

GREEN POWER Twice as expensive here than in India, Pakistan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's average tariff on renewable energy is \$0.155 per kilowatt-hour – more than double compared to India and Pakistan, according to a new study published yesterday by Change Initiative, a non-government organisation.

In Pakistan, the average tariff is \$0.32, while India's is \$0.58, the study shows.

M Zakir Hossain Khan, chief executive of Change Initiative, unveiled the study at a press conference held in the organisation's office.

The study, titled "Follow the Renewable Energy Finance", said the privately-owned RE based power plants are charging more than the government owned ones.

"The private RE projects are charging \$0.13 per KWh while the tariff rate of public plants is \$0.10 per KWh on average," it mentioned.

Unsolicited power plants are raising the tariff, it said, adding that majority of the projects are being awarded in an unwelcome way, which is initiated by developers without a competitive bidding process under the Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provisions) Act, 2010.

"In both the unsolicited and large projects, the tariff is higher," said Zakir, adding that in neighbouring countries, regulatory authorities have predetermined tariff rates based on size and publicly disclosed comprehensive detailed cost estimation and tariff rates on various projects.

"This level of transparency is lacking in Bangladesh, where regulatory bodies don't provide such information."

He said that under no circumstances should the potential of renewable energy be nipped in the bud by undermining the jurisdiction of the Energy Regulatory Commission and looting immoral benefits through unreasonable tariffs.

According to the study, of the 52 large scale renewable energy projects under construction, only 16.48 percent were solicited while 83.17 percent were not.

It mentioned, "The solicited plants have a rate of \$0.106 per KWh on average, while that of the unsolicited ones is \$0.114 per KWh."

Bangladesh ranks 111 out of 190 countries in renewable energy usage – only 4.73 percent share of RE with a capacity of 1,194 MW out of total 25,211MW.



The Martyred Intellectuals Memorial in Dhaka's Rayerbazar is covered with wreaths, placed by different political parties, social and cultural organisations, and ordinary citizens on the occasion of the Martyred Intellectuals Day yesterday. The nation paid respect to the brightest minds, who were killed by the Pakistan Army towards the end of the Liberation War.

PHOTO: STAR

Slow pace, irregularities mark monument construction

AHMAD ISTIAK

Since its inception in 2001, the Liberation War affairs ministry has taken up two projects to identify and preserve killing fields in different parts of Bangladesh, but both initiatives have been marred by irregularities and slow pace.

The first such scheme was taken up in 2004. In the next four years until 2008, the ministry identified 193 killing fields, but was able to build monuments on only 35 of them, at a cost of Tk 60 crore.

In addition to the slow pace, the project saw irregularities in the construction work.

In 2016, officials from the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the planning ministry visited 12 of these monuments to check their current state.

The team found 11 of them in dilapidated condition. Each of the 11 was constructed using very poor-quality materials. The structural strength of the monuments was also found very weak. Heaps of garbage were found in and around them all, according to the inspection report seen by The Daily Star.

In the second phase under the current government, the ministry started building 280 monuments in the killing fields in 110 upazilas in 40 districts. The project, which is ongoing, would cost an estimated

Tk 442 crore, much of which will go to acquiring land. Each monument will cost an estimated Tk 80.92 lakh.

Initially, the project duration was set from July 2018 to June 2021, which was extended twice, first up to 2023 and then up to June 2025. The project saw about 19 percent progress as of December this year, a highly project source told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We have completed work in 35 killing fields till June this year. We hope to complete work in nine more killing fields this year," said Md Jahangir Alam, project director and deputy secretary of the Liberation War affairs ministry.

But allegations of irregularities have surfaced again.

In June this year, an IMED team inspected three killing fields where work has been completed in the second phase, and identified irregularities in two of those.

The team found that adulterated and low-grade sand was used in the construction work. At the killing field in Sylhet Cadet College, the contractors did not install any drainage system. As a result, rainwater was seen clogged during the visit, which was rainy season. The plaster of the columns of the monuments were also done very poorly, according to the inspection report obtained by The

Daily Star.

"I don't know about the first phase. Regarding the second phase, when the inspection team from IMED visited the monuments, they were still under construction. I don't know how they could submit a report after visiting some under-construction monuments," said Project Director Jahangir Alam.

Julhas Ali Sarker, assistant director of IMED who led the inspection team, said, "The materials used to build the monuments were of extremely poor quality. We found that adulterated sand was used in those monuments. I have presented my findings clearly in the report. How they will deal with these is absolutely an internal matter of the relevant ministries."

Corruption in constructing monuments for war martyrs is not just a heinous crime, it is also an insult to their memories, said Shahriar Kabir, chairman of Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee.

INTERESTED IN LARGE PROJECTS

Researchers say the government should go for installing small memorial plaques in the killing fields instead of building large monuments. This way, the government will be able to preserve all the killing fields at a much lower cost.

"In 1996, we submitted a design for

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Missing madrasa boy found dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police yesterday recovered the body of a 13-year-old boy from Chattogram's Bandartila area after he was kidnapped on Wednesday.

The body was found in a sack with his hands and feet tied at the Hamid Ali Road area of Bandartila around 11:30am.

Md Abdullah, 13, son of Mahmud Talukdar, a sixth-grader at Alia Madrasa in Mathbaria, Pirojpur, used to stay with his maternal grandmother there as his parents worked in Chattogram.

His family claimed Abdullah was killed after they failed to pay the ransom of Tk 10 lakh to the kidnappers.

Abdul Khaleque, a relative of the deceased, said Abdullah had been missing since Wednesday morning, reports UNB.

"Police launched a raid to find Abdullah. In the meantime, an unidentified person called at night and demanded a ransom of Tk 10 lakh to return Abdullah. When we gave the number to the police, the police tracked the number throughout the night and conducted raids based on CCTV footage. But they could not find Abdullah," he said.

Yesterday morning, the locals found Abdullah's body. EPZ Police Station officer-in-charge (investigation) Jamal Uddin said, "The body was sent to Chittagong Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy. Our investigation is ongoing."

2 die after being run over by trains

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Two people were killed after they were run over by trains at two separate places on the Joydebpur-Bangabandhu Bridge rail route in Kalihati upazila of Tangail yesterday.

The deceased are Delwar Hossain, 56, a rickshaw van driver from Deopur village, and Md Samsul, 58, a rickshaw puller from Salla village.

Railway police and locals said that Shamsul was run when he was crossing the rail track at Salla area at around 9:00am, while, Delwar was run over as he was crossing the rail track at Hatia area at around 10:00am.

Sub-Inspector Ali Akbar, in charge of Gharinda Railway Police Outpost, said the bodies were recovered and later handed over to their relatives after completion of necessary legal procedures.

Baby born in ambulance carrying father's body

UNB, Satkhira

A woman gave birth to a baby girl inside an ambulance on the way to her home in Satkhira's Ashashuni upazila with the body of her husband, who died at a hospital in town.

Altaf Hossain, 34, a brick kiln worker from the upazila's Pratapnagar, died of cancer on Tuesday at Satkhira Medical College Hospital.

On Wednesday morning, when his pregnant wife, Rahima Khatun was returning to Pratapnagar in an ambulance with her husband's body, her water broke and she started having contractions.

She later gave birth to a baby girl, confirmed Abu Dawud Dhali, chairman of the Pratapnagar Union Parishad.

The union parishad assured them of all necessary support, he added.

Biman short of cash, yet reaches for pricey Airbus

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signed by United Kingdom's Minister of State in the Department for Business and Trade Lord Dominic Johnson and Private Industry and Investment Adviser to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Salman F Rahman in London regarding the purchase of eight Airbus A350s and two freighters.

But all of this happened even before Biman carried out a viability study on such a purchase – the techno-financial team was formed after the decision to buy Airbus planes was made.

Biman board on May 3, decided that the purchase of planes could only happen after a technical and financial evaluation. The board did not insist on a particular airframe maker, saying, "Up to eight Rolls-Royce powered A350-900/1000 aircraft (the "A350 Pax Aircraft") or any other suitable aircraft (wider or narrow) as per Biman's requirement".

The joint communicate was signed two days later.

The proposed first purchase will consist of two A350-900s, to be delivered in 2026 and 2027. Biman must make \$100 million in pre-delivery payments for the two planes. At least \$30 million of it must be handed over during deal signing and the rest over the following 30 months, according to the Airbus proposal.

If Biman buys these planes, and commits to buying eight more, they will get up to \$434 million in credit for other Airbus products and services, according to the Airbus proposal.

Biman's techno-financial committee is still figuring out how to raise funds to purchase the planes. They would also be planning the routes, and estimating the fuel burn, maintenance costs, revenue earnings, and figuring out whether the revenue would be enough to cover the instalments for the new planes.

The committee is not doing a comparative analysis between Airbus and Boeing's offers.

BIMAN'S OUTSTANDING LOANS

Biman is planning to buy Airbus aircraft when it has not paid off loans

for most of the planes in its fleet.

Of its 21 planes, Biman fully owns four, two short-haul De Havilland Canada Dash 8-400s and two Boeing 737-800s. It is set to pay off the loans for two Boeing 777-300ERs which joined the fleet in 2011.

Biman has so far paid off about half of what it owes to aircraft manufacturers for purchases between 2011 and 2021.

The carrier has about Tk 8,534 crore in outstanding loans according to data obtained from Biman. For most of its planes, over 60 percent of the loans are yet to be paid off, according to documents.

Biman would be paying Tk 8,401 for the two A350-900s alone. It will need to spend more on setting up a wholly separate management system for the A350s, including hangars, sets of pilots, cabin crew, maintenance engineers, and ground service providers.

Biman is yet to calculate how much it would cost to set up this new system but Airbus's rival Boeing in October claimed that the costs of transition would exceed \$146 million.

This cost of transition into a mixed fleet involves purchases of equipment, spares, and training. Sources said Biman would need to spend an additional \$61.77 million just on spare engines, parts, and equipment.

According to the Airbus proposal, 80 percent of the financing will be arranged by the export credit agencies concerned of Airbus. Biman will have to borrow the other 20 percent from banks.

The \$550 million with which Biman bought the five planes between 2019 and 2021 came from the country's reserves. Biman is yet to return that money. Three Dash-8s and two Boeing 787-9s were bought.

Biman is eyeing new planes when the ones already in its fleet are underutilised.

To make the carrier's long-haul planes – the Boeing 777s and 787s – economically viable, they should be in the air for at least 15 hours a day, highly-placed Biman sources said.

Biman's aircraft utilisation data from June to October this year obtained by The Daily Star shows that the highest per day use was achieved with two Boeing 787-9s – 12.43 hours.

The two Boeing 737-800s flew less than 10 hours a day, while the Boeing 777s and 787-8s flew a little over 11 hours a day.

The five short-haul Dash-8s flew the least, only 6.27 hours a day.

McKinsey & Company, one of the leading management consultation agencies in the world, which has provided business strategies to over 21 global aerospace companies, wrote in a 2022 article, "Regardless of aircraft type, airlines that buy newer, more expensive aircraft will



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Biman board member Rear Admiral (ret'd) Md Khurshed Alam

have to manage the large weight on their balance sheets by maximizing utilisation. Ideally, new planes should be in the air for 10 to 12 hours a day for narrow bodies and 14 to 15 hours a day for wide bodies."

The Boeing 777s and 787s are wide-body planes while the Boeing 737s are considered narrow-body.

Biman officials, choosing to be anonymous, said the fleet was being underutilised because there is an acute shortage of cockpit crew.

If Biman had a mixed fleet, the cockpit crew crisis would have worsened, said Biman insiders with knowledge of crew planning.

If Biman sets aside two pilots for the A350s, they would be ready to fly by the end of 2027. But the first Airbus will be delivered in 2026.

Airbus in its sales proposal said it would train six sets of cockpit and six sets of cabin crew members for each aircraft and that the training would start a year before delivery and end a year after.

Antonio da Costa, vice president of marketing for Airbus, told The Daily Star that this [buying Airbus planes] would be an investment in the long run. "When Bangladesh buys A350s, pilots will be trained to operate those. Later, if the country buys A320s or any other aircraft of Airbus, the same pilots would be able to fly those



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Biman board member Rear Admiral (ret'd) Md Khurshed Alam

aircraft with a 10-day training," he said.

All Airbus aircraft cockpits have the same interface, he said.

"Training a pilot to fly B787s [Boeing 787s] and then again to fly B777s [Boeing 777s] comes with a significant cost penalty."

In September, The Daily Star reported that only four out of Biman's engineering staff of 60 had partial training to work on A350s.

If Biman chooses to train the existing force, it would need about five years to complete the training, said engineers of Biman. Airbus offered two years of maintenance

training in its sales proposal.

Airbus's sales proposal also mandates that the planes will be powered by Rolls Royce engines.

Biman does not use Rolls Royce engines in its planes. All its Boeings are powered by GE (General Electric) and CFM International engines, while the Dash 8s are powered by Pratt & Whitney engines.

Airbus's proposal is being evaluated on the basis that Dhaka-New York flights will resume in future.

Biman had operated flights to New York between 1993 and 2006. The US Federal Aviation Authority downgraded Civil Aviation Authority Bangladesh after finding irregularities in its operational activities in an investigation in 2006. It said CAAB did not adhere to International Civil Aviation Organisation standards.

MA Momen, the former managing director of Biman, who first introduced Boeing aircraft during the last caretaker government, describes how Bangladesh became Boeing-dependent. "When I joined in 2006, I was to somehow make Biman survive with its huge debt. We had four fuel guzzling DC10s, which were often grounded, three Airbus 310-300s of which two were on dry lease and one functional F28. The fleet was more a liability than an asset.

"Both Boeing and Airbus came forward with their product plans. After several presentations and discussions, the board gave a nod to Boeing. But before finalising the deal, the commercial aspects were thoroughly examined by KPMG and IBA of Dhaka University," he said.

He said Biman chose Boeing notwithstanding the fact that the cockpit crew would need to be retrained.

Biman is now a profit-making carrier, having cleared a profit of Tk 439 crores in the last fiscal year, up from Tk 158 crore the year before.

"All these started happening 18 years ago. But the very basic business rule remains the same. A mixed fleet is generally recommended when the airline is really big. Otherwise,

it is not cost-effective. Treat Biman as a commercial organisation, not a charitable one and go for an appropriate cost-benefit analysis. If the result is positive in the short and long run, there is no harm in going with a mixed fleet. If it is not, please do not harm the airline," he said.

AL, JP meet

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Quader, are expected to hold a meeting with Awami League leaders at 4:00pm," a JP leader said wishing anonymity.

"After finalising the decision, we will have to complete the other necessary works, including handing over the letters on the allocation of the party's electoral symbol to the party's nominees. The letters have to be sent to the Election Commission within December 17, the last date for withdrawal of candidature," he added.

Asked about yesterday's meeting with a government agency, another JP leader said they have demanded that the AL does not field any candidate in at least 60 constituencies.

"We have also demanded that 'Awami League independents' do not run in those 60 constituencies."

The meeting discussed the JP nominees' position in their respective constituencies, he told The Daily Star.

A JP leader close to a participant of the meeting said the seat-sharing issue was expected to be placed before AL President Sheikh Hasina yesterday.

The decision on sharing seats will be finalised as per Hasina's directive, he added.

Meanwhile, JP Secretary General Chunnun yesterday admitted that they had meetings with the AL over seat-sharing.

"We will be able to give you [journalists] more information on sharing seats tomorrow [today]," he told reporters at the JP chairman's office in Banani.