

Tarique, family offer prayers for Khaleda Zia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tarique Rahman, acting chairman of the BNP, attended a doa and milad mahfil for former prime minister and party chairperson Khaleda Zia at Gulshan Azad Mosque yesterday.

He entered the mosque at around 4:00pm, accompanied by senior party leaders. Earlier, Tarique offered Juma prayers at another mosque in Gulshan.

Meanwhile, family members of Khaleda visited her grave at Zia Udayan in Dhaka yesterday morning.

They arrived at the grave around 10:30am, led by Khaleda's granddaughter Zaima Rahman. Also present were Sharmila Rahman, widow of Khaleda's younger son Arafat Rahman; their daughter Zaha Rahman; and other relatives.

Standing by the grave, they recited verses from the Holy Quran and offered prayers. The family remained there for about 20 minutes.

Public access to the grave, which had been open since after Fajr prayers yesterday, was temporarily restricted for about an hour during the family's visit.

IMRAN KHAN'S ARREST Pak court jails journos for life over protest ties

REUTERS, Karachi

A Pakistani anti terrorism court sentenced eight journalists and social media commentators yesterday to life imprisonment in absentia after convicting them of terrorism-related offences linked to online activity in support of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan.

The convictions stem from cases registered after violent protests on May 9, 2023, when Khan's supporters attacked military installations following his brief arrest. Since then, the government and military have launched a sweeping crackdown on Khan's party and dissenting voices, using anti terrorism laws and military trials to prosecute hundreds accused of incitement and attacks on state institutions.

In its ruling, the court said actions by the accused "fell within the ambit of terrorism" under Pakistani law and that their online material promoted "fear and unrest" in society.

GM Quader

FROM PAGE 1 including Tk 3 lakh from house/shop rent, Tk 30 lakh from shares and deposits, and Tk 11 lakh as opposition leader's allowance.

At that time, Quader held Tk 49.88 lakh in cash, nearly Tk 36 lakh in bank deposits, and jewellery worth Tk 1.12 lakh.

In the latest affidavit, he listed Tk 60.32 lakh in cash, noted that bank deposits were submitted separately, and declared Tk 40 lakh in savings certificates/fixed deposits. His jewellery holdings remain unchanged.

Meanwhile, his wife, Sharifa Quader, has been described as a singer and businessperson. In 2024, she had Tk 59.59 lakh in cash, and now she has Tk 48.90 lakh.

Quader's movable assets are valued at Tk 1.95 crore, while Sharifa's are valued at Tk 1.72 crore. The couple also have houses in Lalmonirhat and Dhaka. Quader's properties are worth Tk 1.59 crore, while Sharifa's Dhaka house is valued at Tk 70 lakh.

Quader's vehicle is valued at Tk 84.98 lakh, while Sharifa owns one worth Tk 80 lakh.

The affidavit also notes 12 criminal cases against Quader, all under investigation, and a personal loan of Tk 12 lakh.

Since the death of his elder brother, Jatiya Party founder and former president HM Ershad, GM Quader has been serving as party chairman. He has contested six parliamentary elections, winning five. He was elected from Lalmonirhat 3 in 1996, 2008, and 2018, and from Rangpur 3 in 2001 and 2024.

Akhter earns

FROM PAGE 1 and furniture valued at Tk 1.20 lakh.

The affidavit does not mention ownership of any electronic goods by the couple. It also says that the couple has no outstanding loans.

Akhter, 28, holds a postgraduate degree, works as a trained lawyer, and earns Tk 85,000 from agriculture, Tk 1.80 lakh from business, and Tk 2.40 lakh from employment annually.

Sanjida, a homemaker, owns movable assets worth Tk 14 lakh (current value Tk 16 lakh), including Tk 4 lakh in cash and jewellery worth Tk 10 lakh.

In his latest income tax return, Akhter showed an annual income of Tk 5.05 lakh and paid Tk 10,500 as taxes. The return also mentioned that he has assets worth Tk 14.35 lakh.

Akhter declared 118 decimals of agricultural land -- 18 decimals in Rangpur's Kaunia bought for Tk 23,000, and 100 decimals inherited but not yet formally divided, registered, or mutated.

For his election campaign, Akhter plans to spend Tk 50 lakh, with Tk 1 lakh from his legal practice and Tk 49 lakh raised through public crowdfunding. The affidavit also states that Akhter faces two criminal cases and is currently out on bail in both.



From left, BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman attends a doa and milad mahfil for his mother, party chairperson and former prime minister Khaleda Zia, at Gulshan Azad Mosque yesterday. Khaleda's family members, including her granddaughter Zaima Rahman (centre), offer prayers at her grave at Zia Udayan in the morning.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL

ACC to scrutinise affidavits of aspirants

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ACC spokesperson and Director General (Prevention) Akter Hossain said the commission has already begun scrutinising affidavits submitted by candidates.

"If any affidavit is found to contain incorrect or false information, we will take action in accordance with ACC laws and regulations," he said.

He added that the ACC's intelligence unit is working on the issue. "We are monitoring news reports in the media regarding candidates' affidavits."

ACC officials said candidates who provide false information could face charges for possessing wealth beyond known sources of income.

Under Section 27(l) of the ACC Act 2004, individuals found to own property disproportionate to their declared income must explain the source in court. Failure to do so can result in three to ten years in prison, fines and confiscation of the assets.

An EC official said the commission would consider any ACC recommendation only after assessing its legal authority, the nature of the allegations and whether the issue falls within the ambit of the law.

However, the EC has made clear that it will not independently verify affidavits unless objections are raised. This position has remained unchanged since the system was introduced in 2008.

Since then, candidates have been required to submit detailed affidavits with their nomination papers, following a High Court directive. These disclosures include educational qualifications, criminal records and the assets, income and liabilities of candidates and their dependents.

A November amendment to the RPO further requires candidates to disclose assets held abroad. The High

Court also instructed the EC to make affidavit information public so voters can make informed decisions.

Yet election experts and governance campaigners say the verification mechanism has never been enforced.

Election expert Abdul Alim, a member of the now-defunct Electoral Reform Commission, said neither the EC nor the ACC had scrutinised affidavits since 2008.

"The commissions of 2014, 2018 and 2024 lacked the leadership or mindset to take it forward. In fact, the Election Commission never had the courage to verify these affidavits. Such ideas were never in their plans," he said.

A former election commissioner echoed that view, saying the EC lacks the capacity to verify wealth statements within the short time before polls, particularly when it comes to assets held abroad. He added that he was unaware of any government agency scrutinising affidavits since the 2014 election.

Against this backdrop, the ACC's decision has been welcomed as long overdue.

Experts and campaigners, however, stressed that a joint effort involving the ACC, the EC, and the National Board of Revenue (NBR) is essential to uncover the true picture.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman praised the initiative but stressed that its impact would depend on proper execution.

"If carried out without fear or favour, it can help curb entrenched malpractice in electoral politics and improve transparency and accountability," he said.

He said investigators should focus on verifying the credibility of submitted data, including

inconsistencies between declared income and actual wealth, as well as beneficial ownership, through case-by-case field investigations.

Experts also stressed the need for coordination. If nationwide scrutiny proves difficult, they suggested starting with random sampling.

Iftekharuzzaman said the NBR must cooperate by sharing income tax data to allow meaningful comparisons.

"For the EC, it is about the validity of candidacy," he said. "For the NBR, it is about tax compliance. For the ACC, it is about illicit wealth."

According to EC data, 2,569 aspirants -- 2,091 party nominees and 478 independents -- submitted nomination papers ahead of the February 12 election. Returning officers will scrutinise the papers until January 4.

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahaman Masud said the EC would not send affidavit information to the ACC or NBR, but those agencies are free to examine the documents independently.

"From the EC's side, there is no objection," he said.

Asked whether the EC would act on ACC recommendations, Masud said the commission would first consider its legal authority and the nature of the allegations, and would act only if the matter falls within the law.

Explaining why the EC does not independently verify affidavits, he cited time constraints.

"There are only a few days," he said. "Unless there is an objection, the information is deemed correct."

He added that candidates, who are running for a public office, declare their information to be true to the best of their knowledge, and the EC accepts it unless evidence suggests otherwise.

Manna, Azad among 34 disqualified

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In the same constituency, Jatiya Party candidate Shariful Islam Jinnah was rejected for not submitting the asset statement form with his affidavit.

In Munshiganj-3, BNP district unit member secretary Md Mahiuddin, who sought to contest as an independent, was rejected after discrepancies were found in the signatures of one percent of supporting voters, said Returning Officer Syeda Nurmalah Ashrafi.

Two BNP rebel candidates in Munshiganj-1, Mir Sarafat Ali Sopu and Momin Ali, faced disqualification for the same reason.

In Pabna-1, independents Khairun Nahar Miru and Eunus Ali were

rejected for failing to provide the required voter signatures, said Additional District Election Officer Sayeed Abu Sayeed.

For the same reason, seven candidates in Natore-1, Natore-2 and Natore-4 were also excluded, according to District Election Officer Md Nazrul Islam.

In Kurigram-3, BNP's Rangpur Divisional Assistant Organizing Secretary Abdul Khalek was disqualified for forgery in voter signatures, confirmed Abu Bakkar Siddique, assistant commissioner and executive magistrate.

In Cumilla-1, 12 candidates, including Jamaat and Jatiya Party nominees, were rejected. Jamaat's Yusuf Sohel

in Cumilla-3 was disqualified for concealing information about dual citizenship, while Jatiya Party's Iftekhar Ahsan for incomplete statements. CPB General Secretary Abdulla Al Kafi Ratan, contesting Cumilla 5, was excluded for inconsistencies in signatures.

In Brahmanbaria, six independents were rejected: two in Brahmanbaria-1 and four in Brahmanbaria-3.

A total of 2,582 candidates had submitted nomination papers to contest the national election scheduled for February 12, according to the Election Commission.

[Our correspondents from respective districts contributed to the report]

Tarique to begin countrywide tour next week

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and reconnect directly with voters and party activists, they said.

Over in Dhaka, he has been regularly holding court at the party's Gulshan office.

He has instructed BNP candidates to follow the electoral code of conduct and avoid any actions that could damage the party's image. The party has decided to remove all its banners and posters from across the country, including the capital.

The BNP has already expelled nine leaders for running as rival candidates against the party's official nominees.

Party nominees have submitted their nomination papers, and a central election steering committee has been formed to oversee campaign strategy, coordination and discipline.

The steering committee will focus on message consistency, candidate performance and rapid response to

political developments.

Another committee has prepared a draft manifesto and the party is now reviewing it, according to people involved with the proceedings.

However, several major tasks remain incomplete, including resolving tensions involving rival candidates in some constituencies and addressing dissatisfaction among grassroots leaders over nominee selection.

The BNP has already expelled nine leaders for running as rival candidates against the party's official nominees.

The death of party chairperson Khaleda Zia has created a strong wave of public sympathy that could turn into increased voter support if the party remains organised and focused, said a party leader asking not to be named to speak candidly on the issue.

"It has given us fresh energy as we prepare for the polls," he added.

Greater emphasis is now being placed on election strategy, party leadership and strengthening the organisation as time is limited, said a standing committee member asking not to be named.

"Emotion alone will not decide the polls -- political readiness, unity, and discipline will be crucial."

The focus now is to turn this emotional moment into election-related activities through proper planning and strategy, centred on direct engagement with voters via rallies, district-level visits and face-to-face interaction, he added.

"We are all deeply saddened by the death of Khaleda Zia. But to build a happy and prosperous Bangladesh as Khaleda Zia dreamed of, we must move forward towards the election.

We want to turn the grief over her death into strength," Prince said.

His wife, Rahat Ara Begum, owns assets worth approximately Tk 2.44

crore -- more than Tk 1 crore higher than her husband's declared assets.

Her movable assets total Tk 1.21 crore, including 20 bhorti of gold, while her immovable assets are valued at Tk 1.21 crore.

The affidavit states that Fakhrul is 77 years old and holds a postgraduate degree.

In terms of assets, the BNP leader owns five acres of agricultural land and a portion of a two-storey ancestral house. His movable assets include Tk 1.26 crore in cash and Tk 3.82 lakh deposited in three bank accounts. He also owns a private car, 10 bhorti of gold and other ornaments, and a double-barrel gun, though their values have been marked as "undisclosed". Additionally, he possesses electronic goods worth Tk 1.5 lakh and furniture valued at Tk 1.4 lakh.

The affidavit further reveals that 50 cases have been filed against him. He has received relief in 47 cases and been acquitted in the remaining three.

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Rahat Ara Begum owns agricultural and non-agricultural land acquired for Tk 51.84 lakh, 12 decimals of land in Thakurgaon valued at Tk 39.72 lakh, and a five-katha plot in Purbachal near Dhaka acquired for Tk 8.54 lakh. She also owns a 1,950-square-foot flat in Gulshan-2, valued at Tk 20.50 lakh, and a car worth Tk 26.52 lakh.

According to tax records, Fakhrul paid Tk 72,889 in income tax in the 2025-26 fiscal year, while his wife paid Tk 1,20,585.

In his submission to the EC, Fakhrul said he would finance his election campaign from his own income and estimated campaign expenditure at Tk 51.16 lakh.

The BNP leader has been elected to parliament three times. He took the oath in 1996 and 2001, but did not after winning the 2018 election.

Neighbourly ties will improve in due course Says Indian FM, wishes Bangladesh well for polls

UNB, Dhaka

Wishing Bangladesh well for the upcoming national election, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar yesterday said neighbourly ties in the region will improve in due course.

"Right now, they (Bangladesh) are heading for elections. We wish them well. We hope that once things settle down, the sense of neighbourliness in this region will grow," he said while responding to a question at an interactive session in Chennai.

Highlighting India's growth, Jaishankar said if India grows, all its neighbours will grow too.

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