

EU seeks ‘face-saving’ deal on UN climate target

AFP, Brussels

EU countries yesterday sought to settle on an emissions-cutting plan to bring to a key UN conference in Brazil, as divisions on the bloc's green agenda threaten its global leadership on climate.

Environment ministers for the 27-nation bloc gathered in Brussels with the clock ticking down on a looming United Nations deadline to produce plans to fight global warming for 2035.

“At the end of the day, we will continue to be either the most ambitious or amongst the most ambitious,” Wopke Hoekstra, the European Commissioner for Climate, said of the yet-to-be-agreed-on EU plans ahead of the talks.

“I’m truly confident that that leadership role that we have played in the past will continue also this year and beyond”.

One of the world’s biggest greenhouse gas emitters behind China, the United States and India, the EU has to date been the most committed to climate action, by some margin.



Hundreds of supporters attend a rally organised by the Jamaat-e-Islami at the south gate of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque around 5:00pm yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Health alert as ‘brain-eating’ amoeba cases rise in India’s Kerala

AFP, New Delhi

India has issued a health alert after infections and deaths caused by a rare water borne “brain-eating” amoeba doubled compared to last year in the southern state of Kerala.

Numbers are still tiny but Altaf Ali, a doctor who is part of a government task force to arrest the spread, told AFP that officials were “conducting tests on a large scale across the state to detect and treat cases”.

Officials reported 19 deaths and 72 infections of the Naegleria fowleri amoeba this year, including nine deaths and 24 cases in September alone.

Last year, the amoeba killed nine people out of 36 reported cases.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says it is often called a “brain-eating amoeba” because it can “infect the brain and destroy brain tissue”.

If the amoeba reaches the brain, it can cause an infection that kills over 95 percent of those affected.

Infections are “very rare but nearly always fatal”, the CDC notes.

The amoeba lives in warm lakes and rivers and is contracted by contaminated water entering the nose. It does not spread from person to person.

The World Health Organization says that symptoms include headache, fever and vomiting, which rapidly progresses to “seizures, altered mental status, hallucinations, and coma”.

EC gets greater powers under amended laws

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Previously, it could only recommend action to relevant authorities.

In case of disputes between the government and the EC over such matters, the EC’s decision will prevail.

The ordinance also makes penalties more stringent. Refusal to perform electoral duties without valid reason, previously punishable by up to one year’s imprisonment or a Tk 5,000 fine or both, will now carry a maximum fine of Tk 100,000.

For misconduct during electoral duties, the current penalty of up to six

months’ imprisonment or a Tk 2,000 fine will be replaced with a minimum of one year and a maximum of five years’ imprisonment, or a fine of up to Tk 20,000, or both.

Meanwhile, Yunus at the advisory council meeting directed ministries and divisions to publicise reforms they have undertaken independently, alongside those recommended by the interim government’s reform commissions.

Press Secretary Shafiqul said the ministries are implementing a range of important reforms beyond the commissions’ proposals.

Of the first set of 121 reform proposals submitted, 77 were marked highly important, with 24 already implemented and the rest underway, he said.

The advisory council also gave final approval to the draft of the Financial Laws (Second Amendment) Ordinance, 2025, prepared under the National Board of Revenue.

In addition, the Income Tax Act, 2023 has been amended to raise the withholding tax on investments in government securities or approved securities by corporate taxpayers from 10 percent to 15 percent.

Kyiv says Russia returned 1,000 bodies to Ukraine

AFP, Kyiv

Ukraine yesterday received 1,000 bodies from Russia that Moscow said were of fallen Ukrainian soldiers, a Kyiv government agency announced.

“Repatriation measures took place today. 1,000 bodies, which according to the Russian side belong to Ukrainian servicemen, have been returned to Ukraine,” Ukraine’s Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War said on Telegram.

Ukraine returned the bodies of 24 Russian soldiers in exchange, said another government body that provides information on Russian prisoners of war and missing Russian soldiers.

The repatriation of soldiers’ bodies and the exchange of POWs are some of the only areas of cooperation between Ukraine and Russia amid the war.

Tens of thousands of soldiers have been killed on both sides since Russia invaded in 2022, though neither side regularly publishes data on their own casualties.

According to Ukraine’s “I Want to Find” project, the exchange of bodies was mediated by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Despite a US-led push to end the conflict through diplomatic efforts and three rounds of direct talks between Kyiv and Moscow, progress towards stopping the fighting appears to have stalled.

Last week, the Kremlin said that peace talks between Russia and Ukraine were on “pause”.

Bolivian parliament passes bill to end child marriages

AFP, La Paz

Bolivia’s parliament has passed legislation to ban marriages and civil unions with minors, bringing the country closer to the 13 Latin American nations that have already outlawed the practice.

A 2014 law restricted marriages to adults, but allowed an exception for people aged 16 and 17 if they had authorization from parents or guardians.

Just over 4,800 such underage unions were registered between 2014 and 2023, according to the Ombudsman’s Office of Bolivia.

The Chamber of Deputies on Wednesday passed an amendment to close the loophole.

The bill had been greenlit by the senate in April and will now be sent to the president for promulgation.

“This is not just a law, it is a promise that our teenage girls will no longer be forced to marry, leave school or take on responsibilities that do not belong to them,” said ruling party senator and bill author Virginia Velasco in a press release.

Officials who register marriages involving minors may be prosecuted and jailed for up to four years, Velasco added.

Advocacy group Save the Children cited data saying 32,300 girls in Bolivia were married before the age of 15 in 2014, the most recent data available.

Child marriages are prohibited in 13 Latin American countries, including Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and El Salvador, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

UK police arrest 3 suspected of spying for Russia

AFP, London

UK counter-terror police have arrested two men and a woman in southeast England on suspicion of spying for Russia, the Metropolitan Police said yesterday.

“All three were arrested on suspicion of assisting a foreign intelligence service, contrary to section 3 of the National Security Act,” police said, adding that the suspects were taken to a police station in London before being released on conditional bail.

A 41-year-old man and 35-year-old woman were arrested at the same address, and a 46-year-old man at a different address the Grays area of

southeastern Essex.

“We’re seeing an increasing number of who we would describe as ‘proxies’ being recruited by foreign intelligence services,” said Counter Terrorism Command head Dominic Murphy.

Six Bulgarians were jailed in May for their roles in a Russian espionage cell run out of a former guesthouse in the eastern English seaside resort of Great Yarmouth.

A number of people are awaiting sentence for an arson attack on a warehouse supplying Ukraine with communications equipment after being recruited by the Russian paramilitary Wagner group.

Disaster if polls not held

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Parwar also said Jamaat wants Bangladesh to move towards an acceptable election. “But unfortunately, we are seeing a quarter exerting political influence or bowing to certain powers. As a result, the government and decision-making authorities are failing to ensure a level playing field.”

He alleged that discussions with the government have so far failed to bring any result.

Around the same time, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish held a rally at the mosque’s north gate, where its Secretary General Jalaluddin Ahmad said, “If the July Charter is not implemented, a national disaster is inevitable. Without it, no electoral process will bring welfare to the nation.”

He claimed there is a conspiracy to foil the aspirations of the July uprising. “Those who want to delay the implementation of the July Charter for the next parliament are actually seeking political advantage.”

We offered Yunus to lead govt

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On July 22, Lt Col Sarwar of DGFI entered his hospital room and pressured him to suspend the movement. He threatened the lives of the disappeared coordinators.

The next day, the DGFI forced him to a Dhaka Reporters’ Unity press conference, demanding he declare the movement was over and accuse the BNP-Jamaat of infiltration, which he refused. Upon his return to the hospital, he faced threats of being forcibly disappeared again.

On July 26, he, Asif Mahmud and Abu Baker Majumder were taken to the DB office, where then DB chief Harun Or Rashid threatened to implicate them in cases unless the movement was withdrawn.

They were abused, denied medication, and pressured through threats targeting their parents and female coordinators.

“At one point, under coercion, I was forced to call off the movement on camera, which was later circulated to the media.”

At that time, DB officials told Nahid their actions were ordered by then prime minister Sheikh Hasina and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal.

Harun even proposed that they go to the PM’s office, which they rejected. Instead, they launched an indefinite hunger strike. A writ in the High Court secured their release on August 1. Weak and ill, six coordinators, including Nahid, immediately announced they had been forced to call off the movement.

On August 3, after consultations with anti-fascist student groups, they launched a one-point demand at the Central Shaheed Minar and

announced a nationwide non-cooperation movement.

Initially set for August 6, the March to Dhaka was brought forward to August 5 after learning the government might block networks or kill or abduct them.

On that day, people marched from across the country.

Protesters came under gunfire at Shaheed Minar and Chankharpool but regrouped at Shahbagh after the army withdrew, turning it into a “human sea”, Nahid said.

As they advanced towards Gono Bhaban, news spread that Hasina had fled by helicopter.

They announced the formation of an interim national government, demanded the release of political prisoners and rejected any form of military or military-backed rule.

Nahid testified that throughout the uprising, police, law enforcers, Awami League activists and affiliates shot at protesters, tortured detainees and carried out mass arrests.

Helicopters fired on demonstrators; bodies of the dead were disappeared or burnt; burials were not allowed; the injured were denied treatment; and families of martyrs were threatened.

He accused Hasina, then home minister, police and chiefs of security forces, demanding investigation, prosecution and severe punishment so that victims receive justice.

After the lunch break, the state defence counsel for Hasina and Kamal began cross-examining Nahid.

The other accused in the case is former inspector general of police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, who has turned approver.

Nahid’s cross-examination will resume on Sunday.

‘God, send a missile to relieve us’

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Jawad, 47, describing his family’s ordeal as they fled their home on Wednesday.

During the journey, their belongings fell off their truck when it suffered a flat tyre.

“As we were putting the belongings back on it, I looked up at the sky and prayed ‘God, send a missile to take us out and relieve us’.

The offensive has sparked international outrage, with the territory already devastated by nearly two years of war imposed on it and the Gaza City area gripped by a UN-declared famine.

“The military incursion and evacuation orders in northern Gaza are driving new waves of displacement, forcing traumatised families into an ever-shrinking area unfit for human dignity,” World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X.

“Hospitals, already overwhelmed, are on the brink of collapse as escalating violence blocks access and prevents the WHO from delivering lifesaving supplies,” he warned.

At least 79 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli strikes or gunfire across the Gaza Strip in the past 24 hours, most in Gaza City, the territory’s health ministry said early afternoon.

The Israeli military said it continued to target “Hamas terror infrastructure” and also operated in the southern areas of Rafah and Khan Yunis.

Israeli media reported that four soldiers were killed inside their military vehicle in the early hours of yesterday in the southern Gazan city of Rafah.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Telecommunications Company said in a statement that its services had been cut off “due to the ongoing aggression and the targeting of the main network routes”.

The US-backed offensive began on Tuesday and came as a United Nations probe accused Israel of committing “genocide” in the Gaza Strip, saying Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other senior officials had incited the crime.

Israel rejected the findings and slammed it as “distorted and false”.

Navi Pillay, who headed the investigation, told AFP that she hoped Israeli leaders would one day be jailed.

“I see similarities” to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, she said, pointing to “the same kind of methods”.

In the United Kingdom, US President Donald Trump yesterday said he disagreed with Prime Minister Keir Starmer over Britain’s plan to recognise a Palestinian state, after the leaders discussed the war in Gaza.

“I have a disagreement with the prime minister on that score – one of



our few disagreements,” Trump said at a press conference with Starmer at the UK prime minister’s country residence Chequers on the second full day of his state visit.

The United States has adamantly rejected the notion of countries recognising a Palestinian state, even as France, Canada and other western allies are set to take the step at the United Nations next week.

The UN Security Council was slated to vote yesterday on the latest call for a ceasefire and increased humanitarian access to Gaza, a move supported by a majority seeking to act despite repeated US vetoes.

The draft that is up for a vote, which was reviewed by AFP, calls for opening access to aid but also “demands an immediate, unconditional and

permanent ceasefire in Gaza respected by all parties” as well as the immediate and unconditional release of hostages.

The United States has already rejected that approach multiple times, most recently in June when it used a veto to back its ally Israel.

Meanwhile, Spain said it will probe “human rights violations in Gaza” to assist the International Criminal Court, which has sought arrest warrants for Israeli officials over alleged war crimes.

On Wednesday, the Israeli military announced “a temporary transportation route via Salah al-Din

Five parties mull forging alliance

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Consensus Commission, which asked parties to hold informal discussions to build an accord on implementing the July Charter, said Javed Rasin, joint convener of the NCP.

“We discussed possible ways of implementing the July Charter and the areas where each party can compromise. We listened to all participants and will now deliberate within our party forum,” he added.

Asked whether the discussions would lead to a pre-election alliance, Rasin replied, “Our main focus now is the implementation of the July Charter.”

Saiful Haque, general secretary of

the Biplobi Workers Party, said the nine parties reviewed three possible routes for implementing the charter at yesterday’s meeting.

These are: holding a referendum, issuing a constitutional order, or invoking article 106 of the constitution, under which the government may seek the opinion of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

Saiful added that a final common position had not yet been reached, but Quaiyum said participants noted a near consensus had emerged on holding a referendum on implementing the July Charter on the day of the national election.

The leaders agreed to reconvene

in the coming days to finalise both a common approach for implementing the charter and strategies to engage other major parties.

Rashed Khan, general secretary of Gono Odhikar Parishad, said a committee was formed to hold separate discussions with the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami in an effort to bring them into alignment on the charter. He did not disclose the names of the committee members.

Rashed ruled out any immediate movement over the charter’s implementation, describing the current period as “a time for discussion” to reach a consensus through dialogue.