

We want peace, but ready to repel external attacks: PM

UNB, Chattogram

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the armed forces are being developed appropriately to give a fitting reply if the country comes under attack by external forces.

"If external forces attack, we have to face that. For that we have to build up appropriate armed forces and accordingly we have taken various steps," she said while addressing the 10th Tigers' Reunion of the East Bengal Regiment at Bangladesh Military Academy (BMA).

She said Bangladesh does not want to engage in war with anyone.

"We believe in the policy of friendship to all and malice to none. This policy was formulated by the Father of the Nation," she said.

Briefly describing various development activities of the government to modernise Bangladesh Army, she said Sheikh Russell cantonment has recently been established in Mawa-Jazira while construction of new cantonments is under way in Mithamin, Rajbari and Trishal.

"Construction of Army Aviation Forward Bases at Chattogram and Cox's Bazar and Aviation School at Lalmonirhat is also in progress," she said.

She mentioned that the government has added new composite brigade and para commando brigade in the army."Sophisticated and up-to-date weapons are being procured for each force," she said.

She said the government wants to transform Bangladesh as a country of peace.

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The carpeting of the road stretching from Jatrabari Police Station to Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Shanirakhra area got damaged a while back. As the road hasn't been fixed since then, due to the ongoing dry season, a thick cloak of dust now covers the entire area, making it difficult for residents to breathe and travel. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

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'Whatever you need, let us know' Momen tells Turkish counterpart

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen had a telephone conversation yesterday with his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu to express solidarity with the government and people of Turkey, and to give assurance of additional support.

Momen conveyed to the Turkish foreign minister that Bangladesh is sending 10,000 tents in addition to the 2,000 already sent, for earthquake victims, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

He also requested his Turkish counterpart to let Bangladesh know if they need anything else, adding that Bangladesh wants to send construction workers for reconstruction efforts in the affected areas.

"We are truly devastated by the scale of destruction and deaths. We express our wholehearted condolence

Can't force students to disclose marital status for admission

Says High Court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday in a verdict ruled that educational institutions cannot compel any admission seeker to disclose their marital status for admissions.

The HC bench of Justice Naima Haider and Justice Md Khairul Alam delivered the verdict after hearing on a rule that in December 2017 questioned the legality of educational institutions seeking information on marital status of admission seekers.

Deputy Attorney General Amit Das Gupta, who represented the state, told The Daily Star that following the HC judgement, no student can be forced to disclose their marital status for his or her admission in any institution across the country.

The HC also declared illegal the Rajshahi Government Nursing College's action of asking a rape victim to write that she was abandoned by her husband in the admission form, he said.

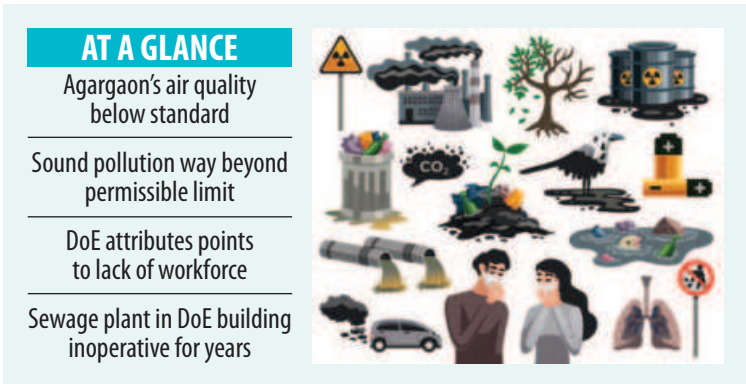
The deputy attorney general said details based on which the HC delivered the judgement can be known when the full text is released.

Following a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Fahriya Ferdous, the HC on December 11, 2017

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DoE fails to keep its own environment safe

Study finds air quality in Agargaon heavily toxic



MOSTAFA YOUSUF

The Department of Environment (DoE) has failed to keep the environmental indices at a permissible level even in Agargaon, its headquarters in Dhaka.

The air quality in Agargaon was found heavily toxic, as unfit vehicles and construction sites are constantly contributing to this end, while noise pollution is also a common problem.

In a recent study done by the Centre for Atmospheric Pollution Studies (CAPS) under Stamford University's Department of Environmental Science, which was published in January this year, both the levels of air and sound pollution were found to be hazardous in the area.

The study assessed the air during pre-monsoon, monsoon, post-monsoon and winter. It found an average of 74 microgrammes of particulate matter 2.5 (PM 2.5) per cubic metre annually. According to the national standards set by DoE, the amount should be 15 microgrammes per cubic metre of air.

The average of PM 10 accounted for 200 microgrammes per cubic metre whereas the appropriate amount should be 65.

While PM 10 is three times its permissible limit, PM 2.5 is five times higher than its permissible limit.

The study came across heavy noise pollution in Agargaon as well. It measured 91.3 decibels of sound, while

the permissible limit for a mixed area such as Agargaon is 60.

During a recent visit, this correspondent found the STP (sewage treatment plant) -- built under Clean Air and Sustainable Environment (CASE) in 2015 on the DoE office compound -- non-functional. The plant was supposed to treat waste generated by the DoE.

This correspondent tried contacting Abdul Hamid, director general of DoE, via phone and texts but could not despite repeated attempts.

Kazi Abu Taher, DoE additional director general, refused to comment on the matter when contacted.

However, requesting anonymity, an upper-tier official from DoE told this newspaper that the department requires eight executive magistrates to run its operations, but it only has three.

"We carry on with the drives twice a week in Agargaon. There are some challenges in this regard. In every mobile court, police forces are needed, which are not readily available," said the official.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), told The Daily Star that as the agency responsible for protecting the environment is not even responsible for its own actions, it cannot hold others accountable.

"DoE has to step up as Bangladesh's environmental performance is shamefully low," she added.

NEONATAL DANGER SIGNS Are new mothers aware enough?

AFROJA AFRIN

Although new motherhood is a time of joy and excitement, it can be overwhelming too, especially for mothers who are not equipped with the knowledge needed to identify the signs of life-threatening diseases in their neonates.

From the very first day of their life till 28 days, a neonate goes through many phases of adaptation in the outer world. The changes occur to their bodies so fast that a little bit of ignorance or carelessness can put them at risk, said neonatal health experts.

According to the World Health Organization, mothers should be aware of several danger signs in newborns, such as a decrease in food consumption, seizures or convulsions since birth, rapid breathing (more than 60 breaths in one minute), chest retractions, high fever (37.5°C or higher), low fever (35.4°C or lower), feet soles turning yellow, a lack of movement unless stimulated or no movement even when stimulated, and signs of infection such as redness or drainage from the umbilicus, skin boils, or pus drainage from the eyes.

The Daily Star interviewed 20 new mothers and none of them was aware of the danger signs that could turn fatal. Some of them came to know such signs for the first time.

Take the example of 25-year-old Mitu Akter, mother of three, who came to Azimpur Maternity Hospital around two weeks ago, with her 19-day-old baby suffering from a cold and cough.

When asked about the matter, Mitu said, "I don't know, because nobody told me about this."

Rokeya Begum (not her real name), a mother of three, came with her newborn who vomits after being fed. She too could not answer any of the neonatal danger signs mentioned by the WHO.

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Both patients and doctors have a responsibility to educate themselves. The shortage of healthcare providers compared to a large number of patients is a major issue and makes it difficult for doctors to allocate enough time to each patient.

PROF FERDOUSI BEGUM
President of Obstetrical and Gynecological Society of Bangladesh

Development futile without harmony Speakers tell seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Development will not be sustainable, if there is no communal harmony in the country. Divisive politics, religious intolerance and ethnic division are harming the peaceful co-existence of the country's people, speakers told a seminar.

The Hunger Project and Freedom of Religion or Belief Leadership Network jointly organised the seminar at Cirdap in the capital yesterday.

Badiul Alam Majumdar, country director of The Hunger Project, said development is synonymous with harmony.

"A development devoid of harmony will not be sustainable. Three factors -- divisive politics, religious intolerance and ethnic division -- are harming the harmony that the country has been cherishing for years," he said.

"During the Liberation War, we protected each other. But it seems we are now standing on the edge when it comes to communal harmony.

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CUSTODY OF JAPANESE CHILDREN 'Go for out-of-court settlement' Dhaka court asks parents

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday asked the parents of two Japanese children to settle the issue of custody out of court, taking the children's future welfare into account.

Judge AHM Habibur Rahman Bhuiyan of Dhaka's District and Sessions Judge's Court made the comment during the hearing on an appeal filed by Bangladesh-born US citizen Imran Sharif over custody.

Before this, the judge accepted the appeal filed on February 2 by Imran, challenging the trial court verdict, which granted custody to the children's mother Eriko Nakano.

Judge Habibur fixed the final hearing's date on March 15.

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Workers seek overtime, festival bonus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Shop Employee Federation yesterday demanded an allowance for working overtime along with two festival bonuses, which is mentioned in Bangladesh labour law, to ensure that workers receive the benefits to which they are legally entitled to.

Shop employees work for 12 hours in Ramadan and the night before Eid

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LIVING ON THE EDGE ... In what looks like an almost dystopian setting, a schoolchild, along with a guardian, is seen near the edge of a half-broken flat in the port city's Bakalia area yesterday. The building, built on the Rajakhali canal, was partially demolished around six months ago during the canal's renovation under the "Chattogram City Water Reclamation, Extension, Renovation and Development Project" by the Chattogram Development Authority. However, residents of the building continue to live there even at the risk of their own lives.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAHAN

Rabindranath 'disappears'

DU authority removes sculpture of poet, terming it 'bad culture'

DU CORRESPONDENT

Rabindranath Tagore's sculpture, placed by some Dhaka University students beside the Raju Memorial Sculpture protesting the "recent incidents of censorship and repression" in Bangladesh, was removed by the DU authorities yesterday.

The authorities say they demolished the sculpture as it represented a "degraded culture".

Soon after, the students placed a banner at the site of the removed sculpture which read, "Gum Hoye Gelen Rabindranath" (Rabindranath has disappeared).

DU Chhatra Union leader Shimul Kumbhakar told The Daily Star, "We placed the sculpture along with some students of fine arts at the university. However, the proctorial team of the university removed it."

"When we called DU Proctor Prof AKM Golam Rabbani over the phone and asked him about how the sculpture of a Nobel laureate was 'offensive' to them, he disconnected the call," he added.

Contacted, Proctor Rabbani said, "It was built without our permission. They placed a distorted sculpture of the poet. We could not tolerate it."

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