

33. Nurul Amin Shah Alam

Who was Nurul Amin Shah Alam? Nurul Amin Shah Alam was a subsistence farmer who worked in rice fields and fisheries in Myanmar before he and other ethnic Rohingya were made to do forced labor. Shah Alam and his family fled to Bangladesh and then to Malaysia working in a refugee camp in construction and as a blacksmith to earn enough money to pay for his family's travel expenses. By 2013, Shah Alam's pregnant wife and all of their children had been brought over, but they lacked the documents to gain Malaysian citizenship.

How did Nurul Amin Shah Alan end up in ICE custody? In 2015, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees arranged for Shah Alam's resettlement to the United States, but he declined the offer as it did not extend to his adult children. In 2024, the U.S. government agreed to allow Shah Alam's eldest three sons into the country as well. Shah Alam, his wife, and their two youngest children arrived in Buffalo on December 24, 2024. They had legal refugee status. Nurul didn't speak English, had trouble walking and used a cane. His son told Reuters that Shah Alam could not read or write, and he was nearly blind.

How did Nurul Amin Shah Alam die under ICE responsibility? Nurul Amin Shah Alam was arrested in 2025 after a misunderstanding with local police while using a curtain rod as a walking stick. He then spent months in the county jail. Upon his release from jail on February 19, 2025, and while his family waited nearby to pick him up, he was briefly detained by U.S. Border Patrol, who determined he could not be deported because of his refugee status. Without notifying his family or his lawyer, Border Patrol released him but left him outside a closed coffee shop in near-freezing winter temperatures in Buffalo. His body was found five days later, about six miles from where he had been dropped off. This was exactly 14 months to the day after he, his wife Fatimah, and his two younger sons, fleeing genocide in Myanmar (as a Muslim minority), had arrived in the U.S. and were given refugee status.

What happened after Nurul Amin Shah Alam's death? The local medical examiner officially ruled his death a homicide. They determined that a stress-induced ulcer had allowed gastric acid to leak into his belly, causing excruciating pain. The official cause of death: complications of a perforated ulcer, precipitated by hypothermia and dehydration.

Sources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing_of_Nurul_Amin_Shah_Alam

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2026/05/12/nyregion/buffalo-refugee-nurul-amin.html>

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