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Mumbai attacker Ajmal Kasab executed secretly, sparks celebrations

BY KAUSTUBH KULKARNI AND NAEEM ABBAS

MUMBAI, India/FARIDKOT, Pakistan | Wed Nov 21, 2012 6:51pm IST

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1 OF 6. A man holds a picture of Mohammad Ajmal Kasab with a noose, as he celebrates Kasab's execution, in Ahmedabad November 21, 2012.

CREDIT: REUTERS/AMIT DAVE

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It was the first time a capital sentence had been carried out in India since 2004. There was celebration on the streets of Mumbai and other cities as news of the execution spread, but militant groups in Pakistan reacted angrily, as did residents of his home village of Faridkot.

People set off fireworks and handed out sweets in India. Some held up photos of Kasab with a rope noose superimposed over his head.

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MISSING MALAYSIAN PLANE

Attack survivor Vishnu Zende, who was working at Mumbai's train station where nearly 60 people were killed, said the execution brought it all back.

"When I heard the news of Kasab's execution today, I remembered those horrifying moments of the attack," Zende said.

"My eyes were filled with tears."

IN PICTURES: Indians cheer death of Kasab, click [here](#)

An effigy of Kasab was hung by the neck from the entrance gate of the station by a right-wing local party. A crowd of about 30 shouted "Pakistan murdabad" (death to Pakistan) as they beat the effigy, which had shoes hung around its shoulders.

In Pakistan, a senior commander of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militant group, which India blames for the assault on Mumbai, called Kasab a hero and said he would inspire more attacks.

"To die like Kasab is the dream of every fighter," the commander told Reuters by telephone from an undisclosed location.

The Pakistan Taliban said they were shocked by the hanging.

"There is no doubt that it's very shocking news and a big loss that a Muslim has been hanged on Indian soil," Taliban spokesman Ihsanullah Ihsan told Reuters.

TICKET TO HEAVEN

Kasab was buried inside the prison where he was hanged, officials said. He was quiet and seemed nervous before the execution, a prison guard told the NDTV network. He prayed and asked if his family had been informed, which they had.

India said it would hand over the body to Pakistan if asked. Talking to Reuters from Faridkot, Kasab's aunt said she was proud of him and wanted his body back. A schoolmate remembered a boisterous child who loved karate "but never harmed anyone". Villagers threw stones and slapped around journalists who went to the village in the province of Punjab.

This year, Saudi Arabia extradited an Indian-born militant accused of being a key plotter in the Mumbai attacks. Police say Sayeed Zabiuddin Ansari, also known as Abu Jindal, helped coordinate the attack from a "control room" in the Pakistani city of Karachi and also helped to train the gunmen.

In a video of his interrogation by police, Kasab said his trainers and handlers had assured him prior to the attack that his killing spree was a sure ticket to rewards in heaven.

In August, the Supreme Court upheld Kasab's 2010 death sentence over the attacks. President Pranab Mukherjee rejected his plea for clemency on November 5, although this was not made public until Tuesday night.

The timing of the execution, shortly before a series of state elections, may be beneficial for the government, which opposition leaders accuse of being soft on national security.

"FOOT SOLDIER"

Ten militants arrived on the Mumbai shoreline in a dinghy on November 26, 2008, before splitting into four groups and embarking on a killing spree. They held off elite commandos for up to 60 hours in two luxury hotels and a Jewish centre in the city.

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India says Islamabad is failing to act against those behind the raids, including LeT founder Hafiz Saeed, who has a \$10 million U.S. bounty on his head. Pakistan admits the attacks were planned on its soil, but denies official involvement.

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It says seven suspects are being prosecuted for their role.

"Kasab was a foot soldier, the generals are in Islamabad, in Pakistan, and full justice will be done when they are brought to justice," Gopalapuram Parthasarathy, a former ambassador to Pakistan, told Reuters.

Improving relations with Pakistan is a keystone of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's foreign policy. Singh, who was born in present-day Pakistan when it was still part of British India, has repeatedly postponed visiting the country because of lack of progress on convicting the Mumbai suspects.

However, India and Pakistan's relations have gradually improved since the attacks, with progress made on trade and economic ties.

Possibly because of the planned execution, India on Tuesday asked Pakistan to postpone a visit this week by Interior Minister Rehman Malik, saying the dates were "not suitable for us". Malik was due to put the final seal on a deal to ease visa restriction for travellers.

Kasab's execution happened very quickly for India's usually glacial justice system. Three people convicted of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi are still on death row, 21 years after he was killed by a suicide bomb.

In Pakistan, many said the hanging happened quickly only because of his nationality. People questioned whether Kasab was really guilty, despite the video evidence.

Pakistan was informed beforehand about Kasab's execution, said a Pakistani foreign ministry official who asked not to be identified. "If all judicial procedures were followed, then the decision is acceptable," the official said.

(Writing by Frank Jack Daniel and Ross Colvin; Additional reporting by Annie Banerji, Arup Roychoudhury, Diksha Madhok, and Suchitra Mohanty in NEW DELHI, Swati Bhat, Henry Foy and Aradhana Aravindan in MUMBAI, Imtiaz Shah in KARACHI and Michael Georgy and Mehreen Zahra-Malik; in ISLAMABAD.; Editing by Nick Macfie)

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