



TRIBUTES AND RESPECTS FROM ACROSS BORDERS

Foreign dignitaries, including top officials from India and Pakistan, paid their last respects to BNP chairperson and three-time prime minister Khaleda Zia at her funeral in Dhaka yesterday. Indian External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar, Pakistan's National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Nepal's Foreign Minister Bala Nanda Sharma and Bhutan's Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade Lyonpo DN Dhungyel met BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman and conveyed the deepest condolences on behalf of their governments. On the sidelines, Jaishankar and Sardar Ayaz Sadiq exchanged greetings.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

She rests next to her husband at Zia Udyan

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a namaz-e-janaza at the South Plaza of the National Parliament that saw the largest gathering in the history of Bangladesh.

After the namaz-e-janaza was completed at 3:05pm, Khaleda's body was transported to Zia Udyan in the national flag draped freezer van in which Khaleda began her final journey starting from Evercare Hospital in the morning.

At the Zia Udyan, her coffin was transferred to a special ceremonial carriage. After the flag-draped coffin was brought close to the burial site, members of the army and navy carried it on their shoulders and marched slowly to the grave, with Tarique following behind.

The coffin was then gently opened, and the armed forces folded the flag and handed it to the family.

Tarique went down to the grave to receive his mother's body while his aides held the BNP flag on top for privacy.

The event was held under tight security, with police, army and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel securing the area to ensure safety.

After her burial, Khaleda was given a Guard of Honour by armed forces under the supervision of the President Guard Regiment.

Following the burial, Tarique stood

by the grave with his wife, Zubaida Rahman, daughter Zaima Rahman, and other family members.

The widow of Khaleda's younger son Arafat Rahman Koko and his daughters stood in quiet reflection, along with other close family members, including Khaleda's brother Shamim Eskander, his wife Kaniz Fatema, another sister-in-law of Khaleda Nasrin Ahmed, sister Selina Islam.

As the burial concluded, mourners gathered outside the Zia Udyan entrance gate, trying to watch inside.

At 4:53 PM, the Guard of Honour was held. Then the chiefs of the army, navy and air force; Law Adviser Asif Nazrul and Tarique laid wreaths at the grave. Two wreaths were also placed on behalf of President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

The ceremony concluded with the solemn playing of the Last Post by bugles.

At 5:06 PM, a prayer was held for Khaleda Zia. Tarique raised both hands, with his gaze fixed on the grave of his mother. After the prayer, Tarique met with attending officials before leaving for his Gulshan residence with his family by bus.

Earlier in the day, strict security measures were implemented, with law enforcement agencies restricting access

to the area.

No outsiders were allowed to enter as Khaleda's body was transported to Zia Udyan, and police along with BGB forces were deployed at the entrance.

Before the burial, a massive crowd had gathered at the National Parliament and Manik Mia Avenue for Khaleda Zia's funeral prayers.

People began arriving early in the morning, and by noon, the streets from Manik Mia Avenue to Karwan Bazar were packed with mourners.

Khaleda led the BNP for 41 years and earned the title of the 'uncompromising leader' during the anti-autocracy movement of the 1990s.

She served as a member of parliament five times, as the Prime Minister thrice and the leader of the opposition twice. She never lost an election she contested.

Khaleda's last public appearance was on November 21 at the Armed Forces Day reception at Dhaka Cantonment. Two days later, she was admitted to Evercare Hospital for routine tests, during which doctors detected a chest infection and kept her under observation. She was also suffering from pneumonia.

She breathed her last at the capital's Evercare Hospital around 6:00am on December 30, just five days after Tarique returned to Bangladesh after 17 years in exile.

Jamaat open to unity govt with BNP

Says its chief in interview with Reuters; talks held with several parties

REUTERS, Dhaka

Jamaat-e-Islami is open to joining a unity government after February's parliamentary vote, and has held talks with several parties, its chief told Reuters yesterday.

Opinion polls suggest that Jamaat-e-Islami, a once-banned Islamist party, will finish a close second to the BNP in the first election it has contested in nearly 17 years, as it marks a return to mainstream politics in the predominantly Muslim nation of 175 million.

Jamaat last held power between 2001 and 2006 as a junior coalition partner with the BNP and is open to working with it again.

"We want to see a stable nation for at least five years. If the parties come together, we'll run the government together," Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur

Rahman said in an interview at his office in a residential area in Dhaka, days after the party created a buzz by securing a tie-up with a Gen-Z party.

Jamaat advocates Islamic governance under sharia law but has sought to broaden its appeal beyond its conservative base. Shafiqur said anti-corruption must be a shared agenda for any unity government.

The prime minister will come from the party winning the most seats in the February 12 election, he added. If Jamaat wins the most seats, the party will decide whether he himself would be a candidate, he said.

The party's resurgence follows the ousting of long-time prime minister Sheikh Hasina in a youth-led uprising

in August 2024. Hasina, whose Awami League party is now barred from the election, was a fierce critic of Jamaat, and during her tenure, several of its leaders were sentenced to death for alleged war crimes during the 1971 independence war with Pakistan, a war Jamaat opposed.

Jamaat had been banned from elections since 2013 after a court ruled its charter violated the country's secular constitution. An interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus lifted all restrictions on the party in August 2024.

TIRES WITH INDIA AND PAKISTAN
Shafiqur said Hasina's continued stay in India after fleeing Dhaka was

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The addresses that witnessed Khaleda's life

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often alone. Visitors were restricted to a small circle of close friends and political colleagues. She could neither move freely nor leave the house. In 2013, trucks and lorries blocked her residence, preventing her from going out, an act her supporters described as profound disrespect toward the nation's first woman prime minister. In 2015, from her party office, she bid farewell to her son, Arafat Rahman Koko, who died during his exile in Malaysia, returning once again to solitude at Firoza.

On February 8, 2018, a healthy Khaleda Zia walked into the old jail on Nazimuddin Road. After more than two years, she emerged gravely ill. Her condition deteriorated during incarceration, prompting her transfer to Bangladesh Medical University,

formerly known as PG Hospital. From then on, illness became her constant companion.

During the Awami League regime, court appearances became routine. At times, with special permission, she attended hearings from Firoza or the hospital. These repeated summons added further strain to her declining health.

Evercare Hospital, formerly Apollo Hospital, became another defining address in her later years. Frequent stays turned the hospital into a second home.

Another landmark in her journey was parliament. As first lady, prime minister, and leader of the opposition, the Jatiya Sangsad served as a central stage of her political career.

Her namaz-e-janaza was held at the

parliament complex — the same place where her late husband's funeral prayer had once been offered.

Just days before her final hospitalisation on November 23, Khaleda visited Ziaur Rahman's mausoleum to offer prayers. Yesterday, she was laid to rest beside him. His mausoleum has now become her final home.

The Cantonment house, Firoza, prison, Evercare, and parliament were not merely addresses. They shaped the "uncompromising leader" she became.

When she said, "Bangladesh is my only address. Where will I go, leaving my country?" she meant it. This soil, this nation, and its people were her life. In the end, the land of Bangladesh became her eternal address.