

Trump open to easing Iran sanctions Says Kazakhstan to join Abraham Accords

AFP, Washington

President Donald Trump said Thursday that Iran has asked for heavy US sanctions against Tehran to be lifted -- and that he is open to having a discussion about it.

"Frankly, Iran has been asking if the sanctions could be lifted. Iran has got very heavy US sanctions, and it makes it really hard," Trump said during a dinner with Central Asian leaders.

"I'm open to hearing that, and we'll see what happens, but I would be open to it."

Western countries, including the United States, have long accused Iran of seeking to acquire atomic weapons, while Iran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes.

Tehran has been reeling under years of international sanctions, especially after the United States in 2018 withdrew from an international nuclear accord with Tehran and reimposed tough punitive measures.

**N Korea fires unidentified ballistic missile
 Says Seoul's military**

AFP, Seoul

North Korea fired a ballistic missile yesterday, Seoul's military said, around a week after US President Donald Trump approved South Korea's plan to build a nuclear-powered submarine.

Analysts have said Seoul's plan to construct one of the atomic-driven vessels would likely draw an aggressive response from Pyongyang.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said North Korea fired an unidentified ballistic missile towards the East Sea, referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

The missile landed in the sea outside Japan's economic waters and no damage or injuries had been reported, said Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi.

Govt trying to delay polls

FROM PAGE 1
 referendum by November to give legal basis to the July charter.

Thousands of leaders and activists from various BNP units and its affiliated organisations joined the rally, filling the area from Kakrail to Motijheel.

Reiterating BNP's position, Fakhrul said the referendum must be held on the same day as the national polls.

He said the final recommendations of the Consensus Commission excluded notes of dissent by some political parties and included several issues that were never discussed.

"For almost a year, they worked on drafting the charter. On October 17, in front of parliament, all political parties signed the document based on the consensus reached through the National Consensus Commission," he said.

The BNP leader, however, alleged that just days later, the consensus commission came up with new recommendations that were not in the signed charter.

Fakhrul criticised a statement



Artistes perform at Dhaka Flow Fest 2025 at Shahabuddin Park in Gulshan yesterday. Blending global wellness with local culture, the festival brings people together through yoga, dance, music, and conscious living. The three-day event will end today.

PHOTO: STAR

AMAZON CLIMATE SUMMIT World leaders turn up the heat on fossil fuels

AFP, Belém

World leaders were set to meet for a second day of climate talks in the Brazilian Amazon yesterday after fiery speeches and renewed criticism of Big Oil marked the opening session.

Dozens of ministers and several heads of state and government, including those of Spain, Germany and Namibia, were set to meet in Belém just before the United Nations' (UN) annual two-week conference, COP20, which starts on Monday.

Evidence of the climate crisis, driven largely by the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation, has never been clearer: the past 11 years have been the hottest on record and marked by intensifying hurricanes, heat waves and wildfires.

UN chief Antonio Guterres and a series of national leaders said on Thursday that

the world will fail to keep global warming below 1.5C, the Paris Agreement's primary target set a decade ago, but said they have not yet given up on its fallback goal of 2C.

The absence of leaders from the world's biggest polluters, including the United States, where President Donald Trump has dismissed climate science as a "con job," cast a shadow over talks, but also catalyzed calls for greater mobilization.

Countries made an unprecedented pledge to "transition away" from oil, gas and coal at COP28 in Dubai two years ago.

However, the issue has since slipped down the agenda as nations grapple with economic pressures, trade disputes and wars, and the Trump administration aggressively pushing for more fossil fuels.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's call in his opening address for a "roadmap" to halt deforestation, reduce

dependence on fossil fuels, and mobilize the financial resources needed to achieve those goals was met with applause.

The coalition backing Lula's call includes European nations and numerous small island states whose very survival is threatened by stronger cyclones and rising sea levels.

Gaston Browne, the prime minister of Antigua and Barbuda, railed against the "large polluters (who) continue to deliberately destroy our marine and terrestrial environments with their poisonous fossil fuel gases."

The idea of phasing out hydrocarbons is also gaining traction in Europe. Despite their divisions, EU countries noted that they have reduced greenhouse gas emissions for more than three decades and are aiming for a 90 percent cut by 2040.

Frustration as retirees rehired for key posts

FROM PAGE 1
 "When contractual appointments are made to top administrative posts, it is natural for promotion aspirants to feel frustrated. This often hampers the normal functioning of the administration, as those awaiting promotion tend to lose focus on their responsibilities," he observed.

He further said it is customary for the government to remove officials who were unable to carry out their duties in designated posts as expected.

The interim government, however, decided to take an unusual path. It transferred at least four secretaries barely a year after their contractual appointments, instead of relieving them of their duties due to poor performance, said several officials at the Secretariat.

Terming the decision unusual in the civil administration, they said these transfers further added to resentment among bureaucrats.

Normally, contractual appointments are made for specific purposes. Once the tenure of a contract ends, the government either discontinues or renews it as deemed necessary. Such officials are not usually transferred.

They also noted that many retired officials, reappointed on contract, struggle to adapt to technology driven administrative processes that have been upgraded in recent years.

Seeking anonymity, an aggrieved additional secretary said, "Those who returned to the administration on contracts after a break of 10-15 years have clearly failed to perform."

"Why would the government still keep them in the administration by transferring them to various positions of lesser significance?" the official asked.

Mohammad Yusuf, appointed as secretary at the shipping ministry in November last year, was removed from the post this month and attached to the public administration ministry.

Even though he has no specific responsibility now, he will continue to receive salary and benefits applicable to a senior secretary, said public administration ministry officials.

MA Akmal Hossain Azad was transferred to the fisheries and livestock ministry only three months after his contractual appointment as secretary of the Health Services Division in August last year. He was later transferred to the Planning Commission as its member.

There are also examples of officials being transferred from comparatively insignificant ministries to important ones, such as the current home secretary and the public administration secretary.

Seeking anonymity, an additional secretary said, "Retired officials, who have been out of the administration for years, naturally struggle to keep up with many issues."

"It's not their fault. It's just how the system works. The administration functions like a machine that needs constant updates," added the official.

Around nine months after his appointment as secretary of the Secondary and Higher Education Division, Siddik Zobair was removed from the position on July 22 this year and attached to the public administration ministry.

He was transferred to the National Academy for Planning and Development as its director general on October 12, meaning the government appointed a senior secretary to a post meant for an additional secretary.

Mokhlesur Rahman was moved to the Planning Commission last month after he served as senior secretary at the public administration ministry for 13 months.

There are also examples of officials being transferred from comparatively insignificant ministries to important ones, such as the current home secretary and the public administration secretary.

Seeking anonymity, an additional secretary said, "Retired officials, who have been out of the administration for years, naturally struggle to keep up with many issues."

"It's not their fault. It's just how the system works. The administration functions like a machine that needs constant updates," added the official.

Non-development spending to rise again

FROM PAGE 1
 budget revision by January, finance ministry officials said.

Last month, the Finance Division asked all ministries and divisions to submit their revised allocation proposals by November 9.

RISING COMMITMENTS

Following the June budget announcement, the government increased several allowances amid growing demands.

Most recently, it raised house rent allowances for MPO-listed teachers, adding around Tk 4,000 crore to non-development spending.

An additional cost is likely if the government moves to implement the pay commission's recommendations.

The commission is expected to submit its report by December, and the finance adviser had told *The Daily Star* earlier that partial implementation of the recommendations during this government's tenure had been under active consideration.

The upcoming national election will also add to expenditure, with around Tk 3,000 crore allocated for the Election Commission. The amount may rise if additional funds are sought.

Meanwhile, the government plans to inject Tk 20,000 crore in capital into a new bank to be formed by merging five troubled Islamic banks.

Of this, Tk 10,000 crore is expected to be transferred this month once the new entity's account is opened as the Bangladesh Bank is giving priority to protecting depositors' funds and restoring public confidence in the restructured system.

The central bank is expected to issue a licence for the new bank later this month after receiving the government's formal application, now awaiting law ministry clearance.

The Economic Relations Division followed, with Tk 6,159 crore spent on repayment of principal and interest on foreign loans.

The agriculture ministry spent Tk 7,495 crore, mostly on fertiliser

Economist Selim Raihan, executive director of South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM), said the capital support for the new bank could be a positive move if accompanied by lasting reforms.

"What needs to be examined is whether the reform initiatives undertaken in the banking sector will be continued under the next government," he told *The Daily Star*.

"Budgetary support for bank capital has been provided in the past as well. If these reforms are not sustained, it could lead to a waste of public funds, as seen in the past," said Raihan, also a professor at the University of Dhaka.

He further said just as political commitment is vital in political matters, it is equally important for economic reforms. "We have seen ample discussions on political issues. Unfortunately, we have not seen such discussions on economic issues with the political parties," he said.

FIRST QUARTER SNAPSHOT

In the last fiscal year, non-development expenditure in the revised budget rose as the government had to pay arrears in the power, energy, and fertiliser sectors, trimming development allocations.

In the first three months of this fiscal year, total government expenditure rose 10.29 percent year-on-year, reaching Tk 1,04,964 crore.

The Finance Division spent the most -- Tk 40,917 crore -- mainly on interest payments on domestic loans, power and energy subsidies, and sectoral incentives.

The Economic Relations Division followed, with Tk 6,159 crore spent on repayment of principal and interest on foreign loans.

The agriculture ministry spent Tk 7,495 crore, mostly on fertiliser

subsidies and incentives.

Three education-related ministries and divisions spent Tk 13,500 crore, largely under the non-development budget for MPO-listed institutions.

The defence ministry spent Tk 5,659 crore, the Public Security Division Tk 4,657 crore, and the food ministry Tk 5,803 crore.

Meanwhile, revenue collection rose 17 percent year-on-year to Tk 11,117 crore in the same period, up from 4.94 percent growth a year earlier.

TIGHTER CONTROL

In view of rising non-development demands, the Finance Division has introduced stricter expenditure controls in the revised budget guidelines.

For example, spending on land acquisition under the non-development budget will be halted, while under the development budget it will be allowed only after all procedures and Finance Division approval are complete.

Except for the education, health, and agriculture ministries, new allocations for residential and non-residential buildings will only be allowed where work orders have already been issued.

Restrictions have also been placed on vehicle purchases, foreign travel, and other discretionary expenses.

Selim Raihan said the upcoming revised budget should serve as a pathway for the next government, noting that most budget implementation typically occurs in the final quarter of the fiscal year.

"In this context, it is crucial to ensure that the revised budget provides a clear pathway for the next administration," he said, adding that expenditure must remain consistent with revenue to prevent fiscal pressure on the incoming government.

Six held

FROM PAGE 1
 murder of Sarwar Hossain Babla, the shooting of the auto-rickshaw driver, and criminal activities in Raiganj."

The arrestees were being interrogated.

Sarwar's father Abdul Kader yesterday lodged a case with Bayezid Bostami Police Station over the killing of his son, accusing eight persons, including Sazzad Ali alias "Boro Sazzad", and 10-15 unnamed others. Maruf Hossain, an assistant commissioner of Chattogram Metropolitan Police, told this correspondent.

TRUMP VERSUS MAMDANI

The president's newest showdown

REUTERS, Washington

Donald Trump loves few things more than tackling a new political foe. But has he met his match in New York's incoming mayor Zohran Mamdani?

The mouthwatering showdown between the Republican and the young Democratic socialist could define the next phase of Trump's presidency.

Trump has appeared to relish having Mamdani as a foil, branding him a communist, mocking the name of the first Muslim and South Asian to lead America's largest city, and threatening to cut federal funding for New York City.

But his rival has shown he can play Trump at his own game.

It's rare for former reality TV star Trump to see himself upstaged, but 34-year-old Mamdani managed it at his victory rally on Tuesday night.

"Donald Trump, since I know you're watching, I have four words for you -- turn the volume up!" he said to huge cheers.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt confirmed to reporters traveling with Trump on Air Force One the next day that the president had indeed watched Mamdani speak. 'Go through all of us' Trump and Mamdani are, at least partly, enemies with benefits.



Leftist Mamdani used Trump as a bogeyman throughout his mayoral campaign, accusing him of "fascism" and comparing the billionaire property developer to the landlords he says are ripping off New Yorkers.

He has also cannily positioned himself as part of the resistance to a president who has pushed his power to its limits and sent the National Guard into Democrat-run cities.

"To get to any of us, you will have to go through all of us," Mamdani said at the victory rally.

For hapless Democrats who have struggled to find a winning message as Trump has savaged them in recent months, Mamdani represents a long awaited chance to fight back.

But for many on the right, Trump now has the ideal opponent to bash.

As Republicans nursed their wounds from defeats in New York, Virginia and New Jersey, Trump said in a speech in Miami on Wednesday that Americans now faced a "choice between communism and common sense."

Trump also blew a dog whistle to the hard-right.

"Mamdani, whatever the hell his name is," Trump said in the same speech -- deliberately mispronouncing Ugandan-born Mamdani's surname in the same way he did with his 2024 election rival Kamala Harris.

Flashing red lights'

Yet the stakes are far higher than a war of words.

Trump has repeatedly threatened to put New York -- his beloved home city -- in the federal crosshairs like he has previously with Los Angeles and Chicago.