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Biman short of cash, yet reaches for pricey Airbus

ZYMA ISLAM

Biman is looking at a Tk 4,000 crore cash shortfall since it has agreed in principle to purchase two Airbus planes for Tk 8,000 crore, without a prior monetisation plan, a board meeting of the national flag carrier revealed.

The board in a meeting asked Biman to figure out how to make the new planes profitable, while an MoU between Airbus and Biman is being drafted amid diplomatic pressures.

A Boeing offer has been on the table for months but it is yet to be taken up for evaluation.

Biman board member Rear Admiral (ret'd) Md Khurshed Alam, said, "The Tk 4,000 crore shortfall is only a very initial estimate and this can change depending on how we reevaluate."

State Minister of the Ministry of Civil Aviation Md Mahbub Ali said at the November 15 meeting that Biman agreed to buy Airbus planes in principle to handle a mix of diplomatic relations and Biman's commercial interests.

"The French president had hoped to

sign a memorandum of understanding during his visit to Bangladesh. Similarly, when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visited the European Union, they asked for the process to be expedited. The other EU countries are also interested in seeing this happen. Rushnara Ali [British parliamentarian from Bethnal Green] had also paid a visit," said the minister.

The MoU would be binding and involve a non-refundable \$10 million commitment fee for two planes, according to the Airbus sales proposal seen by The Daily Star.

"We have agreed to buy the planes because no airlines should be dependent on one aircraft manufacturer only. There is a high demand among passengers for the Toronto and Narita flights and we need to expand the fleet for that," he said. "But we are determined to do this right and will take the time to do so."

During French President Emmanuel Macron's September visit to Dhaka, State Minister Mahbub said Bangladesh has committed to buy 10 Airbus planes. On May 5, a joint communique was

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A Palestinian woman laments while holding the body of a baby at Najar hospital in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, yesterday. Since October 7, Israeli forces have killed more than 18,780 people, mostly women and children, in Gaza. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: AFP



Arsonists and saboteurs have no right to do politics

Says PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said yesterday those who resort to arson and destruction have no right to do politics in Bangladesh.

"They are collaborators of the defeated forces of 1971," she said.

The prime minister said this while addressing a discussion at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre (BICC).

The ruling Awami League organised the programme on the occasion of Martyred Intellectuals Day.

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1971 WAR KILLING FIELDS Revered but not preserved

AHMAD ISTIAK

An unceremonious monument covered by bushes on three sides is barely visible from the adjacent road. At first sight during our visit in October, it was difficult to make out that the small structure is in fact the memorial of the notorious Pahartoli killing field.

During the Liberation War, the Pakistan army and their Bihari collaborators killed at least 10,000 people in this killing field on AK Khan Road in Chattogram, according to genocide researcher Prof Chowdhury Shahid Kader who documented this massacre in his book titled Pahartoli Genocide.

One of the biggest mass killings in the entire Chattogram district was committed on November 10, 1971, on this very ground. After the war, 1,100 human skulls were recovered from just one of the pits here. The skulls are

now preserved in a museum in Chattogram cantonment.

The November 10 massacre lasted from 10:00am to 3:00pm

"From courts to various government offices, there is hardly any authorities where we did not go and request them to preserve the Pahartoli Killing Field. But the government failed to resolve the issue even after so many years."

Eminent historian and genocide researcher Prof Muntassir Mamoon

as members of Pakistan army's Pioneer Force and their Bihari collaborators kidnapped men, women and children from

Wireless Colony, Pahartoli Punjabi Line, Bahadur Shah Colony and Firoz Shah Colony and shot or slaughtered them there, according to the 8th volume of Bangladesh Swadhinata Juddho Dalilpatro.

The main campus of the University of Science and Technology, Chittagong (USTC), now stands on the killing field.

"The site where an academic building of the university is being constructed is part of the killing field, where thousands were massacred. The government could have preserved the killing field if it were sincere about it. But the government failed to do so," Gazi Kamal Uddin, whose father and uncle were killed there, told The Daily Star.

Considering its historical significance, the Supreme Court in 2014 ordered the government to acquire the land to build a

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This under construction building, right, on parts of the notorious Pahartoli Killing Field is the main campus of University of Science and Technology, Chattogram. In 2014, the Supreme Court asked the government to acquire the land for building a Liberation War Complex on the site, but the authorities have yet to do so. The photo was taken in October.

PHOTO: AHMAD ISTIAK

THIS IS PART 2 OF A 5-PART SERIES. READ PART 3 ON PAGE 2. PART 4 COMES OUT TOMORROW.

5 crisis-hit Islamic banks warned over account deficit

They risk being barred from all clearing platforms

MD MEHEDI HASAN

The Bangladesh Bank has told five cash-strapped Shariah-based lenders to adjust the deficit in their current account balance by December 26 or else be blocked out of all clearing platforms.

Banks have to maintain a current account with the central bank for different clearing payment systems and they have to maintain a hefty balance in the account.

But the current accounts of Islami Bank, Social Islami Bank, First Security Islami Bank, Union Bank and Global Islami Bank have been in the deficit for the past year, The Daily Star has learnt from officials informed with the proceedings.

Then on November 28, the central bank sent letters to the managing directors of the five banks -- where Chattogram-based conglomerate S Alam Group holds significant stakes -- instructing them to clear the deficit within 20 working days.

"A review of your current account balance shows that it has been in the deficit for a long time and that is not consistent with normal banking activities. Although you have been repeatedly warned about the matter, no significant action has been taken by you until now," read the letter seen by The Daily Star.

The banks will be barred from all or any specific clearing platform in accordance with the agreement with the payment system department of the central bank for failure to adjust the deficit within the stipulated time, it added.

If the central bank bars the lenders from the national clearing system, they will be rendered invalid as they would not be able to

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Home ministry restricts 'anti-polls' political events

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Acting quickly on the Election Commission's directive, the home ministry yesterday asked police and other authorities concerned to take measures so that no political programmes other than electioneering take place from December 18.

The ministry asked recipients of a circular to take steps so that rallies or any other political programme that may obstruct election preparation or and discourage people from casting votes are stopped from December 18 until after the election.

The ministry issued the circular at the instruction of the EC which sent a letter to the government on Tuesday.

The move sparked criticism with many saying that the instruction virtually puts a restriction on all kinds of political activities of the opposition parties. They also said the move will curtail the democratic rights of citizens.

A day after the EC sent the letter, Election Commissioner Md Alamgir said the political parties can organise peaceful programmes with the authorities' permission and that the parties' rights have not been curtailed.

However, phrases like "discourage people from casting votes" in the circular

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SEAT SHARING

AL, JP meet to thrash it out today

RASHIDUL HASAN

The decision on the much talked about seat-sharing between the ruling Awami League and the main opposition Jatiya Party is likely to be finalised in a meeting of the top leaders from the two parties today, JP insiders said.

Meanwhile, a JP delegation, led by its Chairman GM Quader, yesterday held a meeting with an AL team and a government agency over sharing seats. The meeting discussed the strengths and weaknesses of JP candidates, meeting sources told The Daily Star.

JP Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnun and Senior Co-chairman Anisul Islam Mahmud were also present.

"We are hoping that the seat-sharing issue will be settled by tomorrow [today] as top Jatiya Party leaders, including GM

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14-PARTY ALLIANCE

AL to share 7 seats with 3 partners

Amu tells Star; Inu demands that AL reconsider

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League will share seven seats with three of its partners in the 14-party alliance.

Veteran AL leader Amir Hossain Amu told this to The Daily Star last night.

"I contacted the leaders of the three parties and conveyed the Awami League's decision to them. We will decide about sharing seats with the other alliance partners and inform them soon," said Amu, also the coordinator of the alliance.

Of the seven seats, Bangladesh Workers Party will have three -- Barishal-3 for party President Rashed Khan Menon, Rajshahi-2 for its General Secretary Fazle Hossain Badsha, and Satkhira-1 for Mostafa Lutfullah MP.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President Hasanul Haq Inu will vie for Kushtia-2. The AL did not field any candidate for this seat.

The AL will leave Bogura-4 for JSD's Rezaul Karim Tansen, the incumbent MP from this constituency. The ruling party had nominated Md Helal Uddin Kabiraj for the seat.

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