

# BNP telling lies ahead of Feb 8 verdict

## Alleges Quader

STAR REPORT

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday accused BNP leaders of lying ahead of the February 8 verdict in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case against Khaleda Zia.

He urged the leaders to come up with evidence regarding their allegation that they were being threatened and said that actions would be taken if the allegation was found to be true.

Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, made the statement while talking to reporters in Comilla. He went there to visit a flyover.

About the allegations that the BNP men were being arrested and threatened, Quader said, "BNP men are lying... they have no work but to lie... some of them are pathological liars."

He claimed that the BNP's registration as a political party would be revoked if it did not take part in the upcoming general election.

"They are bound to participate in the election."

Like in the other democratic countries, a free, fair and neutral election would be held in Bangladesh, Quader said, adding that the size of the poll-time cabinet would be smaller and that government would conduct only routine work.

"And the home ministry will work under the guidelines of the Election Commission during the polls," he added.

Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu yesterday alleged that Khaleda was dreaming about a "ghost government" for the next national polls.

"The demands Khaleda Zia made are out of the constitution. She could not provide a perfect roadmap for the national election," he added.

The BNP would never be able to come to power and people rejected Khaleda's "six conditions" for the next polls, Inu, also the president of JSD, said in a public meeting at Shekhahar High School ground in Kahaloo upazila in Bogra.

He said the BNP was plotting to foil the national elections.

He also said there was no relation

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BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia speaking at the national executive committee meeting of the party at Le Méridien Dhaka yesterday. About 15 minutes after she arrived at the venue, men in plainclothes started picking up BNP activists who had gathered there. They put them in minibuses and left.



PHOTO: BNP/COLLECTED

## Don't fall into any trap before polls

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The consequences of betrayal will not be good."

She went on, "From this meeting, I would like to urge all to remain united in any circumstances. There will be various plots and repressive acts against you. They will try to harass you in every way but don't be afraid."

BNP insiders say Khaleda wants to circulate a message among the ranks and files that the government might attempt to divide the party and bring a faction to the election.

After Khaleda was arrested and sent to jail during the army-backed caretaker regime, there was a split in the party.

Before the arrest, she expelled party's secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and appointed Khandaker Delwar Hossain to the post.

Party leaders fear the government might try to split the BNP again and the 20-party alliance if Khaleda is convicted in the Zia Orphanage Trust

graft case.

Khaleda said those who will maintain contact with both the government and the BNP can easily be identified and they will not be forgiven this time.

"I have forgiven the betrayers but this will not happen again because forgiveness is for once. I want to say if anyone of you betrays the party, keep in mind that the grassroots did not betray the party and they will never do that."

She promised to recognise those who will remain with the party in its bad days.

Khaleda also asked her fellow party men to wage protests in a peaceful and democratic way.

"We will have to be courageous to register our protest against any type of injustice and put up resistance against any injudicious move," she said at the inaugural session of the meeting.

"I also urge the country's people to involve in peaceful programmes of BNP and 20 parties."

KHALEDA'S KEY DEMANDS
Non-party election-time govt
Dissolving parliament before polls
No EVMs
Congenial voting atmosphere
Neutral role of EC
Deployment of army

Also at the programme, grassroots leaders asked the central leaders to actively participate in protests on streets as it was seen earlier that there was apparently no movement in the capital although there were huge agitations outside Dhaka.

### KHALEDA FOR FAIR POLLS

The BNP chief said people want a change and this change will come through elections.

She demanded an election-time non-party government, a congenial atmosphere for voting, dissolving

parliament before the polls, discarding the plan to use electronic voting machines, army deployment and neutral role of EC.

Khaleda called upon other political parties to get involved in BNP's movement by forging a national unity to save the country and ensure a credible and inclusive election.

She alleged that the government is using the police and the administration for political gain. "It is forcing police and the administration to serve its political interests. But they will work neutrally for democracy if they get a congenial atmosphere."

"We don't have any fear as the country's people, administration, police and the armed forces are with us."

She said the next election will be held in December as per the prime minister's announcement. "If so, why they have started the election campaign so early? They have no confidence in themselves as the boat [ruling AL's election symbol] has sunk. They

will not be able to win people's hearts through the campaign."

### 'COURT UNDER PRESSURE'

Khaleda alleged that the country's lower courts are now under the grip of the government and they do not have the power to deliver proper judgments.

"We have seen the consequences of delivering proper judgments. A chief justice had to leave the country for delivering the right verdict in Tarique Zia's case."

The former premier further said, "They are holding the trial [in the graft case] to keep the BNP out of election."

The meeting adopted a motion of condolence for the demise of international and national figures, including BNP leaders and activists, at different times.

Later, party secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir presented the party's organisational report. A videoed speech of BNP's Senior Vice Chairman Tarique Rahman was played on the occasion.

## Russian pilot 'killed in fighting' after plane downed in Syria

AFP, Moscow

Russian pilot was killed in Syria yesterday after parachuting into rebel-held territory when his plane was shot down, the Defence Ministry said.

"A Russian Su-25 aircraft crashed during a flight over the Idlib de-escalation zone. The pilot had enough time to announce he had ejected into the zone, under the control of al-Nusra Front fighters," the ministry said, quoted by Russian press agencies.

"The pilot was killed in fighting against terrorists."

It added that "according to preliminary reports, the plane was shot down by a portable anti-aircraft missile system."

The Russian army claimed it had killed "more than 30 al-Nusra Front fighters" during a strike with "high-precision weapons" in the area where the plane was shot down.

The region where the plane crashed is controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, a jihadist outfit dominated by Al-Qaeda's former Syrian affiliate.

Forces supporting president Bashar al-Assad's regime, backed by Russia, launched an offensive at the end of December to recapture the southeastern province of Idlib, the last enclave completely out of Damascus's control.

Opposition groups have in the past shot down Syrian planes, but rarely those of the Russian army.

In August 2016, five Russian soldiers were killed after their helicopter was shot down by rebel groups in Idlib.

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## Onion price

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November 23, it was fixed at \$850.

On January 20 this year, the rate was slashed by \$150 to \$800.

Harun Ur Rashid, president of importers and exporters association at Hili Land Port, said from now on, Bangladeshi traders can import onion as per their choice.

"We are hoping that onion prices would go down in the local markets in a couple of days after onion is imported under the fresh arrangements," he said.

Currently, each kilogramme of imported onion is being sold at Tk 60 in the local markets while it is Tk 55 in the wholesale markets.

## Tigers face tough task

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Mushfiquur Rahim's dismissal on the final ball of the day served only to exacerbate Bangladesh's situation. The umpire called for a review which showed that the ball had hit Mushfiquur's bat before bouncing off his foot and into the hands of Kusal Mendis at silly point.

Coming into the second innings, openers Imrul Kayes and Tamim Iqbal seemed restless and were looking to score runs off almost every delivery, which gave the Sri Lankan bowlers hope.

Despite the odd turn being generated from the rough areas of the pitch and a few deliveries keeping low, it was a still a good deck to bat on. However, Bangladesh's batsmen never looked like settling down to negotiate the final hour with a patient approach and ultimately paid the price.

Imrul, who made 19, was perhaps the worst offender of putting a small price tag on his wicket. He went for an unnecessary sweep, which Sri Lankan skipper Dinesh Chandimal noted and combated with a fielder at short square leg immediately. However, Imrul still went for the sweep off the next delivery

with the ball ending up in the arms of the fielder.

At the other end, Tamim was also keen to score runs and was often pushing for cheeky singles. However, his tendency to get bat on every delivery cost him when he edged a Lakshan Sandakan delivery miles outside the off stump. The left-hander's attempted defensive shot was edged to the wicketkeeper and he departed after scoring a 62-ball 41.

Mominul Haque, the centurion in the first innings, will face the daunting task of saving the game for the home side when he resumes the day on 18.

Earlier, Sri Lanka added a further 209 runs to their overnight score of 504 for three before declaring just after tea on 713 for 9, the second-highest total conceded by Bangladesh. The highest, 730 for 6, was also conceded against the same opposition at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur in 2014.

Overnight batsmen Roshen Silva and skipper Dinesh Chandimal looked to score quickly and stretch the lead as much as they could. Roshen, who was 13 runs shy of his maiden hundred, reached the feat without any

difficulty in his second Test. But the right hander departed soon after, being caught behind off Mehedi Hasan Miraz's bowling for a 230-ball 109 which featured six fours and a six.

Niroshan Dickwella then joined his skipper and the duo kept the scoreboard ticking. Chandimal missed out on a hundred as he was bowled by Taijul Islam on 87; the ball going between the bat and pad.

Dickwella, after scoring a 61-ball 62, became left-arm spinner Sunzamul Islam's debut wicket and Sri Lanka declared soon after Taijul claimed his fourth wicket of the innings with Herath's scalp. The left-arm spinner finished with the figures of 4 for 219 from his 67.3 overs, in the process becoming part of a few records he would want to forget.

Taijul surpassed left-armer Mohammad Rafique's tally of two wickets for 181 runs -- conceded against India in 2007 -- to become the most expensive Bangladeshi bowler in an innings. He also bowled the most number of overs by a Bangladeshi, exceeding Shakib Al Hasan, who had bowled 66 overs against England in 2010.

## 20 BNP men held outside venue

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The identities of the detainees could not be confirmed immediately.

Contacted, Shahidul Haque, officer-in-charge of the capital's Khilkhet Police Station, said they did not pick up anyone from the Le Méridien Dhaka hotel or its nearby places.

He also claimed that he had no idea about yesterday's incident.

This correspondent called Shaikh Nazmul Alam, deputy commissioner (north division) of the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, several times for comments but he did not pick up the phone.

During yesterday's programme, police did not allow anyone, except journalists, to go to the areas near the hotel. The random detainment created a panic among the enthusiastic leaders and activists of the BNP who had gathered to join the programme. Many of them left the place fearing arrest, alleged BNP leaders.

Police launched a crackdown on BNP leaders and activists in the capital and elsewhere ahead of the verdict scheduled to be delivered on February 8 in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case against Khaleda and her son Tarique Rahman.

In the last couple of days, several hundred party men were arrested across the country.

About the arrests, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said, "There is nothing political here. We are arresting criminals only."

"We are arresting those who are involved in vandalism and tried to snatch rifles from police. We are doing it after scrutinising CCTV footage," he said while speaking at a programme in the capital.

On January 30, a group of BNP men attacked a prison van and snatched two of their fellow men from it near Supreme Court area of the capital. The attackers also broke rifles of the policemen guarding the van.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said all the cases filed against "opposition men were politically motivated."

He alleged that the government wanted to eliminate its opposition from politics.

Meanwhile, A Dhaka Court yesterday sent senior BNP leaders Amanullah Aman and Nazimuddin Alam to jail after Ramna police produced them before it.

Apart from the two, Metropolitan Magistrate Subrata Ghosh Shuvo also sent 36 other BNP men, who had been on remand, to jail in connection with vandalism and attack on police.

**BNP MEN PICKED UP IN B. BARIA** Police last night detained four local BNP leaders and activists in Ashuganj upazila of Brahmanbaria.

The detainees are: Ashuganj upazila BNP joint secretaries Alamgir Hossain and Abdu Mia, Ashuganj Sadar Union unit BNP General Secretary Humayun Kabir and activist Salam Mia, police said.

Badrul Alam Talukder, officer-in-charge of Ashuganj Police Station, said they detained the five as they were holding a "secret" meeting at the home of upazila BNP president and Ashuganj upazila Chairman Abu Asif Ahmed in Station Road area.

They were holding the meeting to carry out subversive activities centering February 8 verdict in a case filed against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, he added.

Jahirul Islam, general secretary of BNP in the district, said the five were detained to thwart party preparations for welcoming Khaleda in the upazila on her way to Sylhet today.

## Trump fuels fight

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cried foul over the document, dismissing its release as little more than a stunt, and another thinly veiled effort to undermine the investigation into the Trump campaign's ties with Russia.

They claim the document -- drafted by Devin Nunes, a Trump transition official, Congressman and House Intelligence Committee chairman -- has glaring holes. The FBI itself said it had "grave concerns" over its accuracy.

The memo claims that Democrat-funded research prompted the FBI to spy on a former Trump campaign aide, Carter Page.

In a subsequent statement, White House press secretary Sarah Sanders said the document "raises serious concerns about the integrity of decisions made at the highest levels of the Department of Justice and the FBI."

Trump's son Don Jr tweeted that it should be "game over" for the Russia investigation.

Trump's one-year-old presidency has been dominated by allegations that multiple aides, including Don Jr and his son-in-law Jared Kushner, may have coordinated with the Kremlin to defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Special counsel Robert Mueller has already indicted two officials including Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort, and two more campaign officials have admitted lying to investigators -- including onetime national security advisor Michael Flynn.

The 71-year-old president has decried the allegations as fake news and a Democratic plot. Mueller is soon expected to ask him to testify under oath about what he knows.

The memo's release sent shockwaves across Washington, calling into question the future of Trump's hand-picked FBI Director Christopher Wray.

But he shrugged off attacks on the FBI's independence and pledged to defend his agents in an internal letter sent to staff on Friday and obtained by AFP.

"Talk is cheap; the work you do is what will endure," Wray wrote.

"Let me be clear: I stand fully committed to our mission... I stand with you."

The FBI had previously issued an extraordinary public warning against the memo's release, saying it contained "material omissions of fact that fundamentally impact the memo's accuracy."

But perhaps the biggest question hung over deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein.

Rosenstein oversees the Russia investigation and has the power to fire special counsel Mueller, because his boss, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, recused

himself.

He was the only law enforcement official named in the memo who has not already been fired by Trump or moved from their post.

Trump, when asked if he has confidence in Rosenstein, told journalists in the Oval Office: "You figure that one out."

But the president faced intense pushback from Democrats in Congress, who warned that any attempt to fire Rosenstein or Mueller would be seen as obstruction.

"We write to inform you that we would consider such an unwarranted action as an attempt to obstruct justice in the Russia investigation," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, House Minority Nancy Pelosi and eight other key Democrats said in a statement.

"Firing Rod Rosenstein, DO Leadership, or Bob Mueller could result in a constitutional crisis of the kind not seen since the Saturday Night Massacre," they said, referring to disgraced president Richard Nixon's orders to fire justice officials during the Watergate scandal.

Several senior Republican senators also weighed in to show their displeasure.

"Our nation's elected officials, including the president, must stop looking at this investigation through the warped lens of politics and manufacturing partisan sideshows," said Senator John McCain.

As he prepared to declassify the document, Trump took a swipe at the FBI and Justice Department.

"The top Leadership and Investigators of the FBI and the Justice Department have politicized the sacred investigative process in favor of Democrats and against Republicans," he tweeted.

The president called the alleged bias "something which would have been unthinkable just a short time ago," adding: Rank & File are great people!"

The explosive Republican memo was based on the highly classified, much larger record of the application to obtain a so-called FISA national security warrant in 2016 to surveil Page.

Democrats have sought approval for the release of their own counter-memo that argues Nunes simplified and "cherry-picks" facts to distort what happened. But Republicans have not agreed to that.

Paul Ryan, the top Republican in the House of Representatives, supported the memo's release as an act of transparency while also calling Friday for the Democrat memo to be approved for release.