

Khaleda faces 13 cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is facing 13 cases. Of the lawsuits, two are Zia Orphanage Trust and Zia Charitable Trust graft cases in which she secured bail after appearing before a Dhaka court yesterday.

A High Court bench yesterday sent the BNP chief's four petitions, filed in 2008 challenging the legality of the proceedings of Barapukuria coal mine, Gatco and Niko corruption cases, to the chief justice for "necessary orders".

The cases were lodged by the Anti-Corruption Commission. Khaleda stands accused in five other cases filed during the ongoing nonstop blockade called by the BNP-led 20-party alliance. The investigation into the cases is underway.

On January 23, two cases were lodged with Jatrabari Police Station in the capital against the BNP chief for "instigating" an arson attack on a bus in the area that killed three people.

Three days later, Khaleda was sued for "instigating" another arson attack on a vehicle at Chaudhagram in Comilla. Several were killed in the incident.

She was accused as the mastermind in another arson case filed with Phultala Police Station in Khulna in connection with torching a bus in Damodor in February.

Police in the case statement mentioned that the BNP-Jamaat men set fire to the vehicle on the BNP chairperson's instructions.

Khaleda was named the prime accused in another case filed on February 16 for launching a crude bomb attack on a rally of Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan outside her

office at Gulshan in the capital. The case was lodged with Gulshan Police Station.

Besides, three defamation cases were also filed with courts last year against the BNP chief.

PETITIONS
An HC bench was set to deliver its verdict on Khaleda's petition against Barapukuria coal mine graft case yesterday.

Citing an order on the petition, ACC counsel Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star that the bench sent the plea to the chief justice due to "unprofessional and unethical conduct of the lawyers for the petitioner [Khaleda]".

He said the lawyers did not appear before the bench for placing arguments, although the bench had fixed three dates for the hearing.

On April 2, Khaleda had submitted an application to the chief justice through her lawyers, expressing her no-confidence in the HC bench. In the application, she also prayed for transferring the plea to another bench.

Khaleda's lawyer Bodroddoza Badal yesterday informed the HC bench about his client's no-confidence.

Attorney General Mahbub Alam said the chief justice might send the petitions to another bench or return those to the same one led by Justice Moinul Islam Chowdhury.

The ACC filed the Niko and Gatco corruption cases in 2007 and Barapukuria coal mine graft case in 2008.

Following Khaleda's petitions, the HC issued rules upon the ACC and the government to explain why the cases should not be scrapped and why their initiations against her should not be declared illegal.



A shop that sells souvenirs, photos, and books of BNP leaders open after three months yesterday, top. The BNP central office at Naya Paltan, next door to the shop, gets a good cleaning, left, and leaders, activists and supporters of the party gather outside, right.

PHOTO: STAR

KHALEDA CASES

- 2 under trial
- 3 pending with HC with petitions for scrapping
- 8 under investigation

Relief, after three months' tension

FROM PAGE 1
soon and the government will have adequate time to focus on governance issues.

"We are very happy. Our strategy has worked," an AL central leader said, wishing anonymity. "A positive wind has started blowing in the political arena."

Khaleda had been staying in her Gulshan office since January 3. The government had made several efforts so that she returned to her house, but those went in vain.

Asked, AL Presidium Member Nuhul-Alam Lenin said a positive political scenario was prevailing in the country for the last two days.

The government will now allow the

BNP to hold rallies and processions, said sources in the government.

On Saturday, the government allowed the BNP men to enter their party headquarters at Nayapaltan, which law enforcers had locked on January 3.

Contacted, Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said the BNP took the city elections as an exit path from its ongoing movement, which apparently detached the party from people due to its violent nature.

"Now the question is how much the BNP will be able to utilise the opportunity, refraining itself from falling into the trap of provocation," he said.

On the other hand, Iftekhar said,

the challenge for the government was to prove that a free and fair election was possible under it.

"The prospect of this opportunity depends on the extent to which the two sides are able to ensure peaceful democratic practices before and after the elections," he added.

On the latest developments, Zahirul Islam, a private service holder, said, "It is a positive step. It gave us some relief. We hope Khaleda Zia will call off the blockade. And the government will open talks to reach an agreement with the BNP."

COURT PROCEEDINGS

Khaleda entered the court premises at Bakshibazar around 10:35am amid

tight security.

She was accompanied by party Vice-chairperson Selima Rahman and President of its women front Shirin Sultana.

Before delivering the order on bail petitions, Judge Abu Ahmad Jomadar said he was compelled to issue the arrest warrants for the sake of continuing the trial.

He had no intention to send Khaleda to jail, he added.

None of the three accused, including Khaleda, who were on bail, was present in the court on February 25, prompting the court to cancel their bails and issue the arrest orders, the judge said.

The court then granted Khaleda bail

attaching some conditions: She and the two other accused must appear before the court on every date.

"If you cannot appear before the court on every date, you may ask your lawyers to file a petition seeking exemption from personal appearance. I will grant the petition. On your behalf, your lawyers can appear before the court like another accused Tarique Rahman," the judge told Khaleda.

The prosecution did not oppose the bail considering Khaleda's status, social and political dignity and age, chief prosecutor Mosharrif Hossain Kajol told the court.

The court also granted bail to two other accused -- former BNP lawmaker Kazi Salimul Haque and businessman

Sharfuddin Ahmed.

At the beginning of the proceedings, Khaleda's lawyers questioned the legality of the arrest warrants.

The prosecutor objected to it and asked the defence to omit the phrases questioning the "legality of issuance of the arrest orders".

He said the arrest warrants were absolutely legal, a view the judge supported.

Khaleda's lawyers then deleted the phrases from the bail petitions.

The court allowed Khaleda's lawyers to cross-examine the complainant of the cases, said Harunur Rashid, deputy director of the ACC.

The court adjourned the hearing until May 5.



After spending about three months at her Gulshan office, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is home again around 12:30pm yesterday. Inset: part of security outside the court where Khaleda appeared earlier in the day.

PHOTO: STAR

KEY EVENTS SINCE JAN-3

- JAN 3:** Police confine Khaleda to her Gulshan office and pick up Rizvi Ahmed and admit him to a hospital
- JAN 4:** DMP imposes a ban on rallies in the city
- JAN 5:** Police prevent Khaleda from going out of her office; she announces country-wide nonstop blockade
- JAN 6:** The blockade starts
- JAN 13:** Gun attack on Khaleda's adviser Reaz Rahman in Gulshan
- JAN 18:** Police remove barricade and additional policemen from Khaleda's office
- JAN 19:** Khaleda announces the blockade to continue; Opts to stay in her office
- JAN 24:** Khaleda's son Arafat Rahman Koko dies in Kuala Lumpur; PM fails to meet Khaleda and console her due to a closed gate at Khaleda's office; Khaleda expresses gratitude for Hasina's visit
- JAN 27:** Fakhru is taken on remand
- JAN 31:** Power, cable, internet, mobile and landline connections to Khaleda's office cut; Power restored after 19 hours
- FEB 1:** 20-party's 72-hour hartal starts
- FEB 3:** Hartal extended until the end of the week

- FEB 16:** Minister Shahjahan Khan leads a rally that surrounds Khaleda's office
- FEB 21:** Khaleda skips Shaheed Minar programme on Ekushey February
- MAR 2:** Arrest warrants issued for Khaleda in two graft cases
- MAR 4:** Court issues warrant allowing police to search Khaleda's office
- MAR 9:** 20-party relaxes hartal for 12 hours to celebrate the Tiger's qualifying for the quarterfinals of the cricket world cup
- MAR 10:** BNP's Salahuddin Ahmed goes missing from an Uttara house
- MAR 13:** Khaleda appears before the media after 52 days
- MAR 18:** EC announces polls schedule for three city corporations
- MAR 24:** After 38 days of hartal on all working days since Feb 1, 20-party announces no hartal on Mar 25
- MAR 26:** Khaleda skips Independence Day programme in Savar
- MAR 30:** 48-hr hartal announced
- APR 4:** Police allow BNP men break the lock and enter their central office after 91 days
- APR 5:** Khaleda goes to the special court and returns to her residence

From office to court, then finally home

FROM PAGE 1
She then had breakfast brought from her residence.

Around 9:00am, Khaleda's sister-in-law Kaniz Fatema arrived at the office and talked to her for a while.

Around 9:40am, the BNP chief along with her party leaders and staffs came down to the ground floor.

Party leaders and staffs hugged each other and said goodbye before parting, Shamsuddin Dider, staff of Khaleda's Press Wing, told this correspondent.

Khaleda got into her vehicle at 9:50am. She was accompanied by party Vice Chairman Selima Rahman, Mahila Dal General Secretary Shirin Sultana, and BNP chief's Special Assistant Shamsur Rahman Shimul

Biswas. Before the BNP chief left the office, her luggage was sent to her residence.

Her convoy headed for the court in the Bakshibazar area of Old Dhaka. Whenever the vehicle got stuck in traffic jam, she waved at small crowds on the roadside.

Khaleda reached the court at 10:35am.

Entering the courtroom, she stood next to a chair near the dock.

As Judge Abu Ahmed Jomadar of the Special Judge's Court-3 entered the courtroom, Khaleda's lawyer AM Mahub Uddin Khokon sought the judge's permission to allow his client to sit. Then the court proceedings

began.

At one point, Khaleda angrily said, "Someone is trying to take my photo."

The judge asked the journalists not to take any photo inside the courtroom.

Khaleda then said it was a policeman, not any journalist, who tried to take her photo.

The judge then said, "If anyone has taken a photo [of Khaleda], delete it." If such a photo is uploaded on any website or facebook, legal action would be taken against the person responsible.

There was confusion among party men and journalists whether the BNP chief would go to her residence or party's Nayapaltan central office,

which was opened on Saturday night after three months.

As the proceedings ended, Khaleda left the court around 11:40am and went straight to her residence "Firoza".

As she reached home around 12:40pm, some photojournalists tried to enter the house premises. But her security staffs barred them.

The BNP chief asked the security men to allow them in. Several photojournalists then entered the premises and took her photo.

"How are you?" she was quoted by a photojournalist as asking journalists.

[The story is based on the descriptions given by some party leaders and staff.]

Abbas threatens to turn to ICC over frozen tax money

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas threatened Sunday to turn to the International Criminal Court over Israel's refusal to fully release hundreds of millions of dollars in tax monies owed the Palestinian Authority.

In early January, Israel froze the monthly transfer of funds it collects on behalf of the PA as a punitive measure after the Palestinians moved to join the ICC.

But on Friday, Israel agreed to release the funds after deducting debts due for electricity, water and medical services. Speaking Sunday, Abbas confirmed

that two thirds of they money had been transferred.

"They said they were going to send the money and in the end they did, but a third of it was deducted - why?" he asked during a speech in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

"Now we have a new file to take to the ICC, first there was the (summer) war in Gaza, then there was the settlements and now the Palestinian leadership is considering presenting this issue to the court in due time."

The Palestinians would not accept anything but the full amount, he said. "We will not take the money until we get all of it: either you give us the full amount or we go to the ICC."