

Thai PM

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related to trade and investment with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to strengthen partnership between Bangladesh and Thailand," she told the "Business Networking Dinner".

"We will increase our cooperation with Bangladeshi government to increase trade and investment."

Shinawatra, who assumed the office of prime minister in July last year, said food industry was another area that deserves attention.

"We will enhance our cooperation in food and agriculture sector -- especially on halal food sector," she said, adding that she had already asked her deputies to explore these areas.

Speaking on the occasion, FBCCI President Kazi Akramuddin Ahmed sought duty-free access for Bangladeshi products to Thailand to help grow the trade volume.

Presently, Bangladeshi exporters do not get tariff facilities in Thailand, he said, adding: "As a less developed country and member of the World Trade Organisation, we request your government to provide duty-free access for all Bangladeshi products to the Thai market," said Ahmed.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Commerce Minister GM Quader, Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Faruk Khan, FBCCI first Vice-president Monwar Hakim Ali, Vice-president M Helal Uddin, FBCCI directors, diplomats, business leaders and top government officials attended the dinner, among others.

Addressing the programme, Muhith said Bangladesh had many things to learn from Thailand that had had great achievements in various areas.

"We expect much better trade with Thailand...there's a scope for further expansion of trade and investment," the minister said.

Bangladesh's export to Thailand was worth \$51.43 million and import \$879.52 million in 2011-2012. "We believe that more trade and investment can reduce the trade gap," said the FBCCI president.

"We now feel that more than trading, we need strategic partnership not only with Thailand but also with our neighbours like India and Myanmar," he added.

According to him, it is time to activate and implement the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sector Technical and Economical Cooperation.

"Our cooperation should be widened regionally and bilaterally by establishing land routes to Thailand through Myanmar, exporting manpower, initiating cooperation between ASEAN and SAARC, attracting foreign investment...collaborating in hospital management, building capacity in nurses' training and promoting tourism."

Ahmed said Bangladeshi spend millions of dollars every year for treatment in Thailand, and invited Thai investors to set up world-class hospitals, diagnostic centres and hotels in Bangladesh.

Earlier in the day, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina received Shinawatra at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

She was given a guard of honour there.

The Thai PM is leading a 108-member delegation, including Commerce Minister Boonsong Teriyapirom, Foreign Minister Surapong Toivachakaiul and PM's Office Ministers Niwatthamrong Boonsongpaisan and Sananee Nakpong.

Shinawatra is scheduled to visit the National Mausoleum in Savar and Bangabandhu Museum at Dhanmondi-32 in the capital today.

Hasina will host a lunch in honour of her Thai counterpart at Sonargaon Hotel.

Shinawatra will also have talks with Opposition Leader and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and Foreign Minister Dipu Moni before leaving for Bangkok around 4:00pm today.

14-party demo today

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alliance government assumed power.

Holding trial of war criminals is one of the key electoral pledges of the AL.

The mass rallies and processions will begin at 2:30 pm in all divisional headquarters, district and upazila towns and in the capital, Mrinal Kanti Das, deputy office secretary of AL, told The Daily Star.

In Dhaka, the mass rally will set off from in front of the south gate of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque. The alliance has taken measures to assemble a large number of people in the rally, party sources said.

A mass procession will also begin from in front of the mosque and end at Suhrawardy Udyan after parading the streets near Noor Hossain Square, Paltan intersection, National Press Club and Matsya Bhaban.

Senior leaders of the 14-party alliance will speak at the rally and from where they will announce their next course of programmes.

Leaders of the ruling combine held a series of meetings for the last several days to make today's programmes a success.

MEETING WITH STUDENT ORGANISATIONS

The 14-party yesterday held

a view exchange meeting with its student and youth organisations at AL President Sheikh Hasina's political office in Dhanmondi with a view of making today's programme a success.

Addressing the meeting as the chief guest, AL stalwart Amir Hossain Amu said punishment to the war criminals would have to be ensured through completing their trials immediately to establish the rule of law in the country.

DHAKA CITY 14-PARTY MEETING

A meeting of the 14-party combine's city units was held at the central office of the AL on Bangabandhu Avenue where another AL stalwart Tofail Ahmed said BNP-Jamaat had been conspiring at both home and abroad to protect war criminals.

"We will continue our street programmes until March 26, and hope that the war crimes trial will be completed by then," he said adding that Khaleda Zia's reception programme for freedom fighters was a mockery.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said, "We liberated the country in 1971 under the leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The 14-party yesterday held

"This time, we will foil all the conspiracies of BNP-Jamaat under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina and compel Khaleda Zia to surrender."

AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif termed the BNP an agent of Pakistan and aide of war criminals as it had declared programmes in the month of victory to thwart the trial.

The AL leaders urged all to make today's 14-party mass procession a success.

38 Shibir men

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commissioner (Media and Community Service) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star last night.

Meanwhile, a statement signed by Shibir's central Publicity Secretary Abu Saleh Md Yahya said the arrestees include Sazzad Hossain and Golam Kibria, president and secretary of Shibir Dhaka City (West) unit.

The statement said the government was trying to "uproot" Jamaat-Shibir as part of its attempt to suppress the opposition and the "arrest" of the leaders and activists was part of this "conspiracy".

Assistant Commissioner Rabib, however, said the detainees detained them in connection with the recent attacks carried out by Jamaat and Shibir men in the capital.

Several hundred people including a large number of policemen were injured during dozens of clashes between law enforcers and Jamaat-Shibir men in the capital and across the country recently. There had been wholesale vandalism as well.

He was momentarily disturbed when a journalist from Channel 4 shouted questions at him with a loudhailer, but he recovered and delivered a 15-minute speech which was high in rhetoric and low in novelty.

"Six months ago I entered this building. It has become my home, my office and my refuge. Thanks to the principled stance of the Ecuadorian government and the support of its people, I am safe in this embassy and safe to speak from this embassy," he said to applause.

"True democracy is not the White House, true democracy is not cameras, true democracy is the resistance of people armed with the truth against lies from Tahrir to London," he said.

The Australian former computer hacker thanked Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa for granting him asylum and hit out at the United States and other Western governments.

Assange said that as long as the US government sought to persecute him and the Australian government refused to support him, he had no choice but to remain in the Ecuadorian embassy.

He added that attempts to prosecute him were an attack on freedom of speech before stepping back into the embassy.

Time Blades, 40, one of Assange's supporters, said that he had been coming to the embassy to show his support for the WikiLeaks founder since August.

He raised his hand in a clenched fist salute at the end of the speech, reports AFP.

About 80 supporters gathered on Thursday night to hear Assange speak. They carried candles and held placards reading, "Don't shoot the messenger" and "Don't trust Sweden". Some sang Christmas carols as they waited for Assange to speak from the first floor balcony, a short distance from Harrods department store. There were 60 additional police officers on duty.

Assange emerged with a raised fist and greeted the crowd: "What a sight for sore eyes. People ask what gives me hope. The answer is right

WikiLeaks to publish

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There is permanent police guard and Assange will be arrested if he leaves the premises, The Guardian writes.

"Next year will be equally busy. WikiLeaks has already over one million documents being prepared to be released, documents that affect every country in the world -- every country in this world," he said to applause.

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"I come in defence of freedom of speech and to defend the right of Julian Assange to have asylum granted to him by a sovereign and independent country. This cannot go on for ever. The British government has to permit safe access to Ecuador for Julian Assange. This will only happen as a result of diplomatic pressure and the people pressure," he said.

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S Asian turtles

FROM PAGE 1

miles to nest on the sandy shores of Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest.

"It's a very grim picture," said SM Rashid, head of the Dhaka-based Centre for Advanced Research in Natural Resources and Management.

"In the 1990s we could spot 50-60 turtles nesting in our beaches in a night.

"But now the number has come down to a maximum 10," said Rashid, whose team in June successfully bred a critically endangered turtle using an artificial beach habitat.

Environmentalists blame a spike in fishing and climate change causing sea levels to rise and more cyclones for the alarming drop in turtle population, and they say that humans stealing eggs is another major problem.

In the last five years, the Sundarbans were hit by two devastating cyclones, killing more than 5,000 people living in the villages along the forest.

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Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) sent a protest letter to 21 BSF battalion at Morichabari camp in West Bengal and asked them to return Baset on Thursday.

"We are monitoring the six islands where sea turtles lay their eggs but we fear they are not coming in such numbers due to degradation of the sea, pollution and climate change."

Straddling Bangladesh and India, the 10,000 square kilometre Sundarbans is famous for being the largest wildlife home for endangered Bengal tigers, but it is also a habitat for many rare marine species.

In Bangladesh, which is home to 60 percent of the forest, wildlife experts said the number of turtles arriving

in the last five years, the Sundarbans were hit by two devastating cyclones, killing more than 5,000 people living in the villages along the forest.

BSF has not yet returned the Bangladeshi farmer, said Lt Col Mehedi Hasan, commanding officer of 31 BGB battalion in Lalmonirhat.

Factories set up

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Rajuk board member Sheikh Abdul Mannan.

The said areas came under the control of Rajuk since 1987 and definitely with the master plan since 1997.

Yet hundreds of various factories including around 500 readymade garment units have been set up there. Although mandatory, owners of these factories had neither obtained the land-use clearance nor the building approval from Rajuk, said Mannan.

Rajuk Chairman Md Nurul Huda, however, attributed their failure in supervising development beyond the core city areas to lack of manpower.

The eight-storey building of Tazreen Fashions Ltd, which on November 24 experienced the worst factory fire in the country's history, was constructed on a narrow pathway in Nischintapur village without Rajuk's approval.

The mandatory safety provisions as per the national building code and construction rules had been grossly violated there, said Mubashar Hussein, president of Institute of Architects Bangladesh.

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