



NARINDA CEMETERY

Colombo Saheb's tomb saved from ruin

DIPAN NANDY

In the heart of Dhaka, amid the city's relentless pace, a silent grave has reclaimed its dignity.

Known only as Colombo Saheb, the man buried at Narinda Christian Cemetery remains a mystery — his real name lost to time. Yet his tomb endures, immortalised in one of the earliest visual records of Dhaka: a painting by German artist Johann Zoffany in 1787.

While the city depicted in Zoffany's canvas has transformed beyond recognition, Colombo Saheb's grave has survived — and now it has been



PHOTO: STAR



reborn.

Back in 2023, this correspondent found the tomb in a state of near ruin. A sprawling banyan tree had all but consumed it, its roots choking the

brickwork and threatening collapse.

Two years on, the scene is strikingly different. The cemetery's main gate has been renovated, and just beyond it stands the restored tomb — freed from the slow decay that once loomed over it.

The restored monument was officially inaugurated at Dhaka Christian Cemetery in Wari on September 20.

The restoration was led by Professor Abu Sayeed M Ahmed, who said such work demands both patience and precision. "One cannot afford mistakes in a project like this," he said. "The aim was to bring it back to its original design, without adding anything new. To achieve that, me and my team turned to historical records, relying on rare photographs from 1850 and 1875, alongside Zoffany's painting that had first revealed the existence of the

grave."

Because the tomb was built during the early years of the Mughal period, traditional techniques were used in its restoration. Brick dust and lime formed the base, while natural binding agents such as lentil paste, jaggery and betel nut resin were applied to ensure authenticity.

"The biggest challenge in renovating the tomb was to remove the huge banyan trees that grew on the dome and remove its peaks, so that there was no structural damage," he said.

The work was costly, made possible by support from international heritage groups. The project was funded by the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia, an organisation that has long worked to preserve old cemeteries across India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

Later, the Commonwealth Heritage

Foundation joined as a partner, ensuring the restoration could be completed.

For the Christian Cemetery Board, the project represents more than the repair of bricks and mortar. "We want future generations to come here not just to see a gate or a few graves, but to feel the depth of history, the soul of the city's heritage," said Father Albert Rosario, the board's vice chairman.

The story of Colombo Saheb's tomb, however, is only the beginning. Abu Sayeed M Ahmed said talks are already underway to restore fifteen to twenty more tombs and monuments at Narinda.

If completed, he believes the cemetery will no longer be seen simply as a burial ground, but as a cultural park where the city's layered past will be on display.

Tk 57,257cr in assets frozen at home, abroad

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Assets of nine of the 10 conglomerates, as well as members of Hasina's family, have already been traced overseas, they added.

"All these assets were built with laundered money," one official said. "Orders are being issued through local cases to seize them."

The task force is made up of representatives from the Anti-Corruption Commission, the National Board of Revenue, and the Criminal Investigation Department of police. The ACC is leading the probe, while the BFIU acts as the secretariat.

An ACC official, requesting anonymity, confirmed the authenticity of the task force document.

Md Akhtar Hossain, director general (prevention) of the ACC, told The Daily Star that as part of the investigation, movable and immovable assets of individuals, including from the 10 companies, have been frozen at different times. He, however, declined to provide any breakdown of the assets frozen.

The task force document shows that about Tk 17,215 crore of the frozen assets include money kept in banks and shares in beneficiary-owner (BO) accounts initially suspended by the BFIU and later blocked through court orders. Of the amount, Tk 1,679.72 crore is in local currency and Tk 36 crore in US dollar (\$3 million) in 1,573 bank accounts of individuals and entities. The rest, Tk 15,500 crore in shares, were held in

188 BO accounts.

Under the Money Laundering Prevention Regulations, 2019, the BFIU can freeze bank accounts for 30 days and then extend the freeze up to seven times itself in cases of suspicious transactions or illegal activities. For further extensions, it needs court orders. The BFIU secured court orders to ensure the freeze in these 11 cases, according to the document.

The media had previously reported that accounts of Hasina, her son Sajeeb Wazed Joy, daughter Saima Wazed Putul, sister Sheikh Rehana, and Rehana's son Radwan Mujib Siddiq, among others, have been frozen.

Accounts of several top businessmen were also blocked, including S Alam Group Chairman Mohammed Saiful Alam and his family; Salman F Rahman, former adviser to Hasina and vice chairman of Beximco Group, along with his son Shayan Fazlur Rahman and daughter-in-law; Bashundhara Group founder Ahmed Akbar Sobhan and his family; and Aramit owner and former land minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury and his family.

The accounts of Orion Group Chairman Mohammad Obaidul Karim, Managing Director Salman Obaidul Karim, and their families were frozen as well.

Also frozen were accounts of the Awami League's research wing the Centre for Research and Information

(CRI) and its "Young Bangla" project.

The task force document mentions that in two of the priority cases — one involving Saifuzzaman and the other Beximco — the UK National Crime Agency has frozen assets worth £260 million (Tk 4,256 crore).

The owners and founders of Summit, Orion, Sikder, Nassa and Nabil groups also saw their accounts frozen.

Orion Group MD Salman Obaidul Karim told The Daily Star on August 24 that their personal bank accounts have been frozen while land and properties have been "seized".

As for the company, only transactions for paying salaries or purchasing raw materials are allowed, he said.

"We are facing problems with cash transactions. Many banks are also refusing to open LCs for us because they are afraid of the Anti-Corruption Commission."

He also said they were considering legally challenging the freeze and seizure.

Contacted, Ranjan Chowdhury, vice chairman of Nassa Group, said they have not yet taken any legal steps regarding the frozen assets.

He claimed the group's bank account has been suspended due to loan defaults, not frozen.

The labour ministry is trying to help the company pay salaries since bank borrowing is not an option for many of its enterprises with defaulted loans, he added.

"Our company is now on the verge of shutting down. We have 20,000 to 25,000 employees. That is why we have been trying to somehow continue operations with our own funds."

Summit Group in a statement said that wholesale freezing of accounts has resulted in "aspersions on Bangladesh, the government as well as business entities and connected persons".

It said the freeze orders were "unfounded" and have effectively impacted hundreds of thousands of people and their jobs.

"Both domestic and international financial institutions, who conduct due diligence, immediately come across these wholesale freezes. This diminishes any possibility of foreign direct investment."

This newspaper tried to reach Subrata Kumar Bhowmick, executive director of S Alam Group; Osman Kaiser Chowdhury, director of Beximco; Sayem Sobhan Anvir, managing director of Bashundhara Group; Mohammad Abu Tayeb, media adviser of Bashundhara; and Md Aminul Islam, managing director and CEO of Nabil Group.

They, however, did not respond to calls and WhatsApp messages for comments. These companies did not reply to emails sent to the IDs provided on their websites. Gemcon, Sikder, and Aramit groups also did not reply to WhatsApp messages and emails.

or no awareness of current leadership.

Both camp majhis and diaspora leaders were widely distrusted for corruption and self-interest, with calls for leadership rooted in education, fairness and based in the camps.

In Bangladesh, immediate needs dominate daily life.

Insecurity from armed and criminal groups, lack of education, and inadequate food, healthcare and shelter were repeatedly cited.

Half of those consulted stressed that education for youth is essential to regaining dignity and preparing for future leadership.

Livelihood opportunities were also viewed as critical to reducing dependence on aid.

The OHCHR report concludes with recommendations to monitor AA's abuses, mainstream recognition of Rohingya persecution in Myanmar's pro-democracy movement, invest in Rohingya youth and civil society, expand higher education pathways and ensure reparations, including land restitution, in any repatriation plan.

Yunus seeks WB support

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development, the press release added.

Yunus also delivered a speech at the opening segment of the "First Biennial Summit for a Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Global Economy: Implementing Commitments on Financing the Sustainable Development Goals" at the UN headquarters.

He shared five priorities for better financing the SDGs, including mobilisation of domestic resources fairly, supported by international assistance.

"Tax systems must be progressive, transparent, and [we have to] ensure [that] multinational corporations pay their share. Negotiations under the UN Framework on International Tax Cooperation must address these inequities," he said.

He warned that UN budget cuts or shrinking Official Development Assistance would be counterproductive for countries like Bangladesh, which hosts 1.3 million Rohingya while battling climate shocks and economic turbulence.

He also emphasised leveraging innovative finance and social business, calling for reforms in the global financial system and debt governance, as well as enforcing transparency, preventing illicit financing and ensuring citizen participation.

The chief adviser highlighted the importance of accelerating investment for the most vulnerable, including resilient housing, climate-smart agriculture, healthcare, education and nature-based solutions.

Closing the USD 4 trillion annual investment gap for the SDGs is formidable, yet essential, he said.

"We must heed the voices of the marginalised that depend on us. In Bangladesh, we believe poverty should not be a barrier to one's dreams. Financial inclusion and access to resources are instruments of justice," Yunus said.

The chief adviser also held meetings

with Italy Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, according to CA's press wing.

Meanwhile, while speaking with state dignitaries and others at an event in New York on Tuesday, Yunus said the upcoming February election would usher in a new era of democracy in Bangladesh.

During a reception hosted by US President Donald Trump in New York, Yunus extended an invitation to the US president to visit Bangladesh at his convenience.

At the event, he exchanged pleasantries with Trump and several global leaders, including King Felipe VI of Spain, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, UN Secretary-General António Guterres and Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay.

Also on Tuesday, Yunus held a series of high-level meetings with global leaders. Among them were Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Queen Máxima of the Netherlands and World Health Organisation Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

In a meeting with Anne Hidalgo, the mayor of Paris, Yunus underlined the urgent need for increased funding to support humanitarian efforts for over one million Rohingya refugees living in camps in Bangladesh.

Hidalgo called for improved living conditions in refugee camps worldwide and expressed hope that the Rohingya people would one day return safely and with dignity to their homeland in Myanmar.

Yunus, who played a key role in transforming the Paris 2024 Olympics into one of the largest social business events in history, also emphasised the importance of making all future Olympic Games, including the upcoming Los Angeles Olympics, carbon neutral.

Later in the day, Yunus participated in two events: one on Fashion for Development and another on collaboration between the public and private sectors in social innovation.

Ensure justice for rape of girl in Khagrachhari

Demand protesters in Rangamati procession

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Students and women's organisations brought out a procession in Rangamati yesterday, demanding justice for the rape of a class-eight student in Khagrachhari.

The demonstration, organised by the Pahari Chhatra Parishad (CHT Hill Students Council) and Hill Women's Federation, began at 3:00pm from the Kumarsumit Roy Gymnasium premises.



The procession moved through the town's main road, passing the deputy commissioner's office, before ending at the Shilpakala Academy in Rangamati.

Rumen Chakma, president of the central committee of the Pahari Chhatra Parishad, alleged that rape, torture and persecution in the CHT have become routine because of a culture of impunity.

"The administration and law enforcement agencies continue to play a silent role. The state should take responsibility," he said.

Sumitra Chakma, president of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Youth Association, said Jumma women are unsafe both at home and outside.

He said cases of rape in the hills continue, leaving the community in fear.

The lack of implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord has deepened this insecurity, he added, warning that torture and oppression would persist unless the accord is fully enforced.

On the night of September 23, the girl was raped in Khagrachhari Sadar while returning home after private tuition. Her father filed a case the next morning with Khagrachhari Sadar Police Station against three unidentified men.

Political solution, not aid, only way out

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returned under AA control.

They also described abuses including arbitrary arrests, abductions and violent restrictions on movement, with women and girls facing particular vulnerability.

Despite this bleak outlook, the refugees remain united in their aspiration to return to Myanmar.

Every participant emphasised that repatriation is their ultimate goal, provided that certain fundamental conditions are met.

These include full citizenship and recognition of their Rohingya identity alongside guarantees of equal rights, education, freedom of religion, livelihoods and unrestricted movement, according to the report.

However, with conflict intensifying between the AA and Myanmar's military and elections under the junta dismissed by 95 percent as meaningless, hopes for an immediate return are slim.

The AA's lack of international legitimacy makes it unfit to guarantee their rights, said 20 percent of the participants.

For survivors of the 2017 clearance operations, widows, persons with

disabilities and hijra, the trauma of persecution has created personal reluctance to return, though they too wish for repatriation for the wider community.

Many emphasised a strong sense of belonging to Myanmar, particularly the youth, who said they would contribute to the country's development if treated as equals.

When tracing the root causes of the crisis, 65 percent of the participants pointed to entrenched racism and religious intolerance.

They said fear of Muslims was deliberately manufactured in Myanmar to deny them rights and citizenship.

The community also acknowledged that decades of lost education and disunity have left them politically powerless.

Yet, most said their preferred future lies in peaceful coexistence with Rakhine Buddhists, framing this not as submission but as resilience and a sense of belonging.

Looking forward, refugees called for a democratic Myanmar with an inclusive constitution and credible elections.

Some voiced the need for a

disciplined, politically-led Rohingya defence force to balance power with the AA, although they rejected the proliferation of armed groups whose criminality and regressive views on women have eroded trust.

Participants also urged the international community to establish UN peacekeeping missions or internationally protected safe zones in Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung to ensure security during repatriation.

Justice must mean the restoration of citizenship, restitution of land, compensation and accountability for perpetrators, they said.

As many as 65 percent equated justice with rights, 60 percent demanded the return of land and property, and 58 percent sought punishment of perpetrators through imprisonment or death sentences.

Survivors also wanted recognition of their suffering, though many doubted that international courts would deliver timely justice.

The report further highlights a crisis of leadership.

Some 45 percent said they have no effective representation, while 60 percent of the women reported little