

# Khaleda knew it beforehand

Alleges Ashraf on Aug 17 series bomb blasts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League spokesperson Syed Ashraful Islam yesterday alleged that then prime minister Khaleda Zia had prior knowledge of the countrywide blasts in August 17, 2005.

"We have evidence that Khaleda Zia not only knew about the blasts; she also gave full support to the attackers," he said while addressing a rally at the party's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue.

"Through the attack," he added, "militant organisations declared war against the nation."

The Dhaka city AL organised the rally marking the anniversary of the August 17 bomb attacks.

On this day in 2005, around 500 bombs exploded at 300 locations in 63 out of 64 districts within half an hour from 11:30am. The Jama'atul

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Wife and other family members leave United Hospital on receiving the body of Mohammad Aslam, 58, who died at the hospital two days ago. The hospital agreed to release the body only after the family signed a deal to pay dues of Tk 15 lakh in the next five months.

PHOTO: STAR

# Khaleda 'insolvent' to clear party fee

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froze all eight bank accounts she had on charges of financial anomalies. Later in 2009, it allowed her to draw not more than Tk 50,000 in a month from two of the accounts each.

Aazam, also an adviser to the BNP chairperson, said she would pay all her dues once the NBR unfroze her other six accounts.

According to his own dues, Aazam said he could not pay the fees due to his insolvency. "I have sought time from the party. As soon as I have money, I will pay all the outstanding fees."

The story doesn't end here. Almost all the BNP lawmakers of the ninth JS and more than 400 leaders and members of the national standing committee, national executive committee, advisory council, vice-chairmen and secretaries also dodged the fees regularly.

There are only a few exceptions, however. For instance, former speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, a standing committee member, cleared all dues from January 2010 to July 2014 by paying Tk 67,000 through a cheque in July, sources in the BNP's central office said.

They said a few other leaders also cleared their dues last July. Though

they claim to have regularly contacted leaders requesting them to pay the fees, they got little response.

About the contribution of the grassroots to the party's central fund, they said the amount was not significant.

Contacted, BNP standing committee members MK Anwar, Tariqul Islam and Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman stressed the need for paying the monthly fees regularly for smooth functioning of the party and said they would clear their dues very soon.

According to the BNP's constitution, the party fund is constituted by the fees and donations of members and well-wishers of the party.

The 2009 national council of the party fixed Tk 100 as the monthly fee for a national standing committee member, Tk 500 for a vice-chairman and an adviser to the BNP chief, Tk 300 for a secretary and Tk 100 for a member of national executive committee.

In the last four years, the party has been able to collect only Tk 26.68 lakh in monthly fees till March this year while the outstanding amount is Tk 40 lakh.

This means, the party has on an average collected less than Tk 7 lakh a year only.

However, their expenditures were

astonishingly higher than their income.

In 2012, BNP's income stood around Tk 1.8 crore whereas it spent nearly Tk 2.27 crore.

In its latest audit report submitted to the Election Commission on August 14, the BNP showed its earning at a little over Tk 76 lakh in 2013 while the expenditure was Tk 2.27 crore.

This also depicts a major slump in its earning in 2013 from the previous year.

When BNP's Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed came out after submitting the audit report, journalists asked him how they had met the deficit.

In reply, he said the money had been arranged from earlier savings of the party fund.

He also said fees received from the party leaders at all levels are the main source of BNP's income.

But the picture of fee collection against the expenditures puts in question what he said.

A senior BNP leader, on condition of anonymity, said they collect donations from party leaders and well-wishers ahead of any big events like rallies, processions and hartals. And all these donations remain undocu-

mented. He claimed other major parties do the same.

The discrepancy between the income and the expenditure of the BNP only mirrors the lack of transparency in fund management that exists in the major political parties of the country.

Centre for Policy Dialogue on May 17 released a study, saying political parties in their constitutions mention membership fees, donations and income from assets as sources of funding, but in practice the funds are collected from a variety of non-transparent sources.

"Funds are mostly provided by business men and remain undocumented. This builds a collusive compact between politicians and businessmen and eventually leads to corruption," said political scientist Prof Rounaq Jahan, who led the study.

None of the successive governments has taken any step to bring transparency in the parties' income and expenditure.

The EC in 2011 had moved to introduce state funding system to bring transparency in election expenditures of the parties. It had also drafted a law to this end. But the move never saw the light.

# Hospital releases body

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"The rest of the money we will pay by the stipulated time," she said.

On Saturday the hospital authority had refused to release the body of Aslam, who had died Friday afternoon, on the ground of his family's failure to pay the outstanding dues.

After his nearly one and a half month-long treatment for lung infection at the Coronary Care Unit (CCU) of the hospital, the total bill amounted to Tk 31 lakh.

The family had earlier paid Tk 12 lakh and also had to spend about Tk 2.5 lakh for purchasing blood during different phases of his treatment.

Siraj Uddin, a senior executive with accounts section of the hospital, said that the family's outstanding dues were Tk 19

lakh.

"We offered them a discount of Tk 4 lakh on humanitarian grounds," he said.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Mohammad Nasim yesterday termed the hospital management's earlier decision of not releasing the body "disappointing".

Answering to questions at a programme at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity, Nasim said private hospitals should also consider humanitarian grounds alongside doing business as the health sector is service-oriented.

"I came to know about this incident through newspapers. I'll form a probe committee tomorrow to look into the matter," M M Niaz Uddin, secretary to the health ministry, told BBC Bangla last night.

# Trial possible

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"But the issue of mutiny involved in the assassination of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was never raised," he regretted.

The then chief of army staff, Gen Mustafizur Rahman, said there was still scope to hold the trial for mutiny. He urged the then judge advocate general, who was a senior army officer and expert on military laws and regulations, to speak in detail about it.

The judge advocate general supported the views of Gen Mustafiz. He said the trial for the Bangabandhu killing was being held in the civil court after the scrapping of the Indemnity Ordinance of 1975. "But the trial for mutiny was not held," he added.

The indemnity ordinance promulgated by president Khandaker Moshtaque on September 26, 1975, indemnified the killers of Bangabandhu and imposed a bar on taking of any legal or disciplinary action against those who were involved in the mutiny.

The Awami League-led government scrapped the Indemnity Ordinance in 1996 and began the trial of Bangabandhu's killers in a civil court. The trial was eventually completed with death penalty given to 12 convicts. Of them, five were hanged in early 2010, six are on the run and one has died.

However, after the discussion, the parliamentary body asked the defence ministry to come up with a detailed report elaborating action, if any, taken against the personnel involved in the August 15 incident.

The ministry was also asked to

inform the committee whether any measure had been taken regarding the army personnel who were victimised on the day.

The committee, however, could not follow up on the suggestions due to constraints of time. Within a few months of the meeting, parliament was dissolved.

"We did not have time to make progress as the tenure of the then parliament came to an end," Gen KM Shafiqullah, chief of the parliamentary body, told The Daily Star on Saturday.

In the eighth parliament [2001-2006] dominated by the BNP, the parliamentary standing committee on the defence ministry never discussed the issue. Interestingly, the parliamentary body in the ninth parliament [2009-2014] followed in the footsteps of its immediate predecessor.

Shafiqullah, who was army chief until Gen Zia replaced him on August 24, 1975, however, said it was possible to hold the trial on charge of mutiny if the government had made the move.

Major General (retd) Moiul Hossain Chowdhury, who was acting as adjutant general of the army after August 15 and was later appointed adjutant general, in his book, "Silent Witness of a General", said there was no move to contain the mutiny.

In his view, those who began the mutiny and those who inspired it and those who were present and did not use force to contain the unruly army personnel would have faced charges in connection with the mutiny had there been any move to try them by court martial.

# Fighting escalates

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A push into the city limits of the stricken 420,000-strong industrial hub would be a major breakthrough for government forces after four months of fighting that has claimed more than 2,100 lives and brought the region to the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe.

Ukraine also ramped up the stakes before the talks in Germany by alleging another military convoy including three Grad rocket systems crossed over from Russia.

The fresh claims come as a furor still swirls over Kiev's earlier boasts that it destroyed part of a Russian armoured convoy that breached the frontier Thursday.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin said yesterday's talks with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov would "not be easy" as Germany also demanded that Moscow clarify rebel claims that they had received hundreds of fighters trained in Russia to shore up their insurgency.

"It is important to stop the flow of weapons and mercenaries from Russia," Klimkin wrote on Twitter yesterday.

A Kremlin spokesman denied Moscow had sent "equipment" across the border, its latest dismissal of persistent allegations by the West that it is arming the rebels.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian government recognized the contents of 262 Russian vehicles as humanitarian aid for war-weary civilians in the eastern part of the country, according to a statement from the Ukrainian Cabinet office, reported

CNN.

Ukraine received a list of the inventory on Saturday -- it was signed by the head of the regional ICRC delegation to Russia. The aid will be transported to Ukraine through the Donetsk checkpoint, the statement said.

The West and Kiev fear the convoy could be a "Trojan horse" to help the rebels in eastern Ukraine, or provide Moscow with an excuse to send in the 20,000 troops that NATO says it has massed on the border.

The United Nations says more than 285,000 people have fled the fighting in the east.

Authorities in the besieged main rebel city of Donetsk said shelling killed 10 civilians and wounded eight in 24 hours as government forces tightened the vice on rebels hunkered down there.

An AFP journalist found the wreckage of houses still smouldering after a ferocious bombardment of a western suburb of the mining hub.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called on Moscow to "clarify" bragging by a top separatist leader in the city that troop reinforcements trained across the border had arrived to prop up the ailing insurgency.

Alexander Zakharchenko, "prime minister" of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, said in a video posted online Saturday that rebel forces had welcomed 1,200 personnel "who have received four months of training on Russian territory" as well as 150 items of military hardware, including tanks.

# Another rice variety ready for release

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Bri dhan-62, meant for rain-fed Aman season, is 4.2 metric tons (MT) per hectare while the proposed hi-zincine -- Bri dhan-64 -- has yield potentials of over 6 MT per hectare.

The National Seed Board (NSB) is scheduled to consider the release of Bri dhan-64 at its next meeting later this week, sources at the Ministry of Agriculture told The Daily Star.

Both Bri dhan-62 and Bri dhan-64, which are capable of fighting diarrhoea and pneumonia-induced childhood deaths and stunting, have been developed by Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) breeders through application of biological fortification (biofortification).

Biofortification is a process, in which plant breeders search for seeds having high nutritional value among

existing varieties of crops. They then crossbreed the high-nutrient varieties with high-yielding varieties to provide seeds with high yield and increased nutritional value.

The BRRI breeders developed the high-zinc rice varieties with support from HarvestPlus, a global biofortification mission launched back in 2004 under the Washington-based global agro-science coordinating body Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research.

India lags behind as Bangladeshi breeders have already succeeded in developing two hi-zinc rice varieties -- one (Bri dhan-62) for Aman season and the other (Bri dhan-64) for Boro season.

HarvestPlus Director Howarth E Bouis told The Daily Star that in two years India was expected to come up with some high-zinc rice varieties.

As per the mandate of the international collaboration, the zinc-enriched rice varieties developed in Bangladesh are now expected to reach Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam.

Some 27 countries including Bangladesh have so far released different biofortified crops and more are going to join the bandwagon. Some of the other biofortified crops released in other countries include iron-enriched beans and pearl millets, zinc-rich wheat and vitamin-A-enriched cassava, maize and sweet potato.

HarvestPlus is spending \$10 million for zinc-rice programme between 2013 and 2018, according to Bangladesh Country Manager Md Khairul Bashar.

"We're planning to reach out to half a million households by 2016 with commercialised zinc-rice seeds. The

long-term objective is to develop sustainable markets for zinc-enriched seeds and grain, reaching a market share of over three percent of rice by 2018," Bashar said.

Alamgir Hossain, the main BRRI breeder behind the zinc-enriched rice varieties, said that after NSB released the first high-zinc rice last year, the government, NGOs and private seed associations all together supplied over 10,000 farmers with seeds and informed them of the technologies to be used in cultivating crops during the current Aman season.

To assess rice and total dietary zinc intakes in the country, the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Diseases Research, Bangladesh and the University of California, Davis, are collaborating on nutritional research of zinc-enriched rice in Bangladesh.

# Mohsin slams journos again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Social Welfare Minister Syed Mohsin Ali yesterday alleged many journalists make news reports in exchange for money.

"Many of them write news stories in exchange for money. I wish I could teach them a lesson, but I haven't found a way," he said while addressing a Janmastomi rally as the chief guest at Natun Kalibari in his hometown, Moulvibazar.

"I hate those who do it in exchange for money," added the minister, who on August 9 said journalists are "dirty chaps and of bad character".

Mohsin, however, said he had no complaint against those who were doing their job honestly. He called upon all newsmen to work in the country's interest.

"Newsmen in Sylhet and Nabiganj had tried to demean me in many ways but could do nothing since I was right," said the minister, apparently referring to his previous comment.

He said the Hindus were freely holding religious programmes with Sheikh Hasina in office.

On August 9, the minister said newsmen did not know how to deal with people, and they always misinterpreted things. He claimed the prime minister praised the comments he had made earlier about the media

toilets are very dirty, this is no kind of life," said Feriel al-Zaaneen who is sheltering at a UN school and hasn't been able to have a shower in over a month.

Muntaha al-Kafarna, a mother of nine who has been living in a small tent in the school courtyard did manage to shower at a nearby hospital, but says her family is really suffering.

"My sons have caught lice and nits because they can't shower here," she said.

"I wish a missile would hit us, me and my children. Dying is better than this life."

In Ram