



PHOTO: STAR

A child conductor on duty in a human hauler in Sylhet city's Mirer Maidan. Children from hard up families often take up risky jobs to support their families. The photo was taken on Tuesday.

Xmas today

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human beings. To mark the day, the Christian community has drawn up different programmes, including decoration of Christmas trees with colourful lights, special prayers, distribution of gifts among children and exchange of pleasantries.

The day is a public holiday. President Abdul Hamid will accord a reception to the members of the Christian community at 11:45am today at the Bangabhaban.

Law enforcers will remain alert at different strategic points in the capital and many other places of the country to ensure peaceful celebration of the festival.

Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar along with private TV channels and radio stations will air special programmes while national dailies publish supplements highlighting the day's significance.

The president, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia issued separate messages on the occasion.

The president in his message said, "Bangladesh is a country of communal harmony. All will have to build resistance together against those who want to destroy this tradition to gratify their evil interest."

In her message, Hasina said, "In our constitution, equal rights of people of all religions have been ensured. People of different religions and communities have full freedom to practise their own religious rituals here."

She urged all, including the Christians, to come forward for the country's development.

Save RU campus

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Friday's incident is a criminal offence and the university authority should take legal action against the persons responsible, the students said.

When contacted, the university teachers condemned the incident, but they did not hold any demonstration.

RU Teachers' Association general secretary Prof Shah Azam Shantanu said the way "some outsiders" stopped the examination tainted the image of the university.

"We didn't expect such acts when they could go to court with their complaints."

He, however, said the outsiders' statements should also be taken care of because they questioned the recruitment process.

RU Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof Sarwar Jahan Sajal said the administration was pledge-bound for ensuring good governance on the campus.

"One by one, we stopped illegal trades over bidding and admission on the campus, and we want to maintain discipline in the recruitment process."

He said the authority did not allow any appointment going beyond the logical recruitment process. "We cannot fill the campus with incompetent staff."

He said although they were yet to postpone the recruitment process, it would take some time to complete it.

Thousands of job seekers were harassed as the examination could not be held. "We don't want to repeat the harassment."

He said the VC was away from the campus over official work; they would make decisions on the recruitment when the VC was back.

Our RU correspondent contributed reporting.

Obama signs US defense spending bill

Criticises Guantanamo policy

REUTERS, Honolulu

US President Barack Obama on Friday signed into law an annual defense policy bill, but in a lengthy statement he raised objections to parts of it, including policies blocking him from closing the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Obama pledged in his 2008 presidential campaign to close the military prison, but his efforts have been blocked by mostly Republican opposition in Congress. The Democratic president has instead reduced the population there by transferring prisoners to other countries.

The administration recently told Congress it would move up to 18 more prisoners of the 59 remaining at Guantanamo before Obama leaves office next month.

"During my administration, we have responsibly transferred over 175 detainees from Guantanamo," Obama said in the statement on Friday. "Our efforts to transfer additional detainees will continue until the last day I am in office."

President-elect Donald Trump, who will be sworn in on Jan. 20, said during the campaign that he would keep the Guantanamo Bay facility open and vowed to "load it up with some bad dudes."

The \$618.7 billion defense spending bill passed by the Republican-controlled Congress this month was a compromise version that dropped controversial language requiring women to register for the draft.

But it kept some Republican-backed initiatives Obama had opposed. The

legislation boosts military spending when there has been no similar increase in non-defense funding, and it bars closures of military bases even though top Pentagon officials say they have too much capacity.

House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan, a Republican, said on Friday the legislation would give U.S. troops a pay raise and praised the Guantanamo language.

"This ensures that, right up until his last hour in office, President Obama will not be able to transfer Guantanamo Bay detainees to the United States," Ryan said in a statement.

Obama's predecessor George W. Bush opened the facility to hold terrorism suspects rounded up overseas following the Sept. 11 attacks. Under Bush, the prison came to symbolize aggressive detention practices that opened the United States to accusations of torture.

Obama has maintained for years that he considers "onerous restrictions" on his ability to transfer prisoners a violation of the U.S. Constitution's separation of powers between Congress and the executive branch. But he gave no indication he would try to override those restrictions.

Reflecting the growing migration of espionage and warfare into cyberspace, Obama also said on Friday that he favors splitting the U.S. Cyber Command, which conducts offensive operations, from the National Security Agency and making it independent, similar to the military's European and Pacific Commands.

Trouble began

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Leaders of the Sramik Front held several meetings with leaders and workers of Ashulia garment units before the unrest, said workers of Ashulia-based garment factories -- Ha-Meem Group, Windy Apparels Ltd, Medlar and Starling Creation.

They claimed that local trade union leaders instigated the unrest.

Garment workers want their wages to be increased but at the same time they want the factories to be reopened so they can work, said workers of several garment units in Ashulia.

"We want to work as we have to make rent and buy food," one of them said preferring not to be named.

The unrest for salary hike was confined to a few units initially but then it spread as workers of other garment factories went on work abstention as well, according to workers.

"Some local union leaders even forced workers to go on strike as they did not agree to go for strikes," said a worker of Windy Apparels.

The November 25 meeting was held at a place close to Windy Apparels, which is probably the reason why the strike began from this factory, he added.

The management of Windy Apparels has so far terminated 277 workers of its two units. Five factories located in Ashulia filed several cases against 1,500 workers.

Police arrested 27 people including union leaders, the journalist and local BNP leaders for their alleged involvement in the unrest, police said.

AFM Syed, of the DB (Dhaka North), said detectives arrested 12 people. The DB has been investigating two cases filed with Ashulia Police Station.

However, Mohsinul Kadir, officer-in-charge of Ashulia police, said 26-27 people had been arrested in connection with the unrest and seven cases were filed with the police station.

In another development, Siddiqur Rahman, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said five trade unions wrote to the BGMEA and the government, requesting to open the 55 factories that had been shut in fear of a spillover of the unrest.

"If the trade union leaders and workers want, we will reopen the factories soon," he said.

The BGMEA at a press conference last week announced the closure of the factories when workers took to the street demanding the wage hike.

Ashulia is known as a hub of more than 350 most compliant garment factories. The contribution of the factories amounts to 20 percent of the total export of garment items of \$28 billion in the last fiscal year, according to industry insiders.

Teen boy

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used to come to my shop to buy vegetables. Sometimes, I used to visit their home to take my dues," he said.

Jony said sometimes, he also used to play badminton and cricket with them on their rooftop and sometimes, Shaheed used to sing "Jihadi songs".

A day before the Victory Day on December 16, Jony said, Shaheed requested him to join jihad and kill nonbelievers. "But, I rejected [his proposal]. After that, I never went to that house."

On the Victory Day when Jony went to a local mosque to say Jumma prayers, he also saw Shaheed and Obaidul there.

"One day, I had seen a pistol with Shaheed but I thought it was a toy."

Replying to a query, Jony said two men -- aged around 25 and 35 -- used to come to Shaheed's house in a white car. One of them had a beard.

Apart from the two boys, a woman and a man also used to live in that house, he said.

One day, Jony heard a woman rebuking Shaheed for bringing him to their living room.

Asked why he did not go to police earlier, he said, "I did not realise that they were militants."

Later, members of the counter-terrorism unit of the police took Jony with them for interrogation.

Talking to The Daily Star, a member of the unit said they believe Shaheed is actually

Asif Kaderi, who was killed during the drive yesterday.

Asif was the son of Tanvir Kaderi, a militant who committed suicide to avoid arrest during an anti-militancy drive on September 10. His mother -- Abedatul Fatema alias Khadiza -- sustained injuries and was arrested along with her son Tahrim Qaderi alias Russell, added the member.

Obama pranked

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snowmen, telling People: "There's a whole kind of Chucky element to them. They're a little creepy," prompting his wife Michelle Obama to joke she might move one next to his bed to scare him.

"I would move. If I see one of those snowmen in my bedroom, I'm moving," he said.

While it is not known whether the First Lady made good on her pledge and pranked her husband, staff members in the White House did.

Earlier this week, The White House's official photographer Pete Souza shared a photo on Instagram of Obama hard at work in the Oval Office while a sinister looking snowman can be seen lurking in the garden behind.

"For the past three weeks, there have been four snowmen on display in the Rose Garden," he explained in a caption. "We've been joking that we should move the snowmen a few feet closer to the Oval office every day to see if anyone noticed... Finally, this morning before the President came to the office, some helpful staff -- I won't say who -- moved all the snowmen so each one was peeking through a different window into the Oval."

"This photo was taken this afternoon as the President signed end-of-the-year bills."

While some may consider pranking the boss a risky move, a second post by Souza showed Obama had come to terms with the joke.

Trump vows changes

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Friedman, who has said Washington will not pressure Israel to curtail settlement building in the occupied West Bank.

The resolution was put forward at the 15-member council for a vote on Friday by New Zealand, Malaysia, Venezuela and Senegal a day after Egypt withdrew it under pressure from Israel and US president-elect Trump.

It is the first resolution the Security Council has adopted on Israel and the Palestinians in nearly eight years.

The resolution demands that Israel "immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem", pointing out that the international community views any Israeli construction over the agreed 1967 Green Line as illegal.

While it will not have any practical impact, the resolution is a "significant step" in reconfirming the UN's hopes for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, outgoing Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said on Friday.

Settlement building - which has accelerated year on year under current right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu - is viewed as one of the major stumbling blocks to a lasting peace deal.

Israel has said it will not abide by the measures set out in the document.

In Jerusalem, Netanyahu immediately recalled Israel's ambassadors to New Zealand and Senegal, who were ordered to return for consultations. All current aid to Senegal was to be suspended, the Prime Minister's office said, and an upcoming visit from Senegal's Foreign Minister Mankeur Ndiaye cancelled.

"Israel rejects this shameful anti-Israel resolution at the UN and will not abide by its terms," a statement from Netanyahu's office said.

"The Obama administration not only failed to protect Israel against this gang-up at the UN, it colluded with it behind the scenes," it said.

"Israel looks forward to working with President-elect (Donald) Trump and with all our friends in Congress, Republicans and Democrats alike, to negate the harmful effects of this absurd resolution."

"At a time when the Security Council does nothing to stop the slaughter of half-a-million people in Syria, it disgracefully gangs up on the one true democracy in the Middle East, Israel, and calls the Western Wall 'occu-

pied territory'."

Israel does not have diplomatic relations with either Malaysia or Venezuela.

Defending New Zealand's vote yesterday, the country's Foreign Minister Murray McCully said: "We have been very open about our view that the [UN Security Council] should be doing more to support the Middle East peace process and the position we adopted today is totally in line with our long established policy on the Palestinian question."

Meanwhile, a spokesman for Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas called the resolution a "big blow for Israeli policies."

Saeb Erekat, a former peace negotiator and the number two in the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), spoke of a "historic day".

"December 23 is a historic day and a victory for international legitimacy, international law and international documents," said Erekat.

Sharif Nashashibi, a London-based analyst of Arab political affairs, told Al Jazeera: "It's historic in the sense that it's been decades since the US has done that [abstained]."

"But, in my opinion, it's merely symbolic precisely for that reason, because there are already UN Security Council resolutions in existence that call for pretty much the same thing that this resolution has done."

"These resolutions are decades old and they are just gathering dust. Israel has been allowed to flout them. My fear is that this will just be one of those resolutions that Israel can flout," Nashashibi said.

"We don't have any mechanism to put tangible pressure on Israel to abide by this resolution, so I fear that despite the passing of this resolution, the Security Council has still proved itself largely irrelevant to this conflict," he added.

The resolution demands that "Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem."

It states that Israeli settlements have "no legal validity" and are "dangerously imperilling the viability of the two-state solution" that would see an independent Palestine co-exist alongside Israel.

Some 430,000 Israeli settlers currently live in the occupied West Bank and another 200,000 in annexed east Jerusalem, which the Palestinians see as the capital of their future state.

Tunisia arrests nephew

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The 24-year-old then went on the run and was the focus of a frantic four-day manhunt, before being shot dead by police in Milan.

The Berlin rampage was claimed by the Islamic State group, which released a video Friday in which Amri is shown pledging allegiance to IS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

The Tunisian interior ministry said Amri had sent money to his nephew and shared his jihadist views with him.

"One of the members of the cell is the son of the sister of the terrorist (Amri) and during the investigation he admitted that he was in contact with his uncle through (the messaging service) Telegram," it said.

Amri allegedly urged his nephew to adopt jihadist "takfiri" ideology "and asked him to pledge allegiance to Daesh (IS)," it said.

The fact that Amri was able to travel to Italy unhindered despite a Europe-wide arrest warrant has raised uncomfortable questions for intelligence agencies.

German security services have also faced strong criticism for not keeping better tabs on Amri before the attack, even though he was known to them and suspected of plotting an attack.

But Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere denied there had been a blanket security failure.

It "is impossible to monitor every person suspected of posing a threat around the clock," de Maiziere told the newspaper Bild am Sonntag.

Chancellor Angela Merkel on Friday pledged a "comprehensive" analysis of how the known jihadist was able to slip through the net.

Amri was killed after pulling out a pistol and firing at two officers who had stopped him for a routine identity check Friday near Milan's Sesto San Giovanni railway station.

According to Milan police chief Antonio De Iesu, Amri had a few hundred euros on him but no telephone. Media reports said a train ticket found in Amri's backpack suggested he had boarded a train in Chambéry, south-eastern France, and passed through Turin before arriving in Milan.

German investigators are now racing to find out whether Amri had help from accomplices.

Amri's port of entry to Europe was Italy, arriving on a migrant boat in 2011. He then spent four years in prison there for starting a fire in a refugee centre, during which time he was apparently radicalised.

After serving his sentence he made his way to Germany in 2015, taking advantage of Europe's Schengen system of open borders -- as he did on his return to Italy this week.

German security agencies began monitoring Amri in March, suspecting

that he was planning break-ins to raise cash for automatic weapons to carry out an attack. But the surveillance was stopped in September because Amri, who was supposed to have been deported months earlier, was seen primarily as a small-time drug dealer.

The case has reignited tensions over the more than one million migrants and refugees who have arrived in Germany since last year.

Germany's populist anti-migration AfD party, which has blamed the attack on Merkel's liberal asylum policy, surged to a year-high of more than 15 percent support in a poll on Friday, ahead of a general election expected next September.

Merkel on Friday promised that Germany would be "significantly accelerating" the deportation of rejected asylum seekers.

ROs warn

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Chandpur-3 constituency following allegation raised by chairman candidate Osman Gani Patwari that the MP was influencing voters to vote for chairman aspirant Nurul Amin Ruhul.

On December 22, Patwari filed a complaint with the RO, alleging that Dipu Moni held a meeting with voters and tried to influence them by offering benefits.

"We have received the allegation and on the same day we verbally warned the lawmaker not to violate electoral codes," Abdus Sabur Mandal, the RO and deputy commissioner of Chandpur, told The Daily Star yesterday.

When contacted Dipu Moni, also joint general secretary of AL central committee, told the newspaper, "I have not violated any code and I always follow rules."

Nilphamari RO yesterday verbally warned lawmaker Aftabuddin of Nilphamari-1 in connection with influencing voters.

"We investigated the allegation, but did not find it to be true. But we made the lawmaker aware of the complaints and reminded him to follow the electoral code," Zakir Hossain, returning officer and DC of Nilphamari, told The Daily Star.

When contacted, Aftabuddin denied any wrongdoing.

Meanwhile, polls to the chairman post of Kushtia district council has been postponed due to legal complications over the nominations of a candidate.

The Election Commission in a letter on Friday asked the RO to postpone the polls, said officials of the RO's office.

EC Secretary Muhammad Abdullah said voting to the chairman post has been postponed as a case was pending with the High Court regarding the cancellation of nomination of a candidate.