



Life with an urban monkey

AYMAN ANIKA

Living in Dhaka, one rarely expects encounters with wildlife, especially monkeys. However, my home at Shahjadpur, beside an enormous mango tree, became the stage for a rather unusual drama involving a lone monkey!

It all began as what I could only describe as a bittersweet – and often hilarious – relationship with one of the city's cheekiest primates.

I first noticed the visitor on my windowsill one fine morning. Far from a swinging, lively creature inhabiting the lush forests, this monkey appeared sad and lonely. Curious, I learned from my homeowner that this was the same animal raiding our mango tree.

Despite the landlady's frustration, my heart went out to this solitary figure. To lighten its spirits, I offered some fruits and biscuits, only to be rewarded with a scratch that sent me to the hospital for a rabies vaccine. Lesson learned – not all monkey friendships start with a handshake!

This experience, although painful, got me thinking about the deeper issues at play.

Monkeys, once reigning supreme in the tree-laden areas of Old Dhaka – particularly Gandaria and Wari – now find themselves navigating the concrete jungle. With much of their natural habitat replaced by urban sprawl, these animals have been forced to adapt in unexpected ways.

Without their ancestral homes' abundant trees and natural food sources, they have now turned to scavenging human food. Rooftops



PHOTO: AYMAN ANIKA

and less crowded areas have become their new social hubs, where they can interact and play – albeit far from the ideal conditions of a forest.

Sometimes, their antics are as eccentric as children throwing tantrums. The monkey that visits my

house has developed a peculiar habit of knocking on my window whenever it wants a snack. If ignored, it stages a mini-protest, banging its little fists like a pint-sized revolutionary.

The plight of these urban monkeys is a mirror reflecting our actions.

The gradual erosion of green spaces in Dhaka has not only robbed these creatures of their homes but also of their independence.

Where once they thrived on the fruits of the forest, they now depend on the scraps from our tables. This dependence has led to conflicts and often misunderstandings on both sides. Monkeys stealing clothes and food has become a part of urban legends, and sometimes, they manage to outsmart us in ways that are as infuriating as they are funny.

Despite these challenges, there are moments of genuine connection and understanding. After my initial encounter, the same monkey has become a regular visitor. These visits have taught me about resilience and adaptability. Who knew that sharing a city with monkeys could be so entertaining?

As urban expansion continues, we must acknowledge and plan for the wildlife displaced by our actions. Instead of viewing them as intruders, perhaps we could see them as fellow city dwellers trying to navigate the complexities of urban life.

Simple steps like preserving existing green spaces, planting more trees, and creating urban sanctuaries can make a noticeable difference in the lives of these animals.

As we look towards the future, let's aim for a harmonious coexistence, where monkeys and humans share the cityscape with mutual respect. After all, in the grand symphony of life, every creature has its part to play, and sometimes, a good laugh is the best harmony of all.

Law doesn't allow sending Khaleda Zia abroad for treatment

Says law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said there is no provision in law that would allow BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to go abroad for treatment.

"As far as I know, a process has been initiated to place a pacemaker in Khaleda Zia as part of her cardiovascular treatment. We received no request for sending her abroad," he said.

"Khaleda Zia's jail sentence has been suspended under an executive order, which was issued based on a [specific] law. Under the law, there is no scope for sending her abroad."

Anisul said this while answering questions from journalists after attending the inauguration of the training course for senior assistant judges at the Judicial Administration Training Institute (JATI) in Dhaka. He was the chief guest at the programme.

The minister said Khaleda was released from jail on March 25, 2020, after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina suspended her sentence with an executive order on humanitarian grounds. "Due to this, Khaleda is being able to have treatment as per her own will in the country."

Replying to another question, he said it was not necessary to formulate a new law to collect the wealth statements of government officials, adding that the existing provision requires the officials to submit their wealth statements at the entry stage of their services, which have to be updated from time to time.

The law minister, however, urged journalists to be alert and not malign honest officials.

In response to a separate question, Anisul said there is a provision for the Anti-Corruption Commission to inform the government regarding taking action against any government official for corruption.

It has been incorporated in the law so that the government can be aware of the ACC's action and also think about what action it will take from its end against the official concerned.

JATI's Director General Justice Hasan Foez Siddique presided over the programme, where Law and Justice Division Secretary Md Golam Sarwar also spoke.

ACC opens inquiry into graft claims

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The team members – ACC Deputy Director Anower Hossen, Assistant Director Mahmudul Hasan, and Deputy Assistant Director Sabikun Nahar – have already begun working on it.

In 2004, 2008, 2013, and most recently in 2021, allegations of corruption were made against Matiur, but the ACC never decided to look into them.

Asked why no probes were launched before, Khorsheda said, "The commission will review as to why. Now that new information has surfaced, a probe has been launched."

Meanwhile, the government asked Matiur not to attend the board meetings of Sonali Bank.

"We informed our board members about the government decision," Sonali Bank Chairman Ziaul Hasan Siddiqui told reporters after a board meeting yesterday.

He said it was not the responsibility of the board to appoint or remove Matiur, as he is a representative of the government on the Sonali Bank board. Matiur has plunged into controversy over his wealth after his son, Mushfiqur Rahman Ifat, posted a photo of a sacrificial goat on social media and claimed to have bought it for Tk 12 lakh. There have also been media reports on his family's lavish lifestyle.

These raised questions about the income of this official at this grade (grade-1) with a basic monthly salary of Tk 78,000.

Photos of Ifat with various expensive cars and the family's properties, including flats and resorts in places like Dhaka, Gazipur, and Narsingdi, began doing the rounds on social media.

On Wednesday, Matiur told The Daily Star that Ifat was not his son and that he was a victim of a conspiracy.

Matiur claimed he has two children: a daughter and a son. His daughter lives in Canada, while his son graduated from a university in the US.

Later, media reports, quoting lawmaker Nizam Uddin Hazari of Feni-2 and local leaders, said Ifat is the son of Shammil Akter Shibu, who is Hazari's cousin and Matiur's second wife.

Heap of stocks exposes Matiur's wrongdoing

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than 3 crore shares of at least 10 companies – but this figure may rise. Matiur, who also worked at Chattogram Customs and Large Taxpayer Unit (LTU), VAT, told ntv on Wednesday that he started investing in the capital market in 2008.

He also acknowledged that he made "abnormally high" money from the shares of Fortune Shoes. He bought the company's shares at Tk 8 whose face value was Tk 10, and sold them at Tk 54 each.

"I had a deal with the owner of the shoemaker to offer consultancy to bring the company to the stock market. In return, the owner gave me shares at Tk 8."

He did not respond to our calls and text messages over the last two days.

According to the Companies Act, a company can sell shares at a discount price but with approval from the High Court, and it must be shown in the company's financial reports.

However, the company did not take any approval and did not show it in the financial report of 2015-16 when it got listed. Moreover, the IPO prospectus showed that all shareholders bought shares at face value of Tk 10 each.

Under service rules, government officials cannot work as consultants to facilitate companies to be listed in the capital market. The securities rules also have no option for any individual to offer consultancy related to IPO listing.

It is the job of merchant banks with issue management licences, and there are 66 such merchant banks in Bangladesh, according to BSEC data.

The merchant banks offer their service against a fee, and cannot accept any shares from the company, according to company listing regulations of 2015.

"The issue manager is in no way connected with the issuer and does not hold any of its securities," the regulations say.

Faruq Ahmad Siddiqi, a former chairman of BSEC, said a public service-holder should not offer such consultancy. The securities rules also have no option for that.

"Why did the company give him shares at Tk 8? This is a serious allegation of irregularities that the official himself revealed. It should be investigated thoroughly," he said.

A top merchant banker, who usually offers IPO consultancy service,

said Matiur indicated in the interview that he got shares before listing and no company in Bangladesh sells shares at discount.

"Most companies have to give shares to some influential people as bribes without getting any money or at a lower price."

Usually, companies provide placement shares to regulatory officials to curry favours, he added.

According to the IPO prospectus of Fortune Shoes, Matiur received 5 lakh shares of the company, which was 0.67 percent of the total shares of the company in its pre-IPO period.

His second wife Shammil Akter (Shibli) received 10 lakh shares; his daughter Farzana Rahman 16.50 lakh shares; and his son Ahmed Tawfiqur Rahman Arnab 9 lakh shares, according to the prospectus of Fortune Shoes.

He also received shares from ACME Pesticides, Associated Steel, Lub-rref (Bangladesh), Mamun Agro, ML Dyeing, Ring Shine and SK Trims, according to the company prospectus seen by The Daily Star.

He received 37 lakh shares from Acme Pesticides and 14.5 lakh shares from Associated Oxygen. His first wife Laila Kaniz Lucky had 4.5 lakh shares and his son Ahmed Tawfiqur Rahman Arnab 5 lakh shares from Associated Oxygen.

From a single company – C&A Textiles – he and his family members got 47.3 lakh shares.

Additionally, he received 88.83 lakh shares from SK Trims, 21 lakh shares from Kattali Textiles, 16 lakh shares from ML Dyeing, 10 lakh shares each from Mamun Agro Products and Ring Shine and 8 lakh shares each from Dominance Steel and Lub-rref (Bangladesh).

According to securities rules, any individual can get placement shares. Before getting listed with the stock exchanges, many companies sell placement shares to individuals, especially to friends and family.

Usually, they sell shares at face value or at a higher price considering that the share would be traded at a higher price after listing. In the meantime, investors can make money by holding the shares for one year or more.

But if the same people buy shares from many companies, it raises question as to whether they are getting preferential treatments to buy shares

from all companies, said Siddiqi, the former chairman of BSEC.

The government should investigate whether the person offered any illegal benefits to the companies in return for those placement shares, he added.

A top official of the BSEC said there is no ban on government officials to buy and sell shares on the stock market. But ideally, those having policymaking roles in the stock market or have conflict of interest in the sector should never be allowed to invest in the speculative market like stock exchange.

"The rule should be applied to people who work in offices such as the Securities and Exchange Commission, the central bank or NBR."

BSEC Spokesperson Mohammad Rezaul Karim said if any company sells shares at discount prices, it must take approval from the High Court, but Fortune Shoes did not do that. It only took approval from BSEC to issue shares at face value.

"We have no information as to how he [Matiur] got the shares at Tk 8. Only the company and the person involved can say it."

Any company can offer placement shares to anyone. So BSEC has nothing to say or do if any company sells its shares at face value, he added.

Riaz Uddin Bhuiya, company secretary of Fortune Shoes, said the company sold shares to Matiur at Tk 10.

Matiur is now working to enhance the share price of another company.

"At present, I am working with Silva Pharmaceuticals. Its growth will triple within one year. Its price will also double," he told ntv.

According to a BSEC order, no one is allowed to publicly predict share prices. Also, the Government Servants (Conduct) Rules 1979 say no government official shall speculate in investments.

On the other hand, no company can sit privately with a minority shareholder. The company can talk with minority shareholders in AGMs only.

Buying and selling of shares based on such sittings and confidential information are seen as insider trading, which is illegal, market analysts say.

But Matiur sees it differently.

"I always invest in stock market this way," he told ntv, adding that he made Tk 14 crore by investing Tk 1 crore once.

Benazir again skips

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ACC sources said Benazir's letter was addressed to the ACC chairman, two commissioners, director general (money laundering) and the head of the investigation team.

Benazir wrote that he was staying abroad with family for medical and other personal reasons.

He said he worked in different districts and it would take time for him to collect documents, records, and files relating to his assets and prepare a statement.

Khaleda gets pacemaker implanted

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a pacemaker in her chest considering her physical condition," he said earlier.

Zahid sought prayers from the people of the country for her speedy recovery.

The BNP chairperson has been receiving treatment at the CCU since she was admitted to the hospital early Saturday.

Khaleda was rushed to Evercare Hospital in an ambulance around 3:30am as she suddenly fell ill at her residence, "Firoza" in Gulshan.

She was immediately admitted to

the CCU, where medical treatment began under the supervision of the medical board.

Earlier, when Khaleda went to Evercare Hospital on May 1 for a regular health check-up, doctors treated her at the CCU for two days.

The former prime minister, 79, has long battled various ailments, including liver cirrhosis, arthritis, diabetes, and issues related to the kidney, lung, heart, and eyes.

Since her conditional release from prison in 2020, the BNP chief has been receiving medical care on

several occasions at the hospital under the supervision of a medical board headed by cardiologist Prof Shahabuddin Talukder.

Khaleda's doctors have been advising sending her abroad since she was diagnosed with liver cirrhosis in November 2021.

On October 26, last year, three US specialist doctors completed a hepatic procedure known as the transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt (TIPS procedure) to stop water accumulation in Khaleda's stomach and chest, and bleeding in her liver.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF YASIN KABIR JOY

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina and the party's General Secretary Obaidul Quader release doves during a programme marking the 75th founding anniversary of the AL at the Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday.

AL indomitable

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commitment made before the 2008 election. "Today's Bangladesh has gained dignity as we worked for the people."

"After being elected the president of the Awami League [in 1981], I returned to the country, depriving my children of mother's love and affection, mainly to implement the dream of my father to give the people beautiful and improved lives by changing their fate," she said.

The AL had a series of events over three days to mark its 75th founding anniversary. The last programme was yesterday's grand rally.

The rally was scheduled to start at 3:00pm but the leaders and activists of the party and its various affiliated organisations started gathering at the venue as the gates were opened around 11:00am.

Hasina arrived around 3:30pm.

Yet another investigator

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Ferdous Doreen told reporters after meeting Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan that she heard a vested quarter was trying to get some of the arrestees out of jail.

On June 16, Saidul Karim Mintu, the general secretary of Jhenaidah Awami League, who allegedly told the assailants that they would get the blood money, was sent to jail before his eight-day remand was complete.

Mintu was placed on an eight-day remand, but the Detective Branch (DB) of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, sent him to court within three days.

He did not make a confessional statement and maintained that he was not involved in the murder.

Asked why Mintu was taken to jail before the remand period was over, DB chief Harun said, "No law has been violated. It is the investigating officers' discretion. If officers believe there is nothing more to learn from a suspect, they can take the person to a court and the court can send them to jail."

"Had there been any pressure, we

After reaching the venue, Hasina hoisted the national flag as the national anthem was playing. AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader hoisted the party flag. They then released doves and balloons.

The opposition leader and Jatiya Party chairman, leaders of the AL-led 14-party alliance, and foreign diplomats, among others, were present.

A cultural programme was held on the stage, during which artists of Shilpakala Academy sang the theme song of the founding anniversary and other patriotic songs, and danced.

Marking the day, Hasina paid homage to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by placing a wreath at his portrait at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum on Dhanmondi-32 in the morning.

would not be able to accomplish so much. The home minister repeatedly said that there was no external pressure. He has instructed us to investigate impartially. No innocent person will be harassed."

Aktaruzzaman, who allegedly planned the murder, and several others have not been arrested yet, he said. As the US and India have an extradition treaty, the authorities have requested Indian police to bring Aktaruzzaman back from the US.

Besides, the Interpol was contacted over the matter, and detectives have talked to the US Embassy in Dhaka.

"The investigation is winding up. We have arrested many. We have got some names. We are trying to arrest them."

Asked whether Doreen was going to Kolkata to give DNA samples, Harun said, "Indian police through the embassy requested Doreen to go to India. We spoke to her. She has been suffering from a fever for a few days."

Azim went to Kolkata on May 12. On May 22, India and Bangladesh police said the lawmaker was murdered.