

Be ready to fight if enemies attack

PM urges armed forces

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the armed forces to remain ever prepared to thwart any threat to the country's independence and sovereignty.

"We have to remain prepared. If enemy from outside attacks us, we must resist that in a befitting manner," she said while inaugurating the Sheikh Russell Cantonment in Shariatpur's Jazera.

Joining the event virtually from the Gono Bhaban, Hasina said Bangladesh believes in "friendship to all, malice to none", the foreign policy formulated by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"We don't want to fight with anyone. We will not engage in war, but we have to remain prepared," she said.

In this connection, the PM said the government has taken steps to upgrade the armed forces through training and more resources.

Chief of Army Staff General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed also spoke at the programme.

Hasina listed the measures the Awami League government had taken after coming to power in 1996 for the first time in 21 years.

Besides, she said the then AL government first recruited female officers in army, navy and air force in 2000.

The PM said after winning consecutive elections since 2008, the government has been implementing short, medium and long term plans to build a trained and up-to-date armed forces.

For this "Forces Goal-2030" has been launched on the basis of National Defence Policy-1974 formulated by Bangabandhu, she said.

In addition, Hasina said the government established Bangladesh Peace Building Centre in 2016 and formulated "National Defence Policy-2018".

She extended her gratitude to the chief of army staff and members of army for naming Mawa and Jazera cantonments as "Sheikh Russell Cantonment".

She said her younger brother Russell had aspired to be an army officer.

Hasina said the 99 Composite Brigade and the cantonment has been established to ensure the security of the Padma Bridge.

At the programme, the PM also received a state salute from a smartly tuned contingent of 99 Composite Brigade.

General Officer Commanding of 9th Infantry Division and Commander of Savar area Major General Shaheenul Haque presented a brief description of Sheikh Russell Cantonment.

An audio-visual documentary on Sheikh Russell Cantonment was also screened.



People and rescuers gather near a destroyed part of a Ukrainian government administration building following a bombing, as Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues, in Mykolaiv, Ukraine, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Russia, Ukraine hold ‘meaningful’ talks

Moscow agrees to reduce attacks on key cities; dozens of Russian diplomats expelled from Europe

AGENCIES

Russia said it would scale down fighting around two Ukrainian cities following "meaningful" talks with Ukraine yesterday, as officials raised the prospect of a meeting between the Russian and Ukrainian presidents.

The outcome of the face-to-face talks at a palace in Istanbul raised hopes around the world after more than a month of conflict that has left thousands dead and forced millions from their homes.

On the ground, Ukraine said seven people were killed by a Russian strike on a regional government building in the southern port city of Mykolaiv.

But Ukrainian negotiator David Arakhania said there were now "sufficient" conditions for talks between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Arakhania also called for "an international mechanism of security guarantees where guarantor countries will act in a similar way to Nato's article number five -- and even more firmly".

Russian Deputy Defence Minister Alexander Fomin meanwhile said there had been progress in talks on "the neutrality and non-nuclear status of Ukraine".

Therefore "a decision has been made to radically, by several times reduce the military activity" around the capital Kyiv and the city of Chernigiv, he said.

Russia's chief negotiator Vladimir Medinsky also said there had been "meaningful discussion" and raised the prospect of a Putin-Zelensky meeting.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu called the talks the "most significant progress" since Russia's invasion began on February 24.

US President Joe Biden discussed the "latest developments" with the leaders of Britain, France, Germany and Italy in a call that lasted just under an hour.

Following Tuesday's announcements, European stock markets lifted and oil prices fell by five percent as supply fears eased while the ruble surged 10 percent against the dollar.

The fighting has already forced more than 10 million from their homes and according to Zelensky has killed an estimated 20,000 people.

Ukrainian forces have pushed back Russian forces from around the city in recent days and have recaptured territory in other parts of the country, including in the suburban town of Irpin outside Kyiv -- an important gateway to the capital.

Ukraine has also resumed evacuations from areas in the south of the country occupied by Russian forces.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had opened the talks at the sprawling Dolmabahce palace, recognising "legitimate concerns" on both sides but urging them to "put an end to this tragedy".

Russian oligarch and Chelsea Football Club owner Roman Abramovich, who has been hit by Western sanctions, was also in attendance. The Kremlin said he was acting as an intermediary and denied reports that he had been poisoned during a previous round of negotiations in Ukraine.

CEC for hassle-free NID card service

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibur Awal yesterday asked the Election Commission officials to remain alert so that people needing correction and change of information in the national identity card don't face hassles.

Speaking at a workshop at the Electoral Training Institute in the city, he also asked the officials to work as friends of the people, not as masters.

Awal said the NID card is a highly needed document. Correcting errors in NID cards has become an important matter, he added.

The CEC said the EC's reputation was being tarnished due to the activities of certain individuals. "If the Election Commission officials do not work efficiently and honestly, then the entire Election Commission will have to take the responsibility for that bad image. This issue needs to be monitored."

Teacher suspended for marrying son to schoolgirl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

An assistant teacher of Begumpur Government Primary School in Chuadanga has been suspended over marrying off her 10th grader son to a class 5 schoolgirl.

The action was taken yesterday after an investigation by the upazila education officer found the allegation against the teacher to be true, said Shamim Bhuiyan, Chuadanga sadar upazila nirbahi officer.

Speaking to The Daily Star, the teacher said, "I made a mistake. I apologise unconditionally."

Three held over murder of woman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have arrested three men, including an air conditioner technician, over the murder of a woman in the capital's Sabujbagh four days ago.

The arrestees are: AC technician Bappi, 31, and his associates Sumon Hossain Ridoy, 22, and Rubel, 42.

Police first picked up Bappi from Jhalakathi on Monday night and the two others from the capital's Rampura yesterday, Abdul Ahad, deputy commissioner (Motijheel division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told a press briefing in the city.

The trio entered the house of Tania Afroz Mukta to service an AC and attempted to steal cash and gold jewelry from the closet when she was in the kitchen. As the woman screamed for help seeing them ransacking the closet, Bappi grabbed her and stabbed her with a machete, Ahad said.

Police later recovered Tania's body from the house.

Body recovered from Chattogram school

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police recovered the body of an elderly man from a school in Chattogram's Satkania upazila yesterday morning.

The identity of the deceased, aged about 65, could not be confirmed till last evening, said Tarek Md Abdul Hannan, OC of Satkania Police Station.

Informed by locals, police recovered the body from Khagaria Multipurpose High School around 7:00am, the OC said, adding that the body bore no injury marks.

Probe leaves puzzles

FROM PAGE 1

used by the cybercriminals, the physical examination reports of the consignments, the list of vehicles that carried the goods, and the current location of the empty containers.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the report recently.

When the scam took place, the two IDs used by the criminals to enter the system were supposed to be inactive. One of the officials got transferred while another was on suspension over bribery -- so none had the authorisation to use the IDs.

Yet the committee didn't hold anyone responsible for the IDs remaining active.

After investigating for two months, the probe body recommended filing a forgery case against two officials of Prottoy International, the clearing and forwarding (C&F) agent for releasing the 11 consignments on behalf of the importers.

This was the second cyberattack on the NBR server after a gang had similarly released about 4,000 consignments using the active IDs of two former customs officials in 2019.

Experts fear the main culprits will go unpunished if some pertinent questions are not answered. They also termed the probe report incomplete and an apparent attempt to protect the culprits.

The probe, however, found discrepancies between the information in shipping documents and customs documents. The fraudsters also submitted

fake import permission copies, shipping agents' papers and product lists, the report said.

The import permission numbers also did not match with shipping and customs documents.

"The forgery could have been averted had the port and customs officials properly checked the documents and also verified the authenticity of the import permission," the report observed.

THE IMPORTERS

Nine companies, whose names surfaced over the import of 11 consignments before the probe, in written statements to the committee claimed they were not involved in the forgery. They also denied any wrongdoing when contacted by this correspondent.

Four of the companies -- Grameen Knitwear Ltd, Shanta Denim Limited, Kong Keng Textile (Bangladesh) Co Ltd and Actor Sporting Limited -- "can't avoid their liabilities" as both the shipping and customs documents for four consignments were submitted in their names, the report said.

It, however, did not recommend any punishment against the four companies except for "monitoring their future import activities".

The probe committee cleared MGL Company BD Limited, Helicon Limited, Gold Shine Industries, Tigero Limited and Brothers Plastic Industries Limited -- who were named only in customs documents for seven consignments. The authorities could

prevent release of two of the seven consignments.

Interestingly, five other companies were named as importers in shipping documents, which the committee found authentic.

They are Electro Pack, Hassan & Brothers, ARH Knit Composite Limited, Medina Corporation and Ma Stretch. Of them, Electro Pack responded to the inquiry committee hearing.

Regarding the four absentees, the probe body recommended their explanations be sought.

The Daily Star could not reach these five companies but learnt that they were not named in customs documents.

Proprietor of Prottoy International Md Hafizur Rahman said he had filed a case against some of his staff with Chattogram Bandar Police Station after being informed about this forgery.

"They have committed irregularities using my licence," he told The Daily Star.

Customs law does not allow use of licence on a rental basis.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

The committee did not mention anything about nine documents which reportedly went missing from the Customs House.

The probe committee could have obtained copies of the missing documents from alternative sources, said customs insiders.

The committee ignored the issue of finding the internet protocol (IP) addresses of the scammers

who entered the NBR server. An IP is a unique address that identifies a device on the internet or a local network.

Regarding the server breach incident in 2019, the NBR investigation committee was able to identify seven cybercriminals by collecting IP addresses.

The probe report for last year's scam also did not reveal which officers were involved in physical testing of the consignments all the way to the last stage of releasing goods.

Besides, the customs have no information about the whereabouts of empty containers although those were supposed to be returned to customs depots 15 days after goods reached the destinations.

The investigation committee did not collect the information of the vehicles that carried those consignments from the port although the gate officials have detailed information about those transport companies.

By ignoring this, the insiders said, the probe body wasted an opportunity to get an idea about the destinations of the goods.

Then there is the issue of IDs of the two officials.

"The ID of a transferred officer should not be active unless those in charge of IT section are negligent or involved," former NBR officer Maruful Islam told The Daily Star.

Maruful, also former commissioner of Chattogram Customs House, said, "I retired eight years ago and my ID was

deactivated immediately."

Tafsir Uddin Bhuiyan, the convener of the probe committee, acknowledged that it would have been better to have these issues in the report.

He, however, does not think that the main culprits would be able to escape.

"We could not look into these issues due to lack of time and other limitations," said Tafsir, also joint commissioner of Chattogram Customs House.

Customs House Commissioner Fakhru Alam said it was not possible to identify the main culprits and the destinations of the goods in the investigation due to some limitations.

"However, I believe it will come out in the police investigation."

If t e k h a r u z z a m a n , executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said, "It is frustrating that the main culprits remain unidentified due to poor customs investigations."

In order to prevent recurrence of such crimes, he added, it is indispensable to bring to justice all three parties -- the C&F agents, customs officials and the importers who are the principal beneficiaries of the illegalities.

Gujarat gets India's first 'steel road'

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Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Central Road Research Institute (CRRRI) with help from the Ministry of Steel and Policy Commission

and the NITI Aayog. The project also taps the Government of India's Waste to Wealth and Clean India Campaign.

The pilot project road is one-kilometre-long

and has six lanes. It is made using 100 percent process steel aggregate and substitutes the usual materials. According to CSRI, the thickness of the road has also been

reduced by 30 percent. It is believed that this new method can prevent the roads from any damage caused during the monsoon season.