

South Koreans mourn death of former World War II sex slave

By Kim Tong-Hyung
The Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — Hundreds of South Koreans mourned the death of a former sex slave for the Japanese military during World War II during in a rally in Seoul that demanded reparations from Tokyo over wartime atrocities.

Kim Bok-dong had been a vocal protest leader at the weekly rallies held every Wednesday in Seoul for nearly 30 years. She died following a battle with cancer. She was 92 years old.

At a narrow street near where the Japanese Embassy used to be, protesters gathered around a bronze statue of a girl representing Korean sexual slavery victims and held a moment of silence for Kim. Many of them held signboards with Kim's photos and words including, "We will never forget the life of Kim Bok-dong" and "Japanese government, apologize!"

Kim was one of the first victims to speak out and break decades of silence over Japan's wartime sexual slavery that experts say forced thousands of Asian women into frontline brothels. She travelled around the world testifying about her experience, including at the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 and at a U.N.



Human Rights Council panel in 2016. Of the 239 Korean women who have come forward as victims, only 23 are still alive.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who visited Kim's altar at a Seoul hospital, said in a statement that Kim devoted her life to "restoring human dignity" and that her campaigning gave South Koreans a "braveness to face the truth."

According to Yoon Meehyang, who heads an activist group representing South Korean sexual slavery victims, Kim was dragged away from home at the age of 14 and forced to have sex with Japanese soldiers at military brothels in China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore from 1940 to 1945. She came

forward as a sexual slavery victim in 1992, a year after Kim Hak-sun became the first South Korean woman to identify herself as a former sex slave.

Kim's death came at a time when relations between South Korea and Japan have sunk to their lowest in years over Japan's refusal to fully acknowledge the sufferings of the so-called "comfort women" during World War II and forced laborers during its colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 through 1945.

Moon's government in November announced plans to dissolve a foundation founded by Japan to compensate South Korean sexual slavery victims, which if

ACTIVIST MOURNED. A statue of a girl representing thousands of Korean women enslaved for sex by Japan's imperial forces before and during World War II is seen during a weekly rally near the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, South Korea. Hundreds of South Koreans are mourning the death of a former sex slave for the Japanese military during World War II by demanding reparations from Tokyo over wartime atrocities. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)

carried out would effectively kill a controversial 2015 agreement between the countries to settle a decades-long impasse over the issue.

Many in South Korea believed that Seoul's previous conservative government settled for far too little in the deal, where Tokyo agreed to fund the foundation with 1 billion yen (\$9 million), and that Japan still hasn't acknowledged legal responsibility for atrocities during its colonial occupation of Korea.

Japan had said it didn't consider the money it provided to the fund as compensation, insisting that all wartime compensation issues were settled in a 1965 treaty that restored diplomatic ties between the countries and was accompanied by more than \$800 million in economic aid and loans from Tokyo to Seoul.

Japan blasted Seoul's decision to walk back on the deal, with foreign minister Taro Kono saying Seoul was violating the "most basic rule to live in the international society."

Noted Indian transgender activist shakes up Hindu festival

Continued from page 2

"We have stripped enough in our lives, let us just have fun," Tripathi said.

They bathed in the presence of Juna members.

"For them to bathe with one of the oldest and most orthodox of the monastic orders, I consider that quite revolutionary," said Ashok Row Kavi, chairman of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) advocacy group Humsafar Trust.

Kavi said, though, that Tripathi had "put herself between a rock (and) a hard place" by challenging the akharas' all-male order on the one hand and, on the other, by siding with Hindu nationalists in their call for a temple to the Hindu god King Ram to be built on the site of a 16th-century mosque that Hindu hardliners

destroyed in 1992. Many hijras are Muslim.

The temple campaign is part of a broader effort by members and sympathizers of India's ruling Bharita Janata Party — led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi — to establish Hinduism as the center of Indian heritage, downplaying the multiculturalism that resulted from India's place on the old Silk Road and the hundreds of years of rule by Muslim Mughal kings and the British empire.

Kinnars celebrated their inclusion at Kumbh as a victory, but greater acceptance by Hinduism's most powerful leaders — in the religious and political spheres — remains to be seen.

Mahant Suresh Das, the head of Digambar akhara, one of the largest monastic orders, said a statute limits the number of orders to 13.

"Moreover, they are hijra," he said. "They are

neither man nor woman. The nature has punished them for the misdeeds of their previous lives. We are pure who follow (ancient Hindu religion). The Kinnars are impure."

The Kinnars travelled to Prayagraj, recently renamed by the Hindu nationalist-led Uttar Pradesh state government from the Mughal-era Allahabad, in October 2017, when 60 transgender people were ordained as monks.

Kinnar saint Pushpa Maa said being ordained gave new meaning to her life, "which was otherwise reduced to seeking alms by dancing in marriage or during birth of a child," she said, adding, "I used to beg in trains or main crossings of the city. (Tripathi) helped us to erase that image. We are no longer a hijra but part of an organization which is fighting for our religious rights."

Banerjee reported from Lucknow, India.



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The Asian Reporter's
Lunar New Year
special section
in honor of the
Year of the Pig
begins on page 9.

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4					3	
3			4		7	
	2	3		7	4	
9			1	3		8
			2			
7			4	8		5
	6	9		2	7	
7			1			6
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Difficulty level: Hard

#43347

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last issue's puzzle

Puzzle #38616 (Medium)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

8	2	9	5	6	1	7	4	3
3	7	5	8	9	4	6	2	1
1	6	4	3	2	7	8	5	9
4	1	7	2	8	9	5	3	6
5	3	8	7	4	6	9	1	2
2	9	6	1	3	5	4	8	7
6	4	1	9	5	3	2	7	8
7	5	2	6	1	8	3	9	4
9	8	3	4	7	2	1	6	5

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