

Polls to take place by June 30, 2026

Says CA's press secretary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The next parliamentary polls are expected to take place by June 30, 2026, said Shafiquel Alam, the press secretary to the chief adviser.

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has given a clear cut roadmap about the election, he said at a press conference yesterday when asked about the BNP's demand for a definite roadmap for the next general elections.

It is the Election Commission's job to announce the election schedule and the government's role is to facilitate the EC, said Azad Majumdar, deputy press secretary to the chief adviser.

About enforced disappearances, Alam said all involved, including political parties and members of law enforcement agencies, will be brought to justice.

When asked how the Awami League leaders and members of law enforcement agencies left the country after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina on August 5, Alam said that the government is reviewing the matter.

The government has no concrete

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5 serene escapes in Dhaka to reconnect with nature



PHOTOS: STAR

TASMIAH RAHMAN

In the heart of a buzzing metropolis, finding time to reconnect with nature can be tricky. Amid the cacophony of the urban sprawl, there are serene pockets of nature offering a refreshing escape from the daily grind.

Whether you yearn for a soulful morning walk, a reflective moment by the water, or a lively catch-up with friends, here are five nature retreats that can bestow moments of tranquillity in this concrete jungle.

BALDAH GARDEN: A HISTORIC GREEN HAVEN

Nestled in the heart of Old Dhaka, Baldah Garden is a haven of natural beauty. As you step into the century-old botanical garden, an array of rare species of plants welcomes you. The diverse foliage, like orchids, cacti, conservatory and wall plants, offer a scenic break.

The historic Joy House in Baldah Garden is a tranquil territory, where Rabindranath Tagore once found inspiration to write his poem "Camelia". Nearby, the Shankanand Pond beholds picturesque aquatic plants.

Moreover, there is also a sundial which you should definitely

check out. Overall, the garden is a soothing setting for morning walks or slow nostalgic strolls.

RAMNA PARK: NATURE'S HEART IN THE CITY

Whether you're looking to spend quality time with family and friends or simply bask in the soft warmth of the low noon sun – Ramna Park offers a peaceful oasis right in the heart of Dhaka.

Sprawling with greenery, the park is home to a rich variety of plant life, including fruit-bearing trees, vibrant flowers, medicinal plants, and forestry species. The intricate walkways wind through a tapestry of green, while wooden decks over the lake offer a perfect viewpoint to admire the calm waters.

Morning runs or yoga sessions beneath the towering trees of Ramna Park are especially invigorating. A range of outdoor eateries are also available at the gates to meet your cravings!

MIRPUR BERIBANDH: WHERE THE RIVER MEETS CITY

Mirpur Beribandh, a riverfront retreat on the bank of the Turag, offers city dwellers an exciting respite. The vast highways open up a stunning view of a series of trees and distant villages. Large

boats and smaller vessels glide through the waters, painting a picture of the riverine country forgotten in the city. Visitors can enjoy boat rides and the abundance of a refreshing river breeze while enjoying quick bites or steaming hot tea.

Entertainment parks, floating restaurants, and a footbridge make this spot vibrant with visitors. Before the sun sets, the area becomes enchanting, with the river reflecting hues of orange and gold.

MIRPUR BOTANICAL GARDEN: A PLANT LOVER'S PARADISE

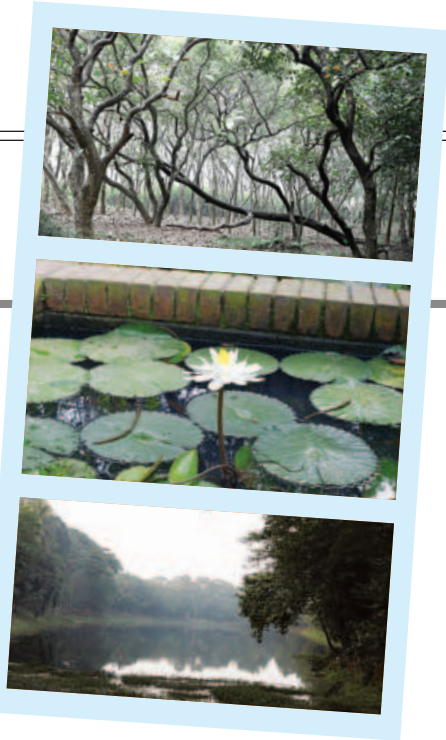
In the ever-bustling concrete city, Mirpur Botanical Garden offers a verdant sanctuary. The 84-hectare garden is home to more than 80,000 plants, herbs and shrubs.

The serpentine lakes and sprawling lawns invite leisurely strolls. Tree corridors, tunnels and seating corners provide an enjoyable experience. The rose garden offers a picturesque scene, especially in winter when a diverse species of roses bloom.

For botany enthusiasts and city dwellers alike, the Mirpur Botanical Garden is the perfect spot to rejuvenate your spirit.

DIABARI, UTTARA: A QUICK OUTING IN NATURE

For an unplanned getaway into the outdoors, Diabari can be a great option. Situated in Uttara, Diabari is well-known for its pockets of green spaces and calm surroundings, providing stunning sunset views and serene wetlands. Visitors can take boat rides, indulge in therapeutic kayaking sessions and take strolls down the hamlet streets. The cool breeze and golden sunlight filtering through the trees create a calming ambience. This location is ideal for a quick hangout for afternoon delights and tea-time treats while enjoying the serene environment.



Crucial door now open

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pathway for the revival of democracy," said Majumdar, who filed the petition along with four other prominent citizens on August 18, 2011.

The amendment was enacted by the parliament on June 30, 2011 during the Awami League government's tenure, with its gazette notification issued just three days later.

The court observed that the provisions undermined democracy, which is the fundamental structure of the constitution.

Additionally, the court nullified several clauses added through the 15th amendment, including Articles 7A, 7B, and 44(2), citing their inconsistency with the constitution.

The AL government became authoritarian with the help of the 15th amendment and with the

judgement of Justice ABM Khairul Haque, according to Majumdar, also the secretary of Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik.

The amendment institutionalised authoritarian governance in two ways: by stipulating holding elections under a partisan government and introducing Article 7A into the constitution, which prohibited criticism of the constitution and labelling such actions as seditions.

"I believe this is a landmark judgement -- a seminal ruling," said Majumdar, also the chief of the Election Reform Commission.

While the judgment has opened a significant door for the return of democracy, whether democracy actually returns depends on future actions.

"Democratic progress requires

behavioural changes. If politicians and stakeholders reform their conduct and fulfil their responsibilities, democracy will be restored. Otherwise, it will not."

Majumdar said he and many others had been vocal against the 15th amendment despite extremely hostile conditions and the court recognised and expressed gratitude to them.

Various entities -- including the BNP, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, Gono Forum, organisations and individuals -- later joined the proceedings of the writ petition as interveners. During the hearing, legal arguments were presented by representatives of all petitioners.

"We filed this writ to uphold truth and justice and to ensure a functional democratic system. Today, I am overjoyed for the entire nation."

ACC to probe Hasina, family

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and failure to investigate into an allegation against Hasina of embezzling money from the Rooppur plant.

Nationalist Democratic Movement Chairman Bobby Hajjaj filed the petition, referring to reports published by different newspapers.

Hasina fled to India on August 5 in the face of a mass uprising led by students.

In another development, the ACC filed cases against former education minister Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury Nowfel, former additional deputy commissioner (Detective Branch) Harun or Rashid, his wife Shirin

Akhtar, and his brother ABMS Shahriar.

The case statement says Nawfel acquired illegal assets worth Tk 2.94 crore, Harun Tk 17.51 crore, Shirin Tk 10.76 crore, and Shahriar Tk 12.96 crore.

The graft watchdog also sued Hasina's former personal assistant Jahangir Alam and his wife Kamrun Nahar.

Jahangir was accused of illegally acquiring Tk 18.29 crore and Kamrun Tk 6.80 crore.

evidence of suspicious transactions of Tk 626 crore in his bank accounts, said sources.

ACC sources said around Tk 626.65 crore was deposited across

23 accounts in eight banks. The accounts are of Jahangir and entities he owns. Of the sum, Tk 624.60 crore was withdrawn.

The ACC investigators deem these transactions highly irregular and suspicious, they added.

The former prime minister during a press conference on July 14 shared how one of her former "peons" accumulated over Tk 400 crore and enjoyed extravagant helicopter trips.

Without mentioning his name, she said she took action against him.

That night, the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit froze the bank accounts of Jahangir and Kamrun for 30 days.

ICT extends probe time by 2 months

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of a warrant. They were ordered to submit an explanation before the court within the next 15 days.

Media reports suggest that Quader had remained in the country for a good while even after the ouster of Hasina on August 5.

Meanwhile, Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury yesterday said the government has been unaware of Quader's whereabouts since the fall of the AL government.

THE HEARING

The 16 accused were brought to the tribunal between 10:00am and 11:00am.

They included former law minister Anisul Huq; industries minister Amir Hossain Amur; food minister Qamrul Islam; civil aviation and tourism minister Lt Col (Retd) Faruk Khan; Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon; Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haq Inu; former adviser on power, energy, and mineral resources Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury; and former ministers Kamal Ahmed Majumder and Golam Dastagir Gazi.

Others brought to the court included former justice Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik and former home secretary Jahangir Alam.

Of the 16 produced before the ICT yesterday, 15 were shown arrested in the case on November 18, with the exception of former agriculture minister Abdur Razzaque, who was

on remand at the time in a separate murder case filed on August 21. He was arrested on October 14.

Razzaque was produced before the ICT and shown arrested in the genocide case yesterday.

Before being presented in the courtroom, the 16 were seen discussing freely in the lock-up room for about half an hour. The hearing began around 11:15am in a packed courtroom.

Azizur Rahman Dulu, a defence lawyer representing Lt Col (Retd) Faruk Khan and Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, claimed his phone was seized upon entering the courtroom. Responding to this, the judges present said it was an established practice to not allow phones inside the courtroom.

Dulu also claimed he had requested a copy of the allegations against his clients but had not yet received it.

The judges then said that, as it was part of an ongoing investigation, it was not the appropriate time to provide copies of the allegations.

Around 1:00pm -- half an hour after the hearing ended -- Zunaid Ahmed Palak was escorted to a prison van.

At that time, journalists asked, "Palak bhai, how are you?". He gave a brief response and then pressed a finger to his lips.

"Pray for me....I have to keep mum," he said as he boarded the vehicle.

Later on, Chief Prosecutor Md Tajul Islam briefed journalists about the hearing.

"All the accused assisted the prime accused Sheikh Hasina in initiating and executing the genocide. They were all involved in the decision-making at various levels.

"We informed the tribunal that we are continuing the investigation against Sheikh Hasina, who is accused of crimes against humanity and genocide during the July-August uprising."

He further said, "For the past 16 years, thousands of people have been subjected to enforced disappearances and inhumane torture in secret detention cells. Many were killed, their bodies tied to heavy cement bags and then thrown into rivers."

"The Commission for Inquiry into Enforced Disappearances found that Sheikh Hasina, her defence adviser Maj Gen (retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, former DG of the NTMC Maj Gen Ziaul Ahsan, and senior police officers Monirul Islam and Md Harun-Or-Rashid were all involved in enforced disappearances. We presented this information to the tribunal."

Tajul further said, "[It [the tribunal]] has accepted the commission's report."

The ICT is currently trying two cases against Sheikh Hasina. In one, she is the sole accused, while in the other, she faces charges alongside 45 others, including Obaidul Quader.

BNP, Jamaat content with

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in the elections held under caretaker governments."

Mosharraf said people have fought for the last 16 years to restore the caretaker government system.

Accusing the AL of violating the constitution to cling on to power, Mosharraf said the parliamentary polls of 2014, 2018, and 2024 cannot be called elections.

Jamaat, on the other hand, congratulated the nation on the "restoration of voting rights".

HC scraps part

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Nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at all government offices.

The historic speech of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 7, 1971, was placed in the fifth schedule of Bangladesh Constitution through the 15th amendment.

Yesterday, the HC bench also struck down articles 7 (A), 7 (B), 44(2) and 58A of the constitution, declaring them void and unconstitutional.

Article 7(A) of the constitution is regarding the use of force and other unconstitutional means to "abrogate, repeal or suspend" the constitutions or any of its articles.

Article 7(B) makes certain parts of the constitution unamendable "by way of insertion, modification, substitution, repeal or by any other means".

Article 44(2) says, "Without prejudice to the powers of the High Court Division under article 102, parliament may by law empower any other court, within the local limits of its jurisdiction, to exercise all or any of those powers."

In the judgement yesterday, the HC bench said even though article 142 of the 12th amendment ensured the provision for referendums, it was abolished by the 15th amendment.

The HC reinstated article 142, saying its scrapping went against the basic structure of the constitution.

In the verdict, the HC said a total of 54 changes, modifications, and substitutions have been brought to the constitution through the 15th amendment.

The court did not delve into other provisions of the 15th amendment that deal with state principles, including secularism, socialism, state religion, nationalism; the issues of displaying the portrait of father of the nation, historic speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 7, 1971; increasing the number of reserved seats for women in parliament from 45 to 50; protection and development of culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities; protection and improvement of environment and biodiversity; and article 116 of the constitution regarding presidential control over lower court discipline.

The future parliament will decide on these issues on the basis of people's opinions, said Justice Farah Mahbub.

Article 116 says: "The control (including the power of posting, promotion and grant of leave) and discipline of persons employed in the judicial service and magistrates exercising judicial functions shall vest in the President and shall be exercised by him in consultation with the Supreme Court."

The HC bench said it would not say

In a statement, Mia Golam Parwar, secretary general of the party and also a former MP, hailed the HC's ruling as a significant victory for the people.

"The 15th constitutional amendment, passed by parliament on June 30, 2011, had stripped the people of their voting rights and ruined the electoral process.

"It also created a tendency to seize power without elections, resulting in no genuine elections being held in 2014, 2018, and 2024.

anything about article 116 as a rule questioning its constitutionality was pending with the court.

The court also clarified that the interim government is not a caretaker government.

It said the current government is different as it was formed by the president after he sought the opinion of the Appellate Division under article 106 of the constitution.

Article 106 says, "If at any time it appears to the President that a question of law has arisen, or is likely to arise, which is of such a nature and of such public importance that it is expedient to obtain the opinion of the Supreme Court upon it, he may refer the question to the Appellate Division for consideration and the division may, after such hearing as it thinks fit, report its opinion thereon to the President."

Replying to a question, Attorney General Asaduzzaman, however, said the interim government can be renamed a caretaker government as the Appellate Division has given legitimacy to this government.

"For example, the district judges are termed as district judges when they deal with civil cases and the same judges are termed as district and sessions judges when they deal with the criminal cases. In the same way, when the persons of this interim government will function for the caretaker government the government will be termed caretaker government," the attorney general said.

The HC earlier heard arguments on the three petitions for 12 working days.

One of the writ petitions was filed by Mofazzal Hossain, a freedom fighter from Narayanpara of Naogaon.

On October 19, the HC bench issued a rule asking the government to explain why the 15th amendment should not be declared unconstitutional. It also questioned why actions taken under the amendment should not be invalidated.

On August 19, another HC bench led by Justice Naima Haider, now on leave, issued a similar rule following a writ petition filed by five Badiul Alam Majumdar, Tofail Ahmed, M Hafizuddin Khan, Md Jobirul Hoque Bhuiyan, and Zahrah Rahman.

Apart from them and the state, a few political parties, including the BNP, Jamaat, Gono Forum, and some SC lawyers placed arguments before the HC against the 15th amendment.

LAWYERS' REACTIONS

After the HC delivered the judgment yesterday, Attorney General Md Asaduzzaman demanded the trial of former chief justices ABM Khairul Haque and Syed Mahmud Hossain for their role in abolishing the caretaker government system.

He said, "They ruined the judiciary. They must be punished."

What occurred in the name of elections was nothing but a farce," said Parwar.

Describing the HC verdict as a milestone for democracy, the Jamaat leader said it re-established people's rights.

"This is another victory for the people. We extend our heartfelt congratulations and greetings to the nation for this achievement in restoring voting rights through a legal battle."

Briefing the press at his office, Asaduzzaman said a seven-member bench led by Justice ABM Khairul Haque announced that the caretaker system was unconstitutional, but two more elections could be held under such a government.

"But 16 months later, he reversed his judgment when parliament amended the constitution omitting the caretaker government system," he said, adding that Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain supported Justice ABM Khairul Haque.

He said Justice Mahmud was instrumental in the destruction of the judiciary.

Due to the judges' roles, he said, democracy was exiled, crimes against humanity and enforced disappearances happened, and cases were filed against dead people.

The attorney general said it is possible to conduct the next two elections under the caretaker government system even if review petitions remain pending with the Appellate Division.

"There were two parts of Khairul Haque's judgment. One was about whether the caretaker government was legal or illegal. In that part, there was a divided judgment, but there was no disagreement among judges on the issue of conducting the next two elections under caretaker government," he added.

Quoting the HC observation, Sharif Bhuiyan, principal lawyer for a writ petitioner, said as democracy and elections are basic structures of the constitution, the caretaker government system became a part of it.

"We filed a review petition on the judgment of Justice Khairul Haque with the Appellate Division which is pending and scheduled for a hearing in the third week of January. If the Appellate Division delivers a verdict in our favour, only then we would be able to say the caretaker government system has been restored," he said.

BNP's Vice-Chairman Zainul Abedin said, "People's will is the basis for changing the constitution, but the previous government did not bother with the people's will while making the 15th amendment. They made the amendment by putting pressure on the court."

Barrister Kaiser Kamal said, "The 15th amendment was the final solution for the Awami League to stay in power and for Sheikh Hasina to stay as prime minister forever."

Lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir said, "Democracy is the basic structure of our constitution, and the court said the caretaker government also became a basic structure of the constitution since it is not possible to conduct free, fair and impartial elections without such a government."