

AFP, New York

US President Donald Trump has been hit by a wave of criticism for accusing Jewish Democratic voters of "disloyalty," but his comment also highlighted the unease of some in the community with its traditional party of choice.

Trump, who has positioned himself as a staunch ally of Israel, made the remark on Tuesday night while criticizing Democratic politicians who support a boycott of the Jewish state.

"Where has the Democratic party gone?" Trump said, adding: "I think any Jewish people that vote for a Democrat, I think it shows either a total lack of knowledge or great disloyalty."

Asked about the comments before flying to Kentucky the following day, Trump -- in typical fashion -- doubled down: "You vote for a Democrat, you're being very disloyal to Jewish people and you're being very disloyal to Israel."

BTRC

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Both the operators have been demanding arbitration against the audit claims as per Bangladesh Arbitration Act 2001. But the BTRC remains non-responsive, saying that it would only follow the Telecommunication Act for its decision.

As per that section 46 of the Telecommunication Act, the telecom regulator can cancel the licence of an operator if it finds the operator's response unsatisfactory.

"This is public money and there is some procedure to realise the amount," said Jahurul, adding that they were only following the Act and relevant regulations.

Contacted M Hafizuddin Khan, a former comptroller and auditor general, said there was no scope of arbitration on a "government audit".

"I think this issue will be settled in the court as mobile operators still have objections over the audit methods," said Khan, also an adviser to a former caretaker government.

Officials of both GP and Robi told The Daily Star that they would try to convince the authorities to follow the procedure and move for an arbitration.

A senior executive of a mobile operator said they may even consider moving to the international court for a solution.

"The telecom regulator is not following proper laws...They are only trying to use their power to get the money in an unlawful way," said the executive, requesting anonymity.

GP and Robi officials said they have invested more than Tk 58,000 crore (over \$7 billion) in Bangladesh and now their investments are at risk.

Both the operators, which have together 12.36 crore or 76 percent of total active mobile connections, currently are not getting any approval from the BTRC about new services, packages and cannot import equipment to maintain their network as well.

On July 22, the BTRC decided not to give any kind of approval to Grameenphone and Robi to roll out new package or service or import network equipment -- to pile on the pressure on the operators to clear their dues.

Earlier on July 4, the BTRC had slashed Grameenphone's bandwidth by 30 percent and Robi's by 15 percent for non-payment of the dues -- enough to slow down their internet speed and raise the call drop frequency.

But the block on bandwidth was lifted on July 17 considering the inconvenience it was causing to subscribers.

3 killed in 'gunfights'

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Hoaikong Urubunia Katakhal area after a tip-off about a large amount of yaba being smuggled from there, said BGB-2 Deputy Commander Major Shariful Islam Jamaddar.

The BGB members signalled a boat to stop on the Naf River. But the smugglers ignored the signal and opened fire, triggering a gunfight, he claimed.

"Alam and Sarker were killed during the shootout," Maj Shariful said, adding that BGB members recovered the bodies and sent them to a local hospital for autopsy.

The BGB claimed to have recovered fifty-thousand yaba pills, a gun, three cartridges and two sharp weapons from the boat.

Meanwhile a man accused of murder was killed in a reported gunfight with the detective branch (DB) of police at the Chakua Daria intersection in Mymensingh's Gafargaon upazila early yesterday.

The incident took place nearly two days after he was allegedly picked up



Israeli border police members detain a demonstrator as a medic tries to help him during a protest in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, near Israel's Ofer Prison in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Study finds reasons for case backlog

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at the Bangabandhu International Convention Centre in the capital.

Some other causes behind the piles of pending cases include shortage of judges, lack of coordination among different government departments and a section of lawyers' unwillingness to settle cases quickly.

Many chief judicial magistrates and district and session judges were present at yesterday's event.

According to the audit, 67 percent of the nearly 1,500 respondents said they had faith in the judicial system. But only 13 percent of them prefer going to courts while the rest would rather have community leaders solve their disputes.

The report identified the time consuming and costly nature of legal procedures behind people's unwillingness to seek justice at courts.

According to the report, in most

cases, it took two to five years to settle a case for which, people involved had to visit courts 20 to 25 times.

On average, it took more than Tk 25,000 to settle a case, said the audit report.

The courts have a backlog of 35 lakh cases and the situation could have been much worse if everyone went to the courts with their issues, it observed.

The magistrate courts alone had 14 lakh cases pending in 2016.

The rate of disposal of cases in the magistrate courts was only three percent and, on an average, at least 1,883 cases remained pending with each judge.

The findings were presented by ATM Morshed Alam, project manager of Justice Reform and Corruption Prevention at the GIZ.

The number of cases pending with chief judicial magistrates' courts increased by 14 percent between 2016 and 2017. At the session judges'

courts and the High Court Division, pending cases rose by 16 and nine percent.

The backlogs cause unbearable sufferings for justice seekers and increase the prison population rapidly, the audit report said.

The audit found that most of the rural people preferred seeking justice from community and local representatives as they considered the process is less complex and faster.

At yesterday's programme, Law Minister Anisul Huq said people would lose their confidence in the judiciary if the piles of cases kept getting bigger.

Promita Sengupta, head of programme (rule of law) at the GIZ Bangladesh; Golam Sarwar, secretary (in-charge, law and justice division) at the law ministry; Zakir Hossain, registrar general at the Supreme Court; Burkhard Ducoffre, deputy ambassador at German Embassy also spoke at the programme.

Russia sends humanoid robot to ISS

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Object Research, the robot is the first ever sent up by Russia.Fedor blasted off in a Soyuz MS-14 spacecraft at 6:38 am Moscow time (0338 GMT) from Russia's Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. The Soyuz is set to dock with the space station on Saturday and stay till September 7.

Soyuz ships are normally manned on such trips, but yesterday no humans are travelling in order to test a new emergency rescue system.

Instead of cosmonauts, Fedor, also known as Skybot F850, was strapped into a specially adapted pilot's seat, with a small Russian flag in hand.

"Let's go. Let's go," the robot was heard saying during launch, repeating the famous phrase used by first man in space Yuri Gagarin.

The silvery anthropomorphic robot stands 1.80 metres (5 foot 11 inches) tall and weighs 160 kilogrammes (353 pounds).

Fedor has Instagram and Twitter accounts with posts saying it is learning new skills such as opening a bottle of water. In the station, it will trial those manual skills in very low gravity.

"That's connecting and

disconnecting electric cables (and) using standard items, from a screwdriver and a spanner to a fire extinguisher," the Russian space agency's director for prospective programmes and science, Alexander Bloshenko, said in televised comments ahead of the launch.

"The first stage of in-flight experiments went according to the flight plan," the robot tweeted after reaching orbit.

Fedor copies human movements, a key skill that allows it to remotely help astronauts or even people on Earth to carry out tasks while the humans are strapped into an exoskeleton.

Such robots will eventually carry out dangerous operations such as space walks, Bloshenko told the state news agency RIA Novosti.

On the website of one of the state backers of the project, the Foundation of Advanced Research Projects, Fedor is described as potentially useful on Earth for working in high radiation environments, demining and tricky rescue missions.

Though initially developed for the emergencies ministry, Fedor can also be seen shooting at targets from

two handguns in a video posted by Russian space agency chief Dmitry Rogozin.

On board, the robot will perform tasks supervised by Russian cosmonaut Alexander Skvortsov, who joined the ISS in July and will wear an exoskeleton and augmented reality glasses in a series of experiments later this month.

Since Fedor is not trained to grab space station handles to move about in microgravity conditions, its legs will be immobilised on the space station, Bloshenko said.

Russian media speculated that Fedor-like robots will be used in Russia's Moon programme.

Fedor is not the first robot to go into space. In 2011, NASA sent up Robonaut 2, a humanoid robot developed with General Motors that had a similar aim of working in high-risk environments.

It was flown back to Earth in 2018 after experiencing technical problems.

In 2013, Japan sent up a small robot called Kirobo along with the ISS's first Japanese space commander. Developed with Toyota, it was able to hold conversations -- albeit only in Japanese.

Bangla month of Bhadra.

Krishna takes birth in ages in the world to safeguard the good and pious people from the hands of malevolent people by establishing truth, justice and beauty in the society, the Puran says.

Make time-bound

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Punishment" on October 5, 1998. According to article 19, paragraph 1, of the Convention, the state party was obligated to submit its initial report by November 4, 1999.

At the press conference, Supreme Court lawyer ZI Khan Panna said the UN body in its concluding observations made 77 recommendations for Bangladesh.

The body highlighted three areas as "priority issues" and asked the government to prepare a report on the progress made on those issues after a year, he said while reading out a statement.

The issues are: following the High Court directives to end custodial torture and death, establishing a mechanism to investigate allegations raised by detainees, and giving protection to those NGOs which are helping CAT, he added.

"Incidents of rights violation are mostly committed by state machineries," said Panna, also chairperson of rights body Ain o Salish Kendra, stressing the need for ending such violations.

Addressing the press conference, Transparency International Bangladesh Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said a section of law enforcement agency members was acting "as if they were violators rather than protectors of law".

"My concern is, if this continues and cannot be controlled effectively, then there will be a time when their names have to be changed. The name of 'law enforcement agency' has to be changed to 'law violation agency'," he added.

He alleged that there were instances in which some law enforcers were directly or indirectly involved in various criminal activities, which was reported by the media and the information could also be obtained via other sources.

No one wants to see law enforcement agency members play such a role, he said, adding that the CAT in its concluding observations had made recommendations to attach importance, among others, to political will.

Iftekharuzzaman said besides departmental probes, there should be objective and independent investigations over allegations against

law enforcement agency members.

Outcomes of departmental probes often resulted in "closing" or "transferring" or at best sending the members in question to retirement. This seemed to be a "reward", he added.

He also emphasised the importance of conducting judicial probes over such allegations, mentioning that the UN body had also stressed the need for forming an independent body to probe various allegations against law enforcers.

According to information provided by the state party's delegation, 17 cases have been filed against members of law enforcement agencies under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act 2013, says the CAT.

The UN body is concerned that further information about these cases is not publicly available and was not provided by the delegation. It is also concerned about reports that no case filed under the act has been completed since its enactment.

It further expressed worry over reports that officials from the police and other authorities had repeatedly requested that the act be amended or repealed to shield certain forces from liability or to limit the scope of conduct prohibited by the law.

Pointing to the government's "denial attitude" over issues related to torture, Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, said the government's image could have been positive if it had accepted the allegations and made pledges before the UN body to correct those.

She added that the government should see the country's rights activists as its allies in combating such incidents.

Zakir Hossain, executive director of Nagorik Uddoyog, said the home ministry has to play a strong role in ending custodial torture and other rights violations committed by law enforcement agency members.

Sanjeeb Drong, general secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, praised the government's positive initiatives, which were welcomed by the CAT, like the state's accession to and ratification of different international human rights instruments.

Biman dreams big

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improve passenger services, she added.

Meanwhile, a Biman official yesterday said Gangchil would primarily fly on Dhaka-Abu Dhabi route.

Speaking to The Daily Star on condition of anonymity, he said following the commissioning of the new aircraft, Biman will now operate seven flights to Abu Dhabi from Dhaka each week, up from six flights. Besides, "Gangchil" will operate on Dhaka-London route too.

Biman has also planned to operate flights on the new Dhaka-Madina route with the modern aircraft in a month or two, he added.

'A SYMBOL OF INDEPENDENCE' Describing Biman as a symbol of the country's independence, Hasina yesterday said people across the globe can know about Bangladesh and respect the country through Biman as its aircraft fly to various countries.

She asked all involved with Biman to operate flights sincerely.

Talking about the newly-inducted Dreamliners Akash Beena, Hangsabalaka, and Gangchil, the PM said it is the responsibility of all to take good care of the new aircraft. "You will have to work keeping in mind that these [aircraft] are the assets of the country."

Hasina said her government gives special attention to modernising Biman Bangladesh Airlines. She described various steps taken for Biman's development.

She said Bangladesh used to borrow money from foreign sources for Biman, but the government has now decided to procure aircraft taking loan from local banks. "Thus we are making our efforts and moving forward step by step."

Mentioning that the government would buy more aircraft to enhance Biman's capacity, the PM said the government already decided to procure two cargo planes to boost export and import.

She elaborated her government's initiatives for the development of the country's airports. She said the previous Awami League government had made Chattogram and Sylhet airports international after assuming power in 1996.

She said the government is constructing a large international airport in Cox's Bazar considering its location on international air routes and the district's tourist attractions.

Hasina commissioned Gangchil by cutting a ribbon at the Dhaka airport around 11:30am. She also boarded and inspected the plane.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Md Mahub Ali, Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary Md Mohibul Haque, Chairman of the Biman Board of Directors Air Marshal (retd) Muhammad Enamul Bari, and Biman Managing Director and CEO Farhat Hassan Jamil, among others, spoke at the event.

Gangchil, the 15th aircraft of the national flag carrier, arrived on July 25 from the Boeing factory in the USA's Seattle in the afternoon that day.

The 271-seat Boeing 787-8 is 20 percent fuel efficient carrier compared to the Boeing 767 it replaces. It is capable of flying 16 hours nonstop with an average speed of 650 miles per hour, reports BSS.

The aircraft provides its passengers with WiFi services up to 43,000 feet up in the air, allowing them to browse the internet or connect with their friends and families.

The prime minister named all the Dreamliners, sources said.

The first Dreamliner named Akash Beena had arrived in Dhaka in August last year and the second one called Hangsabalaka in December.

In 2008, the Biman had signed a \$2.1 billion agreement with Boeing to buy 10 new aircraft. Of them, Boeing has already delivered four 777-300ERs, two 737-800s and three Dreamliners to Biman.

The fourth Dreamliner Rajhangsha will be added to the Biman's fleet next month, the sources said.

MIT professor quits in protest over lab links to Epstein

AFP, New York

The head of a research center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has said he will quit in protest after the revelation of financial ties between the institution and disgraced hedge fund manager Jeffrey Epstein.

Ethan Zuckerman, director of the Center for Civic Media at the MIT Media Lab, said he would leave at the end of the 2019-2020 academic year after finding out that lab director Joi Ito took money from Epstein, who committed suicide in prison on August 10 as he awaited trial on sex trafficking charges.

"My logic was simple: the work my group does focuses on social justice and on the inclusion of marginalized individuals and points of view," Zuckerman wrote in a message posted on the Medium forum Tuesday and added to Wednesday.

"It's hard to do that work with a straight face in a place that violated its own values so clearly in working with Epstein and in disguising that relationship."

Zuckerman said he had apologized to the three recipients of the Media Lab's 2018 "Disobedience Prize" who were recognized for their fight against sexual harassment in the science world.

"For me, the deep involvement of Epstein in the life of the Media Lab is something that makes my work impossible to carry forward there," Zuckerman said.