

Bangladesh to hold elections in late 2025 or early 2026: Yunus

Ahsan Tasnim



Yunus' press secretary said his 'job will be over by June 30, 2026', a hint on the length of interim govt's term

Yunus skips Mujibur's name in V-Day speech

Chief adviser Muhammad Yunus in his speech marking the 54th Victory Day on Monday made no mention of founding father Mujibur Rahman while calling deposed PM Sheikh Hasina's administration the "world's worst autocratic govt". It was a sharp departure from previous addresses. Critics accuse his interim govt of trying to erase Mujibur's legacy and leadership in 1971. Also deviating from tradition, Bangladesh did not stage a Victory Day Parade in the capital. In a statement on Sunday, Hasina called Yunus a "fascist" and alleged that the main aim of the dispensation led by him was to suppress the spirit of the Liberation War. She accused him of leading an "undemocratic group" that has no responsibility towards the people. PTI

Dhaka: The next national elections in Bangladesh are likely to be held between the end of 2025 and the first half of 2026, the interim govt's chief adviser Muhammad Yunus announced on Monday, addressing growing expectations for a poll roadmap.

In a televised speech to the nation on Vijay Diwas, which commemorates Pakistan military's surrender to Indian forces that led to the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, Yunus emphasised the importance of completing major reforms before holding the polls. "I have repeatedly urged all stakeholders to prioritise reforms before the elections," he said.

"However, if — with political consensus — we can proceed with a flawless voter list and minor reforms, elections could take place by the end of 2025. If we incorporate significant electoral reforms and implement the recommendations of the Election Reforms Commission with national consensus, it might require at least an additional six months," said Yunus, who heads the caretaker govt installed after the ouster of Hasina. "Broadly speaking, the elections can be

scheduled between the end of 2025 and the first half of 2026," he added. The elections have been pending since the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League govt on Aug 5 following a student-led uprising.

Yunus' press secretary Shafiqul Alam said his "job will be over by June 30, 2026", giving a subtle indication of the term of the Yunus govt.

Yunus highlighted the pivotal role of the newly-formed Election Commission. "From now on, the responsibility for initiating the process of forming the future govt rests with the EC," he said, noting that the poll body has already begun preparations. He also highlighted the importance of removing fake voters from the list and ensuring a smooth experience for young first-time voters, especially in light of the recent student uprising. "For many young people, this election will mark their first opportunity to vote, making it a memorable event," he said.

Yunus appealed to public to be patient to allow for reforms. "Implementing the Election Reform Commission's recommendations and improving the electoral process will require time. The EC must be given the necessary resources and time to deliver credible reforms."

NSA Doval going to Beijing this week for high-level talks

New Delhi: Amid the recent thaw in ties that followed the completion of disengagement process in eastern Ladakh, NSA Ajit Doval will visit Beijing this week for what will be the 23rd meeting of the special representatives (SRs) of India and China. This will be the first meeting between the SRs since the border standoff erupted in eastern Ladakh in May 2020.

The SR meeting will take place in Beijing on Dec 18. Doval will hold talks with Chinese SR and State Councillor

This is the first meet between the special representatives since the border standoff erupted in Ladakh in May 2020

Wang Yi, who also doubles up as the Chinese foreign minister. While the two met on several occasions on the margins of multilateral events in the past five years, they last met for SR talks in Dec 2019 in New Delhi.

After the Oct 21 agreement this year for disengagement in the remaining friction points of Depsang and Demchok, PM Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping had met on the margins of the Brics summit in Kazan (Russia) and agreed to work towards resuming bilateral exchanges. TNN

Vijay Diwas

Iconic 1971 surrender painting installed at Manekshaw Centre

NEW DELHI, Dec 16 (ANI)

THE Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army, General Upendra Dwivedi, along with Sunita Dwivedi, on Monday installed the 'iconic 1971 surrender painting' at the Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi.

The iconic painting portrays the ceremonial surrender of Pakistani soldiers to the Indian Army on 16 December, 1971, in Dhaka following the liberation of Bangladesh was installed on the occasion of Vijay Diwas.

December 16, 1971, was the day when Pakistan signed the instrument of surrender in



Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army, General Upendra Dwivedi, along with Sunita Dwivedi and senior serving officers of the Indian Army and veterans after installing 'iconic 1971 surrender painting' at Manekshaw Centre (in backdrop) on Monday. (ANI)

Dhaka, following a 13-day India-Pakistan War. This result-

ed in the surrender of over 93,000 soldiers, and the

Pakistan Army's capitulation against Indian forces was complete. Following this decisive victory, India announced itself as a major regional force.

"On occasion of #VijayDiwas, #GeneralUpendraDwivedi #COAS, along with the President #AWWA, Mrs. Sunita Dwivedi, installed the iconic 1971 surrender painting in its most befitting place, The Manekshaw Centre, named after the architect and the hero of the 1971 War, Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw," the Indian Army posted on X. Senior serving officers of the Indian Army and veterans were present.

S Korean investigators push to summon Yoon to let court determine his fate

SEOUL, Dec 16 (AP)

SOUTH Korean law enforcement authorities are pushing to summon impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol for questioning over his short-lived martial law decree as the Constitutional Court began its first meeting on Monday on Yoon's case to determine whether to remove him from office or reinstate him.

A joint investigative team involving police, an anti-corruption agency and the Defence Ministry said it plans to convey a request to Yoon's office that he

appear for questioning on Wednesday, as they expand a probe into whether his ill-conceived power grab amounted to rebellion.

Son Yeong-jo, an investigator with the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, said the team plans to question Yoon on charges of rebellion and abuse of power. He declined to provide specifics when asked how investigators would respond if Yoon refuses to appear.

Son said the team tried to deliver the summons request to the

presidential office but was rerouted to Yoon's personal residence after presidential secretarial staff claimed they were unsure whether conveying the request to the impeached President was part of their duties.

Yoon was impeached by the Opposition-controlled National Assembly on Saturday over his December 3 martial law decree. His presidential powers will be suspended until the Constitutional Court decides whether to formally remove him from office or reinstate him. If Yoon is dismissed, a national

election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

Yoon has justified his martial law enforcement as a necessary act of governance against the main liberal Opposition Democratic Party that he described as "anti-State forces" bogging down his agendas and vowed to "fight to the end" against efforts to remove him from office.

Hundreds of thousands of protesters have poured onto the streets of the country's capital, Seoul, in recent days, calling for Yoon's ouster and arrest.

At nearly \$38bn, trade deficit hits record high

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

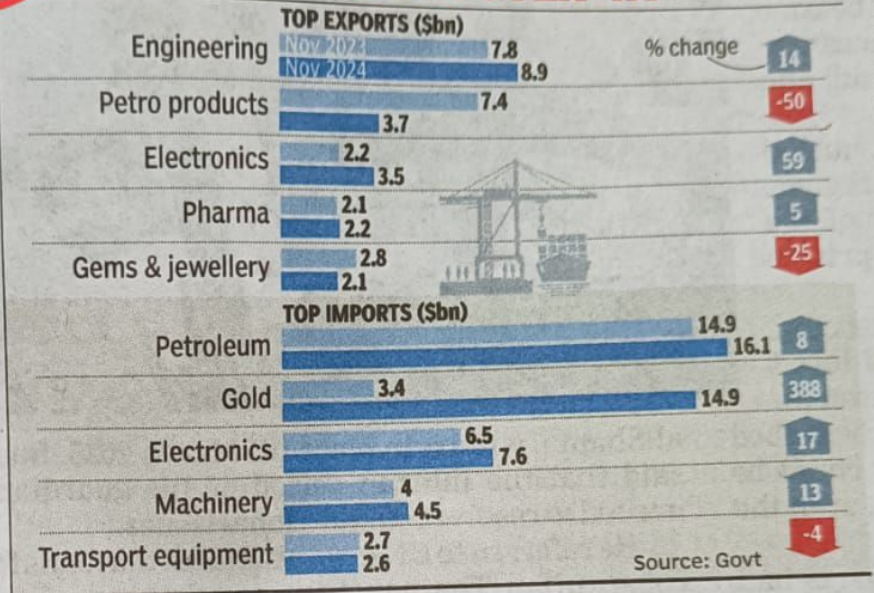
New Delhi: India's trade deficit widened to a record \$37.9 billion in Nov as imports hit an all-time high of almost \$70 billion on soaring gold imports, while exports fell as a decline in petroleum shipments wiped out the gains from non-oil exports.

In Nov, gold shipments into the country soared over four times to \$14.9 billion, compared to \$3.5 billion a year ago, making it the second largest item in India's import basket after petroleum with a 21% share of all imports. What added to the pressure was an 87% jump in vegetable oil imports, which were estimated at \$1.9 billion.

While oil imports were up 8%, the export of petrol and diesel crashed by half to \$3.7 billion. Similarly, gems & jewellery exports were down 25% to \$2.1 billion. Overall exports fell almost 5% to \$32 billion.

Govt is, however, drawing comfort from an 8% increase in non-oil exports to \$28.5 billion. "Non-oil exports are growing in a comfortable manner. Huge fluctuation in petroleum prices is affecting exports," said commerce secretary Sunil Barthwal.

GOLD IMPORTS SOAR OVER 4X



'Swiss MFN withdrawal won't impact EFTA'

New Delhi: The Swiss gov't's decision to suspend the most favoured nation clause in the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) will not impact the proposed \$100 billion investment under the trade deal with the European Free Trade Association, commerce secretary Sunil Barthwal said. TNN

Despite the fall in merchandise exports, the outlook for non-petroleum exports and services remains positive for the next four months, with overall exports seen at over \$800 billion during the current fiscal year, he said.

Barthwal and his colleagues attributed the surge in gold imports to a steep rise in global prices and its safe haven status at a time when

stocks remain volatile. L Satya Srinivas, additional secretary in commerce department, said that in the past too gold imports had seen a surge in a few particular months. Although the officers were silent on the issue, a part of the increase may also be attributed to lower customs duty, resulting in more yellow metal coming through legal channels instead of being smuggled.

India, Sri Lanka decide to ramp up defence, energy, trade ties

NEW DELHI, Dec 16 (PTI)

INDIA and Sri Lanka Monday adopted a futuristic vision to expand their partnership resolved to soon conclude a defence cooperation pact and decided to ramp up energy ties by establishing electricity grid connectivity and multi-product petroleum pipelines.

The decisions were taken during wide-ranging talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Disanayaka.

Prime Minister Modi said both sides decided to emphasise investment-led growth and connectivity for the India-Sri Lanka economic partnership, and it was decided that physical, digital and energy connectivity will be key pillars of the cooperation.

Work will be done to establish electricity grid connectivity and multi-product petroleum pipelines, Modi said, adding India will supply liquefied natural gas to the island nation's power plants.

The Prime Minister also announced that a ferry service will be started between



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Disanayake during a joint press meet at the Hyderabad House, in New Delhi on Monday. (PTI)

Rameshwaram and Talaimanar to boost connectivity between the two nations.

"We both agree that our security interests are interconnected. We have decided to soon finalise the defence cooperation agreement. There has also been an agreement for cooperation on hydrography," Modi said.

The vexed fishermen issue

also figured in the talks.

"We also discussed issues related to the livelihood of fishermen. We agree that we must proceed with a humanitarian approach to this matter," Modi said. Referring to the Tamil issue, Modi said India hopes that the Sri Lankan Government will fulfil the aspirations of the community.