

Russia begins three days of nuclear drills

AFP, Moscow

Russia's army yesterday began three days of nuclear weapons drills involving thousands of troops across the country, as Kyiv escalates its drone attacks and with President Vladimir Putin headed to China.

Throughout its more than four-year offensive in Ukraine, Moscow has flaunted its possession of nuclear weapons and repeatedly threatened to use them.

The drills also come months after the last nuclear arms pact between Russia and Washington broke down, and amid a spate of comments from Putin touting the prowess of Moscow's atomic forces.

"From May 19 to 21, 2026, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation are conducting an exercise on the preparation and use of nuclear forces in the event of a threat of aggression," the defence ministry said.

The drills will involve more than 65,000 soldiers and 7,800 types of equipment and weapons, including more than 200 missile launchers, the defence ministry said. Aircraft, ships, submarines and nuclear submarines will all take part.



Flags and jerseys of football powerhouses flutter above a street market in the capital's Gulistan area as traders stock up on merchandise ahead of the FIFA World Cup, which kicks off on the night of June 11. From Argentina and Brazil to Germany and Spain, the colourful display reflects the feverish enthusiasm that grips Bangladesh whenever the world's biggest football tournament approaches. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Be tough on those who looted banks

Banks' association tells Khosru

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Association of Banks (BAB) yesterday demanded decisive action from the government against owners and groups who looted money from banks, warning that the overall financial cushion against bad loans has declined to an alarming level.

The financial buffer against bad loans, termed the Capital to Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio or Capital Adequacy Ratio in the banking sector, has declined to nearly 3 percent, said the association of sponsors of private banks.

The drop in the capital adequacy ratio has created significant stress across the sector and is limiting banks' ability to support industrial growth, SME financing, employment generation, and investment expansion, it said in a statement.

The BAB delegation, led by its Chairman Abdul Hai Sarker, placed the observations during a meeting with Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury to discuss key fiscal, regulatory, and structural measures required ahead of the upcoming national budget for the fiscal year 2026-27.

The association highlighted the severe challenges currently facing the banking industry, including rising non-performing loans (NPLs), pressure on capital adequacy, weak private sector credit growth, and the erosion of public confidence

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New med college despite struggles

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role in getting the approval, according to health ministry officials.

Then, on April 22, Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain told the parliament that the government is planning to set up medical colleges in seven more districts.

A health ministry official said another district was recently added to the list, taking the total number of medical colleges under process to eight, including the one in Thakurgaon.

A Directorate General of Medical Education (DGME) team has already submitted assessment reports on proposed medical colleges in Narsingdi and Brahmanbaria to the health ministry.

The ministry sent back the report on the Brahmanbaria medical college due to issues related to land, the official said, requesting anonymity.

The DGME was also asked to assess the proposals for medical colleges in Sherpur, Laxmipur, Narsingdi, Natore, Bhola, and Joypurhat.

Save for Joypurhat, the proposals for medical colleges came to the health ministry during the interim government's tenure. For instance, Mahfuj Alam, the information adviser, wrote to the health ministry, seeking a medical college in his hometown of Laxmipur, said health ministry and DGME officials involved with the proceedings. They would not be named as they are not authorised to speak on the matter.

After the BNP came to power, Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anee, water resources minister and a lawmaker from the district, also pushed for the medical college.

Former health secretary Saidur Rahman, who hails from Natore, was behind the proposal for Natore Medical College.

Former finance adviser Salehuddin Ahmed placed the proposal for Brahmanbaria Medical College. Several new lawmakers from the district later supported the proposal.

Abdul Bari, state minister for public administration and a lawmaker from Joypurhat, is behind the proposal for a medical college there. This was the only proposal that came after the BNP formed the government.

Local organisations submitted proposals for medical colleges in Narsingdi, Sherpur, and Bhola. Narsingdi also happens to be the home district of the health minister.

Although a local association

in Thakurgaon submitted an application for a medical college there, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir was behind the move, The Daily Star has learnt from health ministry officials.

Speaking to journalists in his hometown of Thakurgaon on February 28 this year, Fakhrul, also the LGRD minister, said a strong team had already started working on the process for establishing Thakurgaon Medical College and had assured him that student admissions could begin by 2027.

Asked whether the approval was given on political grounds, as Thakurgaon is the home district of the BNP secretary general, the health minister refuted the allegation.

Political party leaders often believe that establishing a public medical college in their areas would bring professor- or associate professor-level doctors, and it would be a manifestation of their party's success.

"There is no political link here. Thakurgaon is a remote area in the northern part of the country, and the medical college is being established considering those issues."

DGME officials said they conducted an assessment before the proposal for Thakurgaon Medical College got the go-ahead.

Asked about not following the commission's recommendation, the health minister said a democratically elected government did not require recommendations from an expert committee to approve a medical college when the DGME itself is a body comprising senior doctors.

Apart from local students, more foreign students are showing interest in studying in Bangladesh, making it necessary to establish more medical colleges, Sakhawat told The Daily Star on Sunday.

From where the medical colleges will manage teachers and

infrastructure, however, remains a big question.

At least 43.38 percent of the teaching posts at government medical colleges lie vacant, according to the latest DGME figures.

The most critical gap is at the top level, where a staggering 68.61 percent of professor posts remain unfilled. Fifty percent of associate professor posts and 51 percent of assistant professor posts also lie vacant.

Seven new medical colleges -- in Netrokona, Naogaon, Nilphamari, Magura, Habiganj, Chandpur and Rangamati -- still do not have their own campuses and hospitals several years after their establishment.

The previous governments had established medical colleges in an unplanned manner, M Muzaherul Huq, a member of the health sector reform commission, told The Daily Star on Sunday.

"Is the new medical college part of any planning?" he questioned.

He said the government should have prepared a strategic plan for the next 10 to 20 years by assessing the need for health manpower and determining how many institutions should be developed to meet future demand.

"Without preparing such a plan, no new institution should be founded," said Muzaherul, also a former regional adviser to the World Health Organization South-East Asia region.

Contacted, Nazmul Hosain, director general of the DGME, said work for building infrastructure for Rangamati Medical College had already started, while the project for Chandpur Medical College had already been approved.

The Development Project Proposals for five other new medical colleges were prepared in 2022, and the authorities are now revising the proposals and hope they would be approved soon.

Regarding the teacher shortage, he said a good number of teachers had been promoted in the last few months, but their postings had not yet been finalised.

Once they are posted, most of the teacher shortage will be resolved, except in some basic subjects, he told this correspondent on Sunday.

Apart from the public medical colleges, there are 72 private medical colleges in the country. Around 11,000 students get admitted to the 110 medical colleges every year.

upcoming local polls independently, according to party sources.

Party sources said Jamaat is moving fast in finalising its candidates, with local leaders already instructed to begin groundwork.

For the mayoral race, the party is considering Narayanganj city unit chief Abdul Jabbar; in Gazipur, Jamaat is likely to back Hafizur Rahman, a former Dhaka North Shibir secretary; in Chattogram, former councillor Shamsuzzaman Helali; and in Rangpur, city unit chief ATM Azam Khan.

For Dhaka North, unit chief Selim Uddin is being considered, while Ducusu Vice President Abu Shadik Kayem is under discussion for Dhaka South.

"We are preparing across the country," said Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Abdul Halim. He said the party has almost finalised all its candidates. "We are getting ready to contest independently, on our own."

8-year-old girl

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"I suddenly heard my daughter screaming and rushed outside searching for her. Near Sohel's flat, I found one of her sandals. I kept banging on the door again and again, but nobody opened it. They killed my daughter so brutally."

Hearing the Parveen's screams, other residents of the building rushed to the flat and repeatedly knocked on the door, but no one responded.

After breaking down the door, Parveen and the others found Swapna, 26, standing in the common area of the flat and then discovered the girl's body hidden under the bed in Sohel and Swapna's room. The child's severed head was found inside a bucket in the toilet, said the victim's uncle, AKM Nazrul Islam.

He added that Sohel cut through the flat's window grille to escape. "His wife was not opening the door when we knocked, to help him escape."

The body was sent to Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Hasan Basir, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, said Swapna was also taken into custody on suspicion of being an accomplice. He added that police believe the child was raped before being murdered. "However, that can only be determined after autopsy."

Members of the Criminal Investigation Department and other agencies visited the scene and collected the knife used and other evidences.

Md Faruk Mia, manager of a garage on the ground floor of the building, said Sohel occasionally worked for him repairing rickshaws and was addicted to yaba.

Visiting the scene, this correspondent found the alley in front of the house filled with stunned and grief-stricken neighbours.

The victim's sister, Raisa Akter, 10, said she and Ramisa had breakfast together minutes before the murder.

"I went to my uncle's house nearby when Ramisa was still eating breakfast. She was supposed to get ready for school after that."

Ride-sharing driver Masud Parvez Roni said he rented a room in the flat to Sohel for Tk 5,000 two months ago, while his brother and sister-in-law lived in another room.

"My wife went to our village home two months ago, and I was outside working as a ride-sharing driver. At the time of the murder, my brother and his wife had also gone out for work."

Saiful Islam, headmaster of Popular Model High School, said Ramisa was a very meritorious student and never missed classes. She ranked first in her class for the last two consecutive years.

"We came to know about the tragic killing just minutes before her class started and visited the scene."

He added that teachers and students of the school were expected to form a human chain in front of the victim's house this morning, demanding exemplary punishment for those responsible.

At a press briefing at the Pallabi Police Station around 10:15pm, SM Nazrul Islam, additional commissioner for crime and operations of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said police went to the scene immediately after receiving information about the killing, recovered the body and sent it to hospital.

"We suspect that something may have happened to the child in the bathroom [of Sohel's room]..."

"Sohel tried to dismember the body to conceal the crime but could not complete it as the child's mother and neighbours began knocking on the door."

He added that Swapna, during primary interrogation, claimed she had taken sleeping pills and was unconscious when the incident occurred.

"This claim will be verified upon investigation."

Nazrul said police, during a database check, found that Sohel was earlier accused in a case under the Anti-Terrorism Act in Natore.

Meanwhile, Emdadul Haque, inspector (investigation) of Pallabi Police Station, told The Daily Star that filing of a case was under process. No case had been registered till the filing of this report at around 1:40am.

New pay scale

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the house rent and other allowances would be paid in two phases in the third year.

Full implementation of the pay commission's recommendations would require Tk 106,000 crore, of which Tk 80,000 crore would be needed for government officials and employees. The rest would go towards pensioners and MPO-listed teachers and staff.

The Ninth Pay Commission has recommended partial implementation of the salary structure this year and the interim government has earmarked Tk 30,000 crore in this fiscal year's budget for partial implementation of the recommendations.

However, the implementation has been pushed back to the next fiscal year amid narrowing fiscal space due to low revenue mobilisation and rising fuel prices due to the Middle East conflict.

The commission recommended 20 pay scales, with the minimum salary proposed to rise from Tk 8,250 to Tk 20,000 and the maximum from Tk 78,000 to Tk 160,000.

The new pay structure was prepared

after reviewing significant changes in "nearly all global and national economic indicators, particularly the sharp rise in the prices of essential commodities over the past decade", said Zakir Ahmed Khan, a former finance secretary who led the pay commission.

The aim was to ensure that the real wages under the new structure do not fall below the 2015 level.

"Without a timely and appropriate pay structure, it has become increasingly difficult for government employees to manage living expenses," he said after handing over the report to Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

The Eighth National Pay Scale was implemented in 2015 in two phases: the revised basic salary took effect from July 1, 2015, while revised allowances came into force a year later.

In fiscal 2014-15, the allocation for salaries and allowances stood at Tk 28,709 crore. Following implementation, the allocation rose sharply to Tk 50,775 crore the next year.

Currently, the government spends Tk 131,000 crore a year for its 14 lakh employees and 9 lakh pensioners.

Elite force needed, Rab or another

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His remarks came after the home minister on Monday said that the government is drafting a law to ensure the force's accountability and transparency.

Responding to past demands from the BNP and others to abolish the force, Zahed said that while Rab has faced criticism, it is equipped with advanced technology and trained and has proven effective against crimes where conventional policing often fails.

However, he said there would be no scope for an elite force to be involved in human rights violations, as a democratically elected government would not misuse such a force, since it depends on public support and electoral mandates.

In response to a question on the repatriation of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, Zahed said no extrajudicial action would be taken if she returns to Bangladesh.

"We wanted to remove Sheikh Hasina from power because she did not ensure justice," said the adviser, who holds the status of a state minister, adding that today's Bangladesh seeks to establish justice.

He said justice would be ensured even for adversaries, including Hasina.

Illustrating his point, he said that if Hasina is acquitted of a death sentence through due process, it would be accepted, and if not, the sentence would be carried out. He added that even a death sentence can be considered justice, provided due process is strictly

Pvt hospitals have to treat

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managing such cases.

Citing the Private Medical College and Dental College Act-2021, the DGHS said private medical college hospitals are required to keep at least 10 percent of their beds reserved free of charge for poor patients.

The authorities have now instructed that half of those reserved beds must be allocated for measles and suspected measles patients. For example, a 250-bed hospital will have to reserve at least 12 beds for such patients, the directive said. Hospitals were also asked to display the information prominently at emergency departments and inquiry desks.

The directive further said that only one guardian or visitor will be allowed to stay with each admitted patient.

The hospitals were also asked to send measles-related data to the DGHS headquarters through the proper channel.

Meanwhile, the authorities directed all government hospitals to ensure adequate doctors at measles wards and ensure two rounds (both morning and evening) of visit by specialist doctors daily, including on holidays.

It also reiterated that all public

hospital must have separate measles wards and all such hospitals would provide treatment to measles. Not more than one attendant would be allowed in the ward, it said.

The directions come as the DGHS recorded 11 more deaths from measles and measles-like symptoms in the 24 hours ending yesterday morning. Of the 11 deaths, nine were recorded as suspected cases and two as confirmed cases.

With the latest fatalities, the total number of deaths from measles and measles-like symptoms rose to 475 since March 15. Of them, 398 were suspected measles deaths, while 77 were confirmed cases of measles.

In the previous three days, the numbers of deaths from measles and measles-like symptoms were five, six and two respectively, shows data from the DGHS.

In the last 24 hours, 73 new confirmed cases were reported, bringing the total to 7,929. The DGHS recorded 1,264 new suspected cases, bringing the total to 56,586.

During the same period, 1,115 suspected measles patients were admitted to hospitals, while 1,110 left hospitals, the DGHS said.