

Kajol all set to be free at last

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Thus began the long legal battle for his bail which lasted more than half the year. It has been 280 days since he has not been home.

Yesterday, the High Court cleared the way of him to walk out of jail as it granted him bail in two of the three cases.

Kajol has already secured bail in the other case recently.

The HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman granted the bail following two separate bail petitions filed by Kajol in the cases lodged with Hazaribagh and Kamrangirchar police stations.

Kajol's lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua told The Daily Star that there was now no legal bar to his client's release following the HC verdict.

Kajol's son Monorom Polok said, "I am happy that my father will be released ... but I cannot be totally happy unless he comes home from jail. That might happen sometime in the middle of next week, or maybe there will be some delay in it."

Polok's apparent skepticism stems from the way this year has turned out to be for his family.

For a single Facebook post, Kajol was denied bail a total of 13 times, according to Article 19, a human rights organisation.

In the meantime, Polok waged a solitary war on social media, on the streets and in front of video cameras to get his father released.

As the days wore on, the protests sparked with innovation -- in one instance he organised a street theatre performance in front of the Shaheed Minar, in another he influenced people to post photos holding placards written "Free Kajol" in them.

To the media, he distributed their childhood photos with Kajol's silhouette blurred out to show the impact of a missing father. Public submissions of cartoons depicting the family's strife, and demanding freedom of expression also poured in, flooding social media.

International human rights organisations like Amnesty International took note of it, releasing a short-illustrated movie on Kajol's ordeal.

HOW BAIL OBTAINED

The HC bench yesterday granted the bail as the investigation officers failed to take permission from the cyber tribunal to probe the two cases within 75 days of their submission.

The court said it would direct the inspector general of police to take necessary steps for training the two officers regarding provisions of the relevant law.

Justice M Enayetur Rahim said the accused (Kajol) could question

TIMELINE

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May 3:
BGB "found" Kajol wandering about the Indian border in the middle of the night

May 4:
Kajol charged with trespassing and illegal entry for which he gained bail, but at the last-minute police arrested him under Section 54

May 18:
Bail denied by Jashore District Chief Judicial Magistrate Court

June 14:
3 separate virtual courts in Dhaka did not accept bail hearings because police had not officially arrested him in the DSA cases

June 24:
Metropolitan Magistrate Dhiman Chandra Mondol of Virtual Court-4 denied him bail

June 28:
Metropolitan Magistrate Debdash Chandra Adhikary denied him bail. Placed him on two-day remand instead

July 29:
Metropolitan Magistrate Baki Billah of Virtual Court-6 denied him bail

August 24, Sept 9 and Sept 14:

Judge KM Emrul Kayesh of Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court denied him bail thrice

October 19: High Court questioned why Kajol should not be granted bail

November 24:
HC granted Kajol bail in one case and ordered investigation officer and Cyber Tribunal to submit progress reports

Yesterday, Kajol released

move any appeal before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court challenging the HC verdict.

On November 24, the same HC bench had granted bail to Kajol in one of the three cases filed under the DSA.

The same day, the HC bench also asked the investigation officers of the other two cases to inform it whether they took permission from the cyber tribunal within the 75 days.

The investigation officer and the Cyber Tribunal were ordered to submit separate reports to the HC.

The HC bench passed the order after Jyotirmoy told the court that the investigations of the two cases were illegal as the probes had to be concluded within 75 days of filing of the cases.

The investigation officers have not completed investigations of the cases in 75 days, which is a violation of the relevant provision of the law, Jyotirmoy argued.

Ruling Awami League lawmaker from Magura-1 Saifuzzaman Shikhor filed one of the three cases with Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station on March 9 against Kajol and 31 others alleging that the accused had defamed him by publishing a report on crimes of expelled Narsingdi Juba Mahila League general secretary Shamima Nur Papiya.

The two other cases were filed against Kajol on March 10 and 11 with Hazaribagh and Kamrangirchar police stations. One was filed by Hazaribagh unit Juba Mahila League leader Yasmi Ara Belly and the other by Sumaiya Chowdhury Banna, a member of Bangladesh Juba Mahila League's central committee.

the jurisdiction of the investigation officer to continue the probe as he did not take the cyber tribunal's permission within those 75 days.

Deputy Attorney General Sarwar Hossain Bappi told the court that the investigation officer did not take the permission as he perhaps did not know the relevant provision.

Investigation officer Md Russell Mollah is a new police officer, he added.

Lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua told the HC that his client, who is a renowned photographer, had been abducted and kept confined for 53 days.

Kajol has been languishing in jail for a long time, but the IO was going on with the probe in violation of the law.

The accused petitioner has right to life as per the constitution and therefore, he might be granted bail in the cases, Jyotirmoy told the court.

DAG Sarwar Hossain Bappi, who represented the state, could not be reached instantly over phone for his comment on whether the government would



A patient receives an injection of their first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine in their car at a drive-in vaccination centre in Hyde, Greater Manchester, northwest England yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Present grim, future worrying

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updated data till December.

On the other hand, seven lakh or more workers made it overseas for jobs in the past four consecutive years with a record high of 10.08 lakh in 2017, shows BMET data.

When it comes to the existing job situation, around 3.26 lakh Bangladeshi expatriates returned home between April 1 and November 30 this year after coronavirus struck, says Expatriates' Welfare Ministry data.

Most of them returned almost empty-handed after job losses.

Now they see a bleak future ahead with little or no prospect of a job anytime soon in the host countries. The government's various initiatives including a Tk 200 crore special loan scheme for their economic reintegration could not yield benefits to the bulk of the returnees.

Besides, after the pandemic hit, thousands of workers who came home on vacation remained stuck for months and endured sufferings in going back to their workplaces.

Now sector insiders said fresh demands have started to arrive.

The expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry approved applications for new recruitments recently, according to documents available on its website.

However, demand letters that recruiting agencies are now receiving are around 10 to 20 percent of what they used to get in the given time before the pandemic, said Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury Noman, secretary general of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira).

Migrant rights activists and experts said as the pandemic hit the international labour market badly, there are reasons to be worried.

They said the government's concrete efforts are required to explore new markets since some existing markets are undergoing reforms in face of economic challenges compounded by the pandemic.

Lack of efforts could cause Bangladesh's labour markets abroad

to shrink, they said, adding the government should prepare a skilled workforce to compete in the post-coronavirus global market.

BMET data shows this year's highest number of overseas workers to be the 1.33 lakh workers employed in Saudi Arabia, followed by 17,398 workers in Oman.

Besides, 9,418 workers have employment in Singapore, 3,503 in Qatar, 3,068 in Jordan, 2,000 in Mauritius, and 1,743 in Kuwait.

While Lebanon and Brunei hired respectively 4,863 and 3,628 workers last year, they hired only 479 and 528 workers as of May this year.

On the other hand, Malaysia stopped hiring workers from Bangladesh in September 2018.

Shariful Hasan, head of Brac Migration Programme, said considering the present coronavirus situation in various countries, the global labour market might not return to normalcy before the middle of next year.

He stressed that the government can take this as an opportunity to prepare workers focusing on new skills that will be required in the post-coronavirus market.

Due to the pandemic situation, new demands like those in the medical technology field have been created, he said.

Besides exploring new markets, diplomatic efforts should be made to hold on to existing labour markets, Shariful said.

The good reputation of Bangladeshi workers and their contributions to the development of host countries can be addressed aptly in this regard, he added.

He also said the economies of Middle East countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were already undergoing reforms when the pandemic hit.

So there is a concern that the labour market for Bangladeshis in those countries will shrink, he said.

But there is scope for expanding existing markets in Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia and Singapore, he added.

Shariful said exploring new markets remained largely on paper and at the discussion table over the years.

The government has to take time-bound targets while exploring new markets, he added.

Shakirul Islam, chairman of Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Programme, said Saudi Arabia has its own long-term plans regarding its economy which includes the Saudi Vision-2030.

They want to ensure migration of skilled workers, he said.

"We have to multiply our efforts if we want to hold on to the market," he said, adding the efforts should be on creating a skilled workforce and scope for them in the overseas market through bilateral negotiations.

He also said in exploring new labour markets, it should be kept in mind that Bangladeshi workers should not become victims of forced labour.

He suggested exploring markets in countries like China, Japan, Italy and Portugal, which have better economic conditions and migration-friendly policies.

Baira Secretary General Shameem Ahmed Chowdhury Noman said foreign employers, mainly from Saudi Arabia, started to send new demand letters which the recruiting agencies have started to process.

The situation is improving gradually, he said.

Besides, a nominal number of workers have also started to go abroad, he added.

Moreover, demand letters which were received before the pandemic this year are also under process, he further said.

Contacted, BMET Director General Shamsul Alam said they have been working to bring back normalcy in the labour migration sector.

The DG said besides workers going abroad in small numbers, professionals have also started to go for overseas jobs in some African and European countries.

"We are resuming it step by step," he told this newspaper by phone.

Police officer shot

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wounds in his right leg at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital.

Walid Hossain, deputy commissioner (media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said the incident took place around 9:30am when a police team carried out a drive at a house on Baishakhi road near the police outpost to arrest a drug trader.

Acting on a tip-off, the police team went there to arrest an accused named Rakib. The team saw four to five people in a room and when ASI Ujjal grabbed one of them -- named Ibrahim Chowdhury -- thinking he was the accused, he bit the police officer's cheek, pulled out a revolver and opened fire on the ASI.

Police fired back and arrested Ibrahim. They also recovered a firearm and 200 yaba pills from his possession.

The injured were taken to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital. From there, Ibrahim was later shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

No interference

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coordination among the three organs of the state, namely the judiciary, the executive and the legislature. In the absence of this coordination there would be chaos in every organ of the government. Bangabandhu pays homage to those lawyers who laid down their lives during the liberation movement.

Bangabandhu furthers says Bangla has to be made the working language in all offices, including courts. There would be difficulty in introducing this language but the initiative has to be taken in spite of difficulties.

BHASHANI WANTS ALL-PARTY GOVT BEFORE POLLS

Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, president of the Bangladesh National Awami Party, reaffirms today his party's decision to contest all 300 seats in the ensuing general elections and suggests the formation of an all-party national government for holding free and fair elections. Addressing a press conference at the NAP office, Bhashani asks the government to take steps immediately to stop secret killings in order to restore law and order and create a congenial election atmosphere. He also urges the government to stop what he terms the abuse of the Collaborator's Act. The Maulana alleges that the preparation of the voters' list is faulty and a large number of people are not enrolled.

BANGABANDHU VISITS FOREIGN OFFICE

The prime minister today pays an unscheduled visit to the Foreign Office while on his way to his secretariat. At the Foreign Office, Bangabandhu has discussions with Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad for about half an hour.

SOURCES: December 19, 1972 issues of Bangladesh Observer, Dainik Bangla and Dainik Ittefaq.

11 districts get

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Laxmipur, Jasim Uddin Haider of Barishal, Begum Yasmin Parveen Tibriji of Bandarban and Md Jahangir Hossain of Sunamganj.

Who are they?

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The ACC lawyer also mentioned the legal steps taken against former BNP ministers Moudud Ahmed, Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain and M Moshed Khan and businessmen Mosaddek Ali Falu and Gias Uddin Al Mamun on corruption charges.

Earlier on November 22, the same HC bench issued an injunction to restrain people from laundering money abroad and directed intelligence agencies to take appropriate steps to stop the laundering of money.

Husband kills

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December 16, the couple locked into a brawl where Soheli at one point killed Amena by her scarf and fled the scene," said the OC.

The victim's brother, who resides near the spot, found the door locked from inside and informed police failing to get response, he added.

Police later recovered the body. The victim's brother lodged a murder case in this connection.

'Hitler's alligator'

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treating Saturn's scales with a special solution.

Born in the United States in 1936, Saturn was moved to the Berlin zoo where he escaped on November 23, 1943, after a bombing raid that killed several of his fellow reptiles.

In 1946, he was found by British soldiers who handed him over to the Soviet authorities.

His whereabouts during the intervening three years are "a mystery", the Moscow Zoo said when Saturn died May 24.

When Saturn was brought to Moscow in July 1946, rumours began circulating that he had been part of Adolf Hitler's personal collection, the zoo said.

Museums in Russia however are closed until January 16 as part of efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Europe to start Covid shots

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Macron had attended an EU summit in Brussels last week and on Monday was personally present at a Paris conference organised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, and president of the European Council, Charles Michel, who were in Paris for the meeting, have entered self-isolation as a precaution.

Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa also went into self-isolation yesterday, a day after a lunch meeting with Macron, his office said.

French Prime Minister Jean Castex will also self-isolate.

'EUROPE'S MOMENT'
Macron's infection came as Europe battles to contain a new upswing in infections with several countries returning to tough lockdowns, curfews and other virus restrictions with fears of an explosion in cases after the Christmas holidays.

Germany reported record daily virus infections at 30,000 cases yesterday.

Denmark, France, Turkey and the

Netherlands have all strengthened curbs, while Germany began a new partial lockdown on Wednesday.

"It feels like a Sunday," said Ines Kumpul, 57, observing the deserted streets of Berlin on the first day of a new partial lockdown. "These measures are necessary but it's stressful."

The EU is to start Covid-19 inoculations on December 27, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said yesterday.

"It's Europe's moment. On 27, 28 and 29 December vaccination will start across the EU," she tweeted.

Pressure has been mounting on the European Union to speed up approvals since Britain and the US started their immunisation programmes with the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

US RECORD DEATHS
As surges in infections prompts tighter restrictions in several European countries, the United States -- the worst-hit nation in the world -- set its own double record, with more than 3,700 deaths and 250,000 new cases in 24 hours on Wednesday.

Twitter cracks down on false posts about Covid vaccines

AFP, New York

Twitter said on Wednesday that it would crack down on false posts about Covid-19 vaccines beginning next week, following in the footsteps of Facebook and YouTube.

The social media platform already targets posts containing false information on how the virus spreads and the efficacy of public health measures such as mask-wearing.

"We will prioritize the removal of the most harmful misleading information, and... begin to label tweets that contain potentially misleading information about the

vaccines," Twitter said in a statement.

"We are focused on mitigating misleading information that presents the biggest potential harm to people's health and wellbeing."

The policy will include action against claims that the vaccine is used to intentionally cause harm or control people.

Vaccination campaigns have started in several countries, including Britain, the United States and Canada, and are about to start in the European Union after the green light from the regulator for the vaccine developed by Pfizer-BioNTech.

Covid positivity rate drops to 8-month low

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As a rule of thumb, the positivity rate is thought to be "too high" if it is more than five percent.

In May, the World Health Organization recommended that the positivity rate should be below five percent for at least two weeks before governments considered reopening.

"Although the positivity rate was decreasing in the last several days, it may rise at any time. In fact, the transmission will show both rising and decreasing trends in the coming days, as we observed during higher [rates of] transmission earlier (May-July),"

Mushuq Hussain, consultant of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) told The Daily Star yesterday.

Since the first three confirmed cases were reported on March 8 in the country, the transmission of Covid-19 was highest between June and July.

The highest daily positivity rate of 31.91 was recorded on August 3. It remained stagnant around 12 percent throughout September and October.

From November, however, it started rising again.

Yesterday's infections took the total number of cases in the country to 4,96,975.

In the same 24 hours, 2,239 patients recovered from their illnesses

raising the total number of recoveries to 4,31,590. This is 86.84 percent of all confirmed cases, up from 86.59 the previous day.

The number of deaths from Covid-19 was 36 over the 24-hour period, which is higher than the previous day's deaths -- 27.

The total number of Covid-19 deaths in the country now stands at 7,192, which is 1.44 percent of all confirmed cases.

Among the 36 deceased, 27 were male.

One of them was aged between 31 and 40 years, two between 41 and 50, four between 51 and 60, and 29 were above 60 years, added the release.