

Remembering Khaleda Zia, her legal ordeal, and the courts that failed her



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The immense gathering on the final day of 2025 for the janaza prayers of Begum Khaleda Zia marked a historic moment as millions came to pay their last respects to her. Overflowing the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban grounds, mourners filled surrounding neighbourhoods, streets, rooftops, and even the subway. It was a spontaneous, unchoreographed expression of love and grief for a leader who had sacrificed her life for democracy. Standing in the lush green fields adjacent to the South Plaza, I found myself reflecting on Khaleda Zia's life of public service, firm resolve, and quiet sacrifice, and on the dignity with which she had endured years of struggle against autocracy.

As a practising member of the bar association, I witnessed—and participated in—numerous politically charged legal proceedings during the 15 years of Awami League's authoritarian rule. I was familiar with Khaleda Zia's cases and had the opportunity to discuss them with the late former attorney general, A. J. Mohammad Ali, who had represented her in all major legal proceedings. A neighbour of ours, Mr Ali often shared details of these cases, particularly his harrowing experiences during the Bakshibazar trials. It was clear that the system was rigged against her. Once the executive decided to prosecute, her fate was sealed. Yet Mr Ali remained resolute, once telling me, "We will keep going to court. We will keep knocking on their doors. They may turn us away, but we will come back again."

The Zia Orphanage Trust case was perhaps the most high-profile case against Khaleda Zia, yet a review of the facts reveals its tenuous foundation. She was accused of

an unprecedented move, enhanced the sentence to 10 years. The judges involved were later rewarded: the trial judge was elevated to the High Court Division and the presiding appellate judge to the Appellate Division.

The Zia Charitable Trust case followed a similar pattern. It concerned a private trust—the Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Charitable

special court.

The Niko graft case further illustrated how the legal system was weaponised against her. In 1998, after failing to secure a tender, the Canadian company Niko Resources submitted a proposal to then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to extract gas from Bangladesh. In 2001, the Hasina government directed that a

Zia over the Niko deal. In 2010, the High Court quashed the corruption proceedings against Sheikh Hasina. Yet in 2015, in broadly similar proceedings against Khaleda Zia, the High Court held that there was no legal bar to prosecuting her. A few years later, the presiding judge of the relevant High Court bench was elevated to the Appellate Division,

Medical) University authorities for appropriate treatment." The court did not even address the proviso to section 497(l) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which allows preferential bail treatment for women and infirm persons accused of non-bailable offences.

It ultimately took a revolution, the loss of over a thousand lives, and the reconstitution of the Supreme Court to correct these injustices. In November 2024, the High Court Division set aside Khaleda Zia's conviction in the Zia Charitable Trust case. Shortly thereafter, in January 2025, the Appellate Division allowed her appeal in the Zia Orphanage Trust case, holding the proceedings to be a "manifestly contrived misapplication of the law" amounting to "malicious prosecution."

By the time Khaleda Zia was released, the damage to her health was irreversible. Years of incarceration, isolation, and denial of proper medical care had taken a devastating toll. The judiciary, constitutionally bound to protect fundamental rights, had instead acted at the behest of the executive, aided by a complicit Attorney General's Office and Anti-Corruption Commission. Judges lacking moral courage and prosecutors driven by political loyalty ensured that she remained imprisoned and unable to seek treatment abroad for what was once a manageable condition.

There is no doubt that the legal system had failed Khaleda Zia. It is difficult to comprehend how a former prime minister—elderly and gravely ill—was denied bail while her appeal remained pending before the Supreme Court. Those who relentlessly pursued her conviction displayed a lack of professional judgement and a readiness to serve partisan interests. The apex court's handling of her case, clearly shaped by the then prime minister's determination to politically eliminate Begum Zia, marks one of its darkest chapters. Its inability to deliver justice in a fair, impartial, and dispassionate manner is a sobering reminder of how far Bangladesh still has to go to achieve true judicial independence.



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misappropriating funds from the "Prime Minister's Orphanage Fund" during her tenure from 1991 to 1996. The defence argued that the fund had never been entrusted to her and that, absent such entrustment, no charge of criminal misappropriation could stand. Evidence showed that the funds were donated by the Emir of Kuwait directly to the trust—facts fatal to the prosecution. Despite this, she was convicted and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. On appeal, the High Court Division, in

Trust—with Khaleda Zia as the managing trustee and her two sons as trustees. Khaleda Zia was charged under section 5(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act as a "public servant," despite the trust being a private trust within the meaning of the Trust Act. Ordinarily, such proceedings would have been quashed as an abuse of process, as the admitted facts disclosed no offence against her. Yet Khaleda Zia was tried, convicted, and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment by a

joint venture agreement with Niko be finalised and placed before the government. After the change of power, and in continuation of these decisions, Bapex and Niko signed an agreement on October 16, 2003, permitting Niko to extract gas from Bangladesh's gas fields.

During the Fakhruddin Ahmed-led 1/II government, the Anti-Corruption Commission, pursuing the so-called "minus two formula," initiated separate proceedings against Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda

superseding several senior judges.

As these proceedings dragged on, Khaleda Zia was repeatedly denied bail. In the Zia Orphanage Trust case, a medical board report was placed before the apex court stating that "her rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is highly active, with advanced deformities and marked functional decline." Despite the seriousness of her condition, the Appellate Division denied her bail, observing instead that "she should cooperate with the (Bangabandhu) Sheikh Mujib

How modern wind turbine technology can reshape Bangladesh's energy future

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Bangladesh, a developing economy heavily reliant on fossil fuels, is entering a critical phase of its energy journey amid rising energy demand and environmental challenges. The power sector, being the largest consumer of natural gas in the country, not only contributes to greenhouse gas emissions but also incurs high energy import costs, as evident in the 13.86 percent surge in LNG imports in FY2024-25. Thus, wind power is becoming a more practical choice as Bangladesh moves towards renewable energy sources.

Bangladesh has considerable potential for wind energy resources. However, the development of the wind energy sector is experiencing slow growth due to a challenging regulatory situation and investment uncertainty. Currently, there are 15 wind energy projects either in operation or in the planning stages, with a total capacity of 777,902 MWp, according to the SREDA. Bangladesh's first commercial wind power plant began its full-scale operation in March 2024. This marked a significant milestone for Bangladesh in its

capacity in Chandpur and Feni.

The wind energy sector is undergoing a major transformation due to recent revolutionary innovations in the way wind is harnessed for electricity generation, which also reduces costs. The recent developments are not only translating into higher efficiencies, but they are also bringing wind power closer to accessibility and affordability than ever. Optimisation of turbines for aerodynamic performance is highlighted as a key research theme in wind technology today. An increase in turbine efficiency is achieved via improved blade design and materials used. New blade designs provide an optimal aerodynamic profile that captures more wind energy over a wider range of wind speeds.

Notable advancements such as variable pitch and twist technologies enable blades to continuously vary to changing wind conditions over their entire span, optimising performance, minimising mechanical loads, and increasing their longevity. At present, the shift towards advanced materials is crucial. Today, most turbine blades are made of composite materials such as fibreglass and carbon fibre with good strength-to-weight ratios. This progress enables building larger blades that can capture more wind energy whilst also extending operational lifetime and reducing maintenance costs. Modern



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One way to overcome limitations associated with regions with lower wind resources, such as Bangladesh, is a concept called "Low Wind", which uses special turbines for low wind speeds. The goal of this design is to produce power when traditional windfarms are not doing so, and eliminate the "cannibalisation effect" responsible for making electricity less expensive when suddenly all farms produce renewable energy at the same time, thus driving down prices. Low Wind turbines are identified by their very-long blades to optimise power at the lowest wind speed, and low cut-out speed around 12-13 metres per second.

Bangladesh can take advantage of the state-of-the-art technologies in wind turbines to enhance its renewable energy capacity. According to a detailed study conducted in 2018 by the US Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory, Bangladesh has wind energy potential of at

least 30,000MW. The coastline is 710 km, and in the southwest lies the Sundarbans mangrove and in the southeast the Saint Martin's coral island. Since fixed wind turbines cannot be installed in the Bay of Bengal, floating wind farms can be positioned further out from shore. If we build seaside windfarms, for instance, using 153-metre blades, we could supply energy to a lot of homes simultaneously. Residential areas are best suited for bladeless turbines. They are easily manageable because they are small, quiet, and less demanding.

The adoption of wind power is expected to speed up the development trajectory for Bangladesh, as it will not only be a green energy source for households but also a powerhouse for the national economy. The growing wind power industry is also expected to nurture a new generation of trained workers, from engineers and maintenance staff to power managers, another factor contributing to the country's development.

Also, the environmental benefits of wind power go far beyond simply reducing carbon emissions. With an increasing demand and production of wind farms, the country will rely less on imported fossil fuels. This shift promises much cleaner air because burning coal releases toxic pollutants such as sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, which conventional power plants continuously spew into the atmosphere daily.

Although there may still be some reliance on traditional sources in the short term, every step forward is crucial. The wind energy sector's coming-of-age can mean a solid green footing for a cleaner future and a better way of life in Bangladesh. In fact, we can lead the way in the deployment of advanced wind technologies with floating offshore farms and low-wind turbines, thus creating energy independence, new industries, and sustainable economic development, while ensuring a large reduction in national emissions.

transition towards renewable energy. Other projects are underway, including the 100 MW Anwara Wind Power in Chittagong, which is currently in the planning stages. This is expected to make a significant contribution to the country's renewable energy capacity by 2035. In addition, the 100 MW Wind Power Plant in Matarbari is set to be completed in 2026. Plans are also underway for wind power plants with lower

wind turbine towers now exceed heights of 160 metres, enabling the deployment of large rotors with diameters of up to 150 metres that can access stronger and more consistent winds at higher altitudes. Meanwhile, the use of segmented blades, which can be converted into long blades to improve the energy capture per turbine, reduces the cost of transportation, a key factor in lowering installation costs.