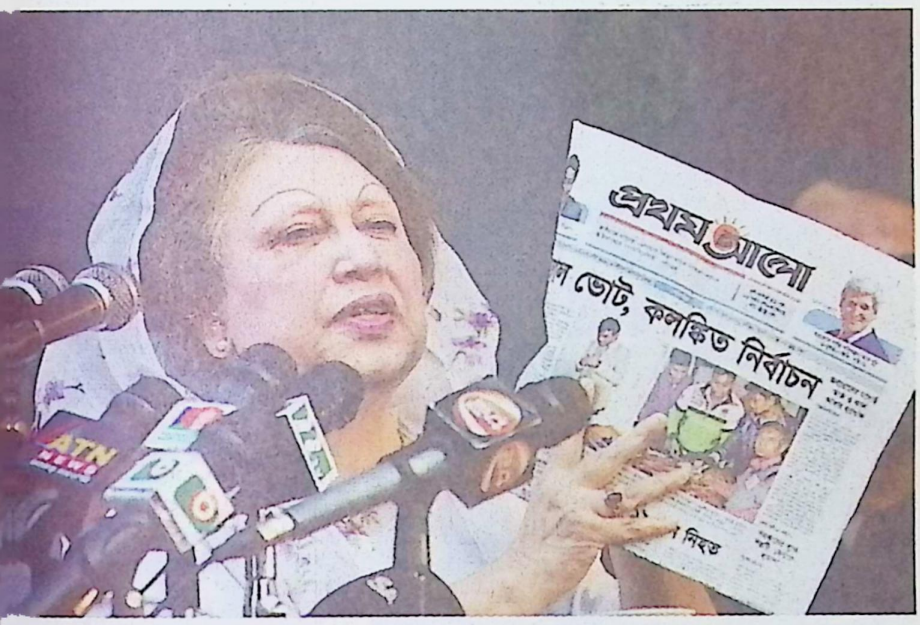
the path of confrontation. She had led her party-led alliance to wage street agitation to destabilise the country by enforcing mindless blockades and hartals. The only aim of it was to force the government to meet their demands. The agitation wore a violent face. Her party's key ally Jamaat-e-Islami men unleashed a reign of terror by burning people to death in such a cruel manner that shocked the conscience of the entire country and the world community as well. Being the leader of the 18-party alliance, she miserably failed to lead the movement in a peaceful manner. Her failure appeared as a blessing for the government that did not hesitate to use the brute force of the state to foil the agitation against the government. The manner the anti-government agitation has lost people's support has become a glaring example of how a movement based on a very popular issue-- installation of a non-partisan election time government for the sake of holding of a free and fair parliamentary election-- has gone in the wrong direction due to violence. Khaleda can in no way deny her failure for this. She must shoulder the responsibility.



But she is still a fortunate politician in Bangladesh. Her leadership will not be questioned in her party. No one will dare to openly criticise her role in the party. There is no scope for practicing democracy within her party. So she will remain as the supreme leader of the BNP which has been made her personal and family property. It must be questioned whether a political party, which is of course a people's organisation, can be run on the whims of a leader?

What will BNP do under her leadership in the coming days? How will she overcome the debacle her party is now facing? The present situation cannot be compared to the ones prevailing in the past when she assumed the party, held in 1984. After his ouster from the presidency by then army Chief General HM Ershad on March 24, 1982, the then BNP chief Abdus Sattar gradually became inactive in the party. At this critical juncture, Khaleda was made vice-chairperson of the party in March 1983. At an extended meeting of the party, she made her first political speech in April the same year. And she was elected chairperson of the party on May 10, 1984.

Some senior BNP leaders did not accept Khaleda as the party chief and they revolted, splitting the party several times. But in their bids they could not succeed as almost all of the BNP leaders remained loyal to her leadership. By refusing to join the 1986 parliamentary polls under General Ershad's government, she appeared as the "uncompromising leader". Like all other opposition parties, her BNP also boycotted the 1988 parliamentary polls held under the Ershad regime. Her stance then was appreciated by people. She got the reward. People voted her party to power in 1991, and she had become the prime minister. Again she assumed the office of the prime minister in 2001 after a break of five years.

But this time, the situation is different. The 2014 parliamentary election in which her party did not join shattered her dream to return to the power. She must now wait for the next election. When will the next election be held? One year, two years or after five years? No one but Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina can give any specific timeframe. So, the situation has left Khaleda Zia in a challenging position. She has to demonstrate the wisdom of a real leader. She needs to reassess her strategy. She must allow inner party democracy and listen to the voices of her party leaders. Her party needs a thorough postmortem of the strategies it followed in the past to chalk out a new course of action. She must start working without any delay to overcome her party's organisational weakness which forced her to depend excessively on Jamaat to wage street agitation. The future must favour her party if she focuses on strengthening the organisation. If she dreams of other alternative ways to return to power, it may again turn as a nightmare for her party.

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