'It felt like I was in a grave'

He was released on December 25.

Kajol now walks with a shuffling gait, his whole body aches at night, and his mental health is in shambles -- but at least he is home.

However, so many questions about his ordeal still remain, and talking with The Daily Star, Kajol answers some of them. But far more worrying, are the details he chose not to disclose.

"It felt like I was in a grave," is how he described his 53-day disappearance. "It was a very small enclosed space with no windows," he said.

"My eyes were tied, my hands were cuffed behind, and my mouth was gagged for all 53 days up until I was dropped off to Benapole. I only kept

count of the days. That is it. "It was indescribable. I spent my days thinking about my family and whether I will ever see them again.

"I feel like I have died and come

He, however, did not divulge details of who was keeping him and where. Asked about the conditions of his confinement or what kind of exchanges he had with his abductors, Kajol also chose to keep these details to himself.

He just said: "My whole body was in so much pain. I carried that pain all throughout Jashore jail and Dhaka Central Jail."

Kajol warns against blaming the whole administration about what happened to him.

"I am most probably a victim of a personal vendetta. This was a conspiracy made by certain people who are only a small part of the government... one cannot blame the whole administration, the law enforcement agencies, or anyone else. The blame solely lies with the few people who orchestrated this, and I recommend that investigators find out who they are.

53 DAYS IN CONFINEMENT

Kajol said he was picked up in front of Bangla Academy.
"I was going towards a political

office where I often spend certain evenings," he said.

At the Bangla Academy, he was surrounded by a group of bikers comprising men in civilian clothes, he said. "Around 10 minutes later, two minivans showed up and I was blindfolded, gagged, and taken in."

Nobody contacted his family about ransom at any point.

He spent 53 days in confinement until one day Kajol was loaded onto a vehicle again and driven towards Benapole.

Asked about how long the journey took, he could not tell since he was blindfolded the entire time. "They shoved me out of the van warning me to stay quiet. I roamed around for a while before the BGB found me," he said.

The Raghunathpur unit of Border Guard Bangladesh claimed they discovered Kajol in a paddy field in Raghunathpur village of Sadipur union, walking into Bangladeshi territory around 12:45am on May 3. The spot where he was found is

is delayed could limit the global

and a faster vaccination process,

global growth could accelerate to

nearly 5 percent, it said in its latest

More than 85 million people have

been infected by the novel coronavirus

and nearly 1.85 million have died

since the first cases were identified in

have long-lasting adverse effects on

the global economy, worsening a

slowdown that was already projected

before the outbreak began, and

the world could face a "decade of

growth disappointments" unless

comprehensive reforms were put in

economies and a more robust recovery

in China helped avert a bigger

collapse in overall global output,

but disruptions were more acute in

most other emerging market and

developing economies, the Bank said.

in emerging markets and developing

economies - including China - is

expected to grow 5 percent in 2021

China's economy was expected to

Excluding China, emerging market

expand by 7.9 percent this year after

growing by 2 percent in 2020, the

and developing economies were seen

A year after the outbreak started, WHO

after a contraction of 2.6% in 2020.

Aggregate gross domestic product

Shallower contractions in advanced

The pandemic is expected to

Global Economic Prospects report.

With successful pandemic control

expansion to 1.6% in 2021."

China in December 2019.

place, the Bank said.

FROM PAGE 12

World Bank sees global

directly adjacent to the border and the

Benapole Land Port. Asked why his abductors released him and why they chose Benapole, he said, "I honestly don't know why I was released. I think they wanted to push me across the border.'

That would still not mean freedom for him, as the journalist would be spending the next seven months in jail, fighting the Digital Security Act cases filed against him.

A probe was not done nine months after the cases were filed, even though the Digital Security Act mandates that investigations into these cases be completed within 60 days, with a probable extension of another 15 days.

In addition, even though Kajol was placed under arrest the very day he was found, so that investigators could probe the Digital Security Act cases against him, any legal step to investigate the conditions of his disappearance is yet to be taken.

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

Three of those rejections were when a virtual court discovered on June 14 that Kajol was not yet formally "shown arrested" under the Digital Security Act cases, even though he had been arrested and imprisoned since May 3.

"What was my fault that I had to be denied bail for nearly a whole year?" he questioned.

7 MONTHS IN PRISON

And the jail conditions during that time -- while an improvement from the conditions of his involuntary confinement -- took a toll on Kajol's mental and physical health.

"The Jashore Central Jail was good.. they were humane. Dhaka Central Jail was the exact opposite," he described.

At Dhaka Central Jail, the "gono room" he stayed in was a jail cell stuffed with everyone who could not pay for space and food. They inmates were assigned cleaning and maintenance jobs to compensate for the shelter they were receiving.

"There were inmates who could get restaurant food delivered to them, whereas I could not even see my son once," he said.

Kajol also said his phone calls from the jail were monitored. "I was allowed a minute or two, and the calls had to be made in front of an officer.'

While waiting for freedom every second, Kajol read voraciously in the jail library to distract himself from thoughts of his family.

All his thoughts revolved around how his family -- his cancer-survivor wife, his 20-year-old son, and schoolgoing daughter -- was surviving now that their breadwinner was languishing

"Over the phone, I could not muster the courage to ask my son whether they have money for household expenses. I would just ask, 'Baba, do you have enough for rent this month?'

For now, Kajol wants to rest, heal, and receive medical treatment. "But in the future, I want to get back to work.

Per capita incomes have dropped

confidence,

in 90 percent of emerging market

and developing economies, tipping

millions back into poverty, with

increasing unemployment and loss

of education time seen dampening

prospects for future poverty reduction,

debt levels among emerging market

and developing economies, with

government debt up by 9 percentage

points of GDP - the largest one-year

act rapidly and forcefully to make

sure the latest wave of debt does not

end with debt crises," the report said,

adding that reductions in debt levels

would be the only way for some

A resurgence of infections stalled

a nascent rebound in advanced

economies in the third quarter, with

economic output now expected to

expand by 3.3 percent in 2021, instead

of 3.9 percent as initially forecast, the

It forecast that US gross domestic

product would expand by 3.5 percent

in 2021, after an estimated 3.6 percent

contraction in 2020. The euro area

was expected to see output grow 3.6

percent this year, following a 7.4

countries to return to solvency.

"The global community needs to

spike since the late 1980s.

The crisis also triggered a surge in

investor

shrinking 5 percent in 2020.

reduced

the Bank said.

Bank said.



A general view of an almost deserted Regent Street in London yesterday, as Britain entered a national lockdown to combat the spread of coronavirus. PHOTO: AFP

Migrants need social, legal protection FROM PAGE 12 GFMD so that that migrant workers that migration is asset

handed, since the pandemic began in March last year, while scopes for overseas jobs have declined significantly. Many of those who had come home on leave remained stranded.

There are some one crore Bangladeshi migrants who annually send home about \$20 billion, which is the lifeline of Bangladesh's economy.

"During the trying times of Covid-19, we have seen many of the migrant workers lost their jobs and were in great difficulty as they were not covered by the social safety nets of the countries of destination," Momen said at a virtual pre-GFMD national consultation organised by the Parliamentary Caucus on Migration and Development with support from WARBE Development Foundation and PROKAS project of British Council.

"Moreover, a large number of migrant workers were living or forced to live in a crowded environment which was risky for transmission of the virus.

"We need to ensure migrants' rights from the early stage of ethical recruitment to wage, health and job protection. For that to happen, the international community should play a key role through platforms like

GFMD so that that migrant workers that migration is essential to tackle are well covered by legal mechanisms in the host countries.

Noting that Bangladesh is a climate vulnerable country, he said about 30 million people may be displaced with one-metre sea level rise.

"Bangladesh cannot handle such a huge uprooted population alone, we need effective and proactive support from the international community," he added.

Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen said unpaid wages and job losses of migrants during the pandemic suggest that migration policies need to be revised for sustainable migration management.

He said irregular migration is increasing with the normal channels of migration being disrupted, and opined that unscrupulous agents and the migrants who take the irregular path of migration should come under

Former foreign secretary Shahidul Haque said with the global economies being disrupted by Covid-19, many of the countries are taking nationalistic policies, which may hamper the SDG targets of including vulnerable populations, including migrants and

However, one should not forget

a pandemic like Covid-19, he said, mentioning that 24 percent of the health workers globally are migrants. Bangladesh Association

International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) President Benjir Ahmed MP said recruiting agencies play a crucial role in overseas employment sector, but their contributions are not recognised.

Much of the visa trading happens in the destination countries, but the recruiting agents are blamed for this unfairly. Destination countries need to come up to prevent such visa trading that increases migration costs," he said.

He suggested that governments and employers of destination countries and the Bangladesh government have a big role in stop the unethical recruitment.

Parliamentary Caucus on Migration and Development Chair barrister Shamim Haider Patwary moderated the discussion.

WARBE Development Foundation Chair Syed Saiful Haque and Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) Executive Director Prof CR Abrar and PROKAS Team Leader Gerry Fox also spoke on the

WHO lauds India's decisive Covid action

action and demonstrate its resolve to end #COVID19 pandemic. As the world's largest vaccine producer it's well placed to do so," tweeted Tedros.

He also hailed the efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the fight against the pandemic. "If we #ACTogether, we can ensure effective and safe vaccines are used to protect the most vulnerable everywhere @ narendramodi".

India has one of the largest vaccine manufacturing capacities in the world (including the largest vaccine producer - Serum Institute of India) and has secured authorisation to mass-produce the AstraZeneca, Novavax and Gamaleya Research Institute vaccines.

Meanwhile, Serum Institute of India (SII) and Bharat Biotech said yesterday they would end a public spat and focus on rolling out Covid-19 shots after executives of both Indian vaccine makers clashed over the approval of their rival shots.

"Both companies respect the great work being carried out each other and put behind the miscommunication and misunderstanding caused during the past week," SII's Chief Executive Officer Adar Poonawalla and Bharat Biotech's Chairman Krishna Ella said in a joint statement.

India's drugs regulator on Sunday approved for emergency use a vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University, which will be manufactured by SII, and another developed domestically by Bharat

But the approval for Bharat Biotech's COVAXIN, developed with a government research body, faced criticism from industry experts and others as the company has yet to release efficacy and safety data, and it still has a Phase III trial underway. "Until we get the efficacy result,

how do we know that anything works?" Poonawalla told Reuters on Ella, however, defended both his

firm and the approval for the vaccine in an online press conference on Monday. "I want to say that it hurts as

scientists. We work 24 hours. Do we deserve that type of bashing from the people?" Ella said, adding his firm was being picked on because it was Indian.

Ella also took a swipe at AstraZeneca, which said in November a dosing error had led to promising results in a subset of its trial volunteers. In yesterday's joint statement, the

companies said they were fully aware of the importance of vaccines for people and countries and they jointly pledged to provide global access to their Covid-19 vaccines.

OXFORD VACCINE

Mexico on Monday authorised the coronavirus vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford for emergency use in the country, which has one of the world's highest Covid-19 death tolls.

Lopez-Gatell announced on Twitter that Mexican regulators had approved the vaccine. Lopez-Gastell said the vaccine

Deputy health minister Hugo

could be available in March. "It depends on the private entities that work on it to specify the production capacity," he explained later during a routine afternoon conference.

It is the second coronavirus vaccine authorized by Mexico, which on December 24 began a mass immunization program using the Pfizer-BioNTech shot, with priority given to health workers, reports AFP.

Israel's health ministry has authorised a Covid-19 vaccine developed by US drugmaker Moderna Inc, the company and an Israeli official said, marking the vaccine's third regulatory authorisation and the first outside North America.

"Ministry of Health of Israel has secured 6 million doses and first deliveries (are) expected to begin in January," Moderna said in a statement on Monday. Israeli Health Minister Yuli

Edelstein said he had no knowledge of shipments arriving this month. To my regret, we will likely only see the company's shipment in two

months," Edelstein told reporters.

"As soon as the vaccines arrive we will use them happily and if the company wants to move the arrival forward we will be happy to receive notification."

Georgia votes in key US Senate runoffs

runoffs in US history. At stake is control of the upper

chamber, now in the hands of Republicans. Polls opened at 7:00 am in the

southern state. A record three millionplus people have voted early, election officials say, and final results may not be known for several days.

spent on the two contests, including spending in the primary and general elections, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

The Republican and Democratic parties have made Georgia their political ground zero, with thousands of volunteers leaving no door unknocked and current and future presidents and vice presidents barnstorming the state for every last vote.

If Democrats flip both seats they win back the Senate, effectively handing Biden all levers of political power in Washington and helping him enact his

"One state -- one state! -- can chart the course, not just for the next four years but for the next generation," Biden told a rally in Atlanta where he campaigned Monday with the races'

be a new day for Atlanta, for Georgia and for America," Biden said.

Senate control would serve as a check on the incoming Biden administration. "The stakes in this election could

not be higher," Trump told a raucous rally in Dalton, Georgia hours after Biden's Atlanta showing. "Make sure your vote is counted.'

pressure on Vice President Mike Pence, who will receive the results of the stateby-state Electoral College in Congress today, to take action in his favour. Biden beat Trump 306-232 in electoral votes and carried the popular vote by more than 7 million ballots.

"I hope Mike Pence comes through for us," Trump said, referring to the vice president as a great guy. "If he doesn't come through, I won't like him quite as much," Trump said.

incumbent senators Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue, both wealthy businesspeople-turned-politicians, against Black pastor Raphael Warnock and documentary producer Jon Ossoff.

watching," Trump implored Georgians to re-elect the Republicans. 'FREEDOM, NOT SOCIALISM'

Trump, still scheming to overturn the election results and lashing out at Republicans who oppose his efforts, jetted to Georgia amid a scandal over his blatant attempt on a phone call to pressure state officials to reverse the certified vote and hand him victory.

A recording of the call between Trump and Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger was published by The Washington Post. Trump

On the tape, Raffensperger he wanted to "find 11,780 votes" -- one more than Biden's margin of victory in Georgia -- and repeatedly and falsely claimed that he won the state, an assertion refuted in recounts and in the courts.

But while Republican officials in Georgia defied the outgoing president's outrage to assert that Biden's victory is clear, Trump supporters at his rally in Dalton, a rural and conservative stronghold, said they remained convinced that he had won.

Like Trump, they touted unproven conspiracy theories that Democrats committed massive fraud to steal the

Court asks PBI

In the case statement, the plaintiff said Mohiuddin and two other police personnel picked up his son on December 29 from a tea stall in front his house on the city's Hamid Khan Road.

At night, he was taken to the DB office and brutally tortured. He was sent to Barishal Central Jail when he fell sick. He died at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital on Sunday morning, the complainant said.

Metropolitan Magistrate Anisur Rahman ordered the PBI to investigate the incident and submit a report to the court by February 23, said court sources.

Meanwhile, SI Mohiuddin has been closed and attached to the police lines. Though he was closed on Monday night, police informed the media yesterday.

Contacted, BMP Commissioner

Shahabuddin Khan said the allegations against Mohiuddin published in the media were taken seriously and he was closed and attached to the police lines. Rejaul had been working as an

apprentice lawyer with Zakir Hossain Mintu, a member of Barishal Bar Association, for several years. The DB on the night of December

29 filed a drugs case against Rejaul with Kotwali Police Station and handed him over to police, said his brother-in-law Abdul Barek Howlader earlier.

A local court sent him to jail the following day.

On January 1, he was admitted to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital. The victim's family repeatedly told the media that Rejaul had been tortured, but police denied the allegation.

Robbers hurl

Motahar Hossain, manager of the branch of Rupali Bank, said, "When robbers entered the bank, the Ansar members began shouting. At this, the criminals stabbed Masud and threw acid on Habibur. Later, locals rescued them and sent them to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College Hospital in Bogura.

They were being treated there, said the ASP.

The robbers could not take anything. A case was being filed with Gabtali Police Station over the incident, said the manager.

Moscow metro

the government's register of jobs deemed harmful for women's health.

The ban on access for women to many professions was widely criticised and a labour ministry decree in September last year cut the number of exclusively male professions from 456 to around 100.

The justification that driving metro trains was dangerous because it meant being underground for long periods came under fire because the metro also employs women as cleaners, cashiers and escalator monitors.

The Moscow transport department said due to the automation of mechanical processes, operating trains is no longer "associated with heavy physical exertion".

The previous register was approved in 2000 and banned women from mining and metalworking jobs, but also from positions like bus driver, sailor, parachutist, auto mechanic, and even maker of wind instruments.

The new list that was due to take effect in 2021 opens many of these to females.

Russian Railways, the country's railway monopoly, previously said it would also begin employing female train drivers in 2021.

New infected

FROM PAGE 12

However, 462,459 patients -- 89.29 percent -- have so far recovered. Bangladesh recorded 3,041.11

infections, 2,715.45 recoveries and

45.04 deaths per million. The country's infection number 500,000-mark on December 20. The first death was reported on March 18 and the death toll exceeded 7,000 on December 12.

The government has been warning of a second wave of Covid-19 in winter and urging people to follow health safety measures. It has also adopted a "no mask, no service" policy.

Vested interest

FROM PAGE 12

government to weed out these evil

Bangabandhu tells the audience that although he told the nation that he would not be in a position to give anything for three years, still they have already given Tk 5 crore to the affected families from the prime minister's fund. In addition to the Tk 100 crore have been given as relief. He adds that a trust for the disabled and crippled freedom fighters has been formed with Tk 4 crore.

Speaking with passion and in a nostalgic mood, Bangabandhu tells the vast gathering that many momentous events of his life took place in this place since his childhood. He says that he had passed matriculation from here, went to jail here and was elected for the first time in 1954 from this area. There is no house in Gopalganj that he has not visited, he adds.

STEPS TO REMOVE MALPRACTICE IN EXAMS

Motivation committees will be set up at every examination centre during the examinations under the education boards and the universities of the country. The measure is aimed at removing malpractice in the examinations.

Source: January 7, 1973 issues of Dainik Bangla, The Bangladesh Observer and Ittefaq.

experts are due in China for a highly politicised visit to explore the origins enduring sensitivity of their mission. of the coronavirus, in a trip trailed by accusations of cover-ups, conspiracy and fears of a whitewash. Under the global glare, Beijing delayed access for independent experts

expanding 3.4 percent in 2021 after grow by 2.5 percent.

WHO experts to wade into tricky

territory in hunt for virus' origins

pandemic, reluctant to agree to an But the WHO now says China has granted permission for a visit by its experts, with a 10-person team expected to arrive shortly for a five or authorities determined to six week visit -- including a fortnight

into China to probe the origins of the

spent in quarantine. Chinese authorities this week refused to confirm the exact dates and details of the visit, a sign of the

Covid-19 was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019, before seeping beyond China's borders to wreak havoc, costing over 1.8 million lives and eviscerating economies.

But its origins remain bitterly contested, lost in a fog of recriminations and conjecture from the international community -- as well as obfuscation from Chinese control of its virus narrative.

percent decline in 2020, while activity in Japan, which shrank by 5.3 percent in the year just ended, is forecast to

A staggering \$832 million has been

ambitious legislative agenda.

"It's a new year, and tomorrow can Republicans argue that keeping

The outgoing president also put

The races feature Republican

Noting that "the whole world is