

Trump sends letter to Iran to negotiate nuclear deal

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump said he wants to negotiate a nuclear deal with Iran and sent a letter to its leadership on Thursday saying he hoped they would agree to talk.

"I said I hope you're going to negotiate, because it's going to be a lot better for Iran," Trump said in the interview with Fox Business Network broadcast yesterday.

"I think they want to get that letter. The other alternative is we have to do something, because you can't let another nuclear weapon."

The letter appeared to have been addressed to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The White House did not immediately respond to a request about that.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov discussed international efforts to resolve the situation around Iran's nuclear program with Iranian ambassador Kazem Jalali, the Russian Foreign Ministry said yesterday.



Smoke rises while members of the Syrian forces ride on a vehicle as they battle against a nascent insurgency by fighters from ousted leader Bashar al-Assad's Alawite sect in Latakia, Syria, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

SLUM PROJECT India SC asks Adani to respond to allegations

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court yesterday asked Gautam Adani's conglomerate to respond to allegations of unfairly winning a bid to redevelop one of Asia's largest slums in Mumbai, with the competing Dubai-based consortium offering to raise its bid.

The legal battle focuses on whether SecLink Technologies was incorrectly excluded from the bidding process when the Indian billionaire won the Dharavi slum project with a \$619 million bid in 2023.

A Mumbai court disagreed with SecLink's position last year, landing the dispute at India's highest court. Adani and the government of Maharashtra, where the slum is located, have denied wrongdoing.

OCCUPIED WEST BANK Israel's ops aligns with annexation 'vision': UN

Hamas urges Trump to meet Palestinian prisoners

AFP, Ramallah

A major Israeli offensive which over several weeks has displaced tens of thousands of Palestinians and ravaged refugee camps increasingly appears to be aligned with the "vision of annexation" of the West Bank, a UN official told AFP.

Israeli forces carry out regular raids targeting Hamas members in the West Bank, occupied since 1967, but the ongoing operation since late January is already the longest in two decades, with dire effects on Palestinians.

"There are growing concerns that the reality being created on the ground aligns with the

vision of annexation of the West Bank," said Roland Friedrich, director of West Bank affairs for UNRWA, the UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees.

"It's an unprecedented situation, both from a humanitarian and wider political perspective," he said.

"We talk about 40,000 people that have been forcibly displaced from their homes" in the northern West Bank, mainly from three refugee camps where the operation had begun, said Friedrich.

"These camps are now largely empty," their residents unable to return and struggling to find shelter elsewhere, he said.

Inside the camps, the level

of destruction to "electricity, sewage and water, but also private houses" was "very concerning", Friedrich added.

Meanwhile, Hamas yesterday urged US President Donald Trump to meet with Palestinian prisoners freed during the ongoing truce in Gaza, following his meeting with released Israeli hostages the day before.

A high-level Hamas delegation was in Cairo yesterday to advance efforts to prolong a fragile ceasefire in Gaza, two senior Hamas officials said.

More than 9,500 Palestinian prisoners were currently being held in Israeli prisons, Friedrich said.

EU saw record drop in births in 2023: data

AFP, Brussels

The number of babies born in the EU was down 5.4 percent to 3.67 million in 2023, the largest drop in decades, official data showed yesterday, underscoring the bloc's demographic issues.

The fertility rate across the EU's 27 countries stood at 1.38 live births per woman, down from 1.46 in 2022 and well below the "replacement level" of 2.1, at which a population is stable.

"This is the largest annual decline recorded since 1961", the bloc's statistical agency, Eurostat, said.

1 dead, 180 missing after migrant boats sink off Yemen, Djibouti

AFP, Addis Ababa

Four boats carrying migrants have sunk off Djibouti and Yemen killing at least one person and leaving more than 180 missing, the International Organization for Migration told AFP yesterday.

The sinkings occurred late Thursday along a route that is increasingly used by Ethiopians hoping to find work in Gulf countries or escape conflict.

"Over 180 migrants are missing after four boats sank last night off the coasts of Djibouti and Yemen," the IOM said.

Two of the vessels, one believed to be carrying at least 30 people and the other roughly 150, were missing off the coast of Yemen, according to the IOM country chief of mission Abdusattor Esoev.

"We are talking about 186 people that may have unfortunately perished in the sea," he told AFP.

The majority of those onboard were believed to be Ethiopian migrants, he said, although five were thought to be Yemeni crew members. At least 57, from both boats, were women.

"We are working with authorities to see if we can find any survivors, but I'm afraid we may not have any," Esoev said. The other two vessels capsized due to strong winds off the coast of Djibouti, he said, based on information he had received.

Police foil Hizb ut-Tahrir procession

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Knowing about the incident, Asif went to the Detective Branch office, secured his release, and took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment.

Talking to reporters, Asif said he secured Arman's release as he thought Arman was innocent.

Over the past few days, the banned outfit put up posters across the city, urging people to join the "March for Khilafat".

In response, Dhaka Metropolitan Police on Thursday, in a statement, said that any activities under the banner of the outfit are punishable under anti-terrorism laws.

The government

outlawed Hizb ut-Tahrir in 2009, considering it a threat to public security.

Under the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009, any form of gathering, procession, distribution of posters and leaflets, or promotional activities by banned outfits is a criminal offence.

If any banned organisation, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, attempts to hold meetings, rallies, or engage in any form of publicity, necessary legal action will be taken, the DMP said in the statement.

In another development, police detained three members of the outfit from the Uttara area yesterday, hours before the procession started.

ACC to probe SPs, DCs over 'midnight voting'

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as the investigation progresses," said the ACC DG.

Senior ACC officials confirmed that a list of suspects has already been compiled, verifying their current positions. Many of them have been found to have amassed significant wealth beyond their known sources of income.

According to various sources, Sheikh Hasina and her close associates -- including trusted senior party leaders and key administrative officials -- were behind the "nighttime voting".

Those directly involved at the district level included 57 deputy commissioners (DCs) and 64 superintendents of police (SPs).

On February 20, the government forcibly retired 22 DCs who had served as returning officers in the last three parliamentary elections.

Regarding this decision, Public Administration Secretary Mokhlesur Rahman said, "The government is making and implementing strong decisions in the interest of the people."

Among these 22 DCs, four had served as returning officers in the 2014 election. At the time of their retirement, three were secretaries, 17 were additional secretaries, one was a joint secretary, and one was a deputy secretary.

Mokhlesur Rahman further added, "Those accused of corruption or abusing their legal authorities are being punished according to service rules."

Regarding the latest national election, he said, "A list of officials involved in the 2024 election has been given to intelligence agencies."

"Officials with less than 25 years of service will be made OSD [Officer on Special Duty]. Officials with over 25 years of service will be forcibly retired," he added.

On February 21, the government announced that 33 DCs who had served as returning officers in the 11th parliamentary election would be made OSD.

Following the forced retirement

of the DCs, Local Government Adviser Asif Mahmud Shojib Bhuiyain in a Facebook post on February 21 said, "The 64 SPs who were responsible for districts during the 2018 nighttime election will also be made OSD or sent into forced retirement."

Subsequently, on February 25, the Ministry of Home Affairs made 82 senior police officers, including DIGs, additional DIGs, and SPs OSD. Among them were 57 SPs who had been in charge of districts during the 2018 national election.

The KM Nurul Huda-led Election Commission became controversial after the 2018 election as opposition parties alleged ballot stuffing the night before election day.

The Awami League got two-thirds majority in that election.

The same month, Transparency International, Bangladesh, in a study found that stamping of ballots took place the night before election day in more than one centre of the 33 out of 50 surveyed constituencies.

On December 24, 2024, a section of police officials claimed they were under pressure from then higher authorities during the last three national polls, which were marred by widespread irregularities.

During a meeting with the Electoral Reform Commission, they alleged that illegal financial transactions were made to engineer the results of the 2014, 2018, and 2024 parliamentary polls.

WFP seeks urgent

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in 2016 and 2017 - in overcrowded camps in the Cox's Bazar district, where they have only limited access to job opportunities or education.

Growing hunger in their home state of Rakhine in Myanmar drove out a majority of the 70,000 Rohingyas who arrived in Bangladesh last year, Reuters reported.

The funding cuts in March come during the holy month of Ramadan and the WFP estimates it will need \$15 million in April to sustain full rations.

PGCB sends clarification

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transmission lines, as was communicated to the authorities of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant on December 26 last year.

"It should be noted that the commissioning of the 230 kV GIS Substation and the 400/230 kV Transformer within the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant are the responsibilities of the plant authorities," it said.

However, since the commissioning of these substation and transformer has not been completed for the past two years, PGCB has been supplying auxiliary power through the "230 kV Baghbhari-Rooppur Transmission Line" which was connected on an interim basis.

There is no remaining work by PGCB on the mentioned two projects which are fully prepared for power evacuation, the explanation said, adding that they have learnt that the substation and the transformer may not be completed before May 2025.

By that time, the explanation said, the PGCB will complete the construction of the Padma River Crossing section of the "Rooppur-Gopalganj 400 kV Transmission Line" and will be able to evacuate the electricity from Unit-1 through the three prepared transmission lines.

"Therefore, the news that the delay in the test operations of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant is due to unfinished transmission line work is not correct," the explanation added.

Sri Lanka signs \$2.5bn debt deal with Japan

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka yesterday signed a deal with Japan to restructure \$2.5 billion in loans, marking the first agreement with bilateral creditors who had pledged debt relief to the cash-strapped nation last year.

Japan said it was granting concessions on a 369.45 billion yen (\$2.5 billion) loan under a comprehensive debt treatment plan, which the International Monetary Fund considers essential for Sri Lanka's economic recovery.

Fight to increase women's political

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Recently, the Electoral Reform Commission and the Constitution Reform Commission have proposed to increase the number of parliamentary seats reserved for women to 100 from 50 at present. The seats would be filled through direct elections.

Women's rights activists have largely welcomed the recommendation.

"We have always advocated for direct votes for women in parliament, and this reform aligns with our vision," Fauzia Moslem, president of the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, told The Daily Star.

The Bangladesh Mahila Parishad though submitted a bill to the government to increase the reserved seats to 150, which would ensure 33 percent representation of women in parliament.

The Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972 mandates that political parties allocate at least 33 percent of all committee positions to women. But major political parties have consistently failed to meet this requirement.

In the last national election, 128 female candidates ran for 99 seats, which is just 4.71 percent of the total 2,713 candidates who took part in the polls. Only 20 women were elected from a total of 300 general seats.

Introduced in 1972 with just 15 seats, the system of reservation was meant to encourage women's political participation. In practice, it has largely been used to keep existing power structures in place.

Instead of serving as a tool for meaningful inclusion, it has historically been politicised by ruling parties, essentially reducing women's roles in governance to tokenism.

This was evident during the Awami League's rule where female members of parliament were beholden to party loyalty rather than political capabilities, as reported by this newspaper in May 2024.

The absence of direct elections for the seats established a system of nepotism and cronyism, where personal connections outweighed merit.

As a result, capable female

politicians were denied genuine opportunities to emerge as strong and impactful leaders.

And even as women rise to leadership positions, they encounter obstacles that limit their ability to lead effectively.

One of the most significant barriers to women's participation has been the violent and exclusionary nature of political organising.

The intimidation and harassment women face, both online and offline, are deliberately designed to push them out of political spaces.

A study of Facebook content during Bangladesh's 12th national election revealed widespread gendered disinformation aimed at discrediting female politicians, journalists and analysts.

This trend continues today, where females who are engaging socially and politically are facing aggressive misogynistic bullying online.

In the wake of the July revolution, instances of moral policing, mob violence and sexual harassment in public places have surged, with weak response from the interim government. The atmosphere of lawlessness has left women particularly vulnerable.

Unchecked, this spread of gendered disinformation has the potential to discourage broader female political participation.

Amidst all these shifts, Bangladesh is looking at the newly formed, youth-led political party, the National Citizen Party (NCP), with cautious optimism.

Born from the July revolution, this new generation of leaders and activists has emerged with the demand for meaningful structural change.

At a rally in Shahbagh in February, the leaders of NCP publicly asserted that women must be actively involved in decision-making rather than being mere participants in politics.

The then convener, Nasiruddin Patwari, called for greater female participation in local government elections.

With its launch, NCP has since appointed three women out of the top ten members in their highest decision-making body: Samanta

Sharmin as senior joint convener and Tasnim Jara and Nahida Sarwar Niva as senior joint member secretary.

While the number is still disproportionate, their presence signals that they have a say in shaping the political direction of the party.

"The idea that 'politics is too rough for women' has been used both as an excuse and a weapon, framing women as incapable while actively making politics hostile and unsafe for them," Jara told The Daily Star.

To ensure sustained participation, the NCP aims to implement some key initiatives: increase the number of women contesting for general seats; establish leadership development programmes and mentorship for aspiring women politicians; create party structures that actively promote women into key decision-making roles; and strengthen legal protections against political violence, harassment and intimidation.

"Power has been hoarded for so long that we have built a system where politics is a family heirloom, not a public service. Women, especially, have been kept on the sideline, handed symbolic roles while the real decisions are made elsewhere. This isn't just about fairness -- it's about effectiveness. When you exclude half the population from leadership, you are running a country on one leg," Jara said.

The future of women's political participation in Bangladesh remains uncertain, but the presence of strong female leaders from the protests to the new political party suggests that change is possible.

Whether this momentum translates into meaningful transformation depends on the ability of these leaders, and the broader political system, to create an environment where women are not just participants but leaders shaping the nation's direction.

Without intentional efforts to dismantle structural barriers, women's voices will continue to be marginalised.

Addressing this gap is not only a question of fairness but a necessary step towards a more just and representative political system.