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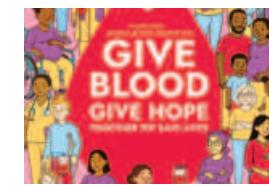
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Hope: Together  
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NEW POLLS TIMING

## BNP upbeat, process irks Jamaat, NCP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government's revised election timeline with certain conditions has stirred cautious optimism as well as raised questions among political parties.

While many parties including the BNP have welcomed the proposed timeline -- mid-February next year -- concerns have emerged regarding how the decision was reached through discussions with only one party.

The BNP had long been demanding that the election be held by the year-end. It had been criticising the interim government for not unveiling a roadmap for the election.

The party, now the biggest one after the fall of the Awami League regime in August last year, pressed on with its call after Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus earlier this month announced that polls would be held in April next year.

The meeting between Yunus and BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman in London on Friday, and the outcome now signal a potential thaw in the relations between the two sides.

This evolving dynamic suggests a realignment of political forces ahead of the next general election, according to party insiders.

The BNP is satisfied with the proposed election timeline,

BNP optimistic, but wary of conditions

Jamaat slams joint press meet as 'ethically unjustified'

NCP says election prioritised over reform, justice

but it has expressed some concerns and reservations due to the strings attached to Prof Yunus's suggested polls timing.

On the other hand, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the National Citizen Party have criticised the government for the way it came up with the fresh timeline.

The Jamaat yesterday said that holding a joint press conference abroad after a meeting with a single political party, and issuing a joint statement about the meeting, is "ethically unjustified" and marks a "deviation from the country's political culture".

"Through this, the chief adviser has expressed a tilt towards a particular party, which has undermined his neutrality," the Islamist party said in a statement.

At the meeting with Tarique, Yunus said the next general election could be held in the week leading up to Ramadan in 2026 if all preparations are completed.

He added that sufficient progress in reforms and the trials of perpetrators of the atrocities during the July uprising would be necessary to bring the election date forward from April.

Yunus made the remarks when Tarique suggested that the election take place before Ramadan. The month of fasting will begin in the third week of February.

This is a significant shift in both sides' stance on election timing.

The Jamaat discussed the issue at its central executive

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## INDIA PLANE CRASH Death toll rises to at least 279

AFP, Ahmedabad

The death toll from the fiery crash of a London-bound passenger jet in an Indian city climbed to 279 yesterday as officials sought to match the DNA of victims with their grieving relatives.

The Air India Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner issued a mayday call shortly before it crashed around lunchtime on Thursday, bursting into a fireball as it hit residential buildings.

A police source yesterday said that 279 bodies had been found at the crash site in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad, making it one of the worst plane disasters of the 21st century.

There was just one survivor out of 242 passengers and crew on board the jet when it crashed, leaving the tailpiece of the aircraft jutting out of a hostel for medical staff.

Emergency services kept

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Queues of patients at the DNCC hospital in the capital's Mohakhali where the health directorate has begun coronavirus testing amid rising number of cases.

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## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, CHILDREN Over 35,000 cases unresolved for over 5 years

ASHUTOSH SARKAR and EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

More than nine years have passed since a case was filed over the rape of a nine-year-old schoolgirl in Dhaka's Khilkhet area. The tribunal dealing with the case has framed charges against the lone accused and held 96 hearings but is yet to complete the trial.

However, a provision of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act says the court is supposed to dispose of such a case within 180 days from the start of proceedings.

The key reason behind the delay is that six of the 10 prosecution witnesses in the case have not appeared before the court to testify.

At a hearing on April 15 this year, the judge of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal 8 said, "The failure to produce witnesses on time has caused the unnecessary delay in disposing of the case."

The tribunal issued non-bailable arrest warrants against four witnesses and ordered four police stations in Khilkhet, Gaibandha, Nilphamari and Madaripur to produce them before it on May 21. However, they were not produced before the court that day, said a court staffer.

Contacted, officers in-charge of the police stations said they didn't receive any court order to produce witnesses.

This is just one of 35,262 cases, filed under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, which remain pending with courts across the country for more than five years, prolonging the victims' wait for justice.

The number of pending cases filed under the Act stood

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