

Gayebana janaza held across country

STAR REPORT

The gayebana namaz-e-janaza (funeral prayers in absentia) of BNP chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia was held in several districts across the country yesterday.

In Jhenaidah, a gayebana janaza was held at the Shaikupa Degree College field at noon yesterday.

The district BNP also announced a seven-day mourning programme, and a condolence book was opened at the party office.

In Kushtia, hundreds of people joined a similar namaz-e-janaza prayer held at the Kushtia Alia Madrasa ground after Zuhur prayers.

In Cumilla, BNP activists and supporters held a gayebana janaza at the Cumilla Town Hall premises yesterday afternoon, with the participation of hundreds of people.

In Rangamati, a janaza and special prayer were held at the Rangamati municipality premises yesterday afternoon.

In Bogura, BNP leaders and hundreds of people joined a janaza held at the Altafunessa playground.

At Chittagong University, the university administration organised a gayebana janaza and doa mahfil after Zuhur prayers at the university's central mosque, seeking eternal peace for her departed soul.

Prayers were also offered at various places of worship on the campus, including mosques, temples, churches and pagodas.

In addition, a separate doa mahfil was held after Asr prayers at the central mosque under the initiative of the Cucusu.

Bangladesh's first female prime minister and a towering political figure, Khaleda Zia, died on Tuesday at a Dhaka hospital after a prolonged illness related to old age.

She was 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 yesterday.

[Our correspondents from respective districts contributed to the report]



An aerial shot of mourners attending the namaz-e-janaza of Khaleda Zia, held at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday. The crowd spilled over onto many streets and thoroughfares. The photo was taken at the Bijoy Sarani-Rokeya Sarani intersection.

PHOTO: HASAN JUBAYED

'A guardian lost at the wrong time'

People from all walks of life flock to Khaleda's funeral

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"I've never voted for her party, but I'm here today," said Minhaz Uddin, a retired government employee who came with his grandson from Savar to pay his last respects to BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Standing near the barricades at Khamarbari, the 61-year-old said the country had lost a unifying leader at the wrong time.

"After the July uprising, like many others, I really felt the need for such a leader. She was a veteran politician who never fled the country, even when she had the chance. You have to respect that courage," he added.

That sense of losing a "guardian" was shared by many. The three-time prime minister, who died on Tuesday, was mourned not only by her party faithful, but also by ordinary citizens who had never carried a BNP flag or voted along

party lines. To them, she symbolised strength, defiance, and reassurance during turbulent times.

By noon, Manik Mia Avenue had turned into a sea of people. Students, shopkeepers, day labourers, housewives, and elderly admirers set aside their daily struggles to join the namaz-e-janaza. Some climbed rooftops, footbridges, and scaffolding, determined to witness history.

Heavy traffic and physical strain tested many, but the desire to bid farewell to the "Deshnetri" (leader of the nation) kept them moving.

Md Roni, a grocer from East Shewrapara, closed his shop, sacrificing a day's income, and walked to Agargaon to attend the prayer.

"I came here simply to pay my last respects to Begum Khaleda Zia," Roni said. "At a time when Bangladesh is facing a critical period, a strong leader like her

was exactly what we needed. It is a huge loss for the nation," he added.

Near Farmgate Metro Station, businessman Shahidul Islam Russell recalled Khaleda Zia's role in the 1990 anti-autocracy movement. "She was the key figure who restored democracy. We cannot forget that debt. I came here with some of my old friends to pay tribute," he said.

Mohammad Suman and five of his friends from the Bhasantek slum area also attended the prayer. Asked whether they were affiliated with any political party, Suman replied, "We are not affiliated with any parties."

Suman works at a printing press in Mirpur 13, while his friends are auto drivers or small shopkeepers.

Like tens of thousands of others, they said they had come simply to pay their final respects to a leader who always stood steadfast for the country.

The addresses that witnessed Khaleda's life

BSS, Dhaka

As Khaleda Zia embarked on her eternal journey amid an outpouring of public love, one cannot but reflect on the addresses that witnessed her life — homes, hospitals, prison, and parliament. Each place stood witness to her transformation from an aristocratic young woman into one of Bangladesh's most consequential political figures.

Her most cherished residence was the house on Mainul Road in Dhaka Cantonment, once the official home of her husband, Ziaur Rahman, during his tenure as chief of army staff. It was here that their sons, Tarique Rahman and Arifat Rahman Koko, grew up. After Ziaur Rahman's assassination in 1981, the house was allocated to Khaleda in his honour, becoming her permanent home.

For the next three decades, the Cantonment house carried memories of Khaleda as a wife, mother, politician, and prime minister. On November 13, 2010, the Awami League government evicted her from there, forcing her to leave behind a lifetime of memories. By then, both her sons had to leave the country in 2008. Khaleda later moved to a residence in Gulshan called "Firoza".

Firoza saw a different Khaleda — frail, ill, and
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'Fascist Hasina can never be absolved'

Says Nazrul Islam Khan at Khaleda's janaza

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Standing Committee member Nazrul Islam Khan yesterday said that ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina would never be absolved of the responsibility for causing the death of BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia.

"Khaleda Zia never bowed before any evil force, domestic or foreign. Those who put her behind bars and made her homeless... they were forced to flee," Nazrul said while addressing a gathering before Khaleda's namaz-e-janaza at Manik Mia Avenue in the capital yesterday afternoon.

He said Khaleda became severely ill due to lack of treatment during her imprisonment of more

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Foreign dignitaries pay last respects

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development of Bangladesh's foreign relations.

Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar represented his government at the state funeral. Ahead of the ceremony, he met BNP acting chairman and Khaleda's son, Tarique Rahman, at the National Parliament to hand over a "personal letter of deepest condolences" from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pranay Verma was also present at the meeting.

"Handed over to him a personal letter from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Conveyed deepest condolences on behalf of the government and people of India," Jaishankar shared on Facebook, adding that he was confident Khaleda's vision would guide the Bangladesh-India partnership.

Modi, in the letter, expressed deep sorrow over the death of former prime minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, conveying condolences to her family and the people of Bangladesh.

"I warmly recall my meeting and discussions with Begum Sahiba in Dhaka in June 2015. She was a leader of rare resolve and conviction, and had the distinction of being the first woman prime minister of Bangladesh," he said, adding that she made many important contributions to Bangladesh's development and to strengthening India-Bangladesh relations.

While her passing leaves an irreplaceable void, Modi noted that her vision and legacy would endure, expressing confidence that her ideals would be carried forward under Tarique Rahman's leadership of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. "And [it] will continue to serve as a guiding light to ensure a new beginning and the enrichment of the deep and historic partnership between India and Bangladesh."

"At this moment of national

mourning, my thoughts are also with the people of Bangladesh."

India's opposition leader Rahul Gandhi also conveyed his condolences. In a message, he said over her long career in public life, Khaleda Zia played a significant role in Bangladesh's political journey.

Khaleda had last visited India officially in March 2006 as prime minister. Later, as leader of the opposition, she visited India in 2012, at the invitation of the external affairs minister.

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly, arrived in Dhaka yesterday morning to represent his government. He was received at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport by senior officials from Bangladesh's foreign ministry and the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka.

Sadiq also held a courtesy meeting with Tarique Rahman, handing over Islamabad's official condolence message. The message described Khaleda as an "uncompromising leader committed to safeguarding independence and sovereignty."

Notably, Sadiq separately exchanged greetings with Jaishankar ahead of the funeral.

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said China mourns the passing of Khaleda Zia and extends sincere sympathies to the interim government of Bangladesh and Khaleda's family.

"As prime minister, she made an active effort to grow the ties between our two countries and it was during her premiership that the two countries established the comprehensive partnership of cooperation featuring long-term friendship, equality, and mutual benefit," the spokesperson said on X.

Her contribution to China-Bangladesh friendship and bilateral relations will forever be remembered,

it added.

Nepal Prime Minister Sushila Karki on X said, "On behalf of the Government and people of Nepal, I extend my heartfelt condolences to her [Khaleda's] family, friends and the people of Bangladesh."

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu also expressed his deepest condolences to the government and the people of Bangladesh as the country mourns the loss of its first female prime minister, Khaleda Zia.

"At this time of immense grief, may Almighty Allah grant strength and patience to the members of her bereaved family," he said on X.

Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath joined the event directly upon arriving in Dhaka.

Nepal's Foreign Minister Bala Nanda Sharma attended on behalf of his government, as did Bhutan's Foreign Affairs and External Trade Minister Lyonpo DN Dhungyel and Maldives Minister of Higher Education, Labour and Skills Development Ali Haider Ahmed.

The visiting ministers from Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan also met Tarique and his family members at the National Parliament.

At the same venue, Law Adviser Asif Nazrul and National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman met foreign dignitaries from South Asian nations and thanked them for their attendance.

Ambassadors and high commissioners from nearly 40 countries, including the United States, China, Russia, the UK, Japan, Germany, Canada, Australia, and the European Union, attended the funeral, alongside heads of various multilateral and regional organisations.

Later in the day, Pakistan National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq and Nepal's Foreign Minister Bala Nanda Sharma separately called on Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at the state guesthouse Jamuna.

parties, garnered 48.2 per cent.

Fewer than 10,000 votes separated the two, and the opposition accused the ruling coalition of fraud, arguing that the alleged irregularities were decisive for the final result.

Dodik has rejected the accusations. The electoral commission ordered a partial recount and eventually annulled the results in 136 polling stations citing irregularities. Experts say the February repeat vote could, in theory, allow Blanusa to win.

Millions mourn

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people were present, many visibly emotional as they waited for hours to pay their final respects.

A flag-draped hearse brought her to the South Plaza around 11:46am, where she lay in state until the funeral began.

The crowd was not limited to the streets alone. People were seen standing on the elevated expressway and on the rooftops of nearby buildings to catch a glimpse of the proceedings.

Microphones had been installed across the venue and surrounding areas, where recitations from the Holy Quran were ongoing.

"She was not only the leader of a party, but a leader of the people irrespective of political backgrounds," said one mourner standing near the Asad Gate.

Law enforcers and volunteers were deployed across the area to manage the crowd and ensure smooth movement. Traffic on surrounding roads came to a standstill, while authorities urged people to remain calm and follow instructions to avoid chaos.

When BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman, just before the prayers began, addressed the crowds who came to pay their last respects to his mother, it was

as a son, not a statesman.

There were no words of politics, no talk about Khaleda's authorship in the story of Bangladesh, nor any reference to the gross injustices she faced.

He simply asked for forgiveness, on her behalf, as her mother.

"I am Tarique Rahman, the eldest son of the late Khaleda Zia," he said, dropping all political hats before a crowd that already recognised him as the chief of the largest political party contesting the upcoming national election.

Mufti Abdul Malek, khatib of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, led the namaz-e-janaza, which was attended by the Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus, Chief Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Dr Shafiqur Rahman, the chiefs of the three services, National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam and others.

The body of Khaleda Zia, who had breathed her last around 6:00am on Wednesday, was brought out of the Evercare Hospital at 8:53am to be taken to her final resting place.

Her body was first taken to Tarique's

residence — House 196 on Gulshan Avenue, a home she visited at last, only in death, as his return to Bangladesh on December 25 came when she lay critically ill in hospital, never to rise again.

There, a grief-stricken Tarique sat alone on a chair inside, reciting verses from the Holy Quran for his mother.

Following the namaz-e-janaza, which ended at 3:05pm, Khaleda's hearse carried her to her final abode beside her husband, martyred president Ziaur Rahman.

With Tarique descending into her grave to receive her body, she was buried around 4:30pm.

Family and party members stretched a grave-sized flag over her burial ground.

With his gaze lowered, Tarique scooped handfuls of soil and gently poured them over his mother.

A guard of honour fired three volleys into the air, and the bugle sounded the Last Post, signalling that Khaleda's duty was done and she could finally rest in peace.

Khaleda was widowed at the age of 36, when Ziaur Rahman was assassinated. Yesterday, the two were finally reunited 44 years later.

From rooftops to streets

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while elevated roads near Farmgate were lined with people offering prayers from afar.

Volunteers guided those with mobility challenges to accessible spaces, helping with wheelchairs or providing chairs, ensuring that no one was left out of the final tribute.

"I knew I could not reach the South Plaza, but I still came," said Abdul Malek, a rickshaw-puller standing near Farmgate since noon.

The diversity of the crowd was striking. Elderly men leaned on walking sticks, young students stood quietly with folded hands, women arrived with children, fathers held their children close, and workers in uniforms paused their day to join the gathering. Many were visibly emotional, wiping tears while whispering prayers.

Near Green Road, Rahima Begum, a middle-aged homemaker, said she felt compelled to come despite the congestion.

"She [Khaleda] spoke for people like us. I grew up watching her stand strong. Today, I wanted to stand for her, even from far away."

Law enforcers and party volunteers were deployed across the area to manage the unprecedented crowd.

Police guided people away from bottlenecks, while volunteers offered water and urged calm.

Traffic on surrounding roads came to a near standstill. Authorities repeatedly requested cooperation from citizens, and despite the congestion, mourners remained patient.

"We are all here for one reason," said Jahid Hasan, a university student near Jahangir Gate. "This is not about inconvenience. It is about respect."

Many described Khaleda as a towering political figure who shaped Bangladesh's modern history and inspired generations.

Rifat Hossain, a middle-aged man offering prayers near Dhanmondi 27, said, "She was not only the leader of a party, but a leader of the people, irrespective of political backgrounds. Today's crowd proves how deeply she is loved."

As the janaza approached, the atmosphere grew solemn. Chants of prayer echoed through Manik Mia Avenue and surrounding roads. From rooftops to footpaths, people stood in silence, hands raised, eyes closed, united in a final act of farewell. The sound of prayers reverberated across the city, a symbolic moment of collective grief and respect.

AFP, Sarajevo

Bosnian Serbs will hold a partial repeat vote in February to replace their banned president Milorad Dodik after some results from November's election were annulled for fraud, the electoral commission said yesterday.

The February 8 vote, concerning more than 80,000 registered voters, could prove decisive in the contest between Dodik's camp and several opposition parties in the Bosnian

Serb entity Republika Srpska.

It will be held at 136 polling stations, out of around 2,160, Bosnia's central electoral commission said in a statement.

After the November 23 election, the commission announced a narrow victory for the candidate backed by Dodik and the ruling coalition, Sinisa Karan, who won 50.4 per cent of the vote.

His main rival Branko Blanusa, supported by several opposition

'Please pray for my mother's eternal peace'

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loudspeakers, reaching the public even in surrounding areas of the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, where the janaza was held.

"I want to tell everyone present here, if Khaleda Zia owed anyone any debt while she was alive, please contact me... If anyone had been hurt by anything Khaleda Zia said or did, I apologise on her behalf," said Tarique, the only surviving son of the former premier.

The funeral prayers, led by the khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, Mufti Abdul Malek, began at 3:03pm and ended at 3:05pm.