

Grief envelopes Evercare Hospital

FROM PAGE 12

mourning banners near the hospital.

"I came here to bid her a final farewell even though I know I will not be able to see her," said Nurun Nahar Nazma, who arrived at Evercare in the afternoon along with her 10 year-old child after travelling all the way from Jashore.

They began their journey in the morning soon after the news of Khaleda's death broke.

"She loved the country above all else. She loved her people and party activists," she said.

Khaleda Zia was an uncompromising leader, a polite politician who never spoke arrogantly or insultingly towards anyone and was loved by all, said Nargis Akter, 60, who came from Badda.

"She has left us at a crucial moment in politics. Bangladesh needed her for a much longer time," she added.

Md Jasim, a BNP activist from the Bhataria area, reached the hospital premises shortly after waking up around 7:00am and learning about the death.

"Begum Khaleda Zia was not a revengeful leader. She wanted to build the nation together with everyone. Her death is an irreparable loss," he said around 3:30pm.

Jasim said he stayed until the dead of the night and will come again in the morning.

Police, BGB and RAB members have been deployed at the hospital's main gate.

Law enforcement agencies are ensuring that party activists remain at a designated distance so that the movement of other patients is not disrupted.

While the crowd of mourners was heavier in the morning, the number of people present declined somewhat after noon.

Meanwhile, soon after the news of Khaleda Zia's death, the party flag was lowered to half-mast and black flags were raised at the BNP Chairperson's Office in Gulshan and other offices.

Many leaders and activists also gathered there.

Some activists said that negligence under the previous government denied their chairperson timely and proper medical care, ultimately worsening her health. They demanded punishment of those responsible.

Apart from Evercare Hospital and the Gulshan office, many party leaders and activists also gathered at the Nayapaltan office, where a sombre atmosphere prevailed.

Trump warns

FROM PAGE 12

The Kremlin yesterday urged all parties to refrain from escalation over Iran.

Trump said he wanted to move to the second phase of the ceasefire deal between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas reached in October after two years of fighting in Gaza, a progression that entails international peacekeeping forces deployed in the Palestinian enclave.

Israel and Hamas accuse each other of major breaches of the deal and look no closer to accepting the much more difficult steps envisaged for the next phase. Hamas, which has refused to disarm, has been reasserting its control as Israeli troops remain entrenched in about half the territory.

Israel has indicated that if Hamas is not disarmed peacefully, it will resume military action to make it do so.

During his Monday comments, Trump heaped the blame on Hamas for not disarming more promptly, arguing that Israel had lived up to its side of the deal and warning that Hamas was inviting grave consequences.

"There will be hell to pay," Trump warned when asked what he will do if Hamas does not lay down its arms. He has made similar statements at previous intervals during the fighting.

Before the meeting, Trump told reporters he would talk to Netanyahu about the possibility of stationing Turkish peacekeepers in Gaza. That is a fraught subject - while Trump has frequently praised Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, Israel and Turkey have a much more circumspect relationship.

While the fighting in Gaza has abated, it has not stopped entirely. Although the ceasefire officially began in October, Israeli strikes have killed more than 400 Palestinians - most of them civilians, according to Gaza health officials.

A year of disruptions for health sector

FROM PAGE 12

efforts to implement those were

hardly visible.

Prof Be-nazir Ahmed, a health expert and former director of disease control at DGHS, said that though the sectoral programmes had some shortcomings, Bangladesh performed reasonably well in preventive healthcare through them over the last few decades.

"But the sudden halt to the programmes has put many of our hard-earned achievements -- such as the country's success in eliminating Kala-azar [a life-threatening parasitic disease] -- at risk of reversal," he told The Daily Star.

The interim health administration could have set an example by simultaneously taking two measures -- preventing corruption and sustaining or improving public health services.

But it could not do so, creating a serious gap in service delivery, which will be difficult for the next administration to overcome, he added.

Prof Rashid E Mahbub, a medical expert and former president of the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), said the administration failed to provide an alternative plan following the suspension of the sectoral programmes, which resulted in service disruptions.

SERVICE DISRUPTIONS

Since 1998, the health ministry

has implemented four Health, Population, and Nutrition Sector Programmes (HPNSPs) to provide a range of health, nutrition and family planning services, with the last one ending in June 2024.

The interim government scrapped the proposed fifth HPNSP and decided to integrate the sectoral programmes into regular ones to improve coordination and strengthen infrastructure.

The ministry took up several projects to complete the unfinished tasks of the Fourth HPNSP and to continue the supply of medicines and other emergency items. Though some projects were approved last month, many health services were disrupted for months, depriving thousands of essential care.

For example, there were disruptions in the supply of five types of medicines for diabetes and hypertension to 430 hospitals, mostly at the upazila level. The supply has yet to return to normal, even though the government recently allocated Tk 100 crore for the service, according to a health official.

Moreover, around 14,500

community clinics, which provide care to 490,000 people a day, saw disruptions in medicine supply throughout the year. No drugs were procured between July 2024 and May 2025 due to a fund crunch after the expiry of the HPNSP, severely affecting the supply of 22 types of medicines.

Though drug supply from the centre was fully restored in August this year with block allocations, procurement was halted in November due to various complications, said an official.

Regarding the disruption, Health Secretary Saidur Rahman said it took time to approve several projects to continue the supply. The situation will gradually become normal.

Health services and vaccination programmes also faced disruptions in November, as several sections of medical professionals demonstrated to press home their demands.

DOCTORS' PROMOTIONS

The interim health administration received praise for its decision to promote more than 6,000 doctors.

But around 5,000 of them were placed in supernumerary posts, which are temporary positions created outside the regular structure.

Allegations were raised that many doctors were deprived of promotions this time as well due to political reasons.

Prof Rashid said it was commendable that the administration promoted many doctors who had been waiting for a long time. However, the existing health infrastructure is not adequate to absorb services from the promoted doctors, and the government does not have the necessary plan in this regard.

Asked, Saidur Rahman admitted that they would not be able to post

all assistant and associate professors to medical colleges due to a lack of available posts. In such cases, they would have to work in hospitals.

Asked about the allegation that doctors affiliated with the pro-Awami League doctors' association were not promoted, he said, "Not everyone will get a promotion, and there are various reasons for that."

LITTLE PROGRESS IN REFORMS

In May, the Health Sector Reform Commission, led by National Professor AK Azad Khan, recommended a sweeping overhaul of healthcare management, but the government did not initiate any major reform.

In its report, the commission suggested that the government make primary healthcare a constitutional obligation and provide it free of cost to ensure universal access.

When asked, Saidur Rahman said the ministry implemented some minor reforms, but made little progress on major ones. "We have tried our best but it's a big sector with a lot of challenges."

Prof Be-nazir Ahmed said that had the interim administration initiated the process of implementing the recommendations properly, the next government could have carried it forward.

"But given the current situation, the next government will have to review them and start the process afresh, which will take a long time, he added.

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