

Stay calm, be alert to conspiracy

Quader to AL men over Khaleda verdict

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ruling Awami League has urged the party men to stay calm following the lower court verdict that sentenced BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to five years in jail.

"There is nothing to be excited over the judgment as it was delivered by the court, not by the government," said AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader at a press briefing at party president's Dhanmondi office last night.

He also called upon the party leaders and activists to face any conspiracy smartly.

About BNP's holding rallies nationwide today and tomorrow in protest against sentencing the party chief, Quader, also road transport and bridges minister, said BNP's protest was against the court as the court had delivered the verdict.

He alleged that the BNP was trying to create chaos in the name of peaceful protest.

"The judgment in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case has proved that both Khaleda Zia and Tarique Rahman are corrupt," Hasan Mahmud, AL publicity and publication secretary, said at another press



Law enforcers guard the police vehicle carrying Khaleda Zia as it reaches the gate of the old Dhaka central jail on Nazimuddin Road yesterday. PHOTO: RAB

It also hit global media headlines

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The international media widely covered the conviction of Khaleda Zia yesterday.

More or less, all the major international media outlets of the world published the news with importance.

UK-based Independent ran the news on its online version with the headline "Bangladesh's ex-Prime Minister found guilty of corruption".

BBC reported Khaleda Zia, who leads the "opposition", was given a five-year jail sentence for corruption, in a news item headlined "Clashes as Bangladesh ex-PM jailed".

Indian news portal "Times of India" posted three separate reports over the five-year conviction. Those were with the headlines: "Clashes in Bangladesh ahead of verdict against ex-PM Khaleda Zia", "Bangladesh court jails opposition leader Khaleda Zia for five years" and "Bangladesh police fire teargas to scatter opposition protesters".

Another Indian news portal Zee News reported "Bangladesh court jails opposition leader Zia for five years".

Qatar-based television channel Al Jazeera published the news on its online version with the headline "Bangladesh opposition leader jailed in corruption case".

The Guardian came up with a story headlined, "Violent protests as opposition leader is jailed in Bangladesh"

Khaleda lands in jail

FROM PAGE 1

The BNP chief now faces 33 more cases filed with different courts and police stations across the country.

The special court also sentenced Khaleda's eldest son and BNP Senior Vice Chairman Tarique Rahman, and four others to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment and slapped a fine of Tk 2.10 crore each.

Tarique, who resides in the UK, was tried in absentia. Earlier in July 2016, he had been awarded seven years' imprisonment in a money laundering case.

As per the BNP charter, he will perform as chairman of the 40-year-old political party in Khaleda's absence.

The other convicts are Kazi Salimul Haque, an ex-BNP lawmaker from Magura; Sharfuddin Ahmed, a businessman; Mominur Rahman, a cousin of Tarique; and Kamal Uddin Siddique, former principal secretary.

Of them, Mominur and Kamal are on the run while Salimul and Sharfuddin were sent to jail yesterday.

The sentence of the fugitives will be effective from the day of their arrest or surrender.

Tension ran high centring the verdict. The government deployed a huge number of law enforcers and paramilitary forces in the capital and elsewhere to prevent BNP activists from staging demonstrations.

Sporadic violence erupted in the capital and some other parts of the country before and after the pronouncement of the judgment, which BNP leaders described as "completely politically motivated". They said they will appeal against it.

Meanwhile, the prosecution and the ruling Awami League said no one is above the law, and this has been proved through the judgment.

High Court on Sunday seeking her bail and stay on the sentence only if they get a certified copy of the verdict by that time.

The BNP chief will have the chance to file an appeal with the HC within 30 days of receipt of the verdict.

Her lawyers applied for a certified copy of the verdict yesterday but they are yet to get it.

BNP leader Moudud Ahmed, also a counsel for Khaleda, told reporters that they will file an appeal on Sunday if they get a copy of the verdict.

If there is any delay in getting the certified copy, it will hold back the bail process.

But the bigger question is whether she will be able to contest the upcoming general elections scheduled for December this year.

According to the law, if someone is convicted and sentenced to at least two years' imprisonment, he or she cannot take part in any election for the next five years.

In Khaleda's case, if the HC grants her bail but upholds the sentence, she will be disqualified from running for election. But if the court stays the sentence, she will be able to take part in the election.

It will be up to the HC whether it will grant her bail or not.

"We have already applied for a certified copy of the judgment. Once we get it, we will file an appeal with the High Court seeking a stay [of the verdict] and bail for Khaleda Zia," Khandaker Mahbob Hossain, a senior counsel for her, told reporters after the verdict.

In her 35 years of political career, the BNP chief has never been convicted in a lawsuit.

Khaleda, the first female prime minister of country, was made vice chairperson of BNP in March 1983 after the assassination of her husband president Ziaur Rahman.

She became the party chairperson

THE FIVE OTHER CONVICTS	
10 YEARS' JAIL AND A FINE OF TK 2.1 CRORE	
Tarique Rahman	
Kazi Salimul Haque alias Kazi Kamal	
Sharfuddin Ahmed	
Mominur Rahman	
Kamal Uddin Siddique	

on May 10, 1984, and has been holding the post since then.

The BNP chief was kept in prison for about a year on corruption charges during the tenure of the last caretaker government. She had also been detained a few times during the mass movement against autocrat HM Ershad in the 1980s and in 1990.

Ershad had been in jail after being convicted in two graft cases -- Janata Tower and Japanese Boat Purchase -- during the BNP-led government's tenure in 1991-1996. He was disqualified from contesting the 2001 national polls after the HC upheld his conviction in Janata Tower graft case in 2000.

The BNP held a series of meetings to fix its next course of action in case their party chief was convicted.

The Awami League, on the other hand, had discussions at different party forums and prepared to face the BNP if it tries to take to the streets and assist law enforcers in maintaining law and order.

Law enforcers took massive security measures and set up checkpoints at all points of entry to the capital. They also carried out raids on messes, hotels and houses of BNP leaders and workers. Police also arrested dozens of BNP men in the last several days.

Yesterday, the capital wore a deserted look with a few public vehicles plying the streets.

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orphanage in Bogra.

The money was deposited in a bank account of the Zia trust on November 15 that year, and Tk 4 lakh was withdrawn from there. Of the amount, Tk 2.77 lakh was spent on buying 2.79 acres of land in Bogra's Gabtoli against the name of Zia Orphanage Trust.

In 13 years between 1993 and April 2006, there was no activity of the trust and the amount deposited in the trust account grew to Tk 3.37 crore with accrued interest.

Later, the money was transferred to bank accounts of three other accused -- Salimul, Mominur and Sharfuddin -- through different transactions, reads the first information report.

The accused misappropriated the money by transferring the amount from a public fund to a private one, it said.

Upon the conclusion of the trial proceedings in the case, the special court in the capital's Bakshibazar on January 25 set February 8 for delivering the judgment.

Since then, there has been a lot of buzz in the political arena centring the verdict.

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Since morning, a huge number of

journalists gathered at the Bakshibazar intersection, some 100 metres from the special court premises. Security personnel allowed them in only after 9:00am upon body search.

Television camerapersons and photographers, however, were not allowed to enter the court premises. Apart from a few exceptions, the security personnel didn't let in more than one reporter of a media house.

Some defence lawyers alleged that many of their colleagues were not allowed to enter.

Though the BNP's press wing said on Wednesday that Khaleda would start for the court from her Gulshan house around 10:00am, she left home around noon yesterday.

Earlier, two other accused -- Salimul and Sharfuddin -- were brought to the court by a prison van around 9:00am.

The judge reached the court around 10:20am under police protection.

Meanwhile, both the prosecution and the defence lawyers had arrived at the court and kept waiting for Khaleda.

BNP senior leaders, including its Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, arrived at 1:35pm.

Khaleda reached the court at 1:52pm. Her arrival was delayed as a huge number of BNP men escorted her vehicle. It had to slow down at several points where many supporters gathered to get a glimpse of her.

She sat on a chair next to a tea table. A tissue box and a bottle of water were kept on it for her.

As Judge Md Akhtaruzzaman took seat at 2:13pm, defence counsel Abdur Rezak Khan told him something in a low voice. The judge then asked all the private security personnel to leave the courtroom, and the BNP chief's security personnel obliged.

He then read out a summary of the 632-page judgment.

During the pronouncement of the verdict, the judge mentioned 11 points

that he took into consideration in reaching the decision in the case.

He also noted that it took quite a long time to dispose of the case because the defence went to higher court on several occasions, challenging the trial court's orders.

The judge mentioned that Khaleda had filed 39 time petitions in the last one year.

The BNP chief kept her eyes closed most of the time during the delivery of the verdict.

As the judge left the courtroom around 2:30pm, two defence lawyers shouted "no, no".

Within moments, police personnel surrounded Khaleda, and prevented others from going near her.

Senior BNP leaders, including Fakhrul, Nazrul Islam Khan and Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain looked gloomy. Some of the party leaders were seen crying after the verdict.

The defence lawyers then got locked into a noisy argument with law enforcers inside the courtroom, saying they wanted to speak to Khaleda. Later, a group of lawyers, including Moudud Ahmed and Jamir Uddin Sircar, were allowed to talk to the BNP chief for around 10 minutes.

After a while, Khaleda was taken to the jail by a white sport utility vehicle at about 2:50pm amid tight security.

ACC Public Prosecutor Mosharraf Hossain Kujal told journalists at the courtroom that they proved the charges against Khaleda and five other accused beyond doubt, and they are satisfied with the verdict.

Abdur Rezak Khan, a senior defence lawyer, said Khaleda was convicted in a "false" case, and that the awarding of rigorous imprisonment to a 72-year-old person was "unjust".

"She didn't misappropriate even a single penny meant for orphans. We will challenge it at the High Court soon after getting the certified copy of the judgment," he added.

Sporadic violence on a day of alarm

FROM PAGE 1

A huge number of policemen, and Rapid Action Battalion and Border Guard Bangladesh personnel in riot gear were deployed.

AL leaders and activists all over the country gathered in their offices but law enforcers kept the BNP offices locked.

The AL men took position at different city points and staged show of force. They even held rallies in front of BNP offices at some places.

Even though Dhaka Metropolitan Police had imposed a ban on any gatherings and processions in the city blocking traffic, AL supporters brought out processions with no obstructions from police.

Police, however, swooped on BNP supporters at different places, including Sylhet, Chittagong and Mymensingh, when they brought out processions.

In Sylhet, AL men armed with firearms were seen alongside police clashing with BNP supporters.

Around 50 people were injured and more than 200 were arrested in Chittagong, Sylhet, Mymensingh, Gaibandha, Khulna, Kushtia, and Brahmanbaria.

The arrestees include Khaleda's Special Assistant Shamsur Rahman Shimul Bishwas, Chittagong city unit BNP President Shahdat Hossain and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal President Rajib Ahsan, BNP leader and former

Khulna chamber president Shaduzzaman Mortaza.

Very small number of intercity buses entered the capital. The number of passengers were also few. Commuters were smaller in number.

Most intercity trains left Kamalapur Railway Station with two to six hours delay.

DHAKA

Clash between the BNP men and police began in Moghbazar area around 12:45pm as police tried to prevent them from joining Khaleda's motorcade heading towards the court.

The BNP activists threw brick chunks at police who used teargas. Ruling party men also joined police.

The clash spilled over to Kakrail just after Khaleda's motorcade reached there. Police again used teargas and charged truncheons on BNP men escorting their leader.

The BNP men torched two parked motorcycles and there were chases and counter chases between them and police.

It happened again around 2:30pm when police stopped the BNP men in Chankharpool area and only allowed Khaleda's motorcade to proceed towards the special court in Bakshibazar.

Police charged truncheons and used teargas during the clash that lasted for 15 minutes. The BNP men threw brick chunks from different alleys.

Police picked up at least 20 BNP men from there. Over 100 BNP men had been picked across the city yesterday.

Minutes after the verdict was delivered, detectives picked up Shimul Bishwas at the court and Chhatra Dal President Rajib at party office in Nayapaltan, police said.

After the verdict, the BNP men did not engage in any type of violence in the capital.

SYLHET

A tri-party clash erupted between the supporters of the BNP and pro-Awami League student body Chhatra League and the police around 3:00pm yesterday.

The clash ensued when pro-BNP Jatiyatabadi Swechhasebak Dal and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal brought out a procession from Sylhet court area and police obstructed them.

Activists of Chhatra League joined in and the clash soon spread to Bandarabazar area and continued for two hours.

Five people including a policeman were injured.

During the clash, a Chhatra League activist with a double-barrel gun and several others with sharp weapons were seen.

The BNP supporters exploded several Molotov cocktails and vandalised vehicles in the area.

Muhammad Abdul Wahab, additional deputy commissioner of

Sylhet Metropolitan Police, said they fired 155 bullets and several teargas canisters to control the situation.

The Awami League leaders and activists brought out a procession in the area two hours later when the situation calmed down.

However, some 50 BNP men blocked Zindabazar area for about 15 minutes around 5:00pm. Police again resorted to gunfire.

CHITTAGONG

In Chittagong, at least five people, including two policemen, were injured in a clash between police and the BNP men in front of the BNP office in Kazir Dewri area around 1:30pm.

Police detained 15 BNP leaders and activists, including Chittagong city unit President Shahdat, at the office.

The clash erupted yesterday afternoon after police had asked BNP activists at the office to leave.

The BNP activists threw brick chunks at police while police charged truncheons on them.

At least 148 BNP-Jamaat men were arrested in the district in 12 hours from 7:00am Wednesday.

Heavy presence of activists of AL and its associate organisations were seen in at least 20 places in the city.

NARAYANGANJ

Suman Miah, 32, was killed when supporters of AL lawmaker Golam Dastagir Gazi and Kayetpara Union Parishad Chairman Rafiquil Islam

Rafiq clashed at Rugganj upazila of Narayanganj yesterday, said police.

The two rival groups of the ruling party were trying to stage a show of force on the west end of Kanchan Bridge centring the verdict.

Witnesses said supporters of the lawmaker had taken position on the west end of the bridge around 11:00am while supporters of the chairman tried to do the same there.

They clashed and chases and counter chases took place when Suman was shot.

More than 50 people, including journalists, were injured. Police constable Mojibor, 42, was among the bullet hit, reports our Narayanganj correspondent.

The wounded were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and local hospitals, said Officer-in-Charge Ismail Hossain of Rugganj Police Station.

Police fired several shots in the air to bring the situation under control, he said.

Despite repeated attempts, The Daily Star could not reach the lawmaker and the chairman for comments.

OTHER PLACES

In Laximpur, 15 people, including three journalists, were injured when AL men attacked BNP supporters as they attempted to bring out a procession from the home of Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Annie, a former BNP

lawmaker.

During the clash, some ruling party supporters attacked and vandalised the home of Annie.

In Noakhali, three BNP men were shot and two pro-BNP lawyers were injured when ruling party men attacked BNP men who were trying to bring out a procession in Dutter Hat.

The BNP men hurled brick chunks at police. Police fired six shots.

In Mymensingh, some 15 members of the BNP and its front organisations were injured in chases and counter chases between them and police.

The clash erupted as police stopped their procession at Natun Bazar.

Police fired 23 rubber bullets to bring the situation under control, said Mahmudul Islam, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station.

In the evening, police detained three people as they attempted to torch a train. One seat of a carriage was burnt.

In Gaibandha, police picked up 20 BNP activists after the BNP and its front organisations brought out a procession after the verdict was delivered. Police also charged truncheons and used teargas on them.

In Rangpur, police used a sound grenade when supporters of the BNP brought out a procession on GL Roy Road after the verdict was delivered.

In Bakal of Satkhira, a bus was set on fire around 7:00pm.