

Fakhrul meets Khaleda after release from jail

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, who walked out of jail four days ago, met with party Chairperson Khaleda Zia last night.

Fakhrul went to Khaleda's Gulshan residence around 8:00pm and had a more than hour-long meeting with the party chief, BNP media cell member Shayrul Kabir Khan told UNB.

As the BNP secretary general was freed from jail after a long time, he paid a courtesy call to Khaleda, Sayrul added.

He said Fakhrul left Khaleda's residence after the meeting around 9:30pm.

Earlier on February 15, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and party Standing Committee Member Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury were freed from jail on bail after nearly three and a half months of their arrest before the 12th parliamentary election.

Earlier on Wednesday, a Dhaka court granted bail to both Fakhrul and Khasru in connection with a case filed over the vandalism of the chief justice's residence during a BNP rally on October 28 last year.

The case was filed by the police on October 29, accusing 59 BNP leaders and activists, including Fakhrul and Khasru.

House help falls to her death from 10-storey building

UNB, Dhaka

A 40-year-old woman died after falling from the roof of a building in the capital's Malibagh area yesterday morning.

Deceased Anwara Begum was a resident of Brahmanbaria and had been working at the home of Md Tariqul Islam, assistant commissioner of Detective Branch of police Mirpur Zone.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Shahjahanpur Police Station Sujit Kumar Saha said while walking on the roof of the 10-storey building in Malibagh Railgate area, she fell around 11:30am and was seriously injured.

On information, police rushed to the spot and took her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared her dead.

The body was kept in the hospital morgue for an autopsy, added the OC.



With Dhaka topping the list of cities worldwide for having the worst air quality even yesterday, it is no surprise that the trees all over the city are almost completely covered in dust. The level of air pollution generally increases in the country during the colder seasons and goes down during monsoon. The photo was taken in the capital's Jurain area.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

POST-POLLS PAKISTAN Imran-backed candidates to join Sunni party

Says PTI in a bid to grab reserved seats in nat'l assembly

REUTERS, Karachi

Independent candidates backed by Pakistan's jailed former prime minister that won seats in inconclusive elections over 10 days ago will join the minority Sunni Ittehad Council Political Party to form a government, the party's interim chief said yesterday.

The interim chief, Barrister Gohar Khan, said at a news briefing the decision to join the minority party was so that former PM Imran Khan's party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which was barred from contesting the election, could access reserved seats in the national assembly.

Parties are allocated 70 reserved seats - 60 for women, 10 for non-Muslims - in proportion to the number of seats won. This completes the National Assembly's total 336 seats. Independents are not eligible for reserved seats.

During the press conference, the leader for the Sunni Ittehad Council Political Party said it had signed a memorandum with the PTI and all direction would come from the PTI and jailed leader Khan.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's two major parties were set to meet yesterday to try and bridge differences over forming a minority coalition government after the inconclusive election, a top party official said.

The talks will be the fifth such round after former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif was named by his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party to lead the country again.

"Both the parties haven't yet agreed on final points," said Ishaq Dar, a senator of Sharif's party, who is leading it in the talks.

"Negotiations are underway on various proposals" for power sharing, he added in a statement on Sunday posted on social media platform X.

The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) party of former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has announced conditional support for the PML-N, saying it will vote for Sharif to form the government, but would not take positions in cabinet.

"I can confirm that it has been decided in principle that the political parties will form a coalition government," Dar told domestic broadcaster Geo TV.

SURRENDER OF TOWN

3 brigadiers sentenced to death in Myanmar

Say military sources

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's junta has sentenced to death three high-ranking officers who oversaw the surrender of a strategic town on the Chinese border to ethnic minority fighters last month, military sources told AFP.

Hundreds of troops put down their weapons and handed over the town of Laukkai in Shan state to the so-called Three Brotherhood Alliance after months of fighting that saw the military lose swathes of territory.

The surrender was one of the biggest single losses for the military in decades, and sparked further criticism of the junta leadership by its supporters.

After the surrender, the officers and their troops were allowed to leave the area by the alliance.

"Three brigadier generals including the commander of Laukkai town were given the death sentence," a military source told AFP on condition of anonymity as they were not authorised to talk to the media.

Fears of Rohingya influx grow in Shahporir Dwip

Explosions heard from across the border

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Sounds of explosions from the Myanmar side of the border were heard in Shahporir Dwip in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf upazila and its surrounding areas yesterday morning, as the fighting between the Myanmar military and rebel Arakan Army rages on.

Locals said the sounds of the explosions felt like earthquakes.

Abdus Salam, a member of Ward-9 of Sabrang Union in Teknaf, said sounds of three explosions were heard between 8:00am and 10:00am.

"Though there is no danger of damage, the locals are frightened."

He said that while there has been no major incident of Rohingya infiltration yet, he fears the flow of refugees may begin again if the level of conflict on the other side increases.

Border sources said that in the recent fighting between the junta forces and Arakan Army in Myanmar's Rakhine state, helicopters pounded bomb attacks on and around Baghgona, Hadibil, Nalbannya, Nayapara villages in Maungdaw area.

About 4,000 people of these areas left their homes and took shelter in the border villages of Sikdarpara and Monnipara. Sources said they are waiting for an opportunity to enter Bangladesh.

On Saturday, a boat carrying five Rohingyas, including a woman with gunshot wounds, came to Shahporir Dwip.

The were later sent back to the Naf river, local sources said.

However, another source said the bullet-hit woman had been given medical treatment.

The Coast Guard said they returned three Rohingyas, including the injured woman's husband, from Shahporir Dwip.

According to Bangladesh Border Guard and Coast Guard sources, their officials are constantly active and trying to prevent any kind of intrusion.

They also said any kind of infiltration from Myanmar will not be allowed in Bangladesh.

BGB sources said that till yesterday, at least 165 Rohingyas have been sent back while infiltrating some borders, including Shahporir Dwip. Besides, locals have been prohibited from moving around the border unless for urgent work.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Tahsin Rahman, media officer of the Coast Guard East (Teknaf), said "Our patrol has been strengthened near the Naf River to prevent infiltration. We resisted more than 200 Rohingyas from January 25 to February 17."

At the beginning of this month, fierce clashes broke out between the government troops of Myanmar and the rebel Arakan Army at the Tumburu border in Ghumdum union in Bandarban's Naikhongchhari upazila.

At one point, 330 members of the Myanmar government forces, mostly Myanmar Border Guard Police, fled to Bangladesh.

They were handed over to the Myanmar authorities on February 15.

Meanwhile, the Arakan Army has established its dominance on the other side of the border of Naikhongchhari.

Saifuzzaman Chy owns over 350 properties in UK

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in the UK, mortgage charges and HM Land Registry transactions.

Saifuzzaman's properties range from luxury apartments in central London to housing in Tower Hamlets -- home to the largest Bangladeshi community in England -- and student accommodation in Liverpool.

The international news agency headquartered in New York City analysed nearly 250 of his UK properties and found that almost 90 percent were classified as new-builds when bought, a valuable component in a UK housing market suffering severe shortages.

These transactions took place during a period when the UK government had committed to making foreign property ownership more transparent amid criticism of the ease with which Russian oligarchs were able to hide their wealth in the UK. This process became more urgent in the wake of Moscow's 2022

invasion of Ukraine.

His property deals could revive questions over whether UK's legislation to scrutinise such purchases involving politicians are effective, according to transparency advocates.

Bloomberg also identified at least five properties in Manhattan in the USA belonging to Saifuzzaman, bought for a total of about \$6 million between 2018 and 2020, according to municipal property records.

He was re-elected as an MP, but lost his cabinet post after the January 7 national election, which was boycotted by the opposition after anti-government protests were violently put down. He has since become the chair of the parliamentary committee for land.

On December 29 last year, The Daily Star ran a report on Saifuzzaman's properties in the UK. Based on the newspaper's calculation from company filings publicly

available on UK government websites, it found at least 260 properties in the UK, for which he has paid at least GBP 134.76 million or Tk 1,888 crore.

The three-time AL lawmaker also has at least 537 mortgages against properties in the UK, a vast majority of which are in London. However, his tax returns, submitted along with his affidavit to the Election Commission, states that he has no foreign income, The Daily Star reported.

The Bloomberg report said that in a pre-election declaration of his interests in December, Saifuzzaman listed his total assets at about Tk 258.3 million (\$2.4 million), and those of his wife, Rukhmila Zaman, at about \$993,000. He did not include his UK property holdings in the declaration of assets in Bangladesh. His 2022-23 salary as a minister of state is listed as about £10,000.

Bloomberg talked to Mezbaul Haque, a Bangladesh Bank spokesperson, who without

commenting specifically on Saifuzzaman, said, "While residing in Bangladesh, there is no provision for an individual to accumulate wealth abroad.... As a general rule, we do not permit individuals to do so."

Saifuzzaman falls into the category of a "politically exposed person [PEP]," as defined in the UK's 2017 anti-money laundering legislation. It puts the onus on estate agents, lenders, property lawyers and others involved in business transactions in the UK to have procedures in place to identify PEPs.

Although these individuals can engage in business transactions such as buying property, their involvement should attract extra scrutiny.

Bloomberg approached the companies named in its story, including financial services and legal firms involved in the property purchases for the Chowdhury-owned companies. The firms that responded said relevant procedures had been

followed. They, however, could not provide an elaborate comment due to concerns over commercial confidentiality.

The Daily Star made several phone calls to Saifuzzaman yesterday but found his mobile phone switched off. A text message was also sent to his number, but no response came.

Bloomberg also did not get any response from the former minister and his wife to requests for comments on his property holdings outside Bangladesh or his asset declaration.

On December 26 last year, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), at a press conference, first raised the issue of a minister's business abroad worth over Tk 203 billion.

TIB did not disclose the name of the minister, but the anti-graft body said if any government authorities seek the information, they are ready to provide evidence.

Fraudsters sneak into NID server again

FROM PAGE 1
They created a website named "sebacenter.xyz" to provide these services as well as a number of cloned websites identical to the official websites of different government agencies.

The cloned websites have since been blocked. But using an admin ID and password obtained from law enforcers, The Daily Star yesterday gained access to one such cloned website.

Upon entering multiple NID numbers and their corresponding date of births, the entire personal information of the individuals, including their photos, appeared on the screen, raising concerns over data protection.

As of October 2023, the country's NID server had information of about 12 crore voters, of whom around 5.5 crore have smart NID cards.

AFM Al Kibria, deputy commissioner of CTTC's Cyber Crime

Investigation Department, said the arrestees gained the NID information from a government website.

An official at the NID wing of the Election Commission told The Daily Star that about 176 organisations have access to the NID server.

The NID server can be accessed by anyone if there are security lapses on the part of the relevant authorities, he said, adding that similar incidents took place in the past as well.

On June 7, 2023, TechCrunch, a San Francisco-based online publisher of start-up and technology industry news, reported that personal information of about 5 million Bangladeshi nationals have been leaked from a government website.

The arrestees are Solaiman Towhid, 25; Khokon, 27; Sheikh Sejan, 24; and Nasir Uddin, 30. They were arrested between February 11 and 14 from different parts of the country, and have since been sent to jail.

Police say they identified 20 "super admins" or masterminds and hundreds of users or "associates" of this racket that operates nationwide. The four arrested are super admins.

Imranul Islam, assistant commissioner of CTTC's Cyber Crime Investigation Department, said most of the customers who availed land tax services through this racket paid their long overdue tax. Many of them did not pay land tax for 30 to 40 years, and used this fraudulent service to evade tax.

He added that the proceeds of the illegal business were distributed equally among the super admins, while the users or agents got commission.

From one such account, they provided 360 fake land development tax payment receipts, according to investigators.

Of the arrestees, Solaiman and Khokon used to work together at a visa processing centre in Sylhet. They

started providing this service since the corona pandemic, as certificates of corona vaccination were required for various government services.

Solaiman, who has skills in web development, can create an exact clone copy of any website. Along with Khokon, he created a clone website, surokkha.gov.bd.xyz, on the model of surokkha.gov.bd and issued fake corona certificates at the time, investigators say.

Later, when the demand for corona certificate fell, they started looking for new ways of forgery. In the meantime, they got Sejan, a "cybercriminal" known as White Devil in cyberspace, and Nasiruddin in the team, they add.

Previously, three cases were filed against Sejan on allegations of birth certificate forgery, NID information leak and various other cyber frauds, according to CTTC officials.

To avail services from these

websites, users were first required to have electronic balance by paying an amount through various mobile financial services. Electronic money in their account was charged against the service they received.

Due to the high demand, the gang created a website (ldtax.gov.bd.xyz) modeled after the Land Development Tax Payment website of the land ministry.

From the cloned website, users collected PDF copies of the tax receipts, which looked like originals, with QR code. But during verification, they came out as fake.

Mohammad Noor Hossain, system analyst at the land ministry, filed a case with Shahbagh Police Station against unnamed persons under the cyber security act on February 8 over the forgery.

CTTC officials then launched an investigation, and arrested the four from Sylhet, Narail and Cumilla.