

Bangladesh court sends Jamaat leaders to jail in graft case

A Bangladesh court Monday sent two top leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel), the country's largest Islamist party, to jail for corruption in the awarding of a coal mining contract when they were ministers in the Khaleda Zia government.

The development could harden the attitude of the four-party alliance of former prime minister Khaleda Zia against participating in the Dec 18 parliamentary polls.

Motiuur Rahman Nizami, the Ameer (chief) of the Jel, and Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mujahid, his right-hand and Jel's secretary general, were sent to jail. Also jailed was Saifur Rahman, who was Zia's finance minister.

The three had served as ministers from 2001 to 2006 when Zia was prime minister.

Judge Arup Kumar Roy rejected their bail plea after they surrendered and ordered that the case be taken up Wednesday.

Earlier Monday, the three surrendered before a court and prayed for bail in the case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

The ACC filed the case on Feb 26 this year, accusing 16 people including Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Chairperson Khaleda Zia of causing a loss of Taka 1.59 billion to the state exchequer by awarding a contract for operating the Barapukuria coal mine to a Chinese company through abuse of power.

The three are to move an appeals court Tuesday, Star Online said.

However, a prolonged incarceration of the three could hurt the electoral prospects of the Zia-led alliance, political analysts said.

Zia and her allies have said they are preparing for the polls and for 'a movement'. Zia has submitted a seven point charter of demands to the caretaker government before she gives the nod to participating in the election.

Without naming anybody, Zia has accused the military-backed caretaker government of working for 'one party', alluding to her rival Sheikh Hasina's Awami League.

The government is trying to woo Zia and her allies and media reports indicate that it is considering the seven-point charter.

There has been a sustained campaign against Nizami and Mojahid by former freedom fighters who accuse the two of collaborating with the Pakistan authorities in 1971 and killing several unarmed civilians, including teachers and artists, before Bangladesh became independent.

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