

Armed forces being made capable to defend country's sovereignty: PM

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Online Desk: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Monday said her government is building the armed forces in such a way as it can defend the country's independence and sovereignty if Bangladesh is attacked. "We don't want war with anyone. But, we have to attain enough efficiency to protect our independence and sovereignty if Bangladesh falls into such situation and we're preparing our forces keeping that in mind," she said. The premier said this while commissioning the newly constructed naval submarine base "BNS Sheikh Hasina" by unveiling its nameplate, joining virtually from her official Ganabhaban residence in Dhaka.

The inaugural function was held at Pekua in Cox's Bazar. The prime minister said her government is maintaining the foreign policy adopted by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, "Friendship to all, malice to none." She asked the armed forces personnel to continue efforts to materialise Father of the Nation's dream of building developed, prosperous and Smart Bangladesh by 2041 free from hunger and poverty alongside discharging professional duties. "We have established the Bangladesh Navy as a smart force. We will build every organisation as modern with up-to-date and technological knowledge," she said.

The premier said they have adopted a "Blue Economy" policy and are working to use the vast marine resources in flourishing country's national economy and thus to contribute to ensuring overall development of Bangladesh. She said the newly commissioned submarine base would help navy increase its operational capacity to secure the vast marine resources while the ships passing through the Bay of Bengal also can take help from the base. "A proud chapter is added to the history of Bangladesh Navy with commissioning the complete and ultra-modern submarine base," she said.

The premier also witnessed the first flag hoisting ceremony in the submarine base of the navy. Chief of Naval Staff Admiral M Shaheen Iqbal gave the address of welcome at the venue in Pekua. A brief audio-visual documentary of the submarine base was screened at the function. Sheikh Hasina said Bangabandhu had enacted the Territorial Waters and Maritime Zones Act, 1974 to establish Bangladesh's rights on its maritime boundaries. But, the United Nations adopted the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982 as an international maritime law, she said.

After 21 years, when AL government assumed power in 1996, Sheikh Hasina said her government had taken some measures and signed the UN unclos to this end, adding that the Zia, Ershad and Khaleda's governments did not take any measures. After coming to power for the second time in 2009, the prime minister said they have been able to establish Bangladesh's rights on the vast marine areas and its resources from neighbouring India and Myanmar with maintaining the friendly relations. Sheikh Hasina said her government formulated "Forces Goal 2030" in line with Bangabandhu's Defence Policy-1974 after assuming power in 2009 and is now implementing the goal aimed at transforming all the military forces as modern and time-worthy organizations.

In last 14 years, a total of 31 warships, including four frigates, six corvettes, four large patrol crafts, five patrol crafts and two training ships were added to the fleet of Bangladesh Navy, she said. "We added two submarines on March 12 in 2017. As a result, today our Navy was established as a three-dimensional naval force," she added. The premier said Bangladesh is currently building ships in local shipyards for its own uses and for others. Bangladesh Navy has completed the construction of five patrol craft including large ones in Khulna shipyard, she said.