

## Yunus to attend Pope Francis' funeral in Vatican

UNB, Doha

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus is set to attend Pope Francis' funeral, his Press Secretary Shaiful Alam told UNB yesterday.

Pope Francis' funeral will be held on Saturday, with public viewing starting today.

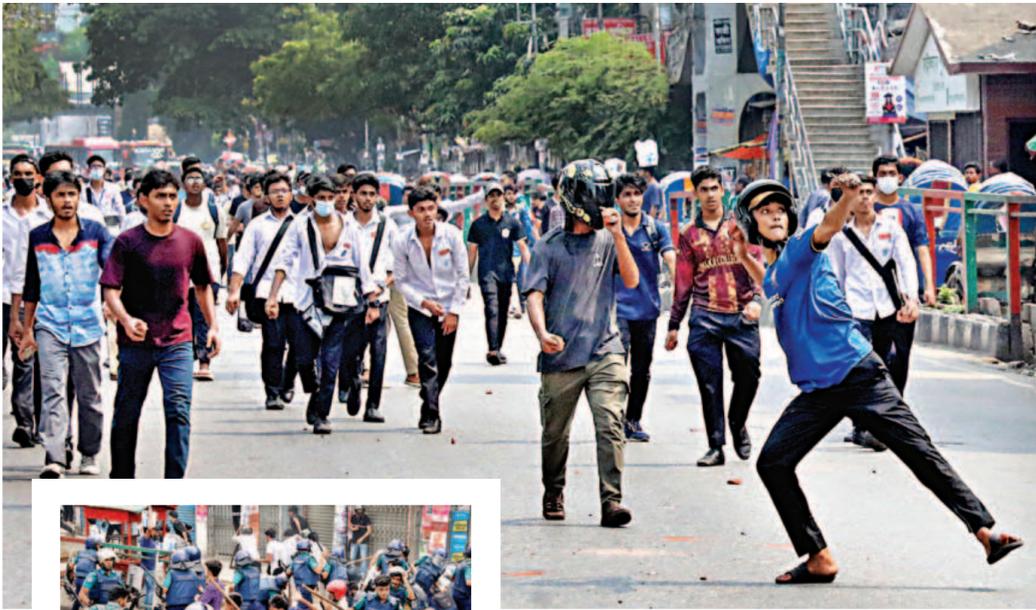
The pope will be laid to rest on Saturday after lying in state for three days in St Peter's Basilica, where the faithful are expected to pay their respects to history's first Latin American pontiff.

Yunus expressed profound condolences on behalf of the government and people of Bangladesh at the passing of Pope Francis, describing him as a beacon of peace, humanity and unity.

In his message to Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of the Holy See, Vatican City, Prof Yunus said his leadership transcended religious boundaries and inspired millions to step up efforts to build a more inclusive, tolerant and compassionate world.

"I have been honoured to meet many times with Pope Francis and to

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A moment during the clash between Dhaka College and City College students on Mirpur Road yesterday. Inset, police use truncheons to bring the situation under control. The clash occurred in connection with a fight between two smaller groups of students from the colleges the previous day. Story on page 3.

PHOTO: STAR

## SAGAR-RUNI MURDER CASE HC gives task force 6 months to submit probe report



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday granted the government-formed task force an additional six months to complete the investigation into the murders of journalists Sagar Sarwar and Meherun Runi in 2012 and to submit its report.

The HC bench of Justice Fatema Najib and Justice Sikder Mahmudur Razi passed the order after Additional Attorney General Mohammad Arshadur Rouf sought nine months to complete the probe.

He informed the court that several officials involved in the investigation had been changed or transferred over the years, delaying progress.

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## Life term or death penalty for culprits

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Crimes under the ordinance will be cognisable, non-bailable and non-compoundable, meaning once the case is filed, the matter cannot be settled outside the court.

At the discussion with the stakeholders, Law Adviser Prof Asif Nazrul said enforced disappearance is a graver crime than murder.

"In some cases, it is even more heinous," he said, adding that their top priorities are ensuring justice for enforced disappearances, murders, and crimes against humanity, particularly for the gruesome incidents that occurred during Sheikh Hasina's authoritarian regime.

"We want to make it difficult for anyone with such dictatorial ambitions to rise again. For that reason, we are enacting various laws and have already initiated judicial processes," he said.

He said they will hold further discussions on the draft with various stakeholders.

According to the draft, enforced disappearance is when any government official, or any person or persons under the authorisation, support, or silent consent of the state or any government authority (a) arrests, detains, abducts, or otherwise deprives any person of liberty; and (b) denies the deprivation of liberty of that person or conceals the fate or whereabouts of that person.

Besides, if any person attempts to commit any offence mentioned in the two subsections mentioned above; directs, assists, or incites the commission of such offence; or conspires in committing such offence would be punished under the law.

Any offence committed under this ordinance shall not be justified on the grounds of a state of war, threat of war, internal political instability, or a state of emergency; nor shall it be justified by the claim that it was committed on the orders of a superior officer or a public authority.

Sharing his opinion on the draft, M Maroof Zaman, a former diplomat and a victim of enforced disappearance himself, said the law should not include capital punishment since it has been formulated in line with an international convention, to which Bangladesh has become a signatory recently.

"The ordinance will have greater international acceptance if the provision for death penalty is dropped," he said.

Barrister Sara Hossain, executive director of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, said setting up of tribunals in every district will require a large number of courageous and skilled manpower.

Saira Rahman Khan, acting secretary of rights body Odhakar, suggested that the ordinance include provisions for compensation for the victim families.

She also demanded provisions for protection and secrecy of victims and witnesses, and a system where a victim's family could access the victim's bank accounts and other assets.

Rights activist Rezaur Rahman Lenin also spoke for compensation.

Lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir said that if incidents of enforced disappearances are widespread and systematic, then they can be prosecuted as crimes against humanity. "We need to specify which cases would be tried under

the new tribunals and which would be tried under the International Crimes Tribunal."

Chief ICT Prosecutor Advocate Tajul Islam said the ordinance should stipulate how far the investigation team could go to probe the offence.

"Specially, it should be determined how the probe body would get into organisations like NTMC [National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre] and other armed forces," he said.

On August 29, 2024, the interim government signed the instrument of accession to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances.

Soon after taking office on August 8, the government also formed an inquiry commission to investigate cases of enforced disappearances during Hasina's 15-year rule.

During her dictatorship, different law enforcement agencies held victims of enforced disappearance for days, months and even years in several secret detention cells (popularly known as Aynaghar) in inhuman conditions, according to the commission report submitted to the chief adviser earlier this year.

During its investigation, the commission received 758 complaints regarding victims of enforced disappearance. Of them, more than one in every four people (27 percent) never returned. A key finding of the inquiry was that the culture of enforced disappearance "was systematically designed over 15 years to remain undetectable."

## Can Bangladesh fend off Vietnam in RMG race?

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by the Export Promotion Bureau, raising questions about statistical reliability.

Despite the correction, Bangladesh retains several structural strengths: a large and affordable labour force, robust backward linkages through its \$25 billion primary textile sector, a global lead in certified green factories, and rising compliance with international safety standards.

But these are increasingly offset by entrenched weaknesses — underdeveloped infrastructure, extended lead times, high borrowing costs, bureaucratic frictions and overreliance on low-value, basic garments.

What separates Bangladesh from competitors like Vietnam is not just cost structure but strategic direction. Vietnam has steadily moved up the value chain, diversifying its product base and leveraging free trade agreements to secure preferential access. With both countries subject to elevated tariffs in the US market, the decisive variable may be the ability to offer differentiated, value-added products and to navigate trade diplomacy with agility.

Without targeted reforms and meaningful trade engagement, Bangladesh's position in global supply chains risks being overtaken — not through a sudden collapse, but by gradual erosion in competitiveness and missed opportunities.

Tapan Chowdhury, a garment exporter and managing director of Square Pharmaceuticals, acknowledged that Vietnam could eventually overtake Bangladesh if key structural challenges remain unaddressed. However, he believes Bangladesh retains its competitive edge — at least for now.

"Given that the Trump administration set the tariff at 37 percent, Bangladesh retains its competitiveness since the effective tariff rate for Vietnam is nearly 10 percentage points higher in the same market," he said.

Tapan urged exporters to shift towards high-value products to withstand price pressures. "International retailers and brands always offer lower prices for basic items. Exporters must adopt the right strategies and be selective in choosing buyers to offset challenges."

Echoing the need for deeper reforms, Rubana Huq, also managing director of Mohammadi Group, said Bangladesh's growth narrative often overlooks entrenched problems.

While the potential of the apparel

sector is widely recognised, Rubana warned that optimism alone is not enough. "Relying solely on the continued growth of basic garments is no longer a viable strategy," she said. The sector must diversify its product base, invest in technology upgrades, and develop a skilled workforce capable of adapting to global demand. She stressed the urgency of expanding capacity in man-made fibre (MMF) garments, where Bangladesh continues to lag behind competitors.

"Bangladesh will lose its competitive edge if we can't engage in active economic diplomacy," she warned, calling for stronger international engagement to secure favourable trade terms.

Faruque Hassan, managing director of Giant Group, raised another important distinction in the comparison with Vietnam. He said Vietnam's export statistics often include both garments and textiles, unlike Bangladesh, which reports garments only.

"For example, Vietnam last year reported more than \$37 billion in combined textile and garment exports, which included several billion dollars worth of textiles," he said. "If we exclude garments from that equation, it will take more time for Vietnam to overtake Bangladesh."

Nonetheless, Hassan stressed the need for swift action. "We need to explore new markets, diversify both products and destinations, invest in technology, and produce more value-added garments. That must go hand-in-hand with improving customs services, port operations, gas supply, and utility services, and removing non-tariff barriers."

Other exporters remain more confident. Md Fazlul Hoque, managing director of Plummy Fashions Ltd, dismissed speculation that Vietnam is about to overtake Bangladesh.

"For years, people have been saying that Vietnam will surpass us, but that hasn't happened. Bangladesh remains competitive and continues to grow."

He added that rankings are less important than performance. "Meeting the market demand is how we can climb even higher."

Indeed, Bangladesh has maintained a strong presence in key markets. It is currently the second-largest apparel exporter to the EU, with annual shipments exceeding \$25 billion, and ranks third in the US with yearly exports of over \$8 billion. In Canada and select emerging markets, Bangladesh has also

expanded its footprint significantly, with market share rising to more than 20 percent, double the level from five years ago.

Still, concerns over looming threats persist. Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury, chairman of Evince Group, pointed to two immediate risks: Trump's tariffs and Bangladesh's upcoming graduation from least developed country (LDC) status, scheduled in November 2026.

He stressed the need for proactive diplomacy in addressing the US tariffs. "Bangladesh must address Trump's tariffs politically. And the government must take timely policy steps to offset the immediate impacts of LDC graduation."

Although countries like the EU, the UK, Canada, and Australia have pledged to extend duty-free access beyond 2026, Anwar-Ul-Alam argued that Bangladesh must not be complacent. He called for negotiating free trade agreements (FTAs) with major trading partners and enhancing engagement with Asian markets such as China, India, and Japan.

If positioned strategically, he noted, Bangladesh could attract new orders as sourcing patterns shift away from China and Vietnam under US tariff pressure. "But this will depend entirely on our diplomatic and strategic responses."

Mostafa Abid Khan, a former member of Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission, warned that even a 10 percent tariff burden could be difficult for many local exporters to absorb. He also flagged Vietnam's advantage under its free trade agreement with the EU, saying the Southeast Asian country continues to strengthen its foothold in the European market.

Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of the Research and Policy Integration for Development, echoed this concern. "Under the EU-Vietnam FTA, Vietnam's exports to Europe are bound to rise. Its presence in the US and Canadian markets is also expanding."

Razzaque also pointed to a critical structural difference. Vietnam's rapid growth in the garment sector is driven largely by Chinese investment, reportedly \$61 billion in textiles and garments. In contrast, Bangladesh's \$55 billion textile and garment sector has less than 5 percent foreign investment.

"This is a relative advantage for Bangladesh," he said, suggesting that US buyers may be wary of Vietnam's deep production ties with China.

## Ensure CJ picked from 3 senior-most judges

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amending Article 48(3) to grant the president more autonomous authority, including the ability to act without consulting the prime minister on certain matters.

Salahuddin did not go into further details about this.

He voiced support for a proposal to make internet access a fundamental right. "This is to ensure that no government can arbitrarily shut the internet down."

The party disagrees with a proposal barring an individual from simultaneously holding the posts of prime minister, party chief, and parliamentary leader.

"Traditionally, the prime minister is also the leader of the parliament and often the party chief. Separating these roles may not be feasible in our political culture," he said.

The BNP is against forming a National Constitution Council and reducing the minimum age for MPs to 21 from the current 25.

The party supports increasing the number of reserved seats for women and recommends holding direct elections for those seats.

The BNP supports the appointment of an Ombudsman, who represents no parties, in local government

elections, and establishing attorney services at the districts, he said.

Regarding a proposal to increase the retirement age of judges to 70, he said the matter required further reviews.

Regarding a proposal to limit how many times an individual can be the prime minister, Salahuddin mentioned that the commission had drafted a revised proposal on the matter at BNP's suggestion, which the party leaders would discuss among themselves.

Regarding local government reforms, the BNP agrees in principle that MPs should not hold posts in local or autonomous institutions, but this also needs parliamentary debate.

Of the 208 recommendations from the Public Administration Reform Commission, the BNP fully agrees with 187, partially agrees with five, disagrees with 11, and has given its opinions on five.

From the Constitution Reform Commission's 131 proposals, BNP agrees with 19 and has reservations or disagreements on the rest.

Out of 243 recommendations by the Electoral System Reform Commission, BNP fully agrees with 141, partially agrees with 14, disagrees with 24, and agrees with but offered

additional comments on 64.

Of the ACC Reform Commission's 20 proposals, the party agrees with 11, disagrees with eight, and has comments on one.

Of the judicial reform proposals, the BNP reviewed 89 and agreed with 62, had comments on nine, and disagreed with 18.

Besides Salahuddin, BNP Chairperson's Advisory Council member Ismail Jabiullah, former Supreme Court Lawyers Association General Secretary Barrister Ruhul Quddus Kajol, and former secretary Abu Md Moniruzzaman Khan, presented these views during their closed-door dialogue with the consensus commission.

Prof Ali Riaz, vice-chair of the commission, said in his opening remarks, "We have found common ground with the BNP alongside some differences. The BNP will discuss the contentious issues internally and return with feedback. We will also review the proposals they have submitted."

Earlier, the consensus commission sent a spreadsheet of 166 key recommendations made by six reform commissions to 39 political parties. So far, 35 parties have submitted their feedback.

## Interpol issues red notice for ex-IGP Benazir

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an application by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), said the police official.

According to the PHQ, the NCB has so far submitted requests for red notices against 12 individuals, including several top officials of the ousted Awami League government, such as former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and former road transport minister Obaidul Quader.

The applications were submitted in three separate phases following the fall of the AI government on August 5 last year in the face of a student-led mass uprising.

AIG Sagar said Interpol is reviewing the requests concerning the remaining 11 individuals.

However, Benazir's name could not be found on the red notice list on Interpol's public website.

When asked about this, AIG Sagar explained that Interpol has strict regulations in place.

"One of Interpol's disclaimers states that 'the majority of red notices are restricted to law enforcement use only', which means they are not always visible to the public," he said.

According to sources, the ACC began investigating Benazir during the Awami League's tenure over allegations of corruption.

On May 4 last year, Benazir left the country with his wife and children while the investigation was still ongoing.

Benazir, who also served as the director general of the Rapid Action Battalion, is still on the run with his family. While his exact location remains unknown, officials believe that the red notice will help trace him, paving the way for his arrest and extradition.

On February 20, the ACC filed a case against Benazir and his wife, Jissan Mirza, accusing them of amassing a large amount of illegal wealth and laundering money.

PHQ sources said that the other nine individuals against whom red notices were sought are: former liberation war affairs minister AKM Mozammel Haque; former foreign minister Hasan Mahmud; former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan; former textiles and jute minister Jahangir Kabir Nanak; former education minister Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury; former mayor of Dhaka South City Corporation Sheikh Faze Noor Taposh; Major General (ret.) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, the defence adviser to the former prime minister; former state minister for power, energy and mineral resources Nasrul Hamid; and former state minister for information Mohammad Ali Aralat.

The NCB made the requests after the prosecution of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) asked the home ministry to seek red notices against them.

The ICT prosecution disclosed the move on April 10.

## Yunus for a fresh vision for Bangladesh's future

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time. When people don't have access to capital, they cannot dream, they cannot build, and they cannot participate in shaping their own futures."

He said poverty is not created by poor people, but a consequence of an economic system where resources surge upwards, concentrating wealth ever more narrowly. Social business armed with the power of financial inclusion can remove this trap and can move millions out of poverty.

On Bangladesh's July 2024 uprising, he said what began as a protest against discrimination evolved into a nationwide call for justice, good governance, and accountability.

It was a generational cry for dignity, transparency, and inclusive governance that listen to the needs and demands of everyone, particularly, the marginalised people, he said.

Prof Yunus called on all to be bold to build a world where no one is too poor to dream and no dream is too big to achieve. "The challenges before us are significant."

"But so too is our capacity for innovation, compassion, and collective action."

Prof Yunus said that intensifying of climate crisis and dwindling funding for tackling it are creating an existential threat for all of us, but self-destructive values like limitless consumption and profit maximization continue.

He said safety of the environment

demands a new way of living that is based on the principles of zero net carbon emissions, zero wealth concentration through the creation of social businesses, and zero unemployment by becoming entrepreneurs.

"We live in a time of profound uncertainty, where multilateralism is under serious threat, climate change is accelerating, geopolitical tensions are rising, and humanitarian crises are deepening."

Prof Yunus said that in today's crisis-prone world, wars and conflicts erode rights and disrupt economies. Peace and stability are fundamental prerequisites for any meaningful and sustainable development.

"The world must not ignore the humanitarian crises that affect people from Palestine to the Rohingyas in Bangladesh," he said.

He said the protracted crisis in Myanmar continues to threaten regional stability. For years, Bangladesh has hosted over 1.2 million Rohingya refugees.

While global efforts continue, world leaders must come together to ensure the safe, sustainable and dignified repatriation of the Rohingyas to their homes in Myanmar, he added.

The chief adviser reached in Doha on April 21 on a four-day visit and received a warm welcome from Qatari ministers and dignitaries as he attended the opening ceremony of the Earthna Summit yesterday.

BANGLADESHI SOLDIERS

Qatar will recruit 725 Bangladeshi soldiers to serve in various capacities, said Shaiful Alam, the chief adviser's press secretary.

Speaking to UNB in Doha, he said the recruitment process will begin within the next two months.

Shaiful said Bangladeshi soldiers have long been deployed in Kuwait, and Qatar now seeks to engage them in a similar manner on a regular basis.

"Qatar will hire 725 soldiers every three years, but we are working to increase that number," he added.

Shaiful said there will be an investment summit today and Prof Yunus will also speak at a conference on the Rohingya issue where global stakeholders will join.

Meanwhile, Saad bin Sherida Al Kaabi, Qatar minister of state for energy affairs, yesterday called on Prof Yunus on the sidelines of the summit.

Earlier in the day, the chief adviser held a meeting with Sheikhha Moza bint Nasser, mother of the Qatar Amir and chairperson of Qatar Foundation, on the sidelines. He also met Sheikh Thani bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, chairperson of Qatar Fund for Development.

Besides, Prof Yunus held a meeting with Nawaf Abdullah Al Hammadi, assistant CEO for International Operations Sector of Qatar Charity, said his Deputy Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad Majumder.