

Myanmar leader to meet Hollande in Paris

AFP, Paris, France

Myanmar President Thein Sein was to meet his French counterpart Francois Hollande in Paris yesterday, as rights campaigners reacted sceptically to his promise to free all political prisoners.

The former general, fresh from a three-day trip to London, is in Europe to build on support for introducing much-lauded reforms in the former pariah state.

During his first official visit to Britain, Thein Sein on Monday promised that all prisoners of conscience in Myanmar would be freed by the end of the year.

He also voiced optimism about ending decades of conflict that have raged between the government and more than a dozen ethnic groups since independence from Britain in 1948.

Activists in Myanmar however have called for actions not words from Thein Sein, accusing the former junta premier of using headline-grabbing amnesties to secure foreign aid and investment.

Thein Sein was due to have lunch with French Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault before meeting Hollande at the Elysee Palace later on Wednesday.

Wait now

FROM PAGE 1 SHAHRIAR KABIR not just once.

Through the punishment of the Al-Badr leader, it has been proved that the Jamaat-e-Islami wanted to make the country void of intellectuals, Kabir, an eminent writer, told The Daily Star over the phone from Turkey.

"This verdict can be used as a reference in future in trying other members of the Al-Badr force," he said, adding that the verdicts of the International Crimes Tribunals are creating renewed interest internationally about the genocide that took place in Bangladesh in 1971.

SHAHIN REZA NOOR

He, however, said it was a matter of grief that his mother could not see this happen as she died a few months ago.

"Mojahed and other collaborators of 1971 claimed several times that no war crimes took place during the Liberation War. But it is now proven that they were involved in war crimes," said Shahin.

JAHIR UDDIN JALAL

well as the victims who were tortured by the collaborators and the Pakistan army during the Liberation War," he said. "But I will be even more pleased when the state finally hangs him."

He added that a few years ago Mojahed had said there were no war criminals in Bangladesh. But the verdict has proved that it was a false statement and Al-Badr, Razakars and the Pakistan army committed genocide in the country in 1971.

"Al-Badr caught me on August 30 and sent me to 112 South Nakhla Para. Just the day before, Mojahed and his forces brought freedom fighters Rumi, Jewel and Bodi there," he said.

"The Pakistan army and Al-Badr tortured Rumi, Bodi and Jewel so much that I could not recognise Rumi bhai at that moment", said Jalal, who was a team mate of Rumi.

He said Mojahed and his party men tortured him and others brutally, but still they did not disclose any information about their team mates or arms.

RUSTOM ALI

and Mojahed at the camp of the Pakistan army and their collaborators at Mohaiminpur Physical Training Institute." He said he witnessed how the anti-liberation forces and the Pakistan army tortured and killed intellectuals at the Training Institute.

"I'm very happy. The country is happy," he said.



Pickets vandalise a bus at Pallabi in the capital's Mirpur area yesterday during the shutdown enforced by Jamaat-e-Islami for the third consecutive day.

PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Syria death toll hits 5,000 a month: UN

AFP, United Nations

Five thousand people a month are dying in Syria's war, which has now generated the worst refugee crisis since the 1994 Rwandan genocide, UN officials said Tuesday.

A host of top officials called on the divided UN Security Council to take stronger action to deal with the fallout from the two-year-old conflict, in which up to 100,000 people are believed to have died.

"The extremely high rate of killings nowadays -- approximately 5,000 a month -- demonstrates the drastic deterioration of the conflict," UN assistant secretary general for human rights Ivan Simonovic told a council meeting.

Nearly 1.8 million people are now registered with the United Nations in countries around Syria and an average of 6,000 people a day are now fleeing, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres said.

"We have not seen a refugee outflow escalate at such a frightening rate since the Rwandan genocide almost 20 years ago," Guterres added.

More than two million Rwandans fled the 1994 genocide, in which radical Hutus killed some 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in a period of about three months.

Guterres said the "danger that the Syrian conflict could ignite the whole region" was "not an empty warning".

Meanwhile, suspected rebel gunmen assassinated a well-known supporter of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Lebanon yesterday, the latest sign that Syria's civil war is spreading to its smaller neighbour.

Mohammad Darra Jamo, a commentator who worked for Syrian state media and often appeared on Arab TV channels to press Assad's cause, was riddled with bullets by gunmen at home in the southern town of Sarafand, sources said.

MOJAHEED'S WAR CRIMES

Conviction after 3-yr legal battle

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After Ghulam Azam, his disciple Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahed has been convicted for holding superior responsibility over subordinates in committing war crimes during the Liberation War in 1971.

International Crimes Tribunal-2 yesterday held Mojahed, as a leader of the infamous Al-Badr force, liable for the atrocities committed by his subordinates during the war.

On Monday, International Crimes Tribunal-1 also charged former Jamaat chief Ghulam Azam with superior responsibility.

In its verdict, tribunal-2 yesterday said, "We are convinced in penning our findings that the prosecution has been able to prove beyond reasonable doubt that there had been a de facto and informal superior-subordinate relationship between the accused Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojahed and the Al-Badr force and that he had effective control on the Al-Badrmen."

After an around-three-year-long legal battle, the tribunal yesterday convicted the Jamaat secretary general of offences he had committed 42 years ago with this observation.

On June 29, 2010, Mojahed, a former technocrat minister in the last BNP-led alliance government,

was arrested along with other top Jamaat leaders -- Motiur Rahman Nizami and Delawar Hossain Sayeede.

However, they were arrested in connection with a case filed for allegedly hurting religious sentiments of the Muslims. Mojahed was eventually shown arrested in a war crimes case on August 2, 2010.

The special agency designated to probe war crimes on July 21, 2010 started investigation into his offences committed during the war and completed its probe in October 2011.

On December 11, 2011, prosecution submitted formal charges against Mojahed but on December 28 that year, the tribunal directed the lawyer panel to submit the charges afresh in an arranged and systematic form.

On January 4, defence, though a petition, sought dismissal of the case but on January 9 rejected the prayer as it was "premature and not tenable in law."

On January 16, 2012, the prosecution again submitted 34 charges against him and the tribunal took those into cognisance on January 26. Following a prosecution petition, Mojahed's case was transferred to tribunal-2 on April 25.

On June 21, Mojahed, who was a top leader of Islamic Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of Jamaat

in 1971, was indicted on seven charges of crimes against humanity.

As per the indictment order, Mojahed in October 1971 was elected provincial president of Chhatra Sangha and became chief of Al-Badr that was especially responsible for the planned killings of the intellectuals at the fag-end of the nine-month-long war.

As many as 17 prosecution witnesses including the investigation officer of the case testified against Mojahed. Eminent war crimes researcher Shahriar Kabir, journalist Shaheen Reza Noor, Mahubul Kamal, victims and freedom fighter Jahir Uddin Jalal were among the prosecution witnesses.

On the other side, the defence had submitted a list of 1,315 witnesses in the case, but the tribunal allowed only three witnesses. Of them, Ali Ahmed Mabru, the youngest son of Mojahed, gave testimony as the lone defence witness.

After the witnesses' testimonies, both the prosecution and the defence in between May 7 and June 5 this year made closing arguments and on the later date the tribunal kept the case waiting for verdict.

Finally, the tribunal yesterday gave Mojahed capital punishment for his war crimes.

TRAYVON MARTIN CASE

Notorious law put under scanner

AFP, Washington

US Attorney General Eric Holder has urged a rethink of "stand-your-ground" self-defense laws following the acquittal of a neighborhood watch volunteer who fatally shot an unarmed black teenager in Florida.

Addressing the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Holder acknowledged the anger stirred by the racially-laced trial of George Zimmerman, found not guilty Saturday of murdering Trayvon Martin.

"Separate and apart from the case that has drawn the nation's attention, it's time to question laws that senselessly expand the concept of self-defense and sow dangerous conflict in our neighborhoods," Holder said on Tuesday.

WWII bomb evacuates 1,500 in Budapest

AFP, Budapest

Hungarian police evacuated around 1,500 people in Budapest yesterday after a World War II bomb was discovered during construction work at an apartment block near Buda Castle.

"Around 80 residential blocks must be evacuated after a World War II bomb weighing 50 kilograms was found in Pala street," Melinda Varkonyi, a spokeswoman for the Hungarian army, told state news wire MTI.

GRAMEEN BANK INQUIRY

Commission's tenure expires Saturday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Grameen Bank Inquiry Commission will wind up its office today as its tenure is set to expire on Saturday.

The commission had been asked to close its temporary office at a residential building in the city's Eskaton as the July 20 deadline falls on a weekend, said sources at the commission and the finance ministry.

The central bank, which provided secretarial and staff support to the commission, wrote to the commission, asking it to hand over its office equipment and IT support system, among other items.

Led by a former bureaucrat, the three-member commission was expected

to submit its final report to the government by Saturday, Finance Minister AMA Muhith said earlier.

But the submission of the report could be delayed further, as Muhith left for Japan yesterday on a weeklong official visit. Commission Chairman Mamun Ur Rashid was also said to be abroad.

The government set up the commission in May last year to review the operations of Grameen Bank and its 48 associated organisations founded by Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus, and to make recommendations about their future structures.

Some of the suggestions made earlier by the commis-

sion in its interim report and in letters to the participants of a proposed workshop caused uproar. The workshop, though, has been postponed.

The board and employees association of the Grameen Bank as well as the supporters of the microcredit organisation from home and abroad protested the commission's plan to restructure the bank in a way that would give the government a controlling stake in the bank.

The commission even suggested that the government suspend the licence of mobile operator Grameenphone, owned by the Norwegian telecom giant Telenor and Bangladesh's Grameen Telecom.

Defence to appeal

FROM PAGE 1

committed genocide in Bangladesh during the Liberation War.

The killings of intellectuals have also been proved through this judgment, she told journalists on the court premises.

The prosecution had made submissions to the court and established that if one joined a group and participated in any incident, he has to take the responsibility of it along with the group, Tureen said.

The defence counsels for Mojahed said they would appeal to the Supreme Court against the judgment awarding death penalty to

the Jamaat leader.

"There is no mention which intellectuals he [Mojahed] killed, how many he killed and where. This is totally a conjecture," chief defence counsel Abdur Razzaq said at a press briefing at his Dhanmondi residence in the capital.

"It is the prosecution's responsibility to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt. As a lawyer, I will say that the prosecution has not been able to prove the case even by one percent, while its responsibility is to prove that by 100 percent. We are surprised that the honourable court, yes I will call it

honourable, that they gave a verdict which is totally unacceptable in the eye of law."

Mojahed's son Ali Ahmed Mabru protested the judgment.

"The judgment was based only on some books," Mabru told journalists on the tribunal premises.

"His [Mojahed's] only offence is that he is an activist of Islamist movement and secretary general of Jamaat," said Mabru.

Later, all the three sons of Mojahed met him at the prison cell of the tribunal. Mabru said their father looked normal and asked them to be patient and courageous.

AL happy

FROM PAGE 1

Mojahed by the International Crimes Tribunal-2.

The BNP, however, kept mum about the verdict. It also remained tight-lipped during the previous verdicts delivered to the war crimes accused.

Jamaat-e-Islami, as usual, rejected the verdict terming it a government conspiracy to kill their leaders, and to eliminate the party.

The party yesterday announced another daylong hartal across the country for today. This will be the fourth consecutive daylong hartal called by the party since July 15.

In their reactions, leaders of the AL, Workers Party of Bangladesh, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed and Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said the verdict against Mojahed had fulfilled the expectation of the nation.

Through the verdict it had been proved that Jamaat was a terrorist party, they said, demanding that the government ban Jamaat as a political party.

"The tribunals have delivered the verdicts after exam-

ining the relevant documents and evidence in a transparent manner, and there is no scope for raising any question over the transparency and acceptability of the trials," Law Minister Shafique Ahmed told reporters at his office in the Secretariat.

Speaking at an extended meeting of Dhaka city unit of the party, AL Joint General Secretary Mahubul Alam Hanif said the verdict had proved that Jamaat was a terrorist outfit, which was involved in anti-Islamic activities using Islam.

Sector Commanders Forum, Amra Muktijoddhar Sontan, Sommito Muktijoddha Front, Jatiya Ganotantrik League, Bangladesh Nari Mukti Andolon, among others, also hailed the verdict.

But BNP's Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed refused to talk on the issue at a press conference at the party's Naya Paltan central office yesterday.

Senior leaders of the party would give their reaction in this regard later, he said.

No escape

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Chowdhury and Fazle Rabbi.

The judgment said, "Al-Badr [Al-Badr] was created not to maintain peace and public order. Rather it is proved beyond reasonable doubt that it had carried out a series of untold criminal activities, in furtherance of the policy and plan of the Pakistan occupation army in a systematic manner."

"The members of the organisation were provided training and arms."

Al-Badr, one of the two wings of the Razakars, thus acted as an auxiliary force of the Pakistan army in 1971.

Tribunal Chairman Justice Obaidul Hassan and two other members -- Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and judge Md Shahinur Islam -- made their observations on Al-Badr while delivering the judgment in the war crimes case against Mojahed.

"Al-Badr was created under the active vigilance of Jamaat-e-Islami and Pakistani occupation army, and it may be unerringly concluded that it acted as an 'auxiliary force' for 'operational', 'static' and 'other purposes' of the occupation

armed force".

About the reason behind Al-Badr's creation, the judgment said, "Of course, the objective was not to guard the lives and properties of civilians.

"The Al-Badr force had acted in furtherance of policy and plan of Pakistani occupation army and in so doing it had committed atrocities in a systematic manner against the unarmed Bengali civilians throughout the territory of Bangladesh in 1971."

Pro-liberation civilians, intellectual groups and the Hindu community were their key targets.

"That is to say, Al-Badr was a 'paramilitary arm' to the Pakistan Army and it acted as its 'death squad', in furtherance of policy and plan to annihilate the Bengali pro-liberation civilians, nationalist intellectuals, civilians belonging to Hindu community and freedom fighters (whom they called miscreants)".

On the basis of witness' information and documents, the judgment said Razakars and Al-Badr men were given salaries and allowances by the then East Pakistan gov-

ernment, and the Al-Badr men were provided with arms under the supervision of that government.

"These two facts are indicative to conclude that the Al-Badr force too was an 'auxiliary force' as it acted for 'operational' and 'static' purpose of the Pakistani occupation army," it said.

The judgment said Mojahed was quite aware of Al-Badr's criminal activities to annihilate selected intellectuals.

Mojahed's authoritative position in Al-Badr was a "fair indicia" that he had "effective control and ability" over the members of Al-Badr, the "action section" of Jamaat, said the judgment.

He could not be relieved of the responsibility of the planned crimes by Al-Badr men with whom he had a "relationship", observed the tribunal.

Mojahed's act, conduct, and inflammatory and provocative speech had substantial impact on Al-Badr, a criminal organisation, in its carrying out of activities and "operation" between December 10 and 16, 1971 to kill selected intellectuals in Dhaka city, it added.

Abe visits island near disputed chain

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe yesterday visited coastguards who patrol waters around islands at the centre of a dispute with China, as election campaigning stepped up a gear.

Abe was in the remote Okinawan island of Ishigaki in the East China Sea, 2,000 kilometres southwest of Tokyo, where he told crews his resolve to stand up for Japan was undimmed.

"The security environment for our territorial waters has become increasingly serious, as Chinese government ships frequently sail to and roam around waters surrounding Senkaku islands," Abe said in an address to about 40 coastguards.

Senkaku is Japan's name for islands it controls, but which China claims as the Diaoyus.

"I very much appreciate your efforts to patrol our

territorial waters. I will continue to take charge and defend our territory, territorial waters and territorial airspace," said Abe, who wore a blue Okinawan shirt and a coastguard cap for the occasion.

Abe's visit to Ishigaki, which lies less than 200 kilometres off the coast of Taiwan, was the first by a sitting premier in 48 years, national broadcaster NHK said.

It comes as the dispute with Beijing over the sovereignty of the uninhabited, but resource-rich islands further north continues to fester, with little sign of any improvement in sight.

"The Senkakus are undoubtedly an integral part of Japan, historically and under international law," Abe said in Ishigaki later in the day.

"We won't budge one bit," he said in a stump speech.