

DHAKA WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 31, 2025

REGD. NO. DA 781

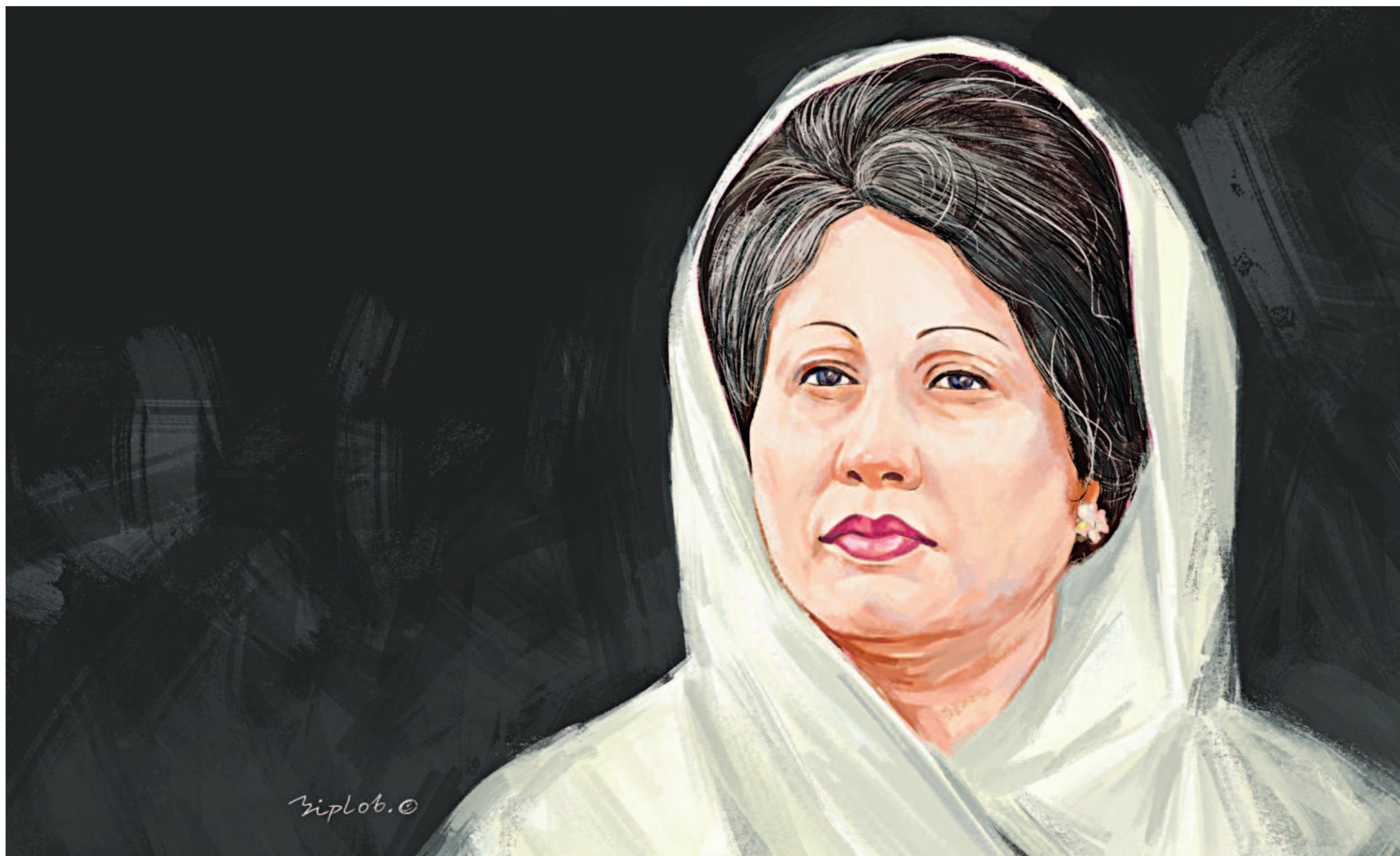
VOL. XXXV No. 339

POUSH 16, 1432 BS

www.thedailystar.net

RAJAB 10, 1447 HIJRI

20 PAGES : Tk 15.00



FAREWELL

Nation grieves as Khaleda Zia departs, leaving a legacy of unbreakable spirit

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA,
SAJJAD HOSSAIN and RASHIDUL HASAN

Khaleda Zia has left behind a nation that she helped rebuild – first as a democratic force, and later as an enduring leader in a fiercely contested political sphere. She was not groomed for the jagged edges of politics. Yet, she became a defining figure of Bangladesh's democratic struggle, navigating the transition from a domestic life in the shadows to the very centre of power.

It was only after the assassination of her husband Ziaur Rahman in 1981 – with the BNP leaderless and fractured – that she stepped in. At the time, she had little political experience, facing stiff opposition from factions within her own party. Senior BNP leaders, many of whom were seasoned politicians, doubted her capability. Despite this internal scepticism and the formidable might of HM Ershad's military regime, she took the helm of the party as its chairperson in 1984.

What emerged from her personal tragedy, her husband's death, was a leader of startling resolve. On the streets

of Dhaka in the 1980s, Khaleda became the "uncompromising leader," a moniker earned by her refusal to negotiate with the Ershad regime. She was detained repeatedly, yet her obduracy became her greatest political asset. It culminated in the 1991 general election, where she led

... The nation pauses to mark the passing of a person who walked out of domestic sphere to topple a dictator. In the years that followed, she was tenacious in political survival and grit

the BNP to a stunning victory, becoming Bangladesh's first female prime minister.

In a rare moment of unity that altered the course of Bangladesh's history, Khaleda made one of her most significant political compromises by

joining forces with her archrival, Sheikh Hasina, in 1990. She agreed to a strategic liaison to oust Ershad. This decision to sit at the same table and formulate a joint declaration was significant. That period also marked a seminal shift in the country's history. Khaleda presided over the transition from presidential to parliamentary form of government, a structural change intended to anchor democracy.

COMPLEX HISTORY

Khaleda's administration in 1996 navigated a volatile political impasse to institutionalise a fair transfer of power. Amid violent boycotts and demands for a neutral electoral overseer, she formed the short-lived 6th parliament and passed the 13th amendment to the constitution. This amendment formally embedded the caretaker government system into law.

Then she promptly dissolved parliament and resigned, only to run for re-election under the very neutral authority she had just introduced. That election brought the Awami League, not the BNP, to power. Still, Khaleda won all

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

‘Country lost its leader, we a loving mother’

Says Tarique Rahman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman paid an emotional tribute to his mother, BNP chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia, following her death, remembering her as both a national leader and a loving mother.

Khaleda passed away while undergoing treatment at Evercare Hospital in Dhaka early yesterday.

In a Facebook post, Tarique said that while Khaleda Zia's public life was marked by sacrifice and struggle, at home she was the family's "truest guardian".

"Her infinite love gave us strength in our darkest moments," he wrote.

"To many, she was the leader of the nation, an uncompromising leader, the Mother of Democracy, the Mother of

World leaders mourn Khaleda

STAR REPORT

World leaders, including the prime ministers of India, Pakistan and Nepal, yesterday extended their deepest condolences on the passing of former prime minister and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Major diplomatic missions also expressed sorrow, reflecting on her contributions to Bangladesh's development, while international bodies, including the United Nations, the European Union and BIMSTEC, issued statements of mourning.

Major diplomatic missions also expressed sorrow, reflecting on her contributions to Bangladesh's development, while international bodies, including the United Nations, the European Union and BIMSTEC, issued statements of mourning.

issued statements of mourning.

The United Nations, in its statement, expressed its deepest sympathies to Khaleda's family and reaffirmed its solidarity with the government and people of Bangladesh.

The European Union also extended its deepest condolences to the people of Bangladesh.

The US Embassy in Dhaka acknowledged her contribution to the development of the country. "Mrs Zia played a pivotal role in shaping her country's modern history, and her leadership was instrumental in advancing Bangladesh's development."

The Russian embassy said, "Russia will remember her with gratitude for the cordial relations maintained with our country during her three tenures as the head of government."

Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang and Foreign Minister Wang Yijun sent separate messages to BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman. "The Chinese people will always remember her with deep gratitude and the highest respect," he said, noting that the Communist Party of China would continue to maintain its friendly relations with the BNP.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

TRIBUTE

Her passing should unite us all to build the nation

MAHFUZ ANAM

What perhaps would be most appropriate on this occasion is a few unattributed quotes that say "Gone from our sight, present in our conscience", "A chapter closes but the story continues", "The leader departs but the ideals remain". Yes, she will be present in our conscience; yes, with her passing her story will not end; and yes, she may have passed away but

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Khaleda to be laid to rest beside Ziaur Rahman

3-day state mourning, public holiday today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia will be laid to rest beside her husband, former president Ziaur Rahman, at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the capital, following her namaz-e-janaza at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban today.

The khatib of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque will lead the janaza, while BNP Standing Committee member Nazrul Islam Khan will conduct the proceedings, the party's Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said yesterday.

He urged all those intending to attend to maintain strict discipline during the janaza and burial, and requested that no one disrupt the ceremony or rush forward for photographs, emphasising the importance of respect and the solemnity of the occasion.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 2



Tarique at BNP's Gulshan office after Khaleda Zia's death yesterday.

Bangladesh, Tarique, Khaleda's elder son, said, adding that the country will miss her "guiding presence that shaped its democratic aspirations".

Recalling her years of political hardship, Tarique said his mother endured repeated arrests, denial of medical care and what he described as relentless persecution. Despite pain, confinement and uncertainty, he said, she continued to protect her family

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6