

WHAT SKELETONS HIDE IN THE PARLIAMENT BUILDING?

Despite affidavits full of information, many of us do not know what the past of our MPs hold

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The past week gave the country a new parliament—289 lawmakers congregated in the Oath Room of the Parliament Complex, stood facing Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury and took an oath to serve their constituencies for the next four years.

They are the makers of the law, but many of those taking their seats in the parliament have a past littered with criminal cases, ranging from murder to corruption. While the lawmakers themselves make the knowledge public by declaring the basic case details on their affidavits while registering with the Election Commission, not too many people actually know the details of these cases.

Meanwhile, it must also be repeated that many, if not most, lawmakers have politically motivated cases against them. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the vast number of MPs who had been charged with Section 143 of the Penal Code when they were in opposition, which is an arbitrary law used to punish people for being part of an “unlawful assembly”. This could mean something as simple as a congregation on the streets.

For Shamsur Rahman Sharif, a lawmaker from Pabna-4 this meant a case under the 1885 Telegraph Act, for not paying his telegram bills. Very oddly though, the case was filed in 2005, well into the era of emails. The case was withdrawn in 2007.

But then there are the murder charges—at least 13 of the MPs sworn in were charged with murder. The number is 14, if Opposition Chief Hussain Mohammed Ershad, who is still fighting charges for the murder of Maj Gen Mohammed Abul Manzur, is included.

Nazrul Islam Babu, elected from Narayanganj-2 was charged with six counts of murder between 2001 and 2005. The cases were filed in Dhanmondi, Ramna and Demra police stations. Babu, who has held this seat for the last two terms, won with over two lakh votes this time. His name was dropped from all six of the cases subsequently.

A close second to Babu is Shamim Osman, the lawmaker from Narayanganj-4—he had four counts of murder filed against him between 1994 and 2002. Two of these cases were stopped by the court, while he was either acquitted or discharged from the rest.

Another notoriously famous case is the one against current Jhenaidah-4 lawmaker Anwarul Azim Anar. He

was charged with the murder of Darshana's BNP general secretary Saiful Islam in 2007. According to a January 2009 report of *The Daily Star*, joint forces including RAB conducted a drive to arrest Anar but failed. In 2014, he was elected into office as an AL lawmaker with a 95 percent majority.

Zunaid Ahmed Palak, made State Minister for ICT affairs for a third time, was also charged with murder in the past, in his constituency of Natore-3. Very interestingly, this case was filed in 2011, nearly three years after MP Palak was elected into office in that constituency. He was discharged from the case later on.

Natore also boasts of another MP accused with murder. Shafiqul Islam Shimul, who represents Natore-2, was charged in 2014, after he took office following the 9th general elections. Shimul was discharged later, meaning his name was omitted from the case.

Last term's Minister of Primary and Mass Education Dr Afsarul Amin was also fighting murder charges in the 70's. According to Dr Amin's affidavit, he was convicted in the case, but the sentence was overturned upon review. The case was filed in Chattogram in August 1975, and there is scant reliable media documentation to be found—Dr Amin himself claimed that the documents got lost in the 1991 cyclone.

Most of the murder charges were lodged during the BNP regime, and the interim period of the caretaker government.

These include Mostofa Lutfulla from Satkhira-1, Zafor Alam from Cox's Bazar-1, Ali Azam from Bhola-2 ABM Fazle Karim Chowdhury from Chattogram-6.

All these lawmakers have one case each except

ABM Fazle Karim Chowdhury, who was accused in two. One of these cases granted him an acquittal, while the other was not sent to trial so he was discharged from the case.

Meanwhile, Zafor Alam's case is still ongoing—and save from Ali Azam who actually obtained an acquittal after going through a court trial, the rest were discharged from the cases.

Also acquitted after trial were Israfil Alam of Naogaon-4 and Nurul Islam Talukdar of Bogura-3, who were charged with murder in 1999 and 1994 respectively.

One case that was once common knowledge but is now hidden in the annals of a decade gone by is the murder brought against 45 AL lawmakers including the Prime Minister herself for clashes at Paltan in 2006.

The murder case stemmed from the fact that the clashes left at least five people dead, and

the case was subsequently withdrawn by the government because they thought it was politically motivated.

Also withdrawn by the government were many of the astronomic number of graft cases filed against politicians during the period of the caretaker government prior to the 2008 national elections. But some of them are still ongoing.

Monjur Hossain, the lawmaker of Faridpur-1 is still battling a 2007 case of money-laundering; the proceeding is hung up based on a stay order. Engineer Mosharrof Hossain of Chattogram-1 is similarly fighting a corruption charge of 2007. There were five other corruption charges filed against him between 2001 and 2002, but he was acquitted after trial.

Abul Hasnat Abdullah, the lawmaker of Barishal-1 was prosecuted for bribery five times—once in 2003, thrice in 2007, and once again in 2013. He was acquitted following trial from the cases filed during the caretaker government, but for the other two cases, his name was discharged.

Abdul Mannan, the face of Bikalpa Dhara, was slammed with seven cases last year for bounced cheques, and the cases are still under trial, while Hasibur Rahman Swapan, the AL lawmakers of Sirajganj-6 is currently being sued for forgery.

Among the seven Jatiya Oikkofront lawmakers elected during the last election, BNP's Secretary General Mirza Fakhurul Islam Alamgir from Bogura-1 has the most number of cases. He has 38 ongoing prosecutions against him, and save for three, the rest were filed during the last decade. The other BNP lawmaker with an ongoing case is Md Mosharrof Hossain from Bogura-4, who was charged under the Explosives Act, 1884. Several of the AL lawmakers, too, are currently going through trial on explosives related cases.

