



The nation yesterday observed Shaheed Asad Day, a student who was killed during the 1969 mass uprising that led to the armed struggle for independence in 1971. But the gate in Mohammadpur, which was renamed as Asad Gate from Ayub Gate, remains uncared for. People, even members of Shaheed Asad Parishad, have pasted posters on it, even though several signboards around the gate read: "Pasting posters here is a punishable offence."

PHOTO: TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Search for info on Pakistani POWs

FROM PAGE 1

putting 195 Pakistani POWs, repatriated following a tripartite agreement in 1974, on trial are getting louder and experts finding no legal bar to bringing them to book.

On December 27 last year, Hannan at a press conference had said the agency would start a probe against the POWs whenever it found a "suitable environment" and "directives from the high-ups."

He had also said that as another country -- Pakistan -- was involved in the matter, they needed to get the government's directives before starting the probe.

Yesterday, Hannan told reporters at agency's Dhanmondi office that the trial of the POWs is now a "national demand" and names of several Pakistani army officials surfaced during investigations into other war crimes cases.

Besides, several Pakistani army officials were also implicated in cases filed under the Collaborator Act-1972 immediately after the war, he said.

"I have formed a committee a few days ago to collect preliminary information about Pakistani Prisoners of War... and the committee has already started its work," he said.

The body is led by Motiur Rahman, a deputy director of the agency, he added.

After the briefing, The Daily Star asked Hannan whether the agency had got government's directive to start investigation against the POWs. He replied, "No, the issue [trial of POWs] has become a national demand and that's why we just want to make some progress in the work. The committee has been formed for this."

He reiterated that government approval would be required for starting any formal investigation against Pakistani soldiers.

Meanwhile, the special committee held its first meeting on Tuesday and it was attended by all the five members, Motiur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

"In the meeting, we have discussed how we will start our work and what kinds of documents we will have to collect," he said.

After independence, Bangladesh collected specific evidence of genocide against the 195 Pakistani army personnel, who were in Indian custody as POWs.

After a long-drawn stressful negotiation over the POWs, a tripartite agreement was signed in Delhi in April, 1974 in which Bangladesh said "having regard to the appeal of the prime minister of Pakistan to the people of Bangladesh to forgive and forget the mistakes of the past," Bangladesh decided not to proceed

with the trial as an act of clemency.

However, legal experts say there is no legal bar to trying the 195 Pakistanis and there has also been a longstanding demand to try them at the ICT, which is now trying their local collaborators.

The International Crimes Tribunal-2, in its 2013 judgment in the case against Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah, had said, "Amnesty shown to 195 listed war criminals are opposed to peremptory norms of international law. It is to be noted that any agreement and treaty amongst states in derogation of this principle stands void as per the provisions of international treaty law convention [Article 53 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of the Treaties, 1969]."

"Despite the immunity given to 195 listed war criminals belonging to the Pakistan armed forces on the strength of 'tripartite agreement', the Act of 1973 [International Crimes (Tribunals) Act-1973] still provides jurisdiction to bring them to the process of justice," said the tribunal.

The demand of trying the POWs has been intensified after Pakistan has recently denied committing any war crimes in Bangladesh in 1971.

About three million Bangladeshis were killed and a quarter million women raped by Pakistan army and their local collaborators.

Ershad tightens

FROM PAGE 1
address the grievances of the Raushan-led group.

Speaking at the programme in the morning, Ershad said he made the changes in the party's top leadership to restore confidence among its leaders and activists.

Flanked by party leaders and activists, Ershad along with Howlader and Quader went to the JP central office in the capital's Kakrail in the evening and stayed there for several hours.

Talking to party men at the office, he said, "It is better to cease to exist than to continue like this -- almost dead, with no heartbeat. We were sinking into oblivion, vanishing into thin air."

"Many of the party men, who remained inactive for long, have become active following the changes in leadership."

The JP chief said he made Quader co-chairman to give the party an "able successor" in the future, as he and Raushan turned too old.

Earlier on several occasions, Ershad had said he would remain JP chairman till his last breath.

But yesterday, Ershad said he is ready to quit chairmanship if party men want it.

On Tuesday, the JP chairman announced replacing secretary general Bablu with Howlader, who had held the post for 12 years since 2002.

Earlier on Sunday, Ershad appointed his younger brother Quader as co-chairman.

Quader told The Daily Star yesterday that his first mission would be to restore party's image.

"Jatiya Party's image is getting slow due to its dual role. We are acting as the opposition, and at the same time we have three ministers in the cabinet. We will have to decide whether to act as a real opposition or stay in the cabinet."

"We will set the party's next course of action in the light of people's aspirations as well as expectations of party leaders and activists," said Quader, a former commerce minister in the previous Awami League-led government.

"Our activities will not remain limited to mere words. We want to regain people's trust through our work," he said.

Talking to this correspondent, Howlader said he would work with other party leaders to bridge the divide that appeared in the party after the January 5 national election of 2014.

S'pore deported 26 'radicalised' Bangladeshis

FROM PAGE 1

the process of becoming radicalised, and he also possessed jihad-related materials, the release said.

He will be repatriated once he completes his sentence, it added.

Of the 26 deportees, 14 returned on December 21. They were arrested the same day as primary investigation found them to have "militant links."

Also that day, police filed a case with the Uttara Purba Police Station against the suspects under the Anti-Terrorism Act. They are in jail custody now.

"We arrested 14 people as we were convinced after interrogating them that they might have some militant links," Mashrur Rahman, deputy commissioner (South Division) of Detective Branch at Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The remaining 12, who returned on different dates, were not arrested, as "detectives did not find their links with militancy in primary investigation", he said. "They are under close observation."

In the case statement, police mentioned that the 14 were arrested from around Khandaker Filling Station adjacent to Abdullahpur Bus Stand at about 7:45pm on December 21.

However, officials in the DB wishing anonymity said they arrested the militant suspects soon after their return

at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport following information from the Singapore authorities.

The next day, a Dhaka court placed them on remand for interrogation. 'IS, AL-QAEDA LINKS'

"Twenty-seven male Bangladeshis working in Singapore have been arrested under the Internal Security Act (ISA) -- the first time a jihadist terror cell comprising foreigners has been uncovered here," The Straits Times of Singapore wrote yesterday.

Investigations showed that the group, which had been meeting since 2013, supported the armed jihad ideology of terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, it said.

Quoting the country's home ministry, the newspaper further wrote that some of them had considered waging armed jihad overseas, but they were not planning any terrorist attacks in Singapore.

Asked about their reported links with Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda, a top DB official here said they were yet to find evidence in this regard. "It takes time and intensive investigation to establish such links."

Though the Singapore authorities shared information about their deportation, they did not share any intelligence and evidence with Bangladesh, the official said.

About the 27 Bangladeshi workers,

a senior official at the foreign ministry yesterday said there were no cases against them in Singapore. They were the followers of Ahle Hadith (a religious movement) and they used to invite people to accept Islam as religion, he added.

Seeking anonymity, he also said there was no specific allegation of their involvement in militancy, extremism or terrorism, but they were under surveillance of the Singapore authorities. Their work permits were cancelled and they were sent back to Bangladesh on suspicion.

In Dhaka, the foreign ministry is likely to get a report from the Bangladesh mission in Singapore over the matter today.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told BBC Bangla Service that police are now investigating the allegations brought by the Singapore government against the Bangladeshis.

Meanwhile, the Bangladeshi community in Singapore has expressed shock at the news.

"It is a shameful situation," said Mohsin, editor of Banglar Kantha, a Bangla newspaper in Singapore.

"Bangladeshis are here to work, not to engage in political or extremist activities," he told The Straits Times yesterday.

Nuruzzaman, 32, a Bangladeshi construction worker there, said, "Sin-

gapore is very safe and secure ... and we like it this way."

"I hope," he said, "Singaporeans will not think that all of us are terrorists."

Helmy Isa, director of mosques for Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS), said he hopes the "exposé of the heinous plan" by the group does not tarnish the good image of Bangladeshi workers in Singapore, reports Channel NewsAsia.

Over the years, Bangladeshis have become part of and been embraced by the diverse mosque congregation, he said.

'RADICAL MATERIALS'

In the course of arrests of the Bangladeshi workers, the Internal Security Department of Singapore recovered a "significant amount" of radical and jihad-related materials, such as books and videos containing footage of children undergoing training in what appeared to be terrorist military camps.

Several members also possessed a shared document with graphic images and instructions on how to conduct "silent killings" using different methods and weapons, reported The Straits Times.

The Singapore ministry release said the group members took measures to avoid detection by the authorities, sharing jihad-related materials dis-

creetly and holding weekly gatherings to discuss armed conflicts involving Muslims.

"They also carefully targeted the recruitment of other Bangladeshi nationals to grow their membership," it said.

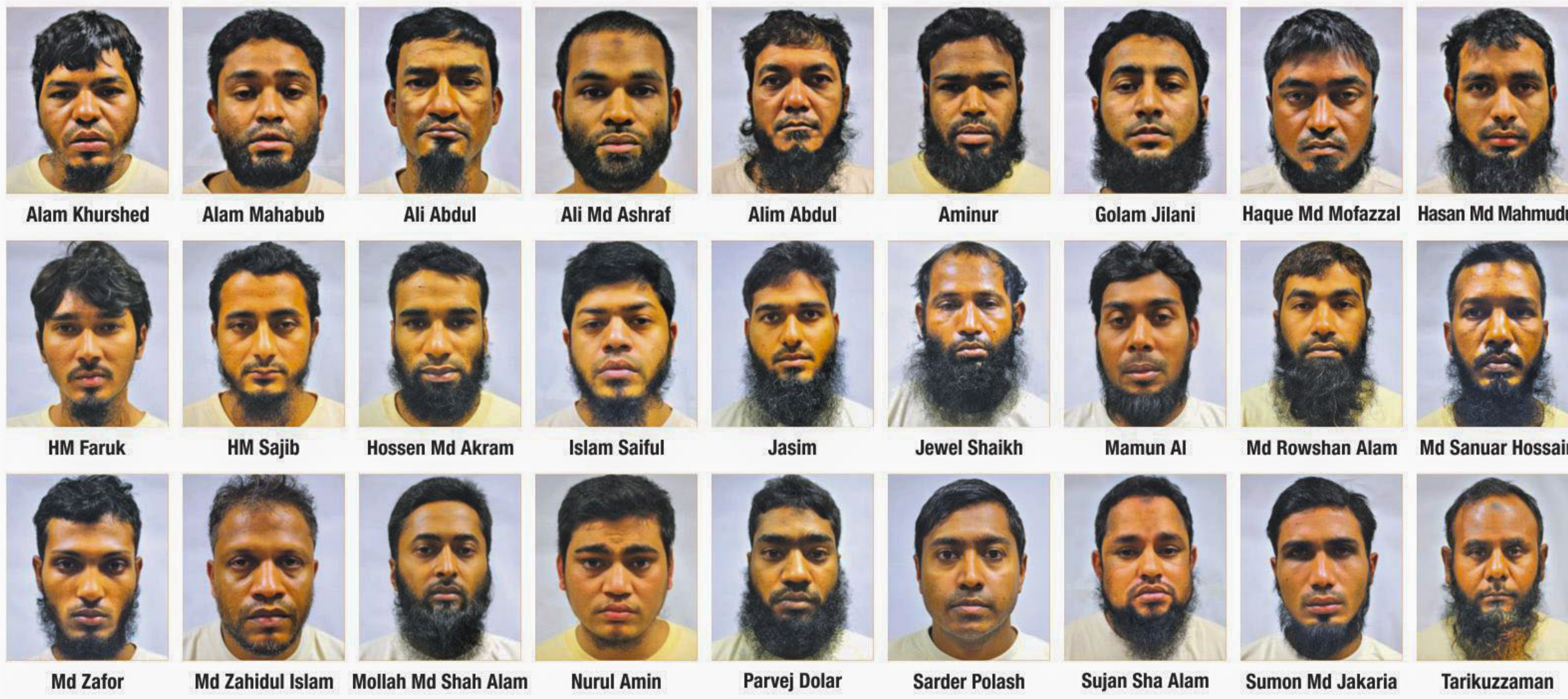
A number of members admitted that they believed they should participate in and wage armed jihad on behalf of their religion. Several contemplated travelling to the Middle East to take part in the ongoing conflict.

Some of them were in support of terrorist groups that killed Shias since they considered Shias to be "deviant".

They also bore grievances against the Bangladesh government over its actions against some Islamic groups and leaders, said the Singapore ministry.

"Members were encouraged to return to Bangladesh and wage armed jihad against the Bangladeshi government. They had also sent monetary donations to entities believed to be linked to extremist groups in Bangladesh."

"Foreigners are guests of our country and they should not abuse this privilege and use Singapore as a base to import their own domestic political agenda and carry out activities in pursuit of such an agenda," added the ministry.



Twenty-six of these 27 Bangladeshi workers have been deported from Singapore. One is still in Singapore jail.

SOURCE: SINGAPORE HOME MINISTRY WEBSITE

Govt striving to build a developed nation

FROM PAGE 1
addressing the ninth session of the present parliament.

Hamid said he firmly believes the government will overcome all challenges and succeed in maintaining peace, discipline and stability in the state and society.

He urged all, including members of the treasury bench and the opposition, to play a constructive and effective role in parliament in fulfilling people's expectation.

The session began at 4:30pm with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury presiding it. Leader of the House Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Raushan Ershad were present.

underscored the need for national unity to sustain the spirit of the Liberation War and consolidate democracy and the rule of law.

Alongside the party in power, the opposition parties have to play a constructive role in ensuring transparency, accountability, tolerance, human rights and the rule of law; they also have to participate in realising the dream of the nation's advancement, he said.

The present government is determined to eliminate terrorism and militancy from the country, Hamid said, adding the administration was making "all-out efforts" to do so.

He read out a brief version of his 114-page speech that was tabled.

The president also highlighted the present government's successes in

different areas, including economy, investment and trade, food and agriculture, environment and climate, local government institutions, health, education, power, tourism, good governance, foreign relations and women child development.

Regarding the country's goal to be a middle-income nation by 2021 and a developed one by 2041, he said he hoped that the country would succeed in achieving the targets by consolidating good governance in every stratum of society, institutionalising democracy and ensuring people's participation in the process.

About the construction of Padma bridge, Hamid said the government had given highest priority to building the bridge to establish a proper and

coordinated communication network across all regions of the country.

Steps have also been taken to strengthen local government institutions and improve their services, he added.

About marine resources, he said short, mid-term and long-term plans had been sketched out to ensure sustainable management of marine fisheries resources, which would be implemented gradually.

The ninth session of the 10th parliament will continue until February 29.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee of the present parliament at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday with the Speaker in the chair. The meeting also decided to hold 45-hour discussion on the president's speech.

Criminals kill farmers' leader in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, PABNA

Criminals shot dead a farmers' association leader of Bangladesh Workers Party in front of his home in Chackia of Atghoria upazila last night.

Abdur Rashid, 35, was the vice-president of Jatiya Krishak Samity, the farmers' wing of Bangladesh Workers Party.

Police and locals said a gang of armed men shot him around 8:30pm when he was going home.

"The gunmen shot him at close range ... He got shot several times in the left of his body and died on the spot," said DM Mizanur Rahman, officer-in-charge of

Atghoria Police Station.

Rashid's party men claimed that outlaws of a "Sharbahara" faction had killed him as he was getting farmers to join the Krishak Samity.

"He had received several threats from the outlaws," said Jakir Hossain, secretary of the Workers Party Pabna unit.

Talking to The Daily Star, Atghoria OC claimed that the motive behind the murder was not clear and the investigation was on.

"We have collected evidence from the scene and we are talking to locals about the incident," he said.