

Hamid pays tribute to Gandhi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Bangladesh President Md Abdul Hamid paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi at his memorial in Raj Ghat, Delhi yesterday on the first day of his six-day official visit to India.

In the visitors' book, Hamid later described India's Father of the Nation Gandhi as a "great soul of our times".

Hamid was received at the Indira Gandhi International Airport by India's Minister of State for External Affairs Gen (Retd) V K Singh and Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Syed Muazzem Ali and Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Pankaj Saran.

From the airport, Hamid, who is paying the visit at the invitation of his Indian counterpart Pranab Mukherjee, was driven straight to the Rashtrapati Bhavan where he will be staying as a guest.

He will hold talks with the Indian president at the Rashtrapati Bhavan this evening. A dinner will be hosted there by Mukherjee in honour of the

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President Abdul Hamid places a floral wreath at the memorial of Mahatma Gandhi in Rajghat yesterday. The president is on a six-day visit to India.

PHOTO: PID

PATUAKHALI WAR CRIMES ACCUSED Forkan indicted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A special tribunal yesterday framed five charges against Forkan Mallik, an alleged Razakar commander from Mirzaganj in Patuakhali, for his involvement in crimes against humanity during the Liberation War in 1971.

After passing the indictment order, the three-member International Crimes Tribunal-2 led by Justice Obaidul Hassan fixed January 19, 2015 for the beginning of his trial with opening statement and recording testimony of the prosecution witness.

The tribunal read out the charges in Bangla so that the accused could understand it. After reading out the charges the tribunal asked him whether he is guilty.

Forkan pleaded not guilty.

The tribunal also asked the defence to submit the list of their witnesses by that day.

Forkan was a supporter and activist of Muslim League from 1970-71 and campaigned for the Muslim League in the 1970 election. According to the investigation agency, he is now a supporter of the BNP.

CHARGES AGAINST FORKAN

The tribunal accused him of the following charges:

Charge 1: On August 12, 1971, corresponding to 26 Shrawan, at about 1:30pm Forkan Mallik, a member of local Razakar force, accompanied by other razakars and Pakistan army

personnel apprehended Hafiz Uddin Khalifa of village Kakarbania and local thana Awami League leader Abdul Kader Jomader and took them to a gunboat where they were detained and later killed.

The group then apprehended Dr Debendra Nath Sarker from his house and shot him dead. Forkan bayoneted Biva Rani to death when she attempted to save her husband Debendra Nath.

Charge 2: On August 15, 1971, corresponding to 29 Shrawan, at about 12:00pm Forkan accompanied by other Razakars apprehended three brothers -- Ramani Kundu, Shyam Sundar Kundu and Sunil Kundu -- from their houses at Subidkhali Bazar under Mirzaganj Police Station of the district Patuakhali and took them to a Razakar camp set up at an old hospital building where the detainees were forcibly 'converted' to Islam.

Charge 3: On August 17, 1971, corresponding to 31 Shrawan, at about 8:00pm Forkan along with his accomplice Razakars attacked the house of Ramkrishna Saha at Subidkhali Bazar under Mirzaganj Police Station of the district Patuakhali and apprehended Golapi Rani Saha, the unmarried daughter of Ram Krishna Saha, and took her to a place known as Jugibari where Forkan and others violated her.

The Razakars then abandoned the unconscious woman near her house.

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New chapter in US-Cuba relations

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point" and "historic day."

In making the announcement, President Barack Obama said decades of trying to isolate Cuba and oust the communist regime had failed, and it was time to turn the page.

The US embassy in Havana has been shuttered since 1961, two years after rebels led by Fidel Castro ousted President Fulgencio Batista.

"We will end an outdated approach that for decades has failed to advance our interests and instead we will begin to normalize relations between our two countries," Obama said.

He said he would urge Congress to lift the trade embargo, imposed in 1960, while using his presidential authority to advance diplomatic and travel links.

"We are all Americans," Obama declared, breaking into Spanish. The White House portrayed the US move as a bid to reassert US leadership in the Western Hemisphere.

Later, Obama even raised the possibility -- something utterly unthinkable until now -- of his visiting the island not far from the coast of Florida. Cuba was ground zero of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 that brought a nervous world to the verge of nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The European Union, which is also moving to normalise ties with Cuba, hailed the breakthrough as a "historical turning point."

"Today another Wall has started to fall," said EU foreign affairs head Federica Mogherini.

In Havana, Cubans were jubilant.

"I have goosebumps all over," said Ernesto Perez, 52, who works at a cafe in Havana's historic city centre.

But Cuban-Americans in Miami, a hotbed of angry opposition to the Castro regime, expressed dismay.

Obama and President Raul Castro praised the help given by Pope Francis, the first Latin American pontiff, and the Catholic Church in brokering better relations between the long-time enemies.

In response, the Vatican said the pope warmly congratulated both governments for overcoming "the difficulties which have marked their recent history."

Canada was also praised for hosting secret talks between the sides.

The breakthrough came after Havana released jailed US contractor Alan Gross and a Cuban who spied for Washington and had been held for 20 years -- one of the most important US agents in Cuba.

Havana also agreed to release dozens of political prisoners, a senior US official said.

The United States in turn freed three Cuban spies, and Obama said he had instructed the US State Department to re-examine its designation of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism.

The stand-off after the trade embargo began was marked by incidents that threatened to send the Cold War to boiling point.

CIA-backed Cuban exiles suffered a bloody defeat in the Bay of Pigs invasion and during the missile crisis US warships blockaded the island.

The embargo hurt the Caribbean island state's economy, but it failed to

unseat the communist government led by the Castro brothers.

Obama now has only two years left in office, Fidel Castro is 88 and ailing and his brother Raul is 83.

With their window for action closing, both sides were under pressure to make a gesture.

US Republican lawmakers quickly denounced the deal, in a foretaste of the resistance that Obama will face as he tries to persuade Congress to back a full end to the embargo.

House leader John Boehner called the deal "another in a long line of mindless concessions to a dictatorship that brutalizes its people and schemes with our enemies."

The 65-year-old Gross, who had been held for five years for spying, was welcomed back onto US soil at an airbase outside Washington by Secretary of State John Kerry.

Also returning was the unnamed intelligence agent who had been caught working for the US in Cuba and held for two decades.

Obama called the Cuban one of the United States' most important agents on the island.

In exchange for this prisoner, the United States released the three Cuban agents, who were welcomed by Raul Castro at Havana's airport as they returned to Cuba.

Gross was arrested in 2009 for distributing communications equipment to members of Cuba's Jewish community while working as a contractor for the US Agency for International Development.

BSF shoots Bangladeshi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A Bangladeshi farmer was shot by Indian Border Security Force on Paschim Joydharbhangha border in Panchagarh Sadar upazila on Wednesday evening.

The victim, Abul Kalam, 45, is son of late Siraj Uddin of Paschim Joydharbhangha village.

Abu Daud Pradhan, chairman of Chaklahat Union Parishad, said some Bangladeshis were grazing their cattle near the barbed-wire fence of the border on Wednesday afternoon.

Seeing this, the BSF members of Khayerbari camp in Jalpaiguri district chased the Bangladeshis.

The Bangladeshis then brought their cattle to an orchard in Joydharbhangha village. At one stage, BSF men along with some Indian locals intruded into the village around 5:30pm.

The BSF men tried to take the cattle to Indian territory, Daud alleged.

As the Bangladeshis tried to resist the BSF, they opened fire on Bangladeshis. Abul Kalam was hit by rubber bullets, he said.

Kalam was first taken to Panchagarh Sadar Hospital and then shifted to

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BB asks for 2 Biman officials' bank info

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Bank has asked banks to send account information of two suspended Bangladesh Biman officials arrested for their involvement with a gold-smuggling racket at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

The Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) of the central bank, in a letter sent to the banks recently, also asked them to send the account information of the families of the two arrestees within 15 days.

The letter was sent after Detective Branch (DB) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police had moved to the central bank for the information to continue its investigation into the matter.

The two top Biman officials -- Captain Abu Mohammad Aslam Shaheed, chief of planning and scheduling, and Tofazzal Hossain, manager (scheduling) -- were arrested on November 18 following seizure of a huge gold consignment at the airport recently.

Three more "members" of the gold-smuggling racket were also arrested on that day.

Pak court

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Pakistani militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

Relations between the two nuclear-armed rivals worsened dramatically after the carnage, in which 10 gunmen attacked luxury hotels, a popular cafe, a train station and a Jewish centre.

Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, accused of masterminding the violence, was granted bail by a judge in the capital Islamabad.

"We had moved a bail application with the Islamabad anti-terror court on December 10, today the judge granted bail to my client after hearing arguments from both sides," Lakhvi's lawyer Rizwan Abbasi told AFP.

Prosecutor Mohammad Chaudhry Azhar confirmed the court had granted bail.

Meanwhile, India's home ministry yesterday reacted strongly to the granting of bail to Lakhvi by the court.

The ministry said it was very unfortunate, especially since it came just days after the massacre in Peshawar in which 132 children lost their lives, reports TNN.

It said Pakistan must appeal in the next court. "Pakistan needs to show more seriousness in taking the 26/11 case trial to its logical conclusion," the ministry added.

Pakistan's PM Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday announced that a six-year moratorium on the death penalty would be lifted for those convicted of terror offences.

The horror of the Mumbai carnage played out on live television around the world, as commandos battled the heavily-armed gunmen, who arrived by sea on the evening of November 26.

Delhi has accused Islamabad of prevaricating over the trials, while Pakistan has claimed India failed to hand over crucial evidence.

The sole surviving gunman from Mumbai, Pakistani-born Mohammed Ajmal Kasab, was hanged in India in 2012.

The attacks traumatised India, exposing the antiquated weapons and methods of the local police force and revealing crucial gaps in the country's defences.

They also derailed a nascent peace process between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan.

In the wake of the Peshawar massacre on Tuesday, Sharif said Pakistan would not distinguish between "good Taliban and bad Taliban" as it seeks to crush the scourge of homegrown Islamist militancy.

'71 campaign

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enemy" -- those fighting the occupation forces for the independence of Bangladesh.

The Dawn, Pakistan's oldest English daily, has reproduced 11 such advertisements that it ran on December 14-18, 1971.

"JEHAD MEANS TOTAL COMMITMENT," an advert of Habib Bank Limited reads, asking people to "donate generously" to National Defence Fund.

"When Muslims are in a state of Jihad, total mobilisation becomes the need of the hour," it added.

To increase Pakistan troops' confidence, United Bank Limited (UBL), another top bank, published a quote of Pakistan founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah: "Muslims can never be crushed during the last 1,000 years by any power. This is a dream and a hallucination. Shed them... Our religion, our culture and our Islamic ideals are our driving force..."

In another advert calling for donation to the defence fund, UBL said its entire network had been "mobilised to go out with earnest zeal" to collect contributions.

"This is a war in which all of us have a duty to perform. While our Gazis defend the motherland, we have to contribute to their success."

Seeking contribution for the war effort, Muslim Commercial Bank appealed to Pakistanis: "In the times of our Holy Prophet (peace be on him) when Jihad Fund had to be raised, Hazrat Abu Bakr offered whatever he owned and Hazrat Omar gave away half of his wealth."

Standard Bank Limited published an ad using Jinnah's famous quote on the eve of 1946 elections, "Give me

silver bullets and I will give you Pakistan".

"Silver bullets are again needed today to save the integrity & honour of our sacred homeland," it read.

Darbar Soap Works quoted president Yahya as saying: "Advance and strike at the enemy with the rallying call of Allah-o-Akbar."

Top rice exporter Rizvi Brothers published several adverts seeking donation. One reads: "Our valiant armed forces are defending the sacred soil of Pakistan in true tradition of the warriors of Islam."

"LADIES! RUSH TO JOIN JEHAD," read another advert asking people to donate woollen jerseys of 40" chest size to the so-called mujahids. The advertiser, Aftab Shafiq Qamar Shafiq & Brothers, offered a discounted price of Rs 4, 5, and 6 per lb of "Pure Mountainous Jersey Wool".

ment of having failed to run the state and indulging in widespread corruption.

"Sheikh Hasina has destroyed the country and its future," said the BNP chief.

Turning to the judiciary, Khaleda urged the judges to perform their duties without fear or favour. "Otherwise, you will have to face ten times harsher punishment on the Judgment Day for the death penalties you wrongly deliver."

Referring to withdrawal of cases against Hasina during the army-backed caretaker government, she said those cases must be revived if proceedings of the lawsuits against her continue.

Khaleda went on to allege that the recent oil spill disaster in the Sundarbans was planned and the government was behind it.

Aman Ullah Aman, former vice president of Dhaka University Central Students' Union, chaired the convention of the pro-BNP student leaders of the 90s.

4 nations agree

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meeting that about \$700 million will be required for connecting Myanmar and India through road network.

The two-day meeting concluded yesterday with the signing of a joint minutes. It was signed by team leaders from four countries. Shahidul Haque signed on behalf of the host side.

The minutes include introduction, vision, major priorities and way forward.

Under the vision, it was said that the corridor will help the four countries economically through connectivity. The economic corridor will play an important role in maintaining peace and security in the region, it said.

The second inter-governmental meeting came up with a decision to prepare a roadmap within next six months for the proposed corridor.

High officials of the foreign ministry said the four countries will prepare a combined report in the next six months. The report will be placed in the next inter-governmental ministerial meeting to be held in India next year.

The meeting decided that the Joint Study Group (JSG) will prepare four country reports focusing on four areas of institutional development, for example, objectives of the BCIM Economic Corridor, concept, scope and elements, principles and modalities of cooperation, and framework of cooperation.

Reports will also be prepared on seven thematic areas: connectivity, energy, investment and financing, trade in goods and services and trade facilitation, social and human development and poverty alleviation, sustainable development, and people-to-people contact.

At the Cox's Bazar meeting, the JSG of the four countries presented their respective country reports. Detailed discussions were held on those reports, said a foreign ministry

official.

During the JSG meeting, 17 representatives from Bangladesh, five from Myanmar and India each and 15 from China took part.

Now the four countries will prepare combined reports on each area based on the four country reports in the next six months, said the official.

Bangladesh will prepare a combined report on the framework of the economic corridor and sustainable development.

India will prepare a report on energy and trade while China on connectivity and investment.

The next inter-governmental meeting in India will hold final discussions on the reports before they are submitted to the BCIM governments.

The meeting minutes said each report is expected to identify actionable areas and concrete projects which will focus on realising the potentials of the corridor and also on deepening BCIM economy-wide cooperation, said the foreign ministry official.

The discussion at the meeting revolved round the K2K (Kunming-Ruili-Bhamo-Lashio-Mandalay-Tamu-Imphal-Sylhet-Dhaka-Kolkata) route, which is 2,800 km long and part of the historic Silk Route, and it offers the best condition to be used as the corridor.

With roads, railways, airlines, water routes, telecommunication networks and energy pipelines, the corridor will connect south-western China, eastern and north-eastern India, Myanmar and Bangladesh to form a thriving economic belt.

Experts say the corridor can give much-needed boost to the intra-regional trade, as the intra-BCIM trade has remained fairly low.

The trade potential of the corridor stands at \$132 billion, according to a study by Research and Information System for Developing Countries in India.

Khaleda denies meeting

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programme organised by former pro-BNP student leaders at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh in the capital.

In her nearly an hour-long speech, Khaleda let out a barrage of allegations and warnings against the government, where threats of "a fresh movement" were the most dominant.

"We will wage a fresh anti-government movement anytime ... braving bullets and teargas," said the former premier.

"This time the streets will not be empty. I believe people, being fed up with the government's repression and looting, will join us in the movement."

"Like your [Hasina's] father [Sheikh Mujibur Rahman] who had warned the then Pakistani government in 1971, I am also warning present administration -- don't fire any more bullets," she said to a cheering crowd inside the packed auditorium.

In an apparent move to defend her son Tarique Rahman's recent remarks

against Bangabandhu, Khaleda said, "What we say are facts based on documents and information".

At a programme in London on Monday, BNP Senior Vice Chairman Tarique termed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman "a big Razakar". In reaction, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Wednesday asked Khaleda to ask her "spoilt" son to "hold his tongue".

In a counter attack yesterday, Khaleda Zia said, "You [Hasina] should also put a leash on your tongue. Though you're a self-declared prime minister of Bangladesh, the sort of language you use doesn't fit you."

"They [the ruling party] are not sparing even the foreigners now. I want to ask Hasina to restrain her tongue first before advising others," she said.

She described Chhatra League and Jubo League, the student and the youth fronts of the ruling Awami League, as "gunda [goon] leagues", and asked the PM to control them.

Khaleda, like on a number of previous occasions, accused the govern-

ment of having failed to run the state and indulging in widespread corruption.

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Aman Ullah Aman, former vice president of Dhaka University Central Students' Union, chaired the convention of the pro-BNP student leaders of the 90s.