

Thai PM to work closely with Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister of Thailand Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha (Ret) has said his government is determined to work closely with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the mutual benefits of the two countries and peoples.

"Given the friendship between our two peoples and the dynamism in our ties, I'm certain that our relations will flourish further under your continued guidance," said the Thai PM in a congratulatory message to Hasina.

Wishing Hasina's success in all her endeavors, the Thai PM said his country has cooperated closely with past governments under Hasina's leadership in the past decade, leading to an enhanced partnership between the two countries in many areas, especially trade and investment and

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Revenue officer held over bribery

ACC takes action receiving complaint on hotline

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday detained a revenue officer of the Chattogram Customs House with Tk 6 lakh in suspected bribe money.

ACC officials detained Nazim Uddin Ahmed after receiving a complaint on its hotline.

The anti-graft watchdog raided his office on the ground floor of the customs house in the evening.

Nazim has been temporarily suspended, said Fazlur Rahman, additional deputy commissioner of the customs.

ACC Deputy Director Mahbubul Alam said the commission received a complaint on its hotline number 106 yesterday morning about Nazim

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Disparity evident

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The government had formed the committee, headed by Afroz, on Wednesday to find the reasons behind the labour unrest and a solution to it. The committee will sit again on Sunday, she said after the emergency meeting yesterday.

The secretary urged the workers to return to work immediately.

"We just need a few days, as we will also have to complete the calculation regarding different grades," she said.

"We will come up with a solution before the end of the deadline even though the government allowed us one month time to resolve the crisis."

She also said the ministry would launch 24-hour hotlines so that workers could lodge complaints directly to the ministry.

Afroz alleged that some vested quarters were trying to keep the protest alive.

BLOCKADES, CLASHES CONTINUE

At least 30 garment workers were injured in clashes with law enforcers at Berun and Kathgora of Ashulia yesterday morning.

Witnesses said thousands of workers from different factories refused to join work and started a demonstration after blocking Dhaka-Tangail highway at Berun around 8:00am.

During the protest, workers burnt wood, bamboo and paper on the road. On information, police rushed to the spot, fired several teargas canisters, used water cannons and charged batons to disperse the protesters, leaving at least 20 workers injured.

Talking to The Daily Star, Almas Hossain, a garment worker, said, "We have come to the streets for our wage. But police are attacking us. The factory authorities are using police to silence us."

In another incident in Kathgora

Find out reasons for defeat

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marking Bangabandhu's Home Coming Day from Pakistani prison on January 10, 1972 after Bangladesh got independence.

Bangladesh Awami League Central Working Committee organised the discussion at Bangladesh Krishibidh Institution.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also President of the Awami League, was in the chair while party leaders Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Matia Chowdhury Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Mahbubul Alam Hanif, Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Abdur Rahman, AFM Bahauddin Nasim, AKM Rahmatullah and Shah Alam Murad, among others, took part in the discussion.

Party leaders Dr Hasan Mahmud and Aminul Islam conducted the meeting.

Other reasons for BNP's debacle in the election is their misdeeds in 2013, 2014 and 2015, the prime minister said, adding that people didn't forget their mayhem when they torched more than 3,900 transports, burnt more than 3,500 people of whom more than 500 succumbed to injuries.

"Women, children, elderly persons, students and even trees could not escape from their attacks. So, how can they expect that people will vote for them?" she asked.

The Prime Minister said choosing a fugitive convict to head the party is also a major cause for BNP's defeat in the election.

"As their main leader is serving in prison for stealing an orphanage's money, her son was made acting chairperson, who was convicted in a number of cases including a case for smuggling 10 truckloads of arms and ammunition, the 21 August grenade attack and a money laundering case where FBI has given deposition against him.

"Was there no leader in BNP except a convicted person to be made their chairman?" Sheikh Hasina asked.

She said trading with nomination is another major cause of BNP's disaster



Flanked by her party leaders, Awami League President Sheikh Hasina places a wreath at the portrait of the Father of the Nation in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the capital's Dhanmondi yesterday, marking the Homecoming Day of the great leader.

PHOTO: PID

in the election.

"They [BNP] put their nomination in auction and the highest bidder got nomination. Many of them met with me and spoke of their anguish," she said.

Above all, the prime minister said BNP has given nomination to 25 leaders of Jamaat the entity of which was declared illegal by the country's highest court.

She said, "People of Bangladesh now believe in the spirit of the

Liberation War and they will never vote for any war criminal."

Sheikh Hasina said the Father of the Nation has liberated the country, but people of Bangladesh suffered immensely for 29 years from 1975 to 1996 and from 2001 to 2008 as anti-liberation forces ruled the country during that time.

"People of Bangladesh found prosperity only when Awami League was in power as the party is guided by the principles of Bangabandhu," she said,

adding that "economic emancipation of the people is our main goal and we want to establish peace and security in public life."

The prime minister said Awami League had framed its election manifesto aimed at making Bangladesh a developed and prosperous nation in South Asia.

She said post 1975 rulers had tried to thwart out all achievements of Bangladesh by killing Bangabandhu on August 15, 1975.

Bangladesh could not go ahead because of their conspiracy and failure.

During the discussion, Sheikh Hasina expressed gratitude to the countrymen for casting their vote for Awami League and to the professionals for overwhelming support in the election.

She said next five years would be a hard time for her party as the government must continue the pace of development and take forward Bangladesh toward prosperity as pledged by it.

area of Ashulia, hundreds of workers from nearby factories took to the streets and blocked the Bismail-Zirab road around 8:00am.

Around 10:30am, police went to the spot and fired teargas canisters and charged batons on them, leaving at least 10 workers hurt.

Contacted, Shana Shaminur Rahman, superintendent of police of industrial police Dhaka-1, claimed when protesters blockaded the roads, police requested them to leave. But the workers refused and started throwing brick chips at the law enforcers. Police then used teargas to

disperse the mob.

Visiting several areas, including Kathgora, Kuturia, Zirab and Jamgora of Ashulia, this correspondent found over 50 factories closed. BGB members, who had been deployed since Wednesday, were seen in large numbers at different points.

In Gazipur, workers staged demonstrations in phases from 9:00am to 2:00pm in different areas, including Bhogra, Boardbazar, Mogarkhal and Borobari. But police did not allow them to occupy the road for long.

No clash took place in the district. In the capital's Shewrapara, several

hundred workers took to the streets and blocked a road in phases between 8:00am and 1:00pm, causing severe traffic jam.

Agitated workers also blocked the Mirpur-Kalshi road for four hours from 8:00am. Later, they left following assurance from the authorities that their demands would be met.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Mahbubur Rahman Ismail, Bangladesh Textile Garment Sramik Federation, said, "I am hopeful that the workers will go back to their workplace immediately as the government has already taken the matter

seriously."

He said incidents of labour unrest lasted for two to four days in the past, but it had entered the fifth day this time as the government's message on the wage structure's review had not been disseminated properly.

Ismail said the basic wages of the workers in the third grade had decreased by Tk 82 and for those in the fourth grades by Tk 40. In the fifth grade, the basic pay rose by just Tk 156.

The wages in those grades decreased as the annual five percent increments of the last five years were not added to the recommended basic salary in 2019, to resolve the crisis.

Workers announced they would rejoin work tomorrow, those protesting in Savar said.

Meanwhile, Mosharraf Hossain, managing director of Standard Group, a leading garment exporter, assured the workers of reviewing the wage structure during a visit to the factory.

Production in more than 100 factories in industrial zones like those in Ashulia, Savar and Gazipur was hampered due to the unrest.

The factory owners will face difficulties in shipments due to the unrest, said some of the owners after yesterday's meeting.

Besides, Md Iqbal Hossain, managing director of Patriot Eco Apparel Limited, a factory at Tongi BSCIC, alleged that many of the protesters looted goods worth Tk 50 lakh from the factory during the demonstration.

"Although the workers of my factory joined their workplace yesterday, they did not work," Hossain told The Daily Star over the phone.

"I might lose work orders worth \$1.5 million due to the unrest..." he said. "I have to make expensive air shipments to maintain the export schedule."



Police use tear gas to disperse protesting garment workers who blocked the Dhaka-Tangail highway in Ashulia's Berun around 8:00am yesterday. Top right and Bottom right, another group of garment workers demonstrates near an RMG unit in the capital's Shewrapara later in the day.

PHOTO: COLLECTED/PRABIR DAS



2 'yaba traders' killed in Cox's Bazar 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Two suspected yaba traders were killed in a "gunfight" with police in Teknaf upazila of Cox's Bazar early yesterday.

Both the deceased Abdur Rashid alias Dhaliya, 47, and Abul Kalam, 35, were named in the list of yaba traders prepared by the home ministry, police sources said.

The incident took place in Khurer Mukhi area around 1:30am, when a team of police carried out a drive for recovering illegal firearms, said Pradip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station.

Sensing the presence of police, the

'Extremely alarming'

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panic among the public.

Citing media reports, the rights body said that at least 34 people fell victim to abduction and enforced disappearance. They were picked up by people who identified themselves as law enforcers.

Of them, 19 were later found, and most of them are now behind bars. The rest are still traceless.

For example, a man named Mohon Mia was picked up from his house in the capital's Mirpur on June 10. The family filed a general diary over his disappearance, but there is no trace of him still today, the report said.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE, LAW AND ORDER

Violence centring on the December 30 election, attacks on opposition candidates and obstructions to their cam-

paign also made news headlines.

Between the date of announcement of the election schedule and the voting day, some 470 incidents of violence took place.

At least 34 people were killed in these incidents -- 19 Awami League men, four BNP supporters, one Ansar member and 10 general people.

In addition, a number of candidates, their supporters and even journalists were beaten on the polling day.

On the night of December 30, a mother of four was beaten up and raped in Noakhali by a group of AL supporters for voting for the candidate of her choice, the report said.

In all, some 67 people were killed in 701 incidents of political violence last year. Another 7,287 were injured in these clashes between law enforcers and political parties, infighting, and

clashes between political rivals.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS SITUATION

Incidents of rape, sexual assault and violence against women and children were also high.

At least 732 women were raped. Of them, 63 were killed after rape while 255 died by suicide after rape. In 2017, 818 women fell victim to rape, according to the report.

As many as 173 women were sexually assaulted last year, down from 255 in 2017. Eight of them killed themselves, while 12 people, including three women, were killed in attacks for protesting such incidents.

On the other hand, at least 85 women were killed over dowry, while 409 were victims of domestic violence.

"We haven't seen any effective trial and punishment. This is why these crimes are recurring," said Sheeza

Hafiza.

Joint efforts by the government and the people are needed to create a culture of human rights in the country, she added.

CHILD TORTURE AND KILLING

A total of 1,011 children were victims of torture and killing last year.

Of them, 283 were murdered, 108 killed themselves, and 28 died in mysterious circumstances.

Also, there were 444 cases of sexual assault, rape, and harassment of children in 2018.

As many as 207 journalists faced repression and assaults by law enforcers, influential people, local representatives, criminals, political activists and government officials while performing their duty. The number was 122 in 2017.

Three journalists died at the hands of criminals.

temples were vandalised and 29 houses were attacked, vandalised and set on fire, the report said.

On December 15, miscreants set fire to the houses of four Hindu families in Alampur village of Feni.

REPRESSION ON JOURNALISTS

Freedom of expression, though a constitutional right, has also been curbed on several occasions, ASK said, adding that the Digital Security Act might further limit freedom of expression.

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