

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 Udyan in Dhaka yesterday morning.

They arrived 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 Zahia 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.



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 Udyan in the morning.

PHOTO: BNP MEDIA CELL



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.

"We will have many more opportunities. That, in a sense, is the message that I took to Bangladesh," said Jaishankar, who visited Dhaka on Wednesday to attend the funeral of BNP chairperson and three-time prime minister Khaleda Zia.

He handed over a letter on behalf of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

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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

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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

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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 trainee 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 Kania 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.

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 Rahmani 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 Nurmahal Ashrafi.

Two BNP rebel candidates in Munshiganj-1, Mir Sarafat Ali Sopa 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 Sayed 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, 12 candidates, including Jamaat and Jatiya Party nominees, were rejected. Jamaat's Yusuf Sohail

in Cumilla-3 was disqualified for concealing information about dual citizenship, while Jatiya Party's Iftekhar Ahsan for incomplete financial statements. CPB General Secretary Abdullah 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]

A positive move

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missive, bear particular significance. This visit by Jaishankar must also be seen in the context of Pakistani and Chinese enthusiasm to engage with the interim government as well as the political parties of Bangladesh. The Indian establishment has been keenly observing this development which must have seemed like Dhaka slipped out of its fold.

Foreign adviser Touhid Hossain later said that the visit of foreign dignitaries was purely out of courtesy and insisted that Jaishankar's visit had nothing to do with politics or bilateral relations. But the gesture from Delhi is unmistakable and Modi's letter clearly suggests that it is very much about bilateral relations and politics.

In the letter, Narendra Modi recalls his meeting and discussions with Khaleda in Dhaka in June 2015. He writes, "She made many important contributions to the development of Bangladesh, as well as to the strengthening of India-Bangladesh relations."

This was echoed by the Indian defence minister as well. Rajnath Singh visited the Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi and signed a condolence book. He wrote in flowing cursive, "Her notable contributions to strengthening India-Bangladesh ties will always be remembered."

It may be recalled here that the relationship between Bangladesh and India during the last BNP tenure (2001-2006) had been strained, to say the least. But Modi's letter shows that India is willing to look past all that as he expresses confidence in Tarique's "able leadership of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party" and that it will "ensure a new beginning

and the enrichment of the deep and historic partnership between India and Bangladesh".

Of note here, is that Modi not only accepts Tarique as BNP leader, but hopes that bilateral relations will flourish between the two countries with him as the leader. Considering that Tarique is not in office, it is implicit that should the BNP come to power, India would be ready to engage constructively and positively. In fact, one might even suggest that the Modi government is not just willing but looking forward to working with the BNP as its counterpart in Bangladesh.

This also indicates a shift in New Delhi. While a number of statements and remarks from the neighbouring country have insisted on "inclusive" elections, which can be taken to mean India's insistence that all parties be allowed to participate in the upcoming election, one might wonder if Modi's letter indicates a slight realignment of his government's expectation. As such, Khaleda's funeral offered New Delhi the occasion to extend an olive branch to BNP.

However, building good relations with one party as India had done during the Awami League regime will hardly be enough for warmer bilateral relations. There is widespread anti-India feeling across the Bangladeshi spectrum that stems from a feeling that the larger neighbour has never treated us as an equal sovereign nation. India must rid itself of the tendency to appreciate our agreement but admonish Bangladesh's assertion. The onus here actually lies with India to develop a genuine people to people relation that could be the foundation of the "new beginning" as Modi puts it.

Porwar's assets worth Tk 1.14cr

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deposited in banks and financial institutions. He also declared electronic goods worth Tk 80,650 and furniture valued at Tk 1.10 lakh. The total acquisition value of his movable assets is about Tk 15.05 lakh, with a current estimated value of around Tk 14.09 lakh.

His wife, Kamrun Nahar Salma, is a homemaker. The annual income of Porwar's dependents is shown as Tk 3,330. She has Tk 2,675 in cash and Tk 4,345 deposited in banks and financial institutions.

Altogether, her movable assets, including 15 bhoi of gold, had an

acquisition value of Tk 52,020, but their current estimated market value is about Tk 22.57 lakh.

In his affidavit, he mentioned that 48 criminal cases had been filed against him and he has been acquitted or discharged in all of the cases.

In the current year, Porwar reported an income of Tk 4,82,478 and paid Tk 5,625 in income tax. His submitted tax return shows total assets worth about Tk 37.81 lakh.

Porwar was elected as an MP from Khulna 5 in 2001 as a candidate of the BNP-led four-party alliance.

Fakhrul's income rose

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Market in Thakurgaon. He earns Tk 7.98 lakh as honorarium from two organisations as a consultant, along with Tk 7,901 from other sources. His income in 2018 was Tk 11.31 lakh.

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 bhoi 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.

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 bhoi of gold, while her immovable assets are valued at Tk 1.21 crore.

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.