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## Get ready to ensure polls by December

Tarique tells BNP leaders, activists at youth rally

SAJJAD HOSSAIN and MD ABBAS

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday said the next general election must be held by December and called on party activists and leaders to prepare to ensure that.

"This is our call to the interim government: the national election must be held by December. We once again want to say: the polls will be held by December," he said, while virtually addressing a mammoth youth rally in front of the party's Nayapaltan headquarters.

"Prepare to ensure that the election is held by December [Decide] who will run the country and who will be your representatives," he added.

Tarique stressed the need for visible preparations by the government for the election. "In the past one and a half decades, about 3.5 crore new voters have been added

**WHAT TARIQUE SAYS**

- » Election's fate trapped in conditions for small and large-scale reforms
- » Efforts underway to delay election
- » Don't turn people, parties into your [govt] opponents

to the voter list. These new voters have not yet had the chance to vote in any national election and elect their preferred candidates as public representatives.

"We want to see a government that is free from fascism, directly accountable to the people through their votes."

Tarique alleged attempts being made to delay the election. He said the government had yet to announce

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Thousands gather for a youth rally outside the BNP's central office in the capital's Nayapaltan yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Eid-ul Azha on June 7

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The holy Eid-ul-Azha, one of the biggest religious festivals of the Muslims, will be celebrated across the country on June 7 as the moon of Zilhajj was sighted in Bangladesh sky yesterday.

The decision was made at a meeting of the National Moon Sighting Committee at the Islamic Foundation yesterday evening with Religious Adviser AFM Khalid Hossain in the chair, meeting sources told The Daily Star.

## Rooppur, MRT-1, Matarbari to get special focus

9.9% of FY26 ADP will go to the three mega projects

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and ASIFUR RAHMAN

Three mega projects will get special focus in the upcoming development budget with the view to providing cheaper electricity, easing Dhaka dwellers' transportation problem and enhancing international trade for Bangladesh.

The three mega projects – Rooppur nuclear power plant, Dhaka mass rapid transit line-1 (MRT-1) and the Matarbari Port Development Project – are together getting Tk 22,710 crore, which is 9.9 percent of the development budget of Tk 230,000 crore for fiscal 2025-26.

The Rooppur nuclear power plant, which aims to provide cheaper electricity, is set to receive the highest allocation in next fiscal year's annual development programme: Tk 12,177 crore.

In the revised budget for this fiscal year as well, the power plant secured the highest allocation: Tk 11,899 crore.

The government is targeting the start of commercial operations of the 2,400-megawatt (MW) nuclear power plant this year, said planning ministry officials.

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DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus has reiterated that the next general election will be held by June next year under any circumstances.

He also said the reform initiatives of the interim government will be carried forward.

Prof Yunus said these when former Japanese prime minister and Japan-Bangladesh Parliamentary Friendship League President Taro Aso called on him at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo yesterday.

The chief adviser reached Tokyo at 2:05pm for a four-day visit. He will attend the Nikkei Forum for Asia today and hold bilateral talks with Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba tomorrow.

Taro Aso thanked Prof Yunus for moving Bangladesh towards political stability and emphasised the need for a general election for a smooth democratic transition.

The interim government has made significant economic progress in restoring discipline in the banking sector, rebuilding the foreign exchange reserve and repaying the debts, he said.

"Japan has given every kind of assistance that we needed in the past 10 months. I want to thank Japan a lot for its support. This is, in a way, a thank you tour," he said.

Several Japanese lawmakers who accompanied Aso during the meeting said that signing the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) could be a step forward in attracting more Japanese investment in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is expecting to complete the negotiation by August and sign the agreement in September.

Once signed, Japan will be the first country to have an EPA with Bangladesh. The bilateral trade is now \$4 billion.

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## Grabbers feast on Sonadia forest

More than 1,000 acres of mangroves destroyed since August last year

MOKAMMEL SHIWO

Over 1,000 acres of protected mangrove forest on Sonadia Island in Moheshkhali upazila of Cox's Bazar have been razed since August 5 last year.

The encroachment, aimed at developing enclosures for shrimp and crab farming, came to light

Encroachers cleared over 4,000 acres of forest

Encroachment continues defying SC order

Forest razed for shrimp and crab farming

recently when grabbers set fire to piles of felled mangrove trees at night in an attempt to destroy evidence of their illegal activities.

The incident, which defied a Supreme Court ruling issued last year, sparked public outrage and led to criticism of the authorities for their inaction.

The upazila administration said it has launched drives against the encroachers.

On May 18, the Department of Environment (DoE) filed a case against 20 individuals, including a local BNP leader and several leaders and activists of the now-banned Awami League, for encroaching on at least 112 acres of forest land.

Over the years, encroachers have cleared over 3,000 acres of Sonadia's mangrove forest and established 37 shrimp enclosures. Last July, the DoE filed a case against 26 individuals, mostly linked to the AL, for grabbing 128 acres of forest land. That move temporarily halted the encroachment.

However, the illegal activities soon resumed.

On November 28 last year, the SC upheld a High Court order that directed the government to immediately stop the destruction

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A shrimp enclosure set up razed a section of the mangrove forest in Sonadia Island.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

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