<u>Tribute pours in for liberation war martyrs</u>

People all around are celebrating Victory Day, that was reaped through the bloodshed of 3 million people and nine months of hardship, in due solemnities.

The day began with President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paying tributes to the Liberation War martyrs to begin the 45th Victory Day of Bangladesh.

The president placed a wreath at the altar of National Mausoleum at 6:34am, adds UNB. He stood there in solemn silence as a token of respect for the martyrs.

He also signed the visitors' book kept on the premises of the National Mausoleum.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina followed with a colourful wreath at the base of the mausoleum. She also stood in solemn silence to pay respect for the martyrs.

A smart contingent plucked from Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Air Force presented a state salute on the occasion when bugles played the last post.

Flanked by senior leaders of the party, Sheikh Hasina, also the Awami League president, laid another wreath at the National Memorial as the party chief.

The Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad, the Chief Justice, ministers, the leader of the opposition, the chiefs of the three services, members of parliament, freedom fighters, diplomats and high civil and military officials were present.

Later in the day, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia accompanied her party men and placed her respect to the martyrs of Liberation War at National Mausoleum.

North Korea sentences Canadian pastor to life in prison

Watch the latest video at video.foxnews.com

North Korea's Supreme Court sentenced a Canadian pastor to life in prison with hard labor on Wednesday for what it called crimes against the state.

Hyeon Soo Lim, who pastors the Light Korean Presbyterian Church in Toronto, was given the sentence after a brief trial. He had been in detention since February.

Lim had earlier appeared at a news conference organized by North Korean authorities in Pyongyang in July and admitted to plotting to overthrow the North Korean state, but other foreigners detained in North Korea and then released have said they were coerced into making similar statements and confessing guilt during their detention.

Lim's relatives and colleagues have said he travelled on Jan. 31 as part of a regular humanitarian mission to North Korea where he supports a nursing home, a nursery and an orphanage. They said Lim, who is in his early 60s, has made more than 100 trips to North Korea since 1997 and that his trips were about helping people and were not political.

North Korea has very strict rules against any missionary or religious activities that it sees as threatening the supremacy of its ruling regime. Merely leaving a Bible in a public place can lead to arrest and possibly severe punishment.

Both the U.S. and Canadian governments warn against travel to North Korea.

Last year, the North released Kenneth Bae, a Korean-American missionary who was convicted of "anti-state" crimes and had been serving a 15-year sentence.

Bae, whose detention received worldwide attention, suffered medical issues in detention. He was freed along with one other American detainee after a secret mission to the reclusive communist country by James Clapper, the top U.S. intelligence official. He is reportedly planning a book about his 2-year-ordeal in detention.

An Australian missionary detained for spreading Christianity was deported last year after he apologized for anti-state religious acts and requested forgiveness.

News Source

Pentagon warns ISIS offshoot growing in Afghanistan, 'operationally active'

The Pentagon delivered a warning Tuesday about the growth of the Islamic State offshoot in Afghanistan, saying the branch has become "more operationally active" there by carving out territory and openly fighting the Taliban.

The Defense Department report also said violence in Afghanistan overall is on the rise and the security situation has worsened since June, with more effective attacks by insurgents and increased casualties among Afghan security forces. The DOD said advances by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) — Khorasan Province (IS-KP) in particular could stoke "increased violence" with other extremist groups in 2016.

IS-KP "has progressed from its initial exploratory phase to a point where they are openly fighting the Taliban for the establishment of a safe haven, and are becoming more operationally active," the report said.

The warning comes as President Obama tries to assure the public about the administration's strategy for fighting the Islamic State, a military operation that focuses on Iraq and Syria.

"We are squeezing its heart and making it harder for them to pump out its propaganda," Obama declared Monday at the Pentagon.

But the recent Paris and San Bernardino, Calif., attacks demonstrate the reach of ISIS' ideology and threat beyond the Iraq-Syria warzone. The offshoot's presence in Afghanistan represents another unstable area where the group is trying to establish a foothold.

The commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, General John Campbell, confirmed to The Associated Press on Tuesday that ISIS allies in Afghanistan indeed are trying to establish a regional base in the eastern city of Jalalabad

Campbell said that "foreign fighters" from Syria and Iraq had joined Afghans who had declared loyalty to the group in the eastern province of Nangarhar, bordering Pakistan.

He said there were also "indications" that the ISIS supporters in Nangarhar were trying to consolidate links with the group's leadership in Syria and Iraq.

This comports with the findings in the DOD report, which said IS-KP has "seized pockets of terrain from the Taliban in Nangarhar Province."

The report also said the Taliban-led insurgency has been emboldened by the U.S.-led coalition's transition this year from direct combat operations to a train-and-advise role. The U.S. now has about 9,800 troops in Afghanistan.

The report noted IS-KP claimed responsibility for an IED attack against a United Nations vehicle in September and conducted an attack later that month against as many as 10 checkpoints.

According to the DOD, the offshoot is growing by recruiting "disaffected Taliban" and others.

During the summer months, Taliban and ISIS loyalists fought fierce battles in the far eastern districts of Nangarhar, with residents reporting a range of atrocities, including arbitrary imprisonment, forced marriages for young women, and beheadings.

Campbell stressed that "they don't have the capability right now to attack Europe, or attack the homeland, the United States. But that's what they want to do, they've said that's what they want to do."

News Source

French teacher attacked by man claiming IS link

A hooded man claiming to be acting for Islamic State attacked a nursery school teacher with a knife-like weapon as he prepared for classes in a school north of Paris, French officials said on Monday.

The male teacher was taken to hospital after the attack by a man wielding a knife or box-cutter who fled the scene after the attack at about 0630 GMT, said the official, adding that antiterrorism officials were investigating.

According to one judiciary official, the assailant slashed at the teacher's neck and said the act was a signal from the Islamic State group, also referred to in France by the name Daesh.

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French police and firefighters are seen in front of the nursery school where a hooded man claiming to be acting for Islamic State attacked a teacher with a knife in Aubervilliers, near Paris, France, December 14, 2015

This is Daesh, it's a warning," the attacker told his victim, the official said, adding the

victim's life was apparently not in danger.

France's education minister and a local government prefect visited the premises of the school in Aubervilliers, in the Saint-Denis region just north of the capital. Classes at the school were cancelled.

The prefect, who was not introduced by name, told reporters it was too early to draw conclusions about the character of the attack, noting that the assailant, wearing a balaclava, had apparently found the weapon at the school premises.

The incident came a month after gunmen and suicide bombers killed 130 people in Paris an attack claimed by Islamic State, the militant Islamist group which controls swathes of Syria and Iraq and has vowed to attack France, a member of the coalition of countries conducting air strikes against it.

It also came days after a knifing in London's underground urban rail network which police are treating as a terrorist attack

Pakistan diplomat's links with terror groups revealed

Police have found evidence of the terror links of a Pakistani diplomat, according to documents available with bdnews24.com.

Some Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) activists recently arrested in Dhaka have blown the lid off these clandestine links during their interrogations, the documents relating to police investigation show.

At least one JMB radical has testified to these links in a judicial confession.



Farina Arshad

Pakistan High Commission's Second Secretary (political) Farina Arshad is said to be involved with the Islamist radicals.

Earlier in January this year, Mazhar Khan, a Pakistani official working in the Dhaka mission, had been expelled after Bangladesh intelligence accused him of funding Islamist radicals and peddling fake currency.

Two of the four JMB radicals, including Idris Sheikh, arrested at Uttara and Khilgaon in Dhaka on Nov 29, were found to be carrying Pakistani passports, said Detective Branch's Joint Commissioner Monirul Islam at a press briefing at the time.

Both these radicals had been travelling frequently between Bangladesh and Pakistan, he said.

Monirul Islam said Idris was in possession of a 'spy mobile', which he was using to communicate regularly with a foreign intelligence agent outside the country.

"He was regularly sharing information with that agent and was also in touch with a female diplomat based in Dhaka." The police officer did not disclose the diplomat's identity at that time.

In his judicial confession before Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Abdullah Al Masud under Section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), Idris named Second Secretary Farina Arshad as the diplomat he was in contact with.

The Pakistan High Commission did not respond to bdnews24.com's attempts to cross-check details.

Senior intelligence sources say another junior diplomat of same origin working in a European mission in Dhaka is alleged to have been involved in anti-Bangladesh propaganda.

Idris details

DB's Monirul Islam told journalists in November that Idris had visited Pakistan via India in 1985.

He married a Pakistani school teacher, Shahnaz Begum, in 1990 and settled in that country. A son, Mohammed Adil, was born.

In 2002, Idris contested national elections from Pakistan Muslim Alliance but lost. In 2007, he returned to Bangladesh and joined the JMB.

Monirul Islam said Idris, 49, had been to Pakistan 48 times in the past two years.

Idris told the magistrate that he had hailed from Chitolmari, Bagerhat and that his father, Kausar Sheikh, was no longer alive.

About his links with Pakistani diplomat Farina Arshad, Idris said on return to Bangladesh in 2007, he had first tried his hand in garment business, but five years later, he switched over to air ticketing and visa processing.

That is when he first met Babul and then Kamal, who introduced himself as someone working for Pakistan intelligence.

Idris said in the judicial confession that he had run up a huge debt to Babul who had frequently booked tickets for him. Babul, he said, left for Pakistan at one stage and gave him Farina's contact number.

Idris said in his confession that Babul later told him that a man arrested for peddling counterfeit Indian currency in Dhaka airport was closely linked to Farina.

On return from Pakistan, Idris married again — this time Manowara Begum from a neighbouring village. He has two daughters and a son with Manowara.

Government sources said when Idris was arrested at Uttara, he introduced himself as a relative of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

One government source said Idris had earlier been arrested on May 1, 2011 from the house of a top radical.

At that time, he was found carrying 47 passports and a case was filed with the Airport Police.

Idris said in his judicial confession that he got a ride from Farina in her car from Baitul

Mukarram to Fakirapool and received Tk 30,000 from her.

An intelligence official told bdnews24.com that Idris had saved a foreign number in his mobile phone as his own.

That number actually belongs to a Pakistani intelligence official called Captain Asim, who is performing a crucial under-cover assignment based in an airport in Pakistan.

The phone Idris carried had the capability to record conversations of other people using malware.

Man guilty of IS-inspired knife plan

A man has been convicted of preparing to carry out a knife attack in London, inspired by so-called Islamic State.

Nadir Syed, 22, from Southall in west London, was arrested hours after buying a chef's knife in November 2014, days before Remembrance Sunday.

Woolwich Crown Court heard how he had been inspired by IS leaders urging attacks on Western targets, including police and soldiers.

The jury could not reach verdicts on two other men on trial.

Haseeb Hamayoon, 29, from Hayes, west London and Yousaf Syed, 20, from High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, denied planning acts of terrorism. They will be retried.

Syria attempt

The jury returned a majority verdict on Syed after more than 50 hours' deliberation.

The court heard how he had expressed admiration for the killers of soldier Lee Rigby and how he shared violent footage of beheadings from Syria and Iraq on social media.



Some of his conversations were made on encrypted applications, the jury was told.

The court heard that Syed had also tried to travel to Syria to fight with IS militants but had been stopped from leaving the country in January 2014.

In September 2014, IS militants issued a fatwa or decree calling on its followers in the West to carry out attacks at home, jurors were told.

'Stamped on poppy'

In the weeks that followed, Syed's behaviour became increasingly worrying to MI5 and police intelligence officers who were watching him.

The court also heard how Syed had appeared in a video in which he stamped on a poppy and kicked it towards a drain, which prosecutor Max Hill QC said was demonstrative of his "attitude to the poppy as the remembrance image in this country".

By November last year he was actively searching for knives of "sufficient quality to source an attack", the court heard, and he was eventually arrested on 6 November shortly after buying a 30cm chef's knife.

Commander Richard Walton, head of the Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism Command, said: "This was an intense and lengthy operation by my officers, supported by the intelligence agencies, and I have no doubt that London is a safer place today with this conviction."

Syed will be sentenced at a later date.

News Source

20 women win seats in Saudi municipal poll

Twenty women have won seats in municipal councils in Saudi Arabia as the ultraconservative Muslim kingdom allowed females to vote and run as candidates for the first time in history in an election on Saturday.

The 20 elected females represent just under one percent of the roughly 2,100 municipal council seats that were contested in the election, reports the rt.com.

It was also only the third ever election in Saudi Arabia. Just men participated in the 2005 and 2011 polls.

The development is viewed as historic for Saudi Arabia where women have fewer rights than men, being forbidden to drive cars and making major life decisions without consent from male relatives, among other restrictions.

"I deeply believe in the importance of voting in order to be part of my country's drive to empower women and elevate their status. The turnout was good and the voting proceeded smoothly. I personally voted based on the candidates' programs and plans," says one of the female first-

time votes.

However, the election was only for two thirds of municipal council seats which have no legislative or national powers but are rather limited to local affairs.

The turnout was also quite low, with just 25 per cent of the voters casting ballots due to election still being a new thing for the Saudis.

Salma bint Hazab al-Otaibi, who won a seat in the Madrika district of Mecca, was hailed as first woman councilor in Saudi Arabia on social media.

Huda al-Jeraisy, a daughter of a former head of the chamber of commerce, was elected in the country's capital, Riyadh.

Two women were elected in Saudi Arabia's most conservative region, Qassim, but their names were not released as well as the name of another female councillor from al-Babtain.

The late King Abdullah announced that the women would vote in 2015 as he had been looking to increase the public role of females in the country.

News Source

No force in world can stop Bangladesh's war crimes trial

The BNP chief's paying tribute to Martyred Intellectuals' Memorial was nothing but a mockery, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said yesterday, adding no one in the world could stop the war crimes trial initiated by her government.

The Pakistani occupation forces and their local collaborators, including Razakars, Al-Badr and Al-Shams, killed poets, writers, teachers, journalists, doctors and many other intellectuals from different fields on December 14, 1971 in the then East Pakistan.



Bangladesh' Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

Their aim was to make the country to be born, Bangladesh, intellectually bankrupt, the PM said at a discussion organised by the ruling party at the Institution of Engineers in the capital to mark Martyred Intellectuals Day.

"Those who committed such crimes are now undergoing trial and their trial will go on alongside the war crimes trial," said Hasina, chief of the ruling Awami League.

Earlier, a one-minute silence was observed remembering the martyrs of December 14, 1971, four martyred national leaders and all the martyrs of the Liberation War, democratic movements of the country and the August 15, 1975 carnage.

The BNP chief is following in the footsteps of her husband Ziaur Rahman, the PM said, criticising Khaleda Zia for making those, executed for war crimes, ministers during her tenure as prime minister.

How she could pay tribute to the martyred intellectuals after making war criminals ministers, Hasina questioned.

"This is nothing but a mockery.... She (Khaleda) thinks our people do not understand anything, but they understand everything."

Before the recent execution of two war criminals, Khaleda returned from London in a hurry, Hasina said, in a bid to save them through waging a movement.

The Prime Minister also took a swipe at those freedom fighters who accompanied Khaleda to the memorial.

Hasina continued saying that following the assassination of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with most of his family members on August 15, 1975, Bangladesh lost its glory and dignity it had attained through the war.

But as the Awami League assumed power after 21 years, she said, Bangladesh began regaining its lost glory.

Neither of the Pakistani occupation forces and their collaborators could forget their defeat and so they want to destroy the spirit of the Liberation War, halt the economic development of the country and force Bangladesh into slavery again, the PM said.

"Their conspiracy is going on and will go on, but we must move on foiling all the conspiracies."

Hasina said some considered Ziaur Rahman the proclaimer of independence and a freedom fighter.

"If Zia were a true freedom fighter, he could not have put war criminals in state power."

Hasina also reiterated her resolve not to bow to anyone and lead Bangladesh into becoming a hunger and poverty-free prosperous country by 2041.

News Source

In Mourning, In Fury

Observance of the Martyred Intellectuals Day was markedly different this year.

The day was observed yesterday with a renewed demand for banning Jamaat-e-Islami, and a call to severe ties with Pakistan for denying the atrocities it had carried out during the 1971 Liberation War.

People from all ages and professions, including family members of the martyred intellectuals, thronged the Martyred Intellectuals' Memorial at Mirpur and the Rayerbazar Mausoleum, with different cultural and political organisations placing wreaths at the altars.

The nation, for the first time this year, saw the execution of a war criminal, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, Jamaat leader and a top brass of Al-Badr, for the killing of intellectuals in 1971.

Dr Nuzhat Choudhury Shampa, daughter of martyred physician Dr Abdul Alim Chaudhury, said, "This year's December 14 is different because the nation saw the hanging of Al-Badr commander Mojaheed. We are hopeful that the government will try the remaining war criminals."



People from every walk of life pay tribute to the martyred intellectuals, placing wreaths at the Rayer Bazar Memorial in the capital on the occasion of Martyred Intellectuals' Day. Photo Star

A diplomatic spat soon followed between Bangladesh and Pakistan over the execution of Mojaheed with Pakistan summoning the acting high commissioner of Bangladesh in Islamabad to deny the atrocities it had committed in 1971.

People from all walks of life yesterday expressed their outrage at Pakistan's denial.

When the Pakistani occupation forces were certain about their defeat, they, aided by local collaborators, particularly the Al-Badr, abducted the country's brightest minds and killed them, often after brutal torture, in an effort to cripple the emerging nation intellectually.

After the butchery, the bodies were left to rot in the killing fields.

Talking about Pakistan's outright lies, Maj Gen (retd) KM Safiullah Bir Uttam, chairman of Sector Commanders Forum (SCF), said, "Bangladesh should cut all ties with Pakistan until it

seeks apology for its recent statement."

Later, the SCF handed over a protest letter to the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka, demanding an unconditional apology from Pakistan for the barbarity of its forces in 1971.



Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said the relationship with Pakistan had been severed in 1971.

A huge number of students from different schools and colleges too gathered at the memorial sites. Many children came with their parents.

A mock mass killing of intellectuals was staged afterwards. An exhibition of photographs on 1971 and paperclips attracted people's attention at the Rayerbazar graveyard.

DU CUTS ACADEMIC TIES WITH PAKISTAN

Dhaka University severed all academic ties with Pakistan from yesterday for the country's denial of the genocide committed in 1971.

The decision came yesterday at an emergency syndicate meeting with Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique in the chair at Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhaban.



"We have cut all bilateral relations with Pakistan, including exchange of teachers and students ... from today [yesterday] as Pakistan denied the genocide committed during the Liberation War of Bangladesh," said the VC at a press briefing following the meeting. From now on, teachers, students and representatives from the DU will not be able to go to any Pakistani institutions and the university will not accept any representatives from the country for academic purposes.

"Dhaka University bears evidences of the atrocities, which are available in the archives of many foreign universities, international media, yet Pakistan keeps lying," he said.

The DU VC also demanded the trial of 195 Pakistani army officers who had committed many crimes in 1971.

President of Federation of Bangladesh University Teacher's Association (FBUTA) Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed said they would hold meetings with the entire public university teachers' associations to severe academic ties with Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Rashed Khan Menon said the government, if necessary, would go to the international court demanding the trial of the 195 Pakistan army persons who had committed war crimes.



At a programme at Dhaka Reporters' Unity yesterday, he said Pakistan was bound to bring the 195 Pakistan army personnel under trial following the Shimla agreement.

MIRPUR MAUSOLEUM

President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paid their tributes to the martyred intellectuals by placing wreaths at the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial at Mirpur, reports UNB.

President Abdul Hamid placed wreaths at 8:00am followed by the prime minister. They stood there in solemn silence for some time.

A contingent of Bangladesh Armed Forces gave a state salute as the bugle played the last post.

After placing wreaths, the president talked to war-wounded freedom fighters and family members of the martyred intellectuals there and inquired about their well-being.



Flanked by central leaders of the party, Sheikh Hasina, also president of Bangladesh Awami League, laid another wreath at the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial as the party chief. She too talked to the war-wounded freedom fighters and inquired about their well-being.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia paid her tributes at the memorial at 10:20am.

Cabinet ministers and political leaders also paid their homage to the martyred intellectuals at the memorial site.

News Source

Explain what is 'Hanadar Bahini'

On Sunday, the BNP, Jatiya Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh issued their statements on the occasion of Martyred Intellectuals Day without naming the Pakistani army and their local collaborators who spearheaded the killing of the intellectuals.

In her statement BNP chief Khaleda Zia said the intellectuals were killed by the "Hanadar Bahini" (occupation forces) and their collaborators.

Jatiya Party chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Raushan Ershad also mentioned Hanadar Bahini.

The Jamaat acting secretary general in his statement said the entire nation remembers with due respects the intellectuals who embraced martyrdom on December 14 [1971], without mentioning who killed them or why.

For BNP and Jamaat, shying away from mentioning Pakistani forces is nothing new. But we would like to know why BNP, Jamaat and JP feel shy about pinpointing who the killers were and who their collaborators were.

What could be the reason? Is it that they feel mentioning Pakistan's name or its collaborators — the Razakars, Al Badr and Al Shams — would be improper?

Is it possible that mentioning Pakistan's name might offend Pakistan and BNP, Jamaat and JP do not want to 'hurt' the feelings of their friendly nation?

Is it possible that they believe the Pakistani army or the collaborators were not involved in the killings?

Or is it possible that BNP, Jamaat and JP just want to wash off our hands from the history and say: let's forget the past and let's look to the future. No point in bringing the murky part of history.

May be the BNP, Jamaat and JP believe all of the above. But then they must explain why they want to pay homage to the martyred intellectuals. If they must pay their homage then they must recognise who killed them and why they were killed. They must also explain who are these 'Hanadar Bahini'? Until then, their homage means nothing to this nation because it's shrouded in self-contradiction, deceit and greyness.

When the Pakistani forces killed our people — they did not feel shy. And today Pakistan still arrogantly denies committing atrocities during the 1971 war.

It's sad to see that a major party like BNP is harping the tune of Pakistan. By saying Hanader Bahini once again, BNP, JP and Jamaat are denying the country's history.

The word "Hanadar Bahini" was ironically introduced in the country by General Ziaur Rahman, a

sector commander in the Liberation War who rose to power following the assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in August 1975.

Though a freedom fighter himself — Ziaur Rahman — who took over presidency in 1977 — changed the reference of Pakistani forces and Razakars or Al-Badrs from all occasions, news and even text books. The word Hanadar Bahini replaced the Pakistani forces.

Ziaur Rahman also reinstated Razakars into the mainstream politics and brought them into his cabinet; lifted ban on Jamaat-e-Islam's politics; built children's park in the place where Pakistani forces surrendered to the Allied forces in the Suhrawardi Udyan; erased records of rape victims who were rehabilitated after independence and took many other measures that would only make Pakistan happy.

It was his twisted politics that made pro-liberation forces look guilty and pro-Pakistani forces heroes.

But times have changed. Replacing "Pakistani forces" with "Hanadar Bahini" did not change the history — but has left Ziaur Rahman a controversial freedom fighter today. We all know who the Hanadar Bahini was.

Our politicians must realise that the treacherous politicians who still regret the birth of Bangladesh have no future in this country. The people of this country are proud of its history and know who killed the intellectuals; the roles of Razakars or Al-Badr and they do not like political parties who still feel shy about the country's history.

The BNP must be black and white on this issue. And Jamaat could redefine its politics by admitting role of its leaders in killing the intellectuals and people of this country. Or else these parties themselves will rapidly become history in this country.

News Source