

Nearly blind Rohingya refugee dies in Buffalo after being “dropped off” miles from home by CBP agents

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On Tuesday, a nearly blind 56-year-old Rohingya refugee, Nurul Amin Shah Alam, was found dead in Buffalo, New York, after U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents released him at a donut shop miles from his home, without informing his family or ensuring his safe return.

Shah Alam was a Rohingya refugee from Myanmar (Burma). The Rohingya are a persecuted Muslim ethnic minority, concentrated mainly in Rakhine State along the border with Bangladesh. They have their own language, culture and communal history in the region, but the state of Myanmar has refused to recognize them as one of the country’s official ethnic groups and instead labels them “illegal immigrants” from Bangladesh.

Shah Alam entered the US as a refugee on December 24, 2024. He arrived in Buffalo, New York, that month with his wife and two children after fleeing persecution in Myanmar, and the family was legally resettled there as Rohingya refugees. He spoke little or no English, was nearly blind and suffering from serious health problems that left him extremely vulnerable. Relatives described him as a gentle man, a father of two, who depended on his family for navigation, communication and basic daily tasks.

On February 19, Shah Alam was arrested by local police and booked into the Erie County jail after an encounter in which officers claimed he did not comply with commands he likely could not see or understand. Body camera footage shows officers threatening him, one saying, “I’m going to shoot you, dude” before firing Tasers, taking him to the ground and handcuffing him; police later alleged he bit two officers. After his arrest, CBP lodged an immigration detainer and was notified when the county prepared to release him.

Once Shah Alam was cleared for release, CBP agents took custody of him but quickly determined he was not subject to removal and decided not to pursue deportation. Instead of returning him to his family or arranging a safe handoff with his lawyer, agents transported him into Buffalo and left him

at a Tim Hortons donut shop north of downtown, roughly five miles from his home. Surveillance video later showed him wandering outside the locked coffee shop on a cold winter night.

Crucially, his family and attorney were never informed that he had been released or where he was left. Relatives were still expecting him to walk out of the county jail and return home; they had no reason to imagine he had been abandoned miles away in an unfamiliar area he could not safely navigate. With city cameras in the area offline due to prior vandalism, there was no real-time public record to aid the search after he disappeared.

Buffalo Mayor Sean M. Ryan issued a blunt statement condemning CBP’s actions, saying the “preventable death of Nurul Amin Shah Alam is deeply disturbing and a dereliction of duty by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection.” Ryan also said the agents’ conduct was “unprofessional and inhumane” and declared that the agency had “failed” to protect human dignity.

Federal and local officials have acknowledged that Border Patrol picked Shah Alam up from Erie County custody, drove him into the city and dropped him off, with a spokesperson confirming that he was taken to a Tim Hortons and left there. Immigration authorities said they released him the same day they received him from the county because he was not deportable, but they have offered no coherent justification for abandoning a nearly blind, non-English-speaking refugee in a strange neighborhood at night.

For nearly a week, Shah Alam’s family searched frantically for him. They filed a missing persons report, canvassed local hospitals and detention centers, distributed flyers and worked with advocates to pressure agencies for answers. His attorney discovered on February 22 that he was not in immigration detention and alerted Buffalo police, exposing the fact that no one in government had told the family that he had been released at all.

Family members have described “days and nights without sleep,” fearing he had fallen, been assaulted or succumbed to the cold, and denounced officials for leaving a disabled man to fend for himself without even a phone call.

On February 25, Buffalo police confirmed that the remains discovered on a downtown street two days earlier were Shah Alam, identified by the medical examiner using X-ray comparison, and notified his relatives. He had been dead for hours when first responders arrived, and emergency personnel were unable to revive him.

Shah Alam’s death is the direct result of the violence and abuse meted out by DHS agencies—CBP and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—against immigrants since the start of the second Trump administration, which has empowered federal agents to deliberately violate the Constitution and shield agents from accountability.

The death of Shah Alam was one of many outrages over the past week across the US:

- **South Texas:** Newly reported internal ICE documents detail how an ICE officer shot and killed US citizen Ruben Ray Martinez in his vehicle, firing multiple times after he allegedly failed to follow commands and struck an agent. This is the same excuse federal agents used to justify the killing of Minnesota mother Renée Nicole Good in January, claiming she attempted to use her vehicle to harm officers, even though multiple cell phone videos from that day show Good did not attempt to hit the agent, who deliberately remained in front of the vehicle to justify his violent actions.

- **Nationwide shootings by ICE and CBP:** A recent review found that ICE and Border Patrol agents have shot and killed five people in recent months, including Silverio Villegas González in Chicago; Isaias Sanchez Barboza in Rio Grande City, Texas; Keith Porter in Los Angeles (killed by an off-duty ICE agent); and Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis, underlining a pervasive resort to deadly force.

- **Vehicle shootings and use of force:** A separate analysis documented 15 incidents in which ICE or Border Patrol agents fired at people in cars, a practice that violates use-of-force standards in most police departments and DHS policy itself; in these cases at least two drivers were killed. Only a minority of those shot by ICE or CBP face ongoing criminal charges, despite official claims that all posed lethal threats.

- **“Detention warehouses” and systemic abuse:** Congressional investigations and human rights monitoring have uncovered more than 1,000 credible reports of abuses in ICE detention, including medical neglect, overcrowding, denial of food and water, physical and sexual abuse, family separation, and mistreatment of children and pregnant women, even as ICE experiments with “warehouse”-style

mass holding sites.

- **Minnesota, ongoing ICE deployments and Medicaid frozen:** Legal observers and community monitors in Minnesota continue to document ICE arrests, tactical teams and raids despite federal claims that the Operation Metro Surge occupation was winding down. Earlier this week, Vice President JD Vance announced that the federal government would be withholding \$259 million in Medicaid payments to Minnesota. This program primarily benefits the elderly, the poor and children.

Public sources show that deaths in US immigration custody have surged since Trump began his second term, but there is not yet a single, definitive cumulative figure for all people who have died in “U.S. custody” across all agencies (ICE, CBP holding, Border Patrol field custody and related facilities).

Based upon media reports the number of people who have died is somewhere between 36 and 40, with 30-32 deaths in 2025 and 6-7 deaths so far in 2026.

Reports show that some deaths in immigration custody and related enforcement incidents have triggered formal investigations, but many have not, and almost none have been examined in a way that families or the public would recognize as transparent, timely or independent.

For deaths in ICE detention, DHS is supposed to open at least an internal case review every time someone dies in custody, and in a subset of cases there is a more formal review or referral. In some cases, local law enforcement and county medical examiners conduct parallel inquiries.

A *Guardian* analysis of the 32 people who died in ICE custody in 2025 found that while ICE claimed deaths were “under review,” only a small number had any publicly visible follow-up by DHS oversight offices, and details were sparse months later.

Tracking projects cited by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) and the American Immigration Council note that at least a handful of cases—for example, the homicide of Geraldo Lunas Campos at Camp East Montana in Texas—did trigger an autopsy explicitly labeling the death a homicide, a federal court order to preserve witness testimony, and litigation. However, these cases are the exception, not the rule.



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