



(From left) A picture dated December 5 1971 shows Jean Kay in a police car being driven to Orly airport to take part in a reenactment of his attempt to hijack a Pakistan airlines aircraft on December 3, 1971; PIA's flight "City of Comilla" is pictured on the runway of Orly airport in Paris, on December 3, 1971; this undated photo shows Jean Kay is being produced before a court in Paris.

PHOTOS: COLLECTED

Jean Kay: Unforgettable story of a forgotten friend

We remember Jean Eugene Paul Kay, an unrecognised foreign friend who greatly contributed to our Liberation War, a day after his 10th death anniversary.

AHMAD ISTIAK

December 3, 1971. It was around 11:30am in Paris. A flight of Pakistan International Airlines had just landed at Paris Orly Airport. The PIA aircraft named "City of Comilla", a Boeing 720B, was bound for Karachi from London with stopovers in Rome and Cairo.

Five passengers were supposed to board the flight at the airport. After completing all the security checks and other formalities they were boarding the plane one by one.

On the same day, French president Georges



activists demanded Kay's release and pressured the government to accept Kay's demands. They also demanded an end to the war in the then East Pakistan.

Meanwhile, the PIA flight waited helplessly on the runway while all its passengers, crew and pilots were being held hostage by Kay.

The French government officials continued discussions with Kay through wireless but all efforts of reaching a compromise failed. Jean Kay remained steadfast about his demands even after six hours of continuous discussion. He made it clear that he would not budge from his demands under any circumstances. At one point the French government gave in and promised that one ton of medicines would be sent to East Pakistan through this flight and the remaining 19 tons of medicines and medical equipment would be sent to India later.

The French government instructed the Red Cross to deliver one ton of medicines according to Kay's demands. Volunteers of the Red Cross

in East Pakistan.

He wanted to tell the world how West Pakistanis were slaughtering thousands of Bengalis every day and how Bengalis were dying due to shortages of food, medicine and medical supplies. He was extremely moved by the deteriorating situation in East Pakistan. He wanted medicines for Bengalis as ransom to free the hostages.

He chose the day because he knew that the West German chancellor was arriving in Paris on that day and as a result, such an incident would draw global attention to the war in Pakistan and the plight of the innocent Bengalis might get a place in the meeting agenda of the global leaders.

He also told the police that he made the plan to hijack the flight in June.

When the police asked Kay about who inspired him to do it, Kay replied that he was inspired by renowned French litterateur and intellectual Andre Malraux. He was deeply inspired by Malraux's speeches and statements.

It should be noted here that on September 17 Andre Malraux published a statement saying, "I will go to Bangladesh and join the Mukti Bahini to fight the Pakistan army because they have been killing innocent unarmed civilians of East Pakistan. They have been committing genocide. They are conducting heinous crimes against women. They have crossed all limits of barbarism."

Jean Kay was also greatly moved by the stories and reports about the situation in East Pakistan in Indian newspapers and magazines.

Jean Kay's trial and Malrow's efforts to release him

As soon as Kay was arrested, Andre Malraux got to know about him. Malraux requested one of his lawyer friends to provide free legal assistance to Kay and he agreed to do that. The trial began and the pilots, passengers and crew of that flight were the witnesses of the case. All the witnesses testified before the court that Kay did not threaten or assault them. Kay had not even pointed his gun at them, according to the witnesses. Rather as soon as he hijacked the flight, he informed the passengers that he was doing it on behalf of the murdered children of East Pakistan.

He appealed to the passengers, "Medicine and medical supplies will be sent through this flight and I hope you will assist me in this effort."

Jean Kay's trial ended soon. The French court sentenced him to five years imprisonment.



Andre Malraux

Malraux again protested against this sentence and demanded Kay's release. Protests demanding Kay's release were organised in many cities of the world. Finally, Kay's sentence was commuted to two years of imprisonment and he was released in 1973.

French Assistance to the Liberation War

On December 8, a supply of 20 tons of medicines and medical supplies donated by the French government reached Kolkata. This supply was the fruit of Kay's immense sacrifice. However, the French government denied that they had sent the supplies due to Kay's plane hijack and the French government said that they had sent the supplies on humanitarian grounds. Nevertheless, Jean Kay's efforts for war-torn Bangladesh greatly moved the global community.

Translated by Md Shah Nawaz Khan Chandan



A screenshot of a live telecast of the plane hijacking. The incident was covered by major media outlets across the world.

He wanted to tell the world how West Pakistanis were slaughtering thousands of Bengalis every day and how Bengalis were dying due to shortages of food, medicine and medical supplies. He was extremely moved by the deteriorating situation in East Pakistan. He wanted medicines for Bengalis as ransom to free the hostages.

Pompidou had a bilateral meeting with the Chancellor of West Germany Willy Brandt in Paris. The West German chancellor and his entourage had also just arrived at the airport and all the security officials were preoccupied with the security of these VIPs.

It was around 11:50 am.

Amid heightened security, a 28-year-old French man named Jean Eugene Paul Kay did something unimaginable. As all the airport staff were too occupied with the VIPs, Kay managed to enter the airport and headed straight for the PIA flight. Carrying a 9mm pistol, Kay rushed to the cockpit and held the pilots hostage.

At gunpoint, Kay ordered the pilots, who were about to fly to Rome, to shut the engines down. He shouted at the pilots and the crew saying he would blow up the plane if they didn't obey his orders.

Kay then seized the wireless set of the captain and established contact with the airport control tower. He told the airport authority that an emergency supply of 20 tons of medicines and medical equipment would have to be sent immediately to the war-ravaged people of East Pakistan. He demanded that the supplies had to be delivered by the same PIA flight he took control of.

He told the authority that his conditions were non-negotiable.

Airport security officials became extremely anxious about the situation. They blocked the terminal adjacent to the PIA flight and briefed the high-ranking officials of the French government. Even French President George Pompidou was briefed about the situation. He instantly postponed his meeting and all other programmes with the West German chancellor.

The news of the hijacking of the PIA flight in Paris spread like wildfire all over Europe. People around the world also learned about his demands. And it also brought to light the plight of Bangalis and drew attention to the liberation war of Bangladesh.

Thousands of people gathered at the Orly airport and expressed solidarity with Kay's demands. Anti-war processions started to be organised in all the major cities and towns. Influential TV channels and media started to broadcast reports about the flight hijacking and anti-war demonstrations.

Kay, who was just like any other unknown youngster in Paris, instantly became an anti-war icon all over the world.

French anti-war protesters and human rights

Who was Jean Kay?

His full name is Jean Eugene Paul Kay. He was born in Millianna in Algeria in 1943. Kay, his father and brother served in the French army. At the beginning of 1971, Kay was working in the engineering corps of the French Army and he was stationed in Yemen. He left the army in March 1971 and returned to France. In the previous year, Kay witnessed a bloody civil war in Biafra, Nigeria where, like Bangladesh, around three million people lost their lives. The Nigerian civil war radically changed Kay's mindset and he increasingly became an anti-war activist.

His activism after the war

When Jean Kay was released from prison, Bangladesh had, by then, become an independent country. After getting released from prison, Kay resided in Paris for some time and then left France for Lebanon. He got involved with various humanitarian organisations in Beirut and continued his activism. He also worked in Australia and later moved to Delhi, India to continue his humanitarian activities. He married an American woman in Delhi. However, the local administration



Jean Eugene Paul Kay

did not approve of his humanitarian activism and he had to leave Delhi and move to Kolkata. There he used to cook and distribute food including chicken soup to the street children.

Jean Kay's secret visit to Bangladesh

When he was in Kolkata Jean Kay came to Bangladesh a couple of times. However, at that time, he was not connected with anybody and as a result, his visit to Bangladesh was never publicised. The story of his Bangladesh visit was first published in French newspapers after his death.

At first, he visited Bangladesh in 1982 and the last time he visited Bangladesh was in 1986. However, he was shocked and disappointed to see military rule in independent Bangladesh. At the beginning of 1985, Jean Kay started living in the Himalayas.

Later in 1986, he returned to Kolkata and got involved with the communist activists. Due to this involvement, the government ordered him to leave India. So, he returned to Paris and from there he left for an unknown island in the Caribbean. There he started to live with his family in a boat and spent the rest of his life there. On December 23, 2012, Jean Kay, the unforgettable, most sincere friend of Bangladesh left the world for good.

Nobody remembers him

Unfortunately, nobody felt the urge to remember this true friend of Bangladesh. The French government never recognised his dedication to humanitarian causes. However, his activism was never for recognition. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence, Bangladesh government honoured the country's foreign friends who contributed to the liberation war in various capacities. So far, 338 foreign friends have been awarded by the Bangladesh government. However, Jean Kay nor his family members have received any form of recognition from the Bangladesh government till now.