



Khawaja Naim Murad, *right*, and his daughter Nameera Naim display ornament designs at the family home in Dhaka, Bangladesh.



The Ahsan Manzil, a government museum and the former residence of Sir Salimullah Bahadur -- the former prince or Nawab of Dhaka, in Dhaka.



Khawaja Naim Murad shows a painting of the Daria-i-Noor during an interview with AFP in Dhaka.

PHOTO: AFP/MUNIR UZ ZAMAN

Daria-i-Noor, ‘sister’ to Koh-i-Noor, awaits first light in 117yrs

Committee to inspect legendary diamond mortgaged by Nawab Salimullah in 1908

BAHARAM KHAN

For over a century, one of the world’s most legendary gemstones has remained hidden – locked in silence, shrouded in myth, and cloaked in official secrecy.

Bangladesh government has decided that the time has come to finally lift the veil on the Daria-i-Noor (Sea of Light), a diamond many believe to be the “sister gem” of the famed Koh-i-Noor (Mountain of Light).

Next week, a high-powered committee led by Cabinet Secretary Abdur Rashid is set to inspect the Daria-i-Noor inside Sonali Bank’s vault, where it has been kept for an astonishing 117 years.

According to the Land Reform Board, the saga of the Daria-i-Noor began when Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka mortgaged the diamond along with 109 other ornaments to the government of the then province of Eastern Bengal and Assam in exchange for a loan of 1.4 million rupees. That could amount to Tk 1,320-1,848 crore in 2025 if the average annual inflation rate is 4.5- 5% over 117 years.

The loan, which was supposed to be repaid in 30 years at an annual interest rate of 3 percent, remains unsettled to this day.

Since then, the diamond has remained under government custody – its location marked in official records but unseen by human eyes. Over the decades, those tasked with safeguarding it never dared to open the sealed box. The fear of being held accountable for any discrepancy, or worse, the discovery of an empty casket, kept everyone from verifying its contents.

Ali Imam Majumder, the current land adviser, has long called for clarity. After taking office, he renewed



Daria-i-Noor Diamond on the left hand of Maharaja Sher Singh painted by August Schoefft, circa 1841–42.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

his plea to the government, urging that the matter be made public. It was at his initiative that a nine-member committee – comprising senior bureaucrats, security officials, and a gem specialist – was formed under the leadership of the Cabinet Secretary.

After two rounds of meetings, the committee resolved to open the box and reveal the truth to the nation. To ensure a smooth and secure operation, a six-member subcommittee carried out a preliminary “rehearsal” at Sonali Bank on October 5. The procedures to be followed during the actual unveiling are now being finalised.

“If we do not open the box, controversy will persist,” a committee member told The Daily Star, seeking anonymity. “But if any mistakes occur during the process, the government could face severe criticism.

That’s why we’ve done a pre-inspection – to make sure everything is handled with utmost caution. The interest surrounding this gem extends far beyond Bangladesh.”

A senior official at Sonali Bank confirmed that a delegation led by the home secretary had recently examined the vault’s condition and its security measures. “The process to open the box is now underway and expected to take place next week,” he said.

During the pre-inspection, officials discovered that the vault allows entry to no more than four individuals at a time – a logistical challenge that will likely prolong the operation. “We cannot say exactly how long the process will take,” the committee member added. “To avoid disruptions, food and refreshments will be arranged so that no one needs to step out until the inspection is complete.”

Given the space constraint, only Bangladesh Television will be permitted to enter the vault to film the proceedings. Other media outlets will be briefed later.

“It won’t be a live broadcast,” clarified one member. “But the entire process will unfold before the cameras, ensuring complete transparency.”

“No one will carry personal devices inside. Every individual entering or leaving the vault will undergo thorough screening. Special Branch passes are being arranged for everyone involved,” said another committee member.

Land Adviser Ali Imam Majumder told The Daily Star that the media will be informed about the next course of action.

Prof Yunus to visit Rome on Oct 12 to join WFP meeting

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus will leave for Rome, the capital of Italy, on October 12 to join a global meeting of the World Food Programme (WFP).

Chief Adviser’s Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam disclosed the information at a press conference at the Foreign Service Academy yesterday.

Apart from delivering a speech at the WFP event, he said, the Chief Adviser will meet high profile personalities on the sidelines of the meeting.

He also briefed the media about the details of a meeting of the National Steering Committee held at the Chief Adviser’s Office in the city’s Tejgaon area with Prof Yunus in the chair.



ROAD ACCIDENT IN OMAN

Eight Bangladeshi workers killed

BSS, Dhaka

Eight Bangladeshi expatriate workers were killed in a road accident in Oman yesterday.

“Nine Bangladeshis, including the driver, were heading towards Dukum Sidra, about 650 kilometres from Muscat, in a microbus when the accident occurred,” Asadul Haque, First Secretary (Labour) at the Bangladesh Embassy in Muscat, told BSS over the phone this evening.

He said the vehicle collided with a large fishing container truck on the road around 3:00pm (Oman time), leaving eight Bangladeshi workers dead and the driver critically injured. The injured driver was rushed to a nearby hospital for treatment, Haque added.

He said they were travelling to the seaside for fishing.

The identities of the deceased are yet to be confirmed, but it is believed that most of them were from Sandwip upazila in Chattogram district, Haque said.

An official from the Bangladesh Embassy in Muscat has already reached the accident site to provide necessary assistance. The bodies of the deceased have been kept at different hospitals in the area.

The embassy will take necessary measures to send the bodies back to Bangladesh following due procedures, the labour official said.

25 former, serving military officers

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In one of the cases, Hasina, Tarique, five former DGFI chiefs, five former directors of its Counter Terrorism and Intelligence Bureau (CTIB), and another former DGFI official have been accused on five counts related to enforced disappearances and torture at the DGFI’s Joint Interrogation Cell (JIC).

The former DGFI chiefs are Lt Gen (ret’d) Md Akbar Hossain, Lt Gen (ret’d) Md Saiful Alam, Lt Gen (ret’d) Ahmed Tabrez Shams Chowdhury, Maj Gen (ret’d) Md Saiful Abedin, and Maj Gen (ret’d) Hamidul Haque.

The former CTIB directors are Maj Gen Sheikh Md Sarwar Hossain, Maj Gen (ret’d) Mohammad Towhidul Ul Islam, Maj Gen Kabir Ahmed, Brig Gen Md Mahbubur Rahman Siddique, and Brig Gen Ahmed Tanvir Mazahar Siddique. Former DGFI official Lt Col (ret’d) Mokhsurul Haque was also named.

Another case accuses Hasina, Tarique, Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, former Rab chiefs Benazir Ahmed, M Khurshid Hossain and Harun or Rashid, along with 11 army officers who served in Rab. The charges include detaining political activists, journalists, bloggers, and others with dissenting views in secret prisons. They allegedly subjected detainees to torture and, in some cases, killed them inside the Task Force for Interrogation (TFI) cell at the Rab-1 compound.

The current and former army officers accused in the case are Col (ret’d) Anwar Latif Khan, Brig Gen Md Jahangir Alam, Brig Gen Tofail

Mostafa Sarwar, Brig Gen Kamrul Hasan, Brig Gen Md Mahbub Alam, Col K M Azad, Col Abdullah Al Momen, Lt Col (ret’d) Muhammad Khairul Islam, Lt Col Md Moshir Rahman Jewel, and Lt Col Saiful Islam Sumon, and Lt Col Sarwar Bin Kashem.

The third case accuses Lt Col Redwanul, Maj Rafat, DMP’s former additional deputy commissioner of Khilgaon Division Md Rashedul Islam, and former Rampura Police Station officer-in-charge Md Mashiur Rahman on six counts for allegedly killing 28 people and committing crimes against humanity in Rampura during the July uprising.

A joint investigation by The Daily Star and Tech Global Institute revealed how Rampura became a hotspot of state-sanctioned killings on July 19, 2024.

According to the report published on August 7 this year, forensic analysis indicated Lt Col Redwanul fired a Type 56 assault rifle, potentially killing at least one victim – 14-year-old Ashiqul Islam.

In-depth forensic analyses confirmed a match by comparing footage from Banasree and Rampura, indicating that the same suspected shooter was present in both locations. The Daily Star independently verified his name and identity. Sources in intelligence agencies, the International Crimes Tribunal, and journalists who were present on the ground identified him as Lt Col Redwanul.

Speaking to reporters after the proceedings, Tajul said prosecutors

had already substantiated several allegations among thousands of complaints received, forming the basis of the formal charges now before the tribunal.

Describing the formal charges in stark detail to the tribunal and later to the journalists, Tajul listed methods of torture allegedly used in secret detention: prolonged beatings, electric chairs, electric shocks, genital electrocution, severing of limbs, and cutting open abdomens before dumping bodies in the Buriganga river.

“One day or another, every perpetrator must face trial... Now that proceedings have begun, efforts will be made to conclude them lawfully in the shortest possible time,” he added.

The chief prosecutor also told the tribunal that “Ayna Ghar”, also referred to as “Art Gallery”, was a code name used by Rab for its secret detention facilities. Detainees were assigned symbolic titles, with the most valuable referred to as “Mona Lisa”. The Rab’s “Ayna Ghar” or TFI Cell was euphemistically called the “Hospital” or “Clinic”.

Speaking to the media after the court proceedings, several victims who endured years of unlawful detention said they sought justice, not revenge.

They described severe mental and physical abuse and urged fair trials so such abuses never recur. They also called for perpetrators, at home or abroad, to be brought to justice and for victims’ families to receive compensation.

Public admin adrift amid leadership vacuum

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But over the last one year, the government, departing from this norm, transferred at least three contractual secretaries, entrusting them with less important roles.

These secretaries in question accepted the demotion and held on to their contractual positions instead of relinquishing them.

Had they followed the example set by former NBR chairman Badiur Rahman during the caretaker government’s tenure in 2007, they could have held their heads high. In protest of his transfer from the NBR to the food ministry as its secretary, Badiur opted for voluntary retirement, with 15 months left in service.

DECISIONS ON DC

Soon after two deputy commissioners took charge in Chattogram and

Mymensingh divisions at the end of last year, allegations of corruption and misbehaviour were raised against them. But it took the government more than a year to withdraw the two and place them under investigation.

Even the latest posting of the DC in Cox’s Bazar had its share of drama. Due to internal conflicts, the newly appointed DC was initially barred from joining the station. He finally took charge eight days after the scheduled date.

Although a government notification was issued 20 days ago, transferring the DC of Naogaon to Chattogram after the withdrawal of the previous DC, the new DC has reportedly been instructed not to join.

This reflects a lack of coordination between the Secretariat and the field

administration, which is far from ideal ahead of a national election.

Moreover, at least 20 DCs, who were supposed to be given responsibilities at various ministries, are still posted in districts, seven months after being promoted to joint secretaries.

One could argue whether there was any need for promoting them while around a thousand joint secretaries are already serving in the administration.

Besides, around two dozen DCs have been sent into forced retirement or made officers on special duty for their questionable roles in the last three national elections. But this brings forth the argument about whether it was logical to single them out.

The punitive measures were taken hastily even before the government formed a commission on June 27 to

Ex-Rab men

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the bandits was brought by General Ziaul Ahsan’s team. And later we learned that, under General Ziaul Ahsan’s direct supervision, many people were taken there in the dead of night. The people who were about to be killed were called packets, or roosters or subjects.”

Anonymous testimonies of former Rab officers were released in the government-produced documentary.

An officer said, “They would not tell us where the destination is. They would reach a spot and say ‘slow down’. When they said slow down, that’s when we realised the process would start.”

He said they would then bring the victims out of the hull opening a hatch and tie sacks of cement to their knees.

“After tying, they place the sack right near the feet. The second man hands over the pillow. Using that pillow [to dampen the gunshot sound], he [Ziaul Ahsan] takes the shot,” said the former officer.

“Sir’s preferred target is the head ... he fires one round, or sometimes two. The need for the second round arises only when he [Ziaul Ahsan] feels someone’s [shooter’s] hand had trembled. Then he would say, ‘second shot.’” the officer said.

Another former officer then showed a photo of a trawler. He said that the victims used to be kept in the hull to hide them from the boatmen.

Another former officer, an eyewitness, said, “Zia shot the victim. I don’t remember if Zia himself threw the body overboard or if someone else with Zia did it. But the body was shot and thrown.”

Another officer told the commission that the victims were killed with lethal injections. He said, “Sir [Ziaul Ahsan] himself used to push the injection.”

identify the roles of those involved in three successive national polls.

For the elections, the first line of responsibility lies with the Election Commission and senior officials of the EC Secretariat. Alongside them, the cabinet secretary, principal secretary, and secretaries of the public administration and home ministries carry direct responsibility.

Scores of officials from the admin cadre have already been punished without due procedure for their “controversial role” in the elections.

But what about officers from different government agencies who were also entrusted with election duties? The point is not that they too should be punished arbitrarily, but that there should be a uniform standard of accountability for all.

Parties sharply split

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expire if not passed within 30 days of parliament’s first session.

They instead advised holding the referendum under a July Charter Implementation Order and empowering the next parliament as a Constitution Reform Assembly, which they called the most sustainable solution.

One of the experts, requesting anonymity, told this newspaper, “At first, it seemed easier to hold the referendum and election together, but now many think it could make things complicated. We are leaving the matter to the government.”

He added that the referendum might also include multiple questions to capture areas of disagreement, along with the main question on implementing the charter.

According to commission sources, the body will hold an internal meeting today to finalise its written recommendations to the government on implementing the July Charter.

‘ON ELECTION DAY’

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed reiterated his party’s stance that the referendum should coincide with the national election.

“The constituent power of the July Charter comes from the people, and the referendum will be the way to exercise that power,” he said.

“If the people approve the charter through the referendum, the next parliament will be responsible for implementing its provisions. The people’s approval through the referendum will create a binding mandate for parliament.”

Salahuddin said holding the referendum before the election would be impractical, costly, and could delay the polls. “People can vote with separate ballots on the same day – it’s not new in our voting culture,” he said.

He warned that requiring implementation of the charter in the first parliamentary session could create complications, suggesting the phrase “as soon as possible” to give lawmakers time for legal and procedural reforms.

He added that the idea of forming an upper house could be considered only after the charter’s approval.

On dissenting opinions, Salahuddin said, “Even if there are disagreements or objections, those will be part of the referendum. If any party wins the people’s mandate later, it can act according to its own position.”

He also proposed that each political party include in its election manifesto a pledge to act on its dissenting points if it wins a mandate.

‘REFERENDUM FIRST’

Jamaat’s representative Shishir Monir said a Special Constitutional Order – the July Charter Implementation Order – is essential.

“The order will specify the referendum and include the full text of the July Charter. Under this order, the referendum will be held. The next parliament will have two powers: one as a regular parliament

and another as a constituent assembly. The first session will have constituent power, and from the second session onward, it will function as a regular parliament,” he said.

He added that the referendum should be held before the national election, possibly in the first week of November if decided soon.

NCP Joint Convener Javed Rasin echoed that position, saying, “Reforms should not be done in a way that could later be challenged or cancelled. We must focus on making them sustainable.”

He warned that holding the referendum on the same day as the election would make it lose importance.

“The July Charter Implementation Order should decide whether the charter will be implemented, and the next parliament must be given special constituent powers since the basic structure of the constitution is being touched,” he said.

Another NCP Joint Convener, Sarwar Tusher, said if the parties could reduce their “notes of dissent” – for example, if Jamaat dropped its demand for proportional representation in the lower house and BNP accepted it for the upper house – it could serve as a good compromise.

OTHER VIEWS

Parties and alliances, including Ganatantra Mancha, the 12-Party Alliance, CPB, BSD, Bangladesh JASAD, and LDP supported holding the referendum on the same day as the national election.

The Ganatantra Mancha proposed holding it under a July Charter Implementation Order, with the next parliament’s first session named the “Constitution Reform Assembly”, where dissent issues would be resolved through discussion.

CPB, BSD, and their allies proposed holding the referendum under the 1991 Referendum Act instead of issuing a new order, while BNP-aligned parties preferred using an ordinance and letting the regular parliament settle constitutional issues later.

Clarification

The Daily Star ran a report on Tuesday headlined “BNP confident it’ll win, form govt alone,” based on an interview of BNP’s acting chairperson, Tarique Rahman, published by the UK-based Financial Times. In its initial report, the FT mentioned that Bangladesh was ranked the world’s most corrupt country by Transparency International for five consecutive years during the BNP’s last stint in power. However, the FT later corrected the reference to clarify that Bangladesh held that position for four consecutive years. We regret any inconveniences. We have already changed it in our online version accordingly.