

Tide turns for jailed politicians, businessmen in Bangladesh

The tide seems to be turning in Bangladesh. Scores of politicians, officials and businessmen jailed for many months, mostly on corruption charges, are starting to get bail with the courts rejecting the Emergency Rules under which they were arrested.

The development comes as the government is preparing for fresh elections to parliament in December and engaging political parties in a dialogue.

It may be a coincidence, but the courts are becoming increasingly assertive.

On Wednesday, a court asked the government to release within an hour noted industrialist Salman F. Rahman, vice chairman of Beximco Group. Rahman sought the court's permission to sue the government for defamation.

He had been in jail since February last year on corruption charges, in a total of 11 cases.

Among prominent politicians, former prime minister Sheikh Hasina has been in the US for the past six weeks for medical treatment after being given bail.

She has since got another month of parole even as a number of cases are being pursued in her absence.

Her chief rival and former prime minister Khaleda Zia received bail this week for four months, along with her ailing elder son Tarique Rahman.

The government eventually decided not to come in the way of her bail, political observers say, following protest demonstrations by Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

On Tuesday, a court released several ministers of her former government, including Motiur Rahman Nizami, the Amir (chief) of Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh's largest Islamist party.

Those who won bail Wednesday include former ministers and BNP leaders including Lutfozzaman Babar.

Babar has been charged with sheltering members of Islamist terror groups who organised a grenade attack on a Hasina rally in August 2004. Twentytwo people died and a hundred were injured in the attack.

A high court bench comprising Justice Sharif Uddin Chaklader and Justice Md Emdadul Haque Azad ordered grant of bail in cases filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), the government and individuals.

The court also stayed proceedings of most cases and asked the state to explain why the petitioners should not get regular bail and why proceedings against them should not be quashed, the Daily Star newspaper said Thursday.

The other accused who got bail Wednesday include former BNP minister Tariqul Islam, former state

minister Aman Ullah Aman, former lawmakers Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, Salauddin Ahmed, Ali Asgar Loby, Nazimuddin Alam, Alamgir Farid and Kamal Ahmed Majumder, former Rajshahi City Corporation mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu and Sylhet City Corporation Mayor Badaruddin Ahmed Kamran.

Meanwhile, the military-backed interim government's plans to grant amnesty to politicians, businessmen and officials have met with limited success.

Not a single politician has figured before the Truth and Accountability Commission (TAC), according to New Age newspaper.

The recently constituted body has yet to receive any case files of politicians from the Anti-Corruption Commission or the National Coordination Committee, the TAC chairman said Wednesday.

The TAC has so far received records of about 182 cases, filed against 184 people, its chairman, said retired Justice Habibur Rahman Khan.

Bangladesh is governed by a caretaker government that cancelled elections in January 2007 amid turmoil and has since conducted a massive drive against crime and corruption, putting in jail over 200,000 people.

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