

# The debate over Khaleda Zia's parole



GOLAM MORTOZA

**E**VER since the imprisonment of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, her party has systematically demanded her release. Recently, a possibility for

under observation by the police. According to the policy, when released on parole, the prisoner will be handed over to the police by the jail authorities and the police will hand over the prisoner back to the jail authorities within the designated time.

Supreme court lawyer Arif Khan told *The Daily Star*, "According to the policy, a person released on parole is

the necessary details including their current address, the hospital they are visiting for treatment and other relevant information must be provided to the embassy."

In 2008, Awami League's then Secretary General, Abdul Jalil was released on parole and he went to Singapore to receive treatment, though it created some controversy later as,

the ongoing cases. And even if she gets bail in all the ongoing cases, she cannot escape prison.

Apart from getting out on "parole" there is a scope to seek presidential clemency. According to Article 49 of the Constitution, if someone admits one's guilt, such clemency can be given. The president has the power to reject the plea for clemency. He can also pardon

him not to enter into such discussions. According to the MP, Khaleda Zia's health had seriously deteriorated, so much so that she couldn't even stand by herself.

A few days ago, Khaleda Zia's sister and a few other relatives had visited her in jail. A senior BNP leader told *The Daily Star* that after the visit, Khaleda Zia's relatives reported that her health was in the worst possible state; both her arms had become bent with stiffness; she could not eat properly. According to Khaleda's relatives, this was the first time she had resigned herself to the idea of bail or release on parole, remarking: "Do whatever you think best." It seemed to them that she was at the end of her life and that was why she made that remark. But one thing is for sure—under no circumstances will Khaleda Zia seek presidential clemency, as according to her, she has not committed any crime.

According to a source, BNP as a party will not appeal for parole. Only if her release on parole is guaranteed will the family appeal for it. Then BNP can claim that the family, on humanitarian grounds, had requested parole. The appeal would have nothing to do with the party.

Almost all BNP leaders believe that her health is more important than anything else and appealing for release on parole will not taint her "no compromise" image. BNP leaders think that even if the government tries to propagate such a notion, the people of this country will not believe it. If Khaleda Zia is released on parole on humanitarian grounds, it will be a positive development for BNP's politics. Yet they cannot shed the apprehension of what the head of the government is thinking. Despite talks between Obaidul Quader and Mirza Fakhrul, this unease has not been alleviated. It is not the court on which Khaleda Zia's release depends; it depends on the decision of the government. And this decision lies mainly with the head of the government.

Golam Mortoza is a journalist. The article was translated from Bangla by the Editorial desk.



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

PHOTO: STAR/PALASH KHAN

not allowed to travel abroad, whether it be for medical purpose or otherwise. Moreover, whether a prisoner admits their guilt or not has nothing to do with the parole."

"Those released on parole do have the opportunity to travel abroad," said S M Rezaul Karim, former Awami League legal affairs secretary and currently the minister of Fisheries and Livestock. "Anyone on parole will have to report to the Bangladesh embassy in the destination country. All

according to parole regulations, this was not permissible.

Now let us come to the question of bail.

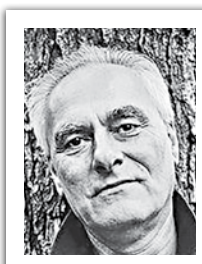
So far, there are 34 ongoing cases against Begum Khaleda Zia; she has already been sentenced for two of them. The two cases have been disposed of at the Appellate Division. Which means, the cases have ended. Since they have been disposed of, there is no scope of her getting bail in these two cases. The only way Khaleda Zia can get bail is for

all the sentences or reduce the duration of the sentence. He can also suspend the sentence for a specific time and arrange for release from prison.

The most crucial question to be considered is, what exactly does Khaleda Zia want? A few months ago, BNP MPs met with her in jail. One of these MPs told *The Daily Star* that when he had broached the subject of taking up the issue of parole or a way for her release, with the government, Khaleda Zia said "there's no use", and asked

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# Is Pakistan's press freedom under threat?



JAMES M DORSEY

**S**WEEPING new regulations restricting social media in Pakistan put freedom of expression and the media at the heart of the struggle to counter both civilisationalist and authoritarian aspects of an emerging new

world order. The regulations, adopted without public debate, position US social media companies like Facebook and Twitter at the forefront of the struggle and raise the spectre of China's walled-off internet with its own state-controlled social media platforms becoming the model for a host of illiberal, authoritarians and autocrats.

The regulations, which take effect immediately, embrace aspects of a civilisational state that defines its legal reach, if not its borders, in terms of a civilisation rather than a nation state with clearly outlined, internationally recognised borders that determine the reach of its law and that is defined by its population and language.

The regulations could force social media companies to globally suppress criticism of the more onerous aspects of Pakistani law, including constitutionally enshrined discrimination of some minorities like Ahmadis, a sect widely viewed as heretic by mainstream Islam, and imposition of a mandatory death sentence for blasphemy.

The new rules force social media companies to "remove, suspend or disable access" to content posted in Pakistan or by Pakistani nationals abroad that the government deems as failing to "take due cognisance of the religious, cultural,

ethnic and national security sensitivities of Pakistan." The government can also demand removal of encryption.

Social media companies are required to establish offices in Pakistan in the next three months and install data servers by February 2021. The government justified the rules with the need to combat hate speech, blasphemy, alleged fake news and online harassment of women.

The Asia Internet Coalition, a technology and internet industry association that includes Facebook and Twitter, warned that the regulations "jeopardise the personal safety and privacy of citizens and undermine free expression" and would be "detrimental to

Pakistan's ambitions for a digital economy."

The introduction of the regulations reflects frustration in government as well as Pakistan's powerful military with social media companies' frequent refusal to honour requests to take down content. Pakistan ranked among the top countries requesting Facebook and Twitter to remove postings.

On the assumption that Facebook, Twitter and others, which are already banned in China, will risk being debarred in Pakistan by refusing to comply with the new regulations, Pakistan could become a prime country that adopts not only aspects of China's 21st-century Orwellian surveillance state but also its tightly controlled media.



People using computers are seen in Islamabad, Pakistan, on October 20, 2017. Recently, the country's government secretly passed regulations that restrict social media activity.

PHOTO: REUTERS/CAREN FEROUZ

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The basis for potential Pakistani adoption of the Chinese system was created in 2017 in plans for the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a USD 60-billion-plus crown jewel of the Belt and Road, an infrastructure, telecommunications and energy-driven initiative to tie Eurasia to China.

The 2017 plan identifies as risks to CPEC "Pakistani politics, such as competing parties, religion, tribes, terrorists, and Western intervention" as well as security. The plan appears to question the vibrancy of a system in which competition between parties and interest groups is the name of the game. It envisions a full system of monitoring and surveillance to ensure law and order in Pakistani cities. The system would involve

deployment of explosive detectors and scanners to "cover major roads, case-prone areas and crowded places...in urban areas to conduct real-time monitoring and 24-hour video recording."

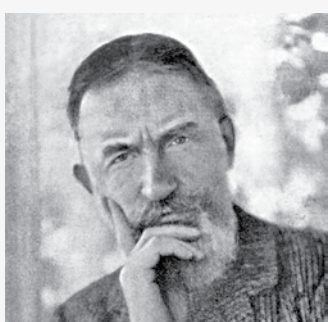
A national fibre optic backbone would be built for internet traffic as well as the terrestrial distribution of broadcast media that would cooperate with their Chinese counterparts in the "dissemination of Chinese culture." The plan described the backbone as a "cultural transmission carrier" that would serve to "further enhance mutual understanding between the two peoples and the traditional friendship between the two countries."

Critics in China and elsewhere assert that repression of freedom of expression contributed to China's delayed response to the Coronavirus. China rejects the criticism with President Xi Jinping calling for even greater control.

Pakistan's newly promulgated regulations echo Mr Xi's assertion during the Communist party's January 7 Politburo Standing Committee meeting that "we must strengthen public opinion tracking and judgment, take the initiative to voice, provide positive guidance, strengthen integration, communication and interaction, so that positive energy will always fill the Internet space... We must control the overall public opinion environment. It is necessary to strengthen the management and control of online media."

Dr James M Dorsey is a senior fellow at Nanyang Technological University's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, an adjunct senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore's Middle East Institute and co-director of the University of Wuerzburg's Institute of Fan Culture.

## QUOTABLE Quote

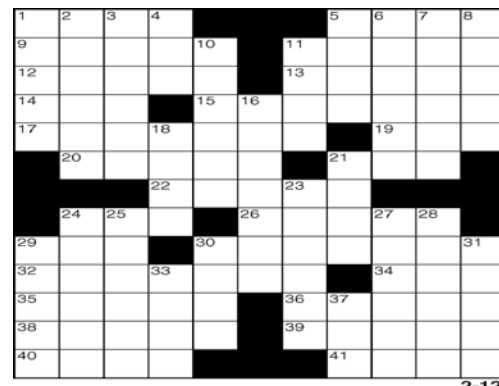


GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (1856–1950) Irish playwright

*If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance.*

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Appliance part
  - 5 Baby bull
  - 9 Love affair
  - 11 Dwight's wife
  - 12 Disney deer
  - 13 Make amends
  - 14 Santa --, California
  - 15 Paint oil source
  - 17 Flowering trees
  - 19 Tour carrier
  - 20 Waffle topper
  - 21 Grammys category
  - 22 Sung story
  - 24 Sassy talk
  - 26 Ladder parts
  - 29 Slump
- DOWN**
- 1 Plotters' group
  - 2 Muscat natives
  - 3 Gypsy language
  - 4 Supply voices for
  - 5 Alley prowlers
  - 6 One-celled organism
  - 7 Roster
  - 8 Flows into
  - 10 Anger
  - 11 Supplies with staff
  - 16 Under attack, perhaps
  - 18 Plunge
  - 21 Tirade
  - 23 Track athlete
  - 24 Sick in bed
  - 25 Disregard
  - 27 Frozen dessert
  - 28 Christian of "Mr. Robot"
  - 29 Strikes, in a way
  - 30 Single
  - 31 Boat back
  - 33 Rowing team
  - 37 Bar topic



## YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

A R O U N D B O N D  
R E D S E A A H O Y  
M O S E S M A L O N E  
S T E A K  
P L U S R A T S  
R E A P G O N U T S  
A C T R O N D O E  
N O T B A D C O O T  
S E A L Y A R D  
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S E L L C O M E T O  
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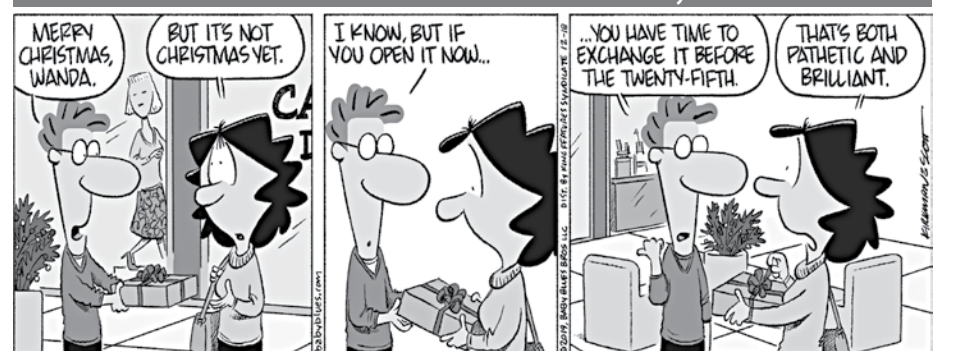
## BETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



## BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott



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