

BEGUM PARA Yunus seeks Canada’s help to recover stolen money

UNB, Dhaka
Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus yesterday requested Canada’s assistance in recovering funds that were smuggled out of Bangladesh and invested in the North American country, specifically in the upscale Bangladeshi neighbourhood “Begum Para” of Toronto.



“They stole money from our people and bought assets in Begum Para. We need your help to recover the assets. It is the money of our people,” Yunus told Canadian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Ajit Singh during a meeting at the State Guest House Jamuna.

The chief adviser said hundreds of billions of dollars were stolen from Bangladesh by oligarchs, cronies, and politicians connected to Sheikh Hasina’s dictatorship, and part of it was laundered to Canada, including in buying assets in Toronto’s infamous

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Trucks carrying aid move in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. Israel said it was sending a team to negotiate the next phase of a fragile ceasefire with Hamas, signalling possible progress ahead of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s meeting with US President Donald Trump.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Size of Dhaka, Ctg divisions should be reduced

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If Tangail and Kishoreganj are added to Mymensingh Division, Dhaka Division will be left Dhaka, Gazipur, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Manikganj, and Narsingdi.

The commission recommends that Dhaka lose seven of its districts and Chattogram lose six districts.

The Awami League government, the process to form Cumilla and Faridpur divisions made progress but the administration backtracked on it before the 2024 election.

The reform commission is reportedly set to submit over 100 proposals that may include expansion of the mobile court’s jurisdiction and abolition of the posts of senior secretaries.

The deputy commissioners should be of the rank of joint secretaries, not deputy secretaries; VAT, tax, and customs should be handled by three independent entities under the National Board of Revenue; political leaders should be appointed personal secretaries to ministers; vehicles should be given to principals of government colleges.

Consensus commission

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8, after which their recommendations will be sent to the political parties for their consideration, according to Asif Nazrul.

He said the first meeting would be presided over by Prof Yunus at the Foreign Service Academy. The government hopes to continue the talks in Ramadan if possible, he added.

BFIU finds NI Mazumder’s money laundering links

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One example cited by the BFIU involves an import of 32,000 kg of oranges from South African firm Zest Fruit for \$7.50 per kg (Tk 775).

However, the international market price at the time was Tk 100-Tk 200 per kg, while the local prices ranged between Tk 250 and Tk 400 per kg, indicating over-invoicing and potential money laundering, the report said.

Similarly, another company, Flamingo Enterprise, received a trade licence in April 2023. Official records show it was owned by Md Mosharraf Hossain, but its business address matched Nassa Group’s headquarters.

Between July 2023 and November 2024, the company opened 59 import LCs worth \$68.4 million.

A review of the transactions found that 13 import LCs, valued at \$3.50 million, were issued in favour of Abdur Rashid General Trading, a Dubai-based company owned by Bangladeshi citizen Mohammad Abdur Rashid.

One questionable transaction involved the import of 650,000 kg of dates for \$0.70 per kg (Tk 77), significantly below the international market rate of Tk 200 per kg.

This raises concerns of under-invoicing, potentially aimed at shifting funds abroad, the BFIU report said.

The BFIU found irregularities in export trade linked to Firoza Garments, a company owned by Mazumder.

Between 2012 and 2022, the company received export LC orders worth \$1.2 billion. While export bills amounting

to \$1.2 billion were repatriated, funds totalling \$11.55 million from 139 LCs remain unrepatriated.

Under the Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2012, failure to bring back repatriable funds constitutes money laundering.

The report suggests that Mazumder and Firoza Garments may have funnelled funds abroad under the guise of exports. Mazumder, who founded Exim Bank in 1999 with former National Bank banker Shahjahan Kabir, took Tk 4,717 crore in loans from the lender through 18 shell companies.

The Shariah-based bank – which counted Mazumder’s wife, Nasreen Islam, as one of its directors – approved the loans despite collateral worth only Tk 486.43 crore, the BFIU report said.

Under central bank rules, a bank director cannot take loans exceeding 50 percent of their shareholding in their own bank.

To circumvent the restriction, several directors, including Mazumder, allegedly took out large sums through shell companies.

Two such companies – Flamingo Enterprise and Madina Dates & Nuts – received substantial loans soon after their establishment.

Exim Bank – where Mazumder and his wife held 6 percent shares after transferring a portion of their shares in November 2022 to their children Walid lbne Islam and Anika Islam – granted Tk 270 crore to one account within months of opening without proper collateral.

The funds were funnelled to other

Many others echoed similar frustrations.

A staff member of the foundation, wishing anonymity, explained that the verification process is stringent to prevent fraud. He said delays primarily occur at the civil surgeon or DC office. He also said the foundation has only 35 employees, which is insufficient to manage such an operation.

STACKED AGAINST VICTIMS
Apart from the 20 people interviewed on the July foundation premises, this correspondent talked to about 50 victims between January 7 and January 25.

A few have already managed to secure the assistance, but said it came “at the cost of their dignity and time”.

Many are still waiting, their applications stuck in the proverbial red tape.

For example, on January 22, journalist Torik Hasan Bappy shared a story on Facebook about Afnan Sabik. A student of Jagannath University, Afnan was wounded in the head and was still awaiting a donation.

The very next day, after the post went viral and caught the attention of the July foundation, they informed him that the spelling of his father’s name was incorrect on one of the documents. As a result, he would have to restart the entire process from scratch.

The mistake was made by officials responsible for enlisting names of the injured at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. But now Sabik has to suffer.

“First I went to DMCH to enlist my name. The officials gave me the runaround,” said Sabik, explaining that he had practically gone round the entire hospital. “It is hard for me to describe.”

“Then they sent me to Jashore to get a signature of the civil surgeon. The civil surgeon sat on my file for days. Then on one morning, a student coordinator of Jashore and the civil surgeon finally paid attention [due to the FB post],” Sabik added. “And now, I have to repeat the entire process because they made an error!”

Then there is the case of martyr Abdur Rahman.

His son, Faisal, had to make at least eight trips from Narayanganj to the foundation in Dhaka’s Shahbagh to secure a cheque.

On his eighth visit, Faisal was told that

a cheque had indeed been issued. But it was to Abdur Rahman’s 110-year-old mother, who lives in Chapainawabganj. What is more, the foundation insisted that the frail, bedridden woman come to Dhaka to collect the cheque!

“How can my grandmother, who can’t even move, travel to Dhaka?” Faisal wondered.

After the incident sparked outrage on social media, a “solution” was proposed: the cheque would be reissued to Abdur Rahman’s wife. However, the money could only be cashed in Chapainawabganj, in the presence of the 110-year-old grandmother, under the supervision of the upazila nirbahi officer, who would ensure the funds were equitably distributed.

On January 23, Sarjis Alam, chief organiser of the Jatiya Nagorik Committee, resigned as the foundation’s general secretary.

The executive committee led by CEO Mir Mahbubur Rahman Snigdho is now overseeing the July foundation’s operations. Several attempts to reach him for comments failed.

Md Jahid Hossain, public relations officer of the foundation, said that the paperwork was very simple for the martyrs and the foundation includes three nominees – father, mother, and wife. “However, it gets complicated selecting one nominee when everyone makes a claim.”

As for the injured, the documents are first sent to the districts authorities. “Once they confirm, we begin our verification process,” Jahid says there are typical types of complications. “Mismatch between the NID and the bKash number. Then, we have to obtain their bank details or another bKash account.”

He admits there are delays. “But we must perform due diligence to ensure that no fake claimants get money. If someone faking injuries gets listed, it would be an insult to the real heroes.”

He says besides the 35 employees at the foundation, there are 150 volunteers in the field who assist with the verification process.

Until January 26, 673 martyr families and 2,396 injured protesters have received financial assistance, he said.

The government has put the official death toll at 826 with some 11,000 wounded as of January.

bank accounts while the central bank reconstituted a new five-member board for Exim Bank with Mazumder and his wife.

The Bangladesh Bank also commissioned a forensic audit of Exim Bank by global accountancy firm Ernst & Young to assess the lender’s asset quality.

As part of the probe, Exim Bank Managing Director Mohammad Feroz Hossain was placed on a three-month leave.

Md Akhter Hossain, the acting MD, told The Daily Star that he was unaware of the BFIU findings as he joined the bank only recently.

Ranjan Chowdhury, vice chairman of Nassa Group, denied all allegations of money laundering and financial misconduct. He stated that the claims were baseless and lacked factual or legal merit.

He emphasised that Nassa Group had always complied with BFIU regulations and provided requested information when required.

“There are no irregularities, no wrongdoing and certainly no shell companies as alleged,” Chowdhury said. Mazumder, who was arrested in October last year in connection with a murder case during the July uprising, remains in jail.

The BFIU report has been submitted to the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Criminal Investigation Department for further action.

EC collects info on 4.97m prospective voters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) has collected information on around 4.97 million people during the door-to-door campaign to update the voter list.

Some 1.52 million names will be dropped from the updated list as they have passed away, EC Senior Secretary Akhter Ahmed told reporters at the EC headquarters in the capital yesterday.

He, however, said this was not the final list, and the number might change.

Akhter Ahmed said the EC had initially targeted to register 6.1 million new voters this year.

Voter registration will continue until April 17, and anyone eligible to become a voter, who were left out during the door-to-door campaign, can register by visiting the registration centres by this time, said the EC official, adding that anyone eligible for voting can register online till the year-end.

Asked about why enumerators did not visit every house, Akhtar said, “We will try to find out why we could not go to all the houses. There could have been some limitations.”

“The data collectors have visited many homes and left their phone numbers as voters weren’t present at the time. But we have to identify the limitations and take action about the places we could not go.”

The number of deceased voters is less than the figure recorded during the last door-to-door campaign three years ago.

Asked about the reason behind this, the EC secretary said, “We will get a clear picture after talking to those who have worked at the field level.”

Language Movement in Tangail

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stance against the demand for Bangla as a state language.

Muslim League leader Shamsul Haque went to Tangail from Dhaka in the first week of March to organise the movement. Following his meeting with local leaders on March 8, a Sangram Committee was formed with Nurul Huda as the convener.

As part of the central programme, the local Sangram Committee decided to observe a strike in Tangail on March 11. In a failed bid to quell the movement, police arrested several student leaders and political activists during a publicity campaign for the strike. Among them were Ali Akbar Khoka, Upen Malakar and Syed Abdul Matin.



According to the book *Bhasha Andolon Teknaf Theke Tetulia* by Ahmed Rafiq, a spontaneous strike was observed in Tangail on March 11. On that day, students marched around the city, demanding Bangla as a state language. Slogans chanted by the protesters included : “*Rashtrobhasha Bangla Chai*” (We want Bangla as a state language) and “*Amader Dabi Mante Hobe/Dabi Na Manle Godi Chhar*” (Accept our demand/ Otherwise leave the chair). At one stage, the police baton charged the protesters and arrested Upen Malakar, Shamsur Rahman Khan and some others.

The students of Tangail also played a crucial role in the Language Movement of 1952. They took to the streets when the government on January 27, 1952, declared that Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan. A Sarbodoyo Rashtrobhasha Sangram Parishad

(All Party State Language Movement Council) was formed with Nurul Huda as the convener.

Ahead of the main protest programme of the movement slated for February 21, Dhaka University student Sophia Khan came to Tangail and met with student leaders Badiuzzaman Khan, Narayan Biswas and others. The organisers of the protests also held secret meetings. They included Abdus Salam Khan, Fazlur Rahman Kaiser, Shamsur Rahman Khan Shajahan, Mirza Tofazzal Hossain Mukul, Jyotsna, Jharna, Saleha and others. To cover the expenses of the movement, two-paisa coupons were printed and voluntary donations were collected from the public.

Tangail was rocked by slogans as students from all schools and colleges in the city took to the streets on February 21, according to the book *Bhasha Andolon Kosh Part 1* by M Abdul Alim.

Among them were students from Bindubasini Boys’ High School and Bindubasini Girls’ School. When students from Karatia Saadat College reached the city, the morale of all the other protesting students increased. They marched around the city under the leadership of Nurul Huda, a student leader of Saadat College. Later, a protest rally presided over by Abdus Salam Khan was held at the Karatia High School ground.

On the same day, the students of Kumudini College in Mirzapur also organised a rally presided over by Kohinoor Yusuf Shahi, a third-year student of the college. They adopted a resolution for Bangla as a state language and against writing Bangla in Arabic script.

When the news of the killing of protesters by police in Dhaka reached Tangail in the evening, students and the public took to the streets. The next day, on February 22, a protest rally was held at the then Police Parade Maidan (now Municipal Park). The protesters held a prayer session for the Language Movement martyrs.

The movement also spread to the rural parts of Tangail.

Rohingyas hit by US fund cuts

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Organisation (WHO) and the Paris Climate Pact.

The Trump administration is reviewing all the US funds and projects for 90 days before any final decision.

Already, the development professionals in Bangladesh working on nearly 100 projects for which \$450 million was disbursed last year are facing troubles.

They have either been asked not to go to the office or work from home, but actually have no work.

However, there was a sense that the Rohingya camps would not be hampered due to the executive order of the US, which determined in 2022 that the atrocities against the Rohingya were genocide and committed support for accountability of the Myanmar junta.

Officials concerned have raised serious concerns over the fact that the US is the largest donor for the Rohingya humanitarian response and that the foreign aid for the Rohingya has been declining over the last years amid other conflicts in other parts of the world.

According to the UN, out of a total \$852.4 million requirement for the Rohingya in 2024, the US provided \$301 million or 55 percent of the total \$548.9 million provided by foreign donors last year.

Some of the major NGOs operating

in the Rohingya camps include BRAC, the International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, CARE Bangladesh and UN agencies.

The WHO and GAVI provide critical medical care including vaccination among the Rohingya, the majority of whom are women and children.

“It is a matter of serious concern if the US government stops funding for the WHO and GAVI as they provide the life-saving vaccines,” Rahman said.

The suspension of many hospitals means limited access to healthcare for the Rohingya, especially emergency care.

“This will definitely create pressure on other hospitals and healthcare quality will deteriorate,” Rahman said.

However, the US during the previous tenure of Donald Trump continued to provide humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya.

“We are optimistic that the US government will do the same this time too,” Rahman added.

The Rohingya facilities are inadequate for the more than a million refugees, said Khin Maung, coordinator for Refugee Youth in Bangladesh, a Rohingya organisation in the Cox’s Bazar camp.

“If the funding from the US is cut or declines, it will have huge impacts on us. We appeal to the US government to continue the funding for the sake of humanity.”