

Khaleda appears

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Khaleda that the atmosphere of court remains calm when she is present there.

The BNP chief, who appeared before the makeshift court at Bakshi Bazar in compliance with the court's previous order, left the court premises around noon.

Earlier on the day, the apex court deferred till November 16 the date for hearing three separate appeals filed by Khaleda regarding the two graft cases.

During the hearing before the SC, advocate Khandker Mahbub Hossain, counsel for the BNP chief, said he was not prepared for the hearing on the appeals.

Khurshid Alam Khan, lawyer for the Anti-Corruption Commission, opposed the adjournment prayers, stating Khaleda's lawyers prayed for the adjournment before the SC while they took time from the trial court on the grounds that the appeals were pending with the apex court. They were doing this only for delaying the trial proceedings of the cases.

A good number of leaders and activists of BNP thronged Chankharpul area near the court premises carrying banners, placards and festoons to welcome their party chief. They also chanted slogans, demanding the cancellation of proceedings of the cases.

Security measures were beefed up in and around the court premises, and

entry of commoners to the area was restricted to avert any untoward incidents on the BNP chairperson's arrival.

Police also blocked a road leading to Bakshi Bazar from Dhaka University's Jagannath Hall intersection. It caused immense sufferings for the residents in the area.

On October 26, the judge asked for her mandatory attendance yesterday after Khaleda had skipped three previous hearing dates "on grounds of security." The last time she appeared for the court's hearing on the cases was on September 17 this year.

Advocate Sanaullah Miah represented BNP Senior Vice-Chairman Tarique Rahman in his absence, while four others were also present in the makeshift court yesterday. Three others have been absconding.

Meanwhile, ACC Deputy Director Harun-or-Rashid, also the complainant of both the cases, appeared before the court to give his full statements in the cases.

The anti-graft body had lodged the two cases in 2008 and 2011.

According to the charge sheet in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case, Khaleda, Tarique and four others embezzled Tk 2.1 crore by forming the charity that exists only on paper.

During the four-party alliance government's tenure, Khaleda and three others abused power to set up a Charitable Trust named after Ziaur Rahman, according to the ACC.



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia waves to her supporters as she appears before a Dhaka court in the capital to attend the hearing in the Zia Orphanage and Zia Charitable Trust graft cases yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

'Parasites' feast on ruling AL

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according to the sources.

This is how over 100 such organisations have been holding programmes at different places in and outside the capital since the AL took office in 2009.

More than 20 organisations have the word "Muktijoddha" (freedom fighter) tagged with them. They include Muktijoddha Projonmo League, Muktijoddha Tarun League, Awami Muktijoddha League, Amra Muktijoddhar Sontan, Muktijoddha League and Muktijoddha Janata League.

The organisations that use the names of Bangabandhu and his family members include Bangabandhu Shishu Kishore Mela, Bangamata Parishad, Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnessa Mujib Parishad and Jananetri Parishad.

'PARASITE OR DIRT'

These organisations do not have constitutions, full-fledged committees or permanent offices. But their "owners" make the best use of their relations with ministers and other powerful leaders who attend the programmes regularly.

Sources said the masterminds behind these organisations use their

influence for transfer of government officials and securing tenders from the city corporation, Wasa, Water Development Board, Local Government Engineering Department, Department of Food and other public offices.

Contacted, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said when a party comes to power such organisations grow like "parasites or dirt".

"Some people float organisations for getting benefits while some extort money using the organisations," he told The Daily Star, adding that some people involved with the AL politics but having no posts form such organisations to be in the limelight.

Interestingly, Obaidul is among the AL big shots who attended such programmes. Just to name a few, he spoke at a programme organised by Bangabandhu Academy at Dhaka Reporters Unity on June 17, 2011, at a Bangalee Jatiyatabadi Parishad discussion at the same venue on October 6 the same year and at a Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnessa Mujib Parishad event in Laxmipur on May 3 this year.

Asked why he attended

programmes organised by such "parasites," Obaidul told The Daily Star yesterday that he only attended the events organised by AL leaders and activists who are devoted yet ignored in the party.

"I was very selective in this regard. I never went to programmes of those organisations that are involved in extortion or those that always seek benefit."

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque said, "Most of these organisations are a fake and were launched with ill motives."

Asked what they were doing to check it, he said they would take action if anyone lodged official complaints in this regard.

Another 20 or so organisations use the name of AL and its election symbol. They include Naukar Samarthak Goshti, Naukar Natun Projonmo, Awami Projonmo League, Awami Samabay League and Matshajibi League.

Humayun Kabir Mizi, general secretary of Bangabandhu Academy and president of Naukar Samarthak Goshti, said some AL leaders and pro-AL businessmen donated money to

arrange programmes.

Soon after the formation of the cabinet in 2009, some top AL leaders who did not get any cabinet post started joining programmes arranged by these organisations.

Among them are Suranjit Sengupta, Mohammad Nasim, Obaidul Quader, Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir and Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya. In those programmes, they used to blast government activities, drawing extensive media coverage.

Suranjit, Obaidul and Muhiuddin were later inducted into that cabinet. Nasim and Maya are members of the current cabinet.

Suranjit Sengupta, who was railway minister in the previous cabinet, started to join the programmes of those organisations again after he lost the job in 2012. The same is true for Hasan Mahmud, former forest minister.

After getting the charge of communications ministry in 2011, Obaidul Quader stopped attending these programmes and started criticising the activities of these organisations.

AUDIENCE AND MEDIA COVERAGE

Abdul Malek, who sells cigarette near

the Press Club, is one of those who supply audience for all programmes and all venues.

"I will supply people, but you have to pay me Tk 80 for each person. And you have to confirm me a day before the programme," he said when this correspondent approached him in guise of an organiser.

Several other suppliers said the audience would not stay at a programme for more than three hours as they would attend more than one programme on a single day.

Media coverage is arranged by certain reporters and photographers, allegedly in exchange for money. They send through emails the news and photos or videos of the programmes to the mainstream media.

The mainstream media often cannot drop the news because influential ministers and AL leaders attend these programmes and give fiery speeches.

THE CONFLICT WITHIN

On June 21 this year, Bangladesh Deshratno Parishad organised a discussion, titled "Evil diplomatic efforts by BNP-Jamaat," at Shilpakala Academy.

In the opening, Razia Mostofa, who

claimed to be president of Dhanmondi Mahila Awami League, took the microphone and claimed she was the founder of Deshratno Parishad. She also showed some documents in support of her claim.

Then one Chitta Ranjan claimed himself to be its president and organiser of the event.

Sources said such conflicts within these organisations were very common.

Interestingly, only a handful of people are behind all these organisations.

Former Krishak League leader MA Karim and Dhaka City AL leader Abdul Haque Sabuj are behind about 40 and 30 organisations respectively, according to the sources.

Contacted, Karim said he did not own any organisation. "But I attend programmes when the founders of the organisations invite me."

Sabuj said they had an alliance of 22 organisations, but he himself floated just one organisation, Bangalee Jatiyatabadi Parishad.

Asked if his organisation is registered, he said, "Why do I need to register?"

China offers vision

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He later welcomed Russian President Vladimir Putin, with whom he has a shared outlook on issues such as trade, investment and geopolitical interests, including a wariness of the United States.

It was "time to gather fruit" from "the tree of Russian-Chinese relations", Xi told Putin, as the two sides signed agreements stepping up their multi-billion-dollar energy and resources cooperation.

CHINESE DREAM

Xi told the business meeting his "Asia-Pacific dream" was based on a "shared destiny" of peace, development and mutual benefit in the region.

The comments have echoes of the "Chinese dream" he regularly speaks of, an unspecified but much-discussed term with connotations of national resurgence.

Beijing -- a veto-wielding permanent member of the UN Security Council -- is leveraging the decades-long boom that has made it the world's second-largest economy to increase its regional and global heft.

But it stresses a policy of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs -- a stance that has enabled it to do business with leaders seen as pariahs in the West.

Its relationship with the United States has been marred by tensions over trade disputes, cyberspying and human rights issues, while Beijing is embroiled in enduring disputes with Tokyo over islands in the East China Sea, and with rival claimants in the South China Sea.

Under Xi, it has been asserting those claims more firmly.

"China wants to live in harmony with all its neighbours," he said yesterday.

Nonetheless, relations with Japan have plunged in recent years with both sides sending ships and aircraft to the islands, which are controlled by Tokyo and claimed by Beijing, raising fears of clashes.

Hopes of an ice-breaking formal meeting between Xi and Abe on the sidelines of the summit have risen

following statements by the two countries agreeing to try to improve ties.

But Japanese officials say the key sentence in their statement was "very carefully written" to avoid Tokyo formally acknowledging that there was a dispute on sovereignty over the islands.

"We did not give in to the Chinese demand," one official said.

'NOT THAT SCARY'

China's decades-long economic boom has seen it overtake Japan as the world's second-largest economy. But its growth reached a five-year low in the third quarter.

Xi said the risks it faced were "not that scary" and slower expansion was expected as its economy matures.

China currently suffers from a deflating property bubble, a crack-down on corruption blamed for curbing some business, and weak demand from Europe.

Even so it was expected to invest more than \$1.25 trillion abroad over the next decade, Xi said, while outbound Chinese tourists would exceed 500 million over the next five years.

As "China's overall national strength grows", he told his audience, it would be able and willing to offer "new initiatives and visions for enhancing regional cooperation".

A draft summit communique seen by AFP calls for a "strategic study" on the Beijing-backed FTAA. But Michael Froman, the US Trade Representative, told reporters Sunday: "It's not the launch of a new organisation; it's not the launch of a new FTA."

FTAAP, he said, was a "long-term aspiration" to be achieved only through other existing negotiations such as TPP, which was "clearly" the priority for the world's biggest economy.

The communique refers to "the eventual realisation" of the FTAA.

But whether the leaders will endorse the so-called "Beijing Roadmap" towards the FTAA remained unclear.

PM to visit Malaysia next month

3 deals likely

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur are likely to ink three deals during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's next month visit to Malaysia.

Diplomatic sources believe the deals are insignificant, but her visit to Malaysia, likely on December 3-4, would strengthen bilateral ties between the two nations.

This is a return visit at the invitation of Malaysian PM Najib Razak, who visited Dhaka in November 2013.

Foreign ministry sources said the two countries will sign three memoranda of understanding (MoUs) on promotion of tourism, cultural cooperation and visa exemption for diplomatic and official passport holders.

Meanwhile, an inter-ministerial meeting was held at the foreign ministry yesterday with its secretary Shahidul Haque. Various aspects of the visit were discussed, and inputs were sought from the relevant ministries to set priorities for the visit.

Although the priority areas are yet to be finalised, manpower export to

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Modi inducts 21 new faces

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right wing Bharatiya Janata Party and Suresh Prabhu of Shiv Sena are among the four new cabinet ministers.

The 17 new junior ministers include Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, the prominent Muslim face of BJP and eminent Bengali singer Babul Supriyo.

This was the first expansion of Modi's council of ministers since he led BJP to a landslide victory in the parliamentary elections and became the prime minister in May this year.

Parrrikar, known for his efficiency and honesty, is set to be India's new defence minister that will enable Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, who has also been holding defence portfolio for the last six months, to give more time to his main beat of finance and lift Indian economy out of slowdown.

Prabhu, a former power minister in Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, senior BJP leader Jagat Prakash Nadda and Jat leader from Haryana state Birender Singh, who joined BJP ahead of recent Assembly elections which brought BJP to power in that state, were the other cabinet ministers to take oath of office and secrecy.

Senior BJP leaders Bandaru Dattatreya and Rajiv Pratap Rudy, who were also ministers in the Vajpayee government, and Mahesh Sharma, newly-elected lawmaker from Gautam

Buddh Nagar bordering Delhi, were sworn-in as ministers of state with independent charge.

Among the 14 ministers of state sworn-in are first-time lawmaker Jayant Sinha, son of India's former finance and foreign minister Yashwant Sinha, and Olympian silver medal winning shooter Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore.

Prabhu is widely praised for his performance as a minister in earlier NDA governments and Modi is understood to have wanted him in his ministerial team.

The eastern state of Bihar, which elects a new legislative assembly next year, has strategically been given three new ministers and now has eight in Modi government. The new ministers from the state are Rajiv Pratap Rudy, Ram Kripal Yadav, who joined BJP recently from Lalu Prasad's party Rashtriya Janata Dal, and Giriraj Singh, a first-time MP known most for his controversial comments.

The new southern state of Telangana got a representative in BJP's Bandaru Dattatreya who was sworn in as minister of state with independent charge.

Hours before yesterday's oath-taking ceremony, Modi met his new ministers over tea in the morning.

Yesterday's expansion took the number of members in the Modi's council of ministers to 66.

US diplomat and Pakistan lobbyist faces spy probe

AGENCIES

A veteran US State Department diplomat and longtime Pakistan expert is under federal investigation as part of a counterintelligence probe and has had her security clearances withdrawn.

The FBI searched the Northwest Washington home of Robin L. Raphael last month, and her State Department office was also examined and sealed, officials said.

Raphael, a fixture in Washington's diplomatic and think-tank circles, was placed on administrative leave last month, and her contract with the State Department was allowed to expire this week.

Two US officials described the investigation as a counterintelligence matter, which typically involves allegations of spying on behalf of foreign governments, reports Washington Post.

Raphael retired from the diplomatic corps in 2005 after 30 years of service and was hired as a contractor in 2009 by the US embassy in Islamabad to oversee development aid and civilian assistance to Pakistan.

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No petition for mercy until review

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organiser of the infamous Al-Badr Bahini responsible for abducting, torturing and killing freedom fighters, intellectuals and pro-liberation people in 1971.

Law Minister Anisul Huq had said that Kamaruzzaman could be executed on the basis of an order of the apex court unless anything to the contrary was stated in its full verdict.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka central jail has already been asked to prepare for the execution of Kamaruzzaman.

However, the confusion over Kamaruzzaman's right to seek a review is yet to be dispelled. Both the prosecution and the defence say the ambiguity will be gone as soon as the full verdict of the apex court is available.

The law minister had said that Kamaruzzaman would get seven days' time after he was handed his death verdict by the SC to plead for presidential mercy.

"Otherwise, he will be executed immediately," the minister said.

However, Shishir Manir yesterday

termed the law minister's comment on the time-frame "illegal and confusing".

"We urge the minister to refrain from making such comments," Shishir said.

After receiving the death warrant from the International Crimes Tribunal-2, Kamaruzzaman will get seven days' time as per Section 991 of old Jail Code and 15 days' time as per the same section of new Jail Code to seek presidential mercy, he said.

Asked about the defence lawyer's

claim, the law minister yesterday refused to make any comment to The Daily Star.

"No comment. I will not make any comment," he said.

Meanwhile yesterday, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam told reporters at his office that the ICT-2 would issue the death warrant for Kamaruzzaman after receiving the Appellate Division judgment.

It depends on the SC whether it will send the full judgment or short judgment to the ICT-2, he added.