officers.

Of them, 234 are from Bangladesh, 29 from Saudi Arabia and one each from Palestine and Sri Lanka.

Sabir Nawaz Shaon, battalion senior under officer of the course, received the "Sword of Honour" while

'Govt did not take it seriously'

Jute workers in Khulna go on hunger strike again

DIPANKAR ROY, Khulna

Workers of eight state-owned jute mills in Khulna and Jashore industrial belt went on an indefinite hunger strike again from yesterday, to press home an 11-point demand including implementation of wage commission.

Thousands of jute workers and their family members took position with their belongings on BIDD Road of Khulna city and Atra industrial area of Khulna-Jashore highway.

Visiting at least five jute mills of Khalishpur and Daulatpur areas of Khulna city, over 7,000 workers of Star and Platinum jute mills were seen taking position under two big tents in front of Platinum mill gate on BIDD Road. Across the river Bhairab, around 3,000 workers of Star Jute Mill also took part in the hunger strike with other jute workers of Platinum Jute Mill.

Workers of Crescent Jute Mill erected a single tent on BIDD Road, where at least 3,000 were taking part in the hunger strike, most of them coming prepared with warm clothes and other belongings. Workers of Daulatpur and Khalishpur jute mills erected two separate tents in front of the respective mill gates.

Workers of Alim and Eastern jute mills sat near their mill gate in Atra industrial area by the Khulna-Jashore highway.

Workers said they did not remove the five tents on BIDD Road, that were erected on December 10 when the workers first went on a hunger strike.

Sukur Mollah, a jute workers of Star Jute Mill came to the spot around 2pm, along with his wife Jharna Begum and six-year-old son Shuvo.

"I have been working for 12 years as a temporary worker. I got only Tk 1,800 per week. How will I give feed my five-member family?" he questioned.

"I asked my wife and son not to come with me, but they did not listen," Sukur said.

Another worker Ramjan Ali, 67, who was hospitalised during the previous phase of the hunger strike earlier this month, also joined yesterday's hunger strike.

"I was hospitalised and received treatment from Khulna Medical College Hospital on December 12 during the hunger strike, but I am back here," said Ramjan Ali.

"We proved our patience earlier, and we will follow systematic demonstration. As a part of it, we had started a hunger strike with the assistance and confidence of general jute workers," said Sahana Sarmin, president of Platinum Jute Mill employees' union.

"But the government did not take it seriously,"

she added. "We are yet to be paid as per the wage commission, which was announced in 2015. The government is promising to consider all our demands, but we want a permanent solution."

Some 30,000 workers of nine state-owned jute mills of the Khulna-Jashore industrial belt went on a hunger strike on December 10, which was postponed on December 13 upon assurances from State Minister for Labour and Employment Monnujan Sufian. One worker died and over 200 fell ill and had to be rushed to hospitals during the hunger strike.

Three meetings were held since then -- between labour leaders, Bangladesh Jute Mill Corporation and the jute and textile ministry. After the latest of those -- on Thursday -- failed to reach a consensus, the workers decided to go on hunger strike again, said Murad Hossain, former president of Crescent Jute Mill and joint convener of CBA and Non-CBA Sangram Parishad.

The workers' demands include cancellation of public-private ownership, payment of provident fund gratuity for retired workers, regularising weekly wages and implementation of the wage commission, and payment of outstanding bills. They also demanded that the government buy jute products for other sectors.



Jute mills workers started their indefinite hunger strike yesterday to press home an 11-point demand, including implementation of wage commission. This photo was taken in front of Platinum Jute Mill in Khulna in the afternoon.

Mock voting for Dhaka city polls on Jan 28: EC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mock voting using electronic voting machines will be held at all voting centres of Dhaka on January 28, ahead of the Dhaka city corporation elections.

The elections to Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) will be held on January 30. People will exercise their voting rights to elect city mayors and councillors with EVMs for the first time in city polls.

Talking to journalists yesterday, Election Commission's NID Wing Director General Brig Gen Mohammad Sidul Islam said demonstrations of how to cast vote using EVM will take place on January 25 and 26.

He said the EC has prepared at least 35,000 electronic voting machines for Dhaka city polls. The EC has also decided to deploy two army personnel at each centre, to operate the EVM. However, they will provide only "technical support", he said.

There are 2,600 voting centres -- 1,460 in DNCC and 1,140 in DSCC -- to serve some 54 lakh voters.

According to the polls schedule, the last date for filing nomination papers is December 31.

The returning officers will scrutinise the nomination papers on January 2, and the last date for withdrawing candidacy is January 9.

'Credible results not possible with EVM'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP says on upcoming Dhaka city polls

Claiming that it is not possible to get credible results from electronic voting machines (EVMs), BNP yesterday alleged that the Election Commission is trying to use the technology in the two city polls to "fulfil the government's desire".

"We're observing with serious concern that the Election Commission has become active to fulfil the government's desire, even after the unprecedented scandal in the national election," BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said.

Speaking at a press conference at BNP's Nayapaltan central office, he also alleged that the EC has taken a position against the will of people, only to bring election

results in favour of the government "through tricks" by using the EVMs.

The BNP leader urged the EC to take proper steps for holding a credible election discarding its plan to use EVMs.

He said it is impossible to have credible results from EVM in polls, as this machine can easily be tampered with.

On December 22, the Election Commission announced that elections to Dhaka north and south city corporations would be held on January 30, using EVMs instead of traditional ballot papers.

December 31 is the last date for submitting nomination papers, while January 9 is the deadline for the withdrawal of candidacy. The EC will scrutinise nomination papers on January 2.

Sylhet rail link with Dhaka, Ctg restored after 5hrs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Rail communication with Dhaka and Chattogram from Sylhet was restored after around five hours yesterday.

Communication was snapped at around 11am as a compartment of a freight train got off the track at the outer signal area -- around 200 metres off Baramchal Rail Station at Kulaura upazila under Moulvibazar.

Moreover, the freight train brought traffic movement to a stop over Fenchuganj-Brahmanbazar regional road, as thousands of vehicles on both side of the level crossing could not pass through.

This is the fourth notable train derailment in the area after the June 23 accident of inter-city Upaban Express, which killed four and injured around a 100. Later on July 19 and July 20, two more train derailments happened in the area.

Witnesses said that a compartment of the freight train was derailed and the train kept moving for some minutes before stopping. The incident broke at least 250 slippers and 500 clips of the rail line.

Locals said they have been urging the railway authority to repair the track for years but no notable repair work is being initiated to solve the problem permanently.

Julhas Mahmud, sub-assistant engineer of the railway, said, "There was some problem at the wheels and tools of the derailed compartment, which was notified earlier but before it could be repaired, the derailment occurred."



Part of a road is dug up for development work by Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Ltd in Chattogram's Katalganj area with no barricade around it, posing a risk of accidents. A number of such development works are going on in the port city, in many cases without safety measures. A motorcyclist and his pillion fell into a similar hole in Chawkbazar area on Wednesday, with one of them critically injured. The photo was taken on Saturday.

One held with 7,950 yaba pills in port city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police yesterday arrested a woman with 7,950 yaba pills from Chattogram Railway Station area.

The arrestee is Azifa Begum (35) of Gazipur.

"On secret information from Police Headquarters, a team of law enforcers raided the railway area and detained Azifa from a tea stall," said Mohammed Mohsin, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kotwali Police Station.

After searching her bag, police found the pills, he added. "Azifa said she collected the pills from Cox's Bazar and was going to Gazipur. One Abir (35) is the buyer of the consignment," said the OC.

During primary interrogation, Azifa said her husband, Md Shah Alam, was arrested by Karnaphuli police on December 5, said the OC. Coincidentally, Alam, who is in jail now, was arrested with similar amount of yaba pills, he added.

Woman with burn injuries dies at RMCH

Clothes caught fire while trying to stay warm

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A woman who sustained burn injuries after her clothes caught on fire while she was warming herself by fire, died at Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH) on Saturday.

The deceased is Rozina Begum (31) of Rangpur's Mithapukur upazila. Rozina's family members said she was warming herself sitting beside a fire on December 21 as the temperature started falling. At one point, her clothes caught on fire, leaving her with burn injuries.

Family members doused the fire and rushed her to Mithapukur Upazila Health Complex.

Later, she was referred to Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH) the same day. She died there on Saturday noon, said Dr MA Hamid, assistant professor of RMCH's burn and plastic surgery unit, adding that she had suffered 55 percent burn injuries.

So far, during this winter, four people have died at the hospital with burn injuries resulting from similar accidents. In 2017, 17 people died after these accidents in different districts of Rangpur division.

According to RMCH sources, the 14-bed burn unit is crammed with patients. Currently, 50 patients with burn injuries are receiving treatment at the unit.

With the fall of mercury in the region, residents of rural areas warm themselves by making bonfires, using throwaway paper, plastic and crop residue. These accidents usually occur as their clothes catch on fire.

At present, the temperature in the region is hovering between 4.5-10 degree Celsius.