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## Free, fair and festive polls in February

**Yunus assures European Parliament members**



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus yesterday reaffirmed his government's commitment to holding a free, fair, transparent, and festive general election in early February next year, ahead of Ramadan.

He gave the assurance during a meeting with a delegation of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), led by Mounir Satouri, at the state guest house Jamuna in Dhaka.

"We have already announced the timeline for the election. It will be held in early February, just before Ramadan," Yunus told the visiting delegation.

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## Govt to reclaim khas land to save farmland

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has taken an initiative to identify and reclaim khas land across the country in a bid to stop the use of agricultural land for infrastructure projects.

Future government projects will be implemented on nearby khas land instead of farmland, with priority given to preserving cultivable areas, said officials.

The decision came at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnec) yesterday, chaired by the chief adviser.

The meeting also formed a high-level advisory

**Many projects are being approved at the expense of farmland while plenty of khas land remains unused. Why should farmland be taken instead of that land?**

Wahiduddin Mahmud, Planning Adviser

committee led by Ali Imam Majumder to oversee the process.

The committee has been asked to identify and document khas land in the country and submit a report within the next two months, detailing the quantity, status, and use of public land, including the amount that has been illegally occupied.

Planning Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud shared the development while talking to reporters after the weekly meeting in the capital.

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People walk carefully over a dug-up stretch of a road in the capital's South Jatrabari. Commuters have been suffering for months as drainage work by Dhaka South City Corporation drags on. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



Farmers passing busy days harvesting paddy that has started to ripen in Rajshahi's Barind region. The photo was taken in Chhoyghati village of Godagari upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN



## Act now to stop Gaza genocide

**Tarique urges world leaders**

STAR REPORT

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman has called upon the international community to take immediate and decisive action against what he terms the Israeli genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

"The world must now take immediate action to take genuine steps enshrined in international law and human morality against the Israeli genocide," he said in a statement on his verified Facebook page early yesterday.

The BNP leader also urged the international community to use all economic, political, and diplomatic avenues to ensure an immediate and lasting ceasefire and allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, reports UNB.

Citing the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), he pointed to the definition of genocide as "the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, national, ethnical, racial, or religious group,"

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## 9 UPAZILA HEALTH COMPLEXES Expansion okayed without solving manpower crisis

TUHIN SHUBHIRA ADHIKARY

The health authorities have moved to expand the capacity of nine upazila health complexes in as many districts to cope with the growing number of patients, without addressing the existing shortage of manpower at the facilities.

Early this month, the Health Services Division (HSD) approved raising the number of beds in eight complexes to 50 from 31 each, and up to 100 from 50 in the remaining one.

However, patients are unlikely to benefit anytime soon, as it will take at least two years to complete the process of recruiting additional manpower and procuring equipment at the nine facilities, officials said.

The facilities are already facing a manpower shortage, casting doubts on the implementation of the initiative to expand their capacity.

They are located in Indurkani of Pirojpur; Kawkhali in Rangamati; Ramu in Cox's Bazar; Balaganj in Sylhet; Baraigram in Natore; Shajahanpur in Bogura; Niklini in Kishoreganj; Nawabganj in Dinajpur; and Chowgachha Upazila Health Complex in Jashore.

Of the health complexes, the one in Chowgachha will be turned into a 100-bed facility.

**The country now has 432 upazila health complexes. However, a long-standing shortage of health workers has been seriously affecting their services.**

In February last year, the government took up an initiative -- "Standard Set-Up for Manpower" -- to ensure smooth delivery of health services at public hospitals across the country.

According to the initiative, a 31-bed hospital should have at least 89 health workers, including 34 doctors and 25 nurses.

However, the initiative has not yet been implemented, said a DGHS official.

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## ASIA CUP 2025 Pak qualify for Super 4 after drama

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Group A Asia Cup match between Pakistan and the UAE on Wednesday started an hour later than scheduled after the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) nearly pulled out in protest of the ICC rejecting its request to remove Andy Pycroft as match referee from the rest of the tournament for his alleged role in the handshake refusal row in the India-Pakistan clash.

Pakistan sealed a 41-run win in the contest, qualifying for the Super Four as runners-up from Group A. India qualified as group champions.

The match was originally scheduled to begin at 8:30pm (Bangladesh Time) but had to be pushed back after the PCB instructed its team to not leave the team hotel for the fixture, reported ESPNcricinfo.

The stalemate finally ended after some last minute negotiations between all stakeholders, and the match began at 9:30pm (Bangladesh Time).

The announcement of Pakistan leaving their hotel to play the game came from the Asian Cricket Council (ACC)

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## Ostrich and emu ancestors could fly: study

AFP, Paris

It may sound like a joke, but scientists have long been puzzled by how the family of birds that includes African ostriches, Australian emus and cassowaries, New Zealand kiwis and South American rheas spread across the world -- given that none of them can fly.

However, a study published yesterday may have found the answer to this mystery: the family's oldest-known ancestors were able to take wing.

The only currently living member of this bird family -- which is called palaeognaths -- capable of flight is the tinamou in Central and South America. But even then, the shy birds can only fly over short distances when they need to escape danger or clear obstacles.

Given this ineptitude in the air, scientists have struggled to explain how palaeognaths became so far-flung.

Some assumed that the birds' ancestors were split up when the supercontinent Gondwana started breaking up 160 million years ago, creating South America, Africa, Australia, India, New Zealand and Antarctica.

However, genetic research has shown that "the evolutionary splits between palaeognath species happened long after the continents had already separated," lead study author Klara Widrig of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History told AFP.

Widrig and colleagues analysed the specimen of a lithornithid, the oldest palaeognath group for which fossils have been discovered. They lived during the Paleogene period 66-23 million years ago.



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PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

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