

Khaleda at ‘Firoza’ after 776 days

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Deserted for the last 25 months, the house on Road no-79 in the capital’s Gulshan-2, was decked up yesterday as its tenant, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, came back after spending 776 days in jail.

Khaleda’s younger brother Shamim Iskandar took Khaleda in his car to the the two-storey house named “Firoza” around 5:20pm yesterday. His wife Kaniz Fatema was sitting next to the former prime minister in the car as it left Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, where Khaleda was receiving treatment.

Khaleda’s sister and brother-in-law, Selima Islam and Rafiqul Islam, and other family members welcomed the BNP chief, who was behind bars on charge of corruption. Khaleda was released following an executive order.

Since Tuesday, when the law minister announced her release from jail, the house was cleaned and party leaders and activists started thronging in front of the house. They chanted slogans as their party chairperson came back home.

Security men of the house said Shamim Iskandar and his wife supervised the cleaning of the house.

One of Khaleda’s security officials said all the rooms of the house were cleaned, including her bedroom, reading room and drawing room on the first floor, and the one on the ground floor.

On the entrance of the first floor, flower tubs were placed, just like they were when she left the house on February 8, 2018.

Sources said daily essentials including rice, lentils, spices, oil, fruits were bought in the morning. Around 3:00pm, Shamim Iskandar brought cooked food for Khaleda.

Tarique Rahman, grandchildren, skyping. Crying.

Family members are thinking of keeping her in quarantine and urging that she avoid public gatherings, didn’t meet any neta, went to her room. Nurse and doctor for home treatment.

Khaleda’s aide Fatema Begum, who was with Khaleda during her imprisonment days, also returned to the house.

The house was crowded with party leaders and activists on February 8, 2018, when BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia left to appear before court for the verdict over a corruption case.

That very day, she was sent to the old jail in Najimuddin Road and had been behind bars since then and the house remained vacant, except four security personnel looked after it by rotation.

Khaleda’s younger son Arafat Rahman Koko’s wife Sharmila Rahman Shithi, along with her two daughters, stayed in the house for around 12 days.

Gas connections and telephone lines of the house were disconnected, said a family member of Khaleda wishing not to be named.

Before landing in jail, a police team provided security for Khaleda but after her jailing, the police protection was withdrawn.

The 74-year-old former prime minister had been staying in the house since 2011, after she was ousted from her long-time home in Dhaka cantonment following a High Court verdict.

The court ruled it was “highly illegal” and “contrary to public interest” for the military chief to give away a cantonment house to Khaleda with the president’s approval.

After being hosted by her younger brother Shamim Iskandar, she started living in the house.

Built on one bigha of land, the two-storey house in Gulshan was decorated to her taste before she moved in.

Facing the Russian embassy, the house with a lush green lawn is also close to the Pakistan High Commission.

The house was “rented” from Tanveer Islam, younger son of retired major and former BNP state minister Quamrul Islam.

After Khaleda came back home yesterday, she called her son Tarique Rahman over Skype and video-chatted with him and his children as they cried together.

While her home was crowded with people, Khaleda did not meet or speak to any of her party leaders or activists and went straight to her bedroom on the first floor.

Her family members said they are thinking of keeping her in quarantine to keep her safe and away from public gatherings at the moment, adding that they are also arranging for nurses and doctors to take care of her at home.

Three US sailors test positive for virus on aircraft carrier

AFP, Washington

Three US sailors from the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt have been diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, the first cases reported on a US Navy ship currently on deployment, officials said Tuesday.

The three have been evacuated and all those they had come into contact with on the vessel, which has more than 5,000 personnel on board, have been quarantined, Acting Navy Secretary Thomas B. Modly told reporters.



Defying social distancing guidance on coronavirus, BNP leaders and activists escort party Chairperson Khaleda Zia to her Gulshan home after she was freed from jail yesterday for six months. The photo was taken in the capital’s Paribagh area.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Khaleda Zia freed, gets back home

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gloves followed the vehicles from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University to Gulshan.

Law Minister Anisul Huq told journalists on Tuesday that Khaleda would be released from jail on humanitarian grounds for six months.

The government made the decision as per section 401 (1) of the Criminal Code of Procedure (CrPC), the minister

mentioned.

The BNP chief landed in jail on February 8, 2018, after a special court sentenced her to five years in prison in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case. On October 30, 2018, the High Court raised her punishment to 10 years.

Party leaders threatened to take to the streets and fight legally to release her. After they failed to get her released, the family members repeatedly urged

the government to release her on bail.

They alleged that her health had declined due to improper treatment at the BSMMU where she had been admitted since April 1 last year. They wrote to the government twice and also met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

While coming out of the hospital, she neither talked to reporters nor waved at the activists.

In the Zia Charitable Trust corruption

case on October 29, 2018, a court jailed Khaleda and three others for seven years. The HC rejected her bail petition three times and the Supreme Court once.

Yesterday afternoon, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, several other senior leaders and Khaleda’s family members reached the hospital about an hour before she was released.

Fakhrul repeatedly urged the crowd to disperse, but no one listened to him.

It may be happening on a ‘limited scale’

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She also informed journalists that no confirmed Covid-19 cases were detected in 24 hours till 1:00pm yesterday. So, the total number of those infected remained same at 39 from the previous day.

So far, the IEDCR has tested 794 suspected cases, including 82 in last 24 hours till 1:00pm.

The fifth person who died from Covid-19 breathed his last yesterday morning at a hospital in Dhaka. He

had been tested novel coronavirus positive on March 18, according to IEDCR.

The patient - male and aged 65 -- had diabetes and hypertension. Initially after the diagnosis, he was being treated in isolation in his locality and was brought to Dhaka on March 21, said sources.

Of the 39 infected patients, five died, nine recovered and were discharged from hospitals while 25 are under treatment. Two people were

discharged yesterday.

Forty-seven people suspected to have contracted the virus are now kept in isolation while 47 others are in institutional quarantine, said IEDCR sources.

The IEDCR director also said facilities for testing coronavirus infection would be expanded to several hospitals and institutions in Dhaka and elsewhere. Currently, such tests are carried out only at the IEDCR in the capital’s Mohakhali.

Prof Flora asked people to call 01944333222 and 10655 to inform them about any suspected coronavirus cases. People can also call 16263 for any health-related issues, she said.

She came up with the information after many complained that they were facing difficulties in reaching the IEDCR hotline numbers.

IEDCR can also be reached through iedccrcovid19@gmail.com, she added.

Tk 5,000cr for workers’ pay

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she said.

Hasina asked the people to strictly follow health instructions to fight against coronavirus and avoid public gatherings.

She said right now the highest priority for the government is to save people from the virus.

Bangladesh has so far confirmed 39 cases after testing 794 people. Of them, five have died so far died and seven others recovered.

The PM said the World Health Organization has already declared the coronavirus crisis a pandemic. She noted that the Independence Day would be observed in a different context this year due to the outbreak of Covid-19.

“Be they rich or poor, developed or developing, small or big, all countries are more or less affected by this virus. Bangladesh is not free from this infection as well.”

She urged everyone to avoid organising programmes which require public gatherings.

Hasina said she was aware that people were passing their days in a kind of panic and worry. “I can understand their psychological condition, but at this crisis moment, we have to face the situation with patience and courage.”

She called on the expatriates who returned from coronavirus-hit countries to thoroughly follow home quarantine rules. “Just stay separately for only 14 days. These instructions have to be followed to save your

family, neighbours, people of the area, and above all, the people of the country.”

She requested the Muslims to offer prayers and followers of other faiths to perform their religious activities at home for now.

Hasina said the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) has opened hotline numbers and doctors have opened 500 numbers. “If the coronavirus symptoms show up, please contact those numbers. The government is arranging all types of treatment.”

She said although coronavirus has the ability to spread quickly, it is not that deadly. Most of the people infected with the virus get well within a few days, but it turns deadly for people with underlying medical conditions and the old, she added.

The PM urged everyone to pay the highest attention to those of their family members who are most sensitive.

“Don’t panic. Panic destroys logical thinking. Your awareness will keep you, your family and above all the people of the country safe,” she said.

Hasina described various measures taken by her government from the very beginning of coronavirus outbreak in China. She said 6,58,981 people have been screened at different ports in the country.

The government has taken up massive programmes since January to tackle the coronavirus. Committees have been formed at

the city corporation, municipality, district, upazila and unions levels, she said.

Covid-19, first reported in China in December last year, has affected 196 countries and territories and one international conveyance. Until yesterday, 435,382 cases have been confirmed globally with a death toll of 19,620, according to Worldometer.

Hasina said health workers have to play an important role in providing treatment to the infected people. “Sufficient materials have been supplied for their safety and enough materials have been preserved as highest priority has been given on their safety. Don’t be confused.”

Urging all not to spread rumours, she warned the rumour-mongers of stern actions.

She mentioned that operation of passenger trains, water vessels and domestic flights have been suspended from last night.

The PM hoped that the world would be able to get rid of this calamity very soon due to the development of science and technology and efforts from all.

Talking about the supply of essentials, the premier said the supply chain within and outside the country is intact.

“Don’t raise the prices of essentials illogically. Don’t deepen the misery of the people. Steps have been taken to monitor the markets everywhere,” she said.

‘TIME TO HELP EACH OTHER’
Hasina said a good number of

people in the country have lost their jobs due to the coronavirus outbreak. “We have to stand beside them.”

She said the low-income people would be provided assistance under the “Return-to-Home” programme for the homeless and landless people as there would be homes free of cost, six month’s food and cash assistance. “The district administrations have been directed in this regard.”

The PM said accommodation has been made in Bhashanchar island to provide shelter and employment for 100,000 people. “The government will take steps if anyone wants to go there.”

She said VGD, VGF and rice for Tk 10 per kg programmes would be continued with free medicine and treatment. She urged the rich to come forward to help the poor.

Mentioning that it is the time for austerity, Hasina urged the people not to purchase excessive consumer goods, and not to hoard and let the fixed-income group people buy.

She said private mill owners and farmers have a huge stock of foodgrains. In the current season, the country has bumper production of potato, onion, chilli and wheat, she added.

Hasina said the test of humanity occurs during a disaster.

“This is the time to help each other and show humanity. The Bangalees are a nation of heroes. The Bangalee nation faced various disasters and crisis with united efforts,” she said.

Noab urges all to read newspapers

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understandable reasons behind it. Man was not prepared for such a virus. The extent of the spread of the virus and the increasing number of deaths along with the fact that the movement of the virus is still under investigation make matters worse. At this sensitive moment, the Newspapers Owners’ Association of Bangladesh (Noab) is expressing heartfelt compassion and unanimity with all.

This is a terrible time, not only for Bangladesh, but for the whole world. We want to tell everybody with firm conviction and pride that we from the newspapers have been with the people in any national emergency and disaster. In the latest adversity of coronavirus, daily newspapers have been publishing items that are helpful, remedial and awareness-building. The dailies are publishing on a regular basis

news regarding ongoing research, new health rules and methods that must be followed along with stories of success in the matter.

We are noticing with agony that in such times of human frailty, the situation is being made more delicate by a section of social media feeding on unreliable information. Many readers are refraining from reading newspapers from such unfounded and conjectural ideas that newsprints may spread the virus. In fact, such ideas have no basis. The United States Journal of Medicine published from New England found in their research that the virus lives for a maximum of three hours in the air, a day on the cardboard and two to three days on plastic and stainless steel. However, Professor Caroline Makhamar, a long-time researcher, has published in the website of Johns Hopkins University that on surface of objects the virus has a

minimal chance of survival even though it might seem fearful to some. From the surface of objects there is very little chance of the virus spreading, one in a thousand, she said.

Thus far no research-information is available to suggest that newsprint or paper helps in the survival of the virus. The World Health Organisation has said that commercial items have very little chance of carrying contamination. Goods being transported to different places at various temperatures have little risk of coronavirus infection. The US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention has said that there is no chance of the spread of this virus through newspapers.

Even then NOAB has started an awareness-building endeavour on behalf of all newspapers for the newspaper agents and hawkers. By now Noab has been distributing masks,

gloves and sanitisers among the agents and hawkers in Dhaka and outside. Such activity by Noab will continue in the future also.

At such a time the important thing is to know the facts and inform what is really happening. The best way to save oneself from coronavirus is to know the latest and reliable information. News publishing is professional work. Before an information is published everything is examined through experienced and knowledgeable hands with great care. For any information, newspapers are the source of reliable news all over the world. During such testing times of coronavirus, newspapers are by the side of the readers as ever awake friends to give them the real security, carefulness and correct decision.

Our goal is to ensure good health, security and wellbeing to all. We request everybody to read newspapers.

PROTECTION FROM COVID-19 Noab to provide protective gears to newspaper agents, hawkers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Newspaper Owners’ Association of Bangladesh (Noab) will provide 3,000 hand sanitisers, 23,000 face masks and 23,000 hand gloves to newspaper agents and hawkers across the country.

The decision was made at a meeting on Tuesday so that the agents and hawkers can distribute newspapers in the capital and elsewhere by protecting themselves from coronavirus infection.

Called by Noab, the meeting of Bangladesh Newspaper Circulation Managers’ Association (BNCMA) was held at the Prothom Alo office in the capital’s Karwan Bazar, says a release.

At the meeting, BNCMA representatives said there were around 20,000 newspaper hawkers in the country.

They said all educational institutions and student dormitories had already been closed as part of efforts to contain the spread of the virus. Newspaper distribution to many apartments in urban areas also remained halted.

Besides, officials from different tiers of the administration have asked hawkers not to distribute newspapers, saying the virus might spread. Some hawkers have remained absent over concern over coronavirus, they said.

Despite these, different hawkers’ associations said they would continue distributing and selling newspapers across the country.

Noab will take special measures to ensure safety of hawkers and agents. They will be provided with support from Noab now and in the future, according to the release.

Citing findings of a research, Noab said there has never been a documented incident where Covid-19 has transmitted from a print newspaper, print magazine, print letter, or print package.

NEWS, PHOTOS ON ARMED FORCES

Don’t publish them without verification

Says ISPR

Bss, Dhaka

The Inter Services Public Relations Directorate (ISPR) yesterday requested all not to publish news and photos on the basis of false, misleading and hypothetical information on the members of armed forces deployed across the country to combat coronavirus.

In a press release, it also requested all to check any information with it before running any news on the armed forces.

On Tuesday, the authorities spread out troops in major cities to help the civil administration tackle the COVID-19 situation.

The personnel were moved out to divisional and district headquarters. Yesterday, they launched full scale anti-Covid-19 campaigns, finalising their modus operandi with divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners, said the press release.

‘Robber’ killed in ‘gunfight’ in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A suspected robber was killed in a “gunfight” with police in Sadar upazila of Kushtia early yesterday, after several hours of his arrest.

The dead -- Parvez Khan, 33, of Kushtia town -- was a member of a notorious robbery gang and had nine robbery cases filed against him, said police.

Golam Mostafa, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kushtia Model Police Station, said they arrested Parvez on Tuesday afternoon and got information on his firearm storage.

On information, police along with Parvez went to Shalda village in the upazila to recover the firearms. On their way, Parvez’s cohorts opened fire on police around 3:30am, forcing the law enforcers to retaliate, he added.

At one point of the “gunfight”, Parvez sustained bullet wounds and died on the spot, he said.

The body was sent to Kushtia General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Asked, who would take responsibility for the death in police custody, the OC said, “We will not be responsible.”

Police claimed that three of their personnel were injured during the “gunfight”. They also claimed to have recovered a foreign pistol, a magazine, three bullets and one Ramda from the spot.

The Daily Star, however, could not independently verify the police claims.