

Trump gives Putin 'peace letter' from wife Melania

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump handed Vladimir Putin a special item at their Alaska summit: a letter written by his wife, First Lady Melania Trump, pleading for the Russian leader to make peace in the name of children.

The first lady's office on Saturday reposted a Fox News article on X containing the short letter, a day after Trump and Putin failed to find a breakthrough at their high-stakes meeting.

Putin read the "peace letter" immediately after Trump handed it to him, while delegations from both sides looked on, according to Fox News.

"In today's world, some children are forced to carry a quiet laughter, untouched by the darkness around them," read the letter, which was signed by the first lady and did not mention Ukraine by name.

"Mr Putin, you can singlehandedly restore their melodic laughter," it added. "In protecting the innocence of these children, you will do more than serve Russia alone -- you serve humanity itself."

BNP won't let Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 1
Media Cell at the Jatiya Press Club.

Tarique said his party's ideological position is also the same as that of the writers and poets when it comes to the independence, sovereignty and democracy of the country. "Like you, we are also committed to preventing the return of autocracy, which the people of Bangladesh drove out some days ago," he said.

Tarique said BNP's political ideology may differ from that of the writers and poets who joined the event, but that should not be seen as a problem. "What truly matters is our common and unwavering faith in the sovereignty of the country."

He called upon all to unite for democracy and fair elections to restore people's ownership of Bangladesh by establishing an accountable government and state system, which can only be established by protecting people's voting rights.

"If we want to establish the truth that the ownership of this country belongs only to its citizens then we must all unite to ensure democracy, freedom of speech and a free, fair and neutral election," Tarique said.

"If we can achieve this, then the rights our respected poets and writers have spoken about today -- freedom of writing, freedom of expression, the right to express differences of opinion and the right to criticism -- can truly be established," the BNP leader said.

The BNP leader also sought the cooperation of all, including writers and intellectuals, in building the Bangladesh its people have long desired.

He said writers and creative minds have inspired people for generations to realise their rights, raise their voices and wage movements through their works.

During mass movements, Tarique said the writers inspired people to speak out against despotic regimes by expressing their patriotism.

Addressing the programme, BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed praised the role of writers and poets in different rights movements and in the struggles against autocratic regimes in 1990 and 2024.

He urged writers, poets and intellectuals to act as a pressure group to ensure freedom of expression in Bangladesh.

A number of writers and poets, under the banner of Jatiya Kabita Parishad, attended the programme and spoke about their freedom to write and express their opinions freely.

European leaders

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sources, the US and Russian leaders discussed proposals for Russia to relinquish tiny pockets of occupied Ukraine in exchange for Ukraine ceding a swathe of fortified land in the east and freezing the front lines elsewhere.

At face value, some of Putin's demands would be hugely difficult for Ukraine to accept, setting the stage for potentially fraught talks about ending Europe's deadliest war in 80 years, which has dragged on for 3 1/2 years and killed or wounded more than 1 million people, reports Reuters.

In his statement after the Alaska summit, Putin signalled no movement in Russia's long-held demands, which also include a veto on Kyiv's desired membership in the Nato alliance.

He also warned Ukraine and its European allies not to "create any obstacles. That they will not attempt to disrupt the emerging progress through provocation or behind the scenes intrigue".

Meanwhile, Trump yesterday hailed "big progress" on Russia. "BIG PROGRESS ON RUSSIA. STAY TUNED!" Trump posted on his Truth Social platform, without elaborating.



Palestine Ambassador to Bangladesh Yousef SY Ramadan calls on Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at the State Guest House Jamuna yesterday.

PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

BNP reaching out to Hefazat, others

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At present, Islami Andolon is spearheading efforts to form an electoral understanding with four other Islamist parties -- Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Khelafat Majlis, Nezame Islam Party, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam.

Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam skipped a liaison committee meeting last Thursday. Two more groups -- Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon, led by Habibullah Miazi, and Bangladesh Islami Oikya Jote, led by Abdul Kader and Sakhawat Hossain -- are also in talks, according to insiders.

These parties, however, say disagreements over leadership of the potential bloc remain a key hurdle. Meanwhile, Jamiat and IAB have begun coordinating to nominate joint candidates across all constituencies, seeking to position themselves as a credible alternative to the BNP in the electoral race.

According to BNP insiders, the party leadership remain sceptical that Jamaat and Islami Oikya Jote can forge a sustainable alliance. However, they acknowledge that if Islamist parties manage to consolidate votes into a single bloc, they could pose a formidable challenge to the BNP in the upcoming polls.

The party's outreach to Islamist groups and Qawmi madrasa-based clerical networks is designed to manage that risk, they said. A senior BNP standing committee member has been given special responsibility

for overseeing these contacts, with another member, Salahuddin Ahmed, recently added to the team.

At the same time, the BNP is wary of international perceptions, knowing that the Awami League and its allies may exploit the rise of Islamist forces to portray Bangladesh negatively abroad. With memories of its controversial past alliance with Jamaat still fresh, BNP is treading cautiously, seeking to expand its base without being branded as aligned with Islamists.

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed told The Daily Star, "We always respect the religious sentiments of Muslims, who make up 90 percent of the population. In this context, we uphold Islamic values." He added, "Alongside democratic forces, we maintain communications with Islamic forces and Islamic scholars like our late President Ziaur Rahman did. But that does not necessarily mean we are moving to form an alliance with Islamist parties."

However, he kept open the possibility of forging an electoral alliance with the parties, including Islamist forces, who took part in the anti-fascist movement.

"It is not true that we are in talks with Islamist parties just to counter Jamaat or Islami Andolon. That is their election strategy. We are following our own," he said.

IAB spokesperson Gazi Ataur Rahman told the Daily Star that a new political reality has emerged since the July mass uprising, with people

expecting a fresh force to take power beyond those who have already ruled.

"People see the Islamist groups as that new political force and expect them to contest the next polls together. To meet this expectation, we are working to build an electoral alliance," he said.

Ataur said the BNP is considering their initiative as a threat.

"We see this as BNP's double standard. They say they are worried about the rise of right-wing forces, but at the same time, they are trying to bring Islamist groups under their umbrella."

Jamaat Assistant Secretary General Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair said their efforts to forge an "electoral consensus" would take final shape after the election roadmap is announced.

Political analysts say the country's political landscape has undergone a major shift following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government. Jamaat-e-Islami has been able to conduct political programmes openly for the first time in more than a decade and a half.

In the absence of the AL, the BNP is seen as the dominant force. However, many smaller parties fear their relevance could diminish if the BNP returns to power.

Analysts say this fear, along with differing views on political reforms, is driving Islamist parties to explore the possibility of an electoral alliance.

postings and promotions -- benefited even further during this period.

"The ministry has amplified this trend to an abnormal and visibly biased level," said an official, seeking anonymity.

A revenue cadre officer said at least 20 officials of the National Board of Revenue were sent into forced retirement or received other forms of punishment for tearing up transfer orders.

However, no action was taken against the admin cadre officials found guilty of engaging in a tussle at the public administration ministry. Some of them were even promoted from deputy secretary to joint secretary, said the official.

"Given such impunity for officials of a certain cadre, how can we have any faith in this administration?" the official asked.

Over the past year, at least nine secretaries and 19 additional secretaries were sent into forced retirement and 87 others designated as OSDs. While some of them were known to be corrupt and abusers of power, the sudden move hindered the administration's functions.

Abdul Awal Majumdar, a former secretary, said the indiscriminate removal of many competent officers weakened the interim government in its early stage.

"Holding an important position in the administration does not make an individual an accomplice in corruption or irregularities," he said.

A former deputy commissioner of Kishoreganj said, "Following the uprising, there was an opportunity to make the public administration more efficient. That chance was lost due to weak leadership at the top."

In its effort to promote transparency, the government in October last year directed all its employees to submit wealth statements for public disclosure. Though officials complied, the

ministry has yet to make those public.

Terming the move an eyewash, several senior admin officials said top bureaucrats know very well which officials are corrupt.

"If the public administration ministry was sincere in taking a strong stance against corruption, it would have amended the outdated Government Servants (Conduct) Rules, 1979, and punished the officials widely known to be corrupt. Such a measure would have sent a strong message," said one of the officials.

Officials and experts noted that no steps have yet been taken to tighten laws and regulations that were relaxed over the last 15 years, widening scopes for public employees to indulge in corruption.

For example, as per the Government Servants (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1985, an employee sentenced by a court -- even for a day -- faced termination. However, the rules were amended in 2018 to allow officials, sentenced up to a year, to retain their jobs.

Over the last year, there was no move to strengthen these regulations; instead, individuals with questionable track records continue to be favoured in recruitment and promotion.

Also, the ministry has not initiated any internal reforms. Though it oversees nearly a dozen institutions, there has been no step to evaluate their roles.

Seeking anonymity, a secretary said the public administration ministry is apparently running without a guardian, as no adviser has been appointed to the ministry.

"Disheartened by the prevailing situation, many promising junior officers are now seeking foreign postings or opportunities for higher studies abroad," added the official.

When asked for comments on the ministry's performance, Senior Secretary Mokhles Ur Rahman declined to speak on the matter.

SM Mizanur Rahman, member secretary of Chalan Beel Rokkha

ministry, said the ministry has yet to make those public.

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NBR traces Tk 40,000cr

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Ahsan H Mansur accused tycoons linked to the toppled Hasina regime of working with members of the country's powerful military intelligence agency to siphon \$17 billion out of the banking sector during her rule.

In response to the CIC findings, Prof Yunus said all relevant agencies, including the CIC, Anti-Corruption Commission, and police's CID, must coordinate their efforts to identify those involved in money laundering and bring them to book, according to the Chief Adviser's Press Wing.

"An example must be set so that in the future, no one can plunder the country's resources and accumulate property abroad," he said.

Rabindra University gets Ecneec's conditional nod

FROM PAGE 1

Students face repeated disruptions as classes and administrative activities continue in rented buildings.

"Since the academic activities had already been launched, we felt it necessary to build permanent infrastructure," Wahiduddin Mahmud said at a press briefing.

The land ministry converted the designated area from pasture to non-agricultural use in 2018. Administrative approval was also granted that year, but construction has not started since.

ECNEC APPROVAL

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) approved the Tk 519.15 crore project on 100 acres of Tagore's estate in Shahzadpur after several revisions of the Development Project Proposal (DPP) and subsequent approvals from the University Grants Commission and the education ministry.

According to the DPP, the university will have 11 faculties and 40 departments, accommodating 7,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The campus will have three five-storey dormitories costing Tk 93.89 crore, and four major non-residential buildings -- a five-storey academic building, a five-storey administrative building, a three-storey central library, and a two-storey Teacher-Student Centre and cafeteria -- costing around Tk 211 crore.

Tk 15 crore has been allocated for furniture, and two smaller establishments for Tk 2 crore.

The plan also includes open spaces, sports grounds, lakes, and designated areas for agriculture, livestock, and fisheries.

At least 33 percent of the land will be kept for tree plantation and greenery, as per forest department guidelines.

ENVIRONMENTAL WORRIES

Environmentalists argue the site lies at the confluence of the Boral and Gohara rivers, which connect to Chalan Beel -- one of the largest wetlands in the country.

"If the university is built at the said site, it will hamper the water discharging. And if the water of the Chalan Beel is stagnant, it will cause waterlogging in the area and leave heavy impacts Besides, filling up a wetland is prohibited as per the existing environmental law of the country," said Fida A Khan, executive director of the Center for Environmental and Geographic Information Services.

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RAID IN SOUTHEAST Iran forces kill seven militants

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Iranian security forces yesterday killed seven members of a jihadist group in the southeastern province of Sistan Baluchestan, state media reported.

Deputy provincial governor Ali Velayatipour said the gunmen, all members of the Ansar al-Furqan group, were killed in the early hours of yesterday, according to official news agency IRNA.

The militants "intended to attack sensitive centres and military and law enforcement bases", Velayatipour said.

Iran has designated Ansar al-Furqan a "terrorist" organisation. Last year, the group claimed a suicide attack that killed a police officer, also in Sistan-Baluchestan.

The province which borders Pakistan and Afghanistan is one of Iran's poorest, and a frequent scene of clashes between security forces and Baluch minority rebels.

It is home to a large ethnic Baluch population, most of whom are Sunni Muslims, in contrast to Iran's Shia majority.

On Saturday, gunmen killed a police officer in a shootout in the province, with the Sunni militant group Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice) claiming responsibility.

The group, based across the border in Pakistan, has claimed multiple attacks in recent years, including an assault on a courthouse last month that left at least six people dead.