

Star

BUSINESS



Nobody wants to be a project director now

Wahiduddin Mahmud says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Planning Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud yesterday said officials are getting increasingly reluctant to take up the role of project director and contractors are showing diminished interest in working in development schemes.

This is due to reforms in public procurement rules, he said after the meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council at the ministry in Dhaka.

He said the interim government's reforms have made procurement more transparent, ending monopolies and requiring contractors to disclose their full business and tax information.

"We could not speed up project implementation as nobody wants to become a project director now, and contractors are also less enthusiastic," he said.

He said that a few big companies had controlled contracts of major projects for years, including highways and railways, manipulating evaluations so only previous contractors benefited.

"Now, no one can monopolise the process, and false or proxy participation is not allowed," he said.

"Naturally, this makes some hesitant to come forward."

He also mentioned administrative hurdles, including shortages of project directors and temporary appointments in many ministries, which have slowed Annual Development Programme (ADP) implementation.

From July to October this fiscal year, only 8.33 percent of ADP allocations were spent, according to Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division data.

Mahmud, an eminent economist, said: "Though I'm not fully certain, corruption, extortion, and similar practices still exist in some form."

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NBFI liquidation sparks tension in stock market

The sector plunges 87%; DSEX falls below 5,000 points again

FINANCIAL CONDITION

The troubled NBFIs accounted for 52% of the sector's Tk 25,089cr in default loans

Combined paid-up capital of the 8 listed NBFIs stands at about Tk 1,450cr

Stock investors hold around two-thirds of this capital, with face value of Tk 947cr

Net asset value per share was Tk 95 negative for all but one NBFI

DROP IN SHARE PRICES YESTERDAY

Name of NBFIs	Fall
International Leasing	10%
Fareast Finance	10%
GSP Finance	9.5%
BIFC	8%
FAS Finance	7.7%
People's Leasing	7.4%
Prime Finance	5%
Premier Leasing	3%

SOURCE: DSE



STAR BUSINESS REPORT

It is a hard time to be a stock investor, especially if your money is tied up in banks and non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs).

Sentiment had already been fragile after the merger of five banks wiped out an estimated Tk 4,500 crore in shareholder value, leaving many retail investors increasingly cautious. Now, with the regulator clearing the way for liquidating nine NBFIs, including eight listed ones, ordinary shareholders face potential losses of Tk 1,450 crore.

The combined impact sent alarm bells ringing across the capital market yesterday, with 83 percent of stocks on the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) falling. NBFI shares saw a steeper drop, sliding 87 percent as panicked investors rushed to dump their holdings.

Bangladesh Bank named FAS Finance, Bangladesh Industrial Finance Company (BIFC), Premier Leasing, Fareast Finance, GSP Finance, Prime Finance, People's Leasing, and International Leasing among the institutions selected for liquidation.

Following the announcement, shares of International Leasing, Fareast Finance, GSP Finance, BIFC, FAS Finance and People's Leasing fell by at least 8 percent, while Prime Finance dropped 5 percent and Premier Leasing 3 percent.

RUSHED SHARE DUMPING
Rashed Ahmed, a retail investor, ordered his broker yesterday to sell shares of a relatively well-performing NBFI despite its history of steady dividends.

"With eight listed NBFIs set to be liquidated, the negative impact

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Remittance jumps 31% in November

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

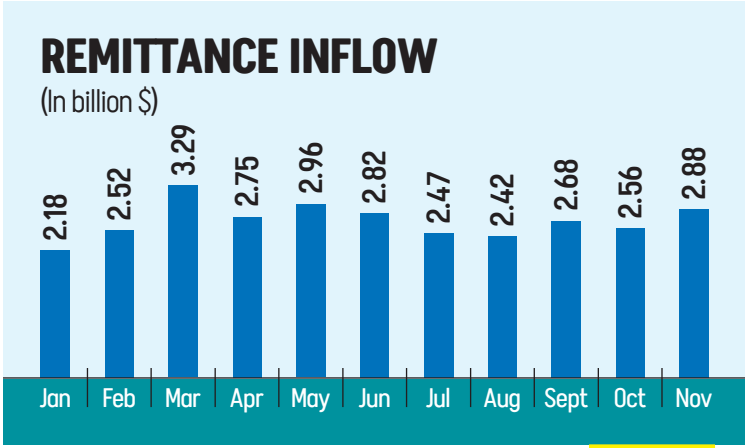
Remittance inflows to Bangladesh rose by 31.34 percent year-on-year to \$2.88 billion in November, marking the highest in the last six months.

Expatriates had sent \$2.19 billion home in the same month last year, according to the latest data from the Bangladesh Bank.

November's figure is also 13 percent higher than October's inflow of \$2.56 billion.

Bangladesh has seen a growing trend in remittance inflows since December last year, driven by multiple factors, including a narrowing gap between official and informal exchange rates, industry insiders said.

During July to November of this fiscal year, remittance inflow reached \$13.03 billion, up from \$11.13 billion in the same period last fiscal year, the data showed.



The recent growth in manpower exports has also boosted remittance earnings. Over 40 lakh people left the country for jobs abroad in the four years ending in fiscal year 2024-25, according to the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET). Industry insiders said this migration will further increase remittance earnings in the coming days.

Bankers noted that as irregular or alternative payment methods are now under control, demand for US dollars has declined, reducing foreign currency transactions through hundi or informal channels. As a result, remittance inflows through banking channels are rising.

A senior central bank official said the regulator had warned commercial banks that it would no longer provide US dollar support, requiring banks to manage their own dollars for import payments.

This has encouraged lenders to make greater efforts to collect more remittances since the beginning of this year, he added.

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Reserves, remittance lift external sector outlook

GED report says

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's external sector improved last year as reserves and remittances grew, though trade remained unstable.

Exports dipped in April and June before recovering, while garment shipments and imports showed mid-year declines followed by modest rebounds later in 2025, according to a government report.

Gross reserves climbed from \$24.35 billion in November 2024 to \$32.34 billion in October 2025, while BPM6 reserves rose from \$18.61 billion to \$27.58 billion.

According to the Economic Update & Outlook November 2025 report by the General Economics Division and the Bangladesh Planning Commission, stronger inflows and prudent management drove the steady rise.

Remittances also provided resilience, consistently surpassing the previous year's levels.

Inflows peaked in March, September, and December 2024, and again in May and October 2025.

The October inflow stood at \$2.56 billion, remaining higher than last year's \$2.40 billion.

Trade indicators were more volatile. Export earnings fluctuated, dipping sharply in April and June 2025 before recovering moderately.

Export earnings were \$3.80 billion in September 2024, hitting a peak of \$4.77 billion in July 2025, then declining to \$3.82 billion in October.

Readymade garments (RMG) continued to dominate exports, mirroring overall trade trends.

In October, RMG exports stood at \$3.02 billion, though still below the mid-year peak. Non-RMG exports

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Renewable energy reforms cut tariffs, but transparency lags: CPD study

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh's shift to competitive bidding for renewable energy projects has led to lower tariffs, but key challenges remain in transparency, accountability, and efficiency, according to a new study by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

Unveiled yesterday at a national dialogue in Dhaka supported by the Australian High Commission, the study analysed 55 solar project tenders floated between December 2024 and March 2025 under the reinstated Public Procurement Act 2006 and the Public Procurement Rules.

The reinstated laws replaced the Quick Enhancement of Electricity and Energy Supply (Special Provision) Act 2010, which allowed unsolicited contracts.

The study found that 41 percent of bidders reported leaks of sensitive data such as bid prices, while only 30 percent believed the evaluation process was largely transparent

"Transparency has improved, but not enough," Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at CPD, said at the event. "Barriers for local firms, poor access to information, and low trust continue to hamper fair competition."

The study found that 41 percent of bidders reported leaks of sensitive data such as bid prices, while only 30 percent believed the evaluation process was largely transparent.

Of 105 firms that purchased tender documents, only 44 submitted bids, and many large-scale projects above 100 MW received no bids due to strict financial requirements.

The average number of bids per package was just 1.4, raising questions about the effectiveness of competition.

On the positive side, the shift to open bidding resulted in a 24.6 percent drop in average tariffs, from \$0.10 per unit to \$0.08 per unit, highlighting the benefits of competitive procurement.

However, firms cited barriers such as unrealistic conditions, slow approval processes, complex land issues, and the absence of digital tendering.

IPDC ডিপোজিট | ১৬৫১৯

Moazzem noted that while the Quick Enhancement Act initially addressed acute power shortages during the previous regime, it was eventually exploited by local and international interest groups.

He said the reintroduction of the Public Procurement Act and rules marks a positive shift but stressed persistent issues regarding efficiency, transparency, and private sector participation.

M Rezwan Khan, chairman of Power Grid Company Bangladesh PLC (PGCB), warned of systemic inefficiencies, noting, "We have nearly 28,000 MW of generation capacity, but demand is far lower. We're paying costly capacity charges due to uncoordinated expansion."

He also criticised the slow approval process – projects currently require up to 29 permissions – and flagged tariff losses due to delayed adjustments.

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DHAKA BANK REAFFIRMS ITS Excellence

DHAKA BANK WINS TWO PRESTIGIOUS MASTERCARD EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2024-25

These distinguished recognitions celebrate Dhaka Bank's relentless pursuit of innovation, sustainable growth, and significant financial inclusion that touched significant numbers of lives across Bangladesh. Dhaka Bank continues to set new benchmarks in responsible and inclusive banking.

This dual triumph is a reflection of the trust our customers place in us and the dedication of every member of the Dhaka Bank family.

Excellence in Mastercard Business (Co-Brands)

Excellence in Mastercard Financial Inclusion

DHAKABANK PLC. EXCELLENCE IN BANKING

Accelerate export diversification ahead of LDC graduation

Commerce adviser also stresses adopting forward-looking trade policies

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh must accelerate export diversification, enhance competitiveness, and adopt forward-looking trade policies to address challenges following its upcoming graduation from the group of least developed countries (LDCs) to a developing nation, Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin said yesterday.

“To navigate this transition successfully, we must hasten diversification, improve competitiveness, and adopt forward-looking trade policies,” Bashir Uddin said while inaugurating the three-day Global Sourcing Expo 2025 Dhaka at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Center in Purbachal, Dhaka.

The adviser emphasised that Bangladesh needs to diversify its export basket, strengthen supply-side capacity, and forge new partnerships with international buyers to remain competitive in a challenging global market.

He noted that while LDC graduation is a major milestone, it will gradually reduce



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Commerce Adviser Sk Bashir Uddin inaugurates the “Global Sourcing Expo 2025 Dhaka” at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Center in Purbachal yesterday.

the preferential market access and duty benefits the country currently enjoys.

Policymakers and industry leaders also stressed the urgency of export diversification and deeper engagement with global buyers to sustain trade growth amid shifting global dynamics.

At a seminar on the sidelines of the expo, Mohammad Hatem, president of the

Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said improved port operations by foreign companies could enhance efficiency in port management.

He also urged the suspension of the amended labour law until a newly elected government takes office, citing that the current amendment is neither industry-friendly nor worker-friendly.

In another seminar, Inamul Haq Khan, senior vice-president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, highlighted the need for easier access to green financing, brand support through knowledge sharing and technology transfer, targeted interventions from development partners for SMEs, and greater regional inclusion so that areas like North Bengal, Sylhet, and Chattogram can benefit alongside Dhaka-centric clusters.

Khan also called on the government to amplify the industry's success stories through Bangladesh's embassies and high commissions abroad, highlighting the country's achievements on the global stage.

Organised for the first time by the government, the expo aims to highlight Bangladesh's expanding export capabilities and attract new global buyers. Jointly arranged by the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) and the Ministry of Commerce, the exhibition will continue until December 3.

bKash helps open 50 lakh DPS accounts in banks, FIs

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Customers have opened more than 50 lakh deposit pension scheme (DPS) accounts through the bKash app across four commercial banks and one financial institution (FI) in just four years since the service was launched.

Through the app, customers can start saving with as little as Tk 250 at any time and from anywhere, choosing weekly or monthly DPS schemes of various tenures offered by multiple institutions on a single platform, according to a press release.

The milestone reflects how collaboration among financial service providers can help expand customer reach and promote sustainable financial inclusion. With this goal in mind, bKash introduced DPS services of different banks and financial institutions on its platform, creating a bridge between formal banking channels and marginal customers.

Beginning in 2021 with IDLC Finance's monthly DPS product, bKash gradually added similar services from Dhaka Bank, Mutual Trust Bank, City Bank, and BRAC Bank.

Weekly DPS products were introduced in early 2024, giving further momentum to the service. Customers seeking shariah-compliant options can also open Islamic DPS accounts offered by two partner banks. Around 30 percent of all DPS accounts opened via the bKash app belong to women, while 80 percent of the customers live outside major cities such as Dhaka and Chattogram.

Gold climbs to six-week high

REUTERS

Gold prices steadied after hitting a six-week high on Monday as risk-off sentiment set the tone, with investors focused on a potential US rate cut later this month, while silver scaled a record high.

Spot gold was up 0.1 percent at \$4,235.59 per ounce as of 0645 GMT after touching its highest since October 21.

US gold futures for December delivery gained 0.3 percent to \$4,269.40.

Silver rose 1.1 percent to \$56.99 per ounce after hitting an all-time high of \$57.86 earlier.

The US dollar fell to a two-week low, making greenback-priced bullion cheaper for holders of other currencies.

“There's a risk-off session in S&P futures, which are down 0.8 percent in line with a sell off in major cryptocurrencies.

Nobody wants

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“But the scope for corruption through contracting has likely shrunk, creating hesitation among those who were previously accustomed to exploiting the system. [Contractors] are unsure whether the usual opportunities still exist.”

The adviser also suggested caution when taking foreign-funded projects, particularly due to higher spending on unnecessary components, including foreign consultants.

“We must stop approving projects simply because development partners offer them. Many technical assistance projects have been ineffective – foreign consultants stay in our offices, collect allowances, write reports, and do little meaningful work before leaving,” he said.

“I have seen this repeatedly throughout my career. We want to break free from this reliance on foreign consultant-driven projects,” he added. However, he acknowledged that in some areas, Bangladesh genuinely needs foreign expertise – for example, in upgrading technology in the garments sector, improving export diversification, microchip manufacturing, and large-scale assembly.

“We can learn these skills. We already assemble mobile phones and motorcycles, but we need to move to higher value addition. In these areas, foreign experts are necessary,” he said.

NBFI liquidation sparks

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could spread across the stock market, especially in the NBFI sector,” he told The Daily Star. “I need to safeguard my investment from further erosion.”

Many others took similar action, creating a selling spree across brokerage houses in Motijheel.

A stockbroker, speaking on condition of anonymity, said investors were selling “out of fear that NBFI liquidations could trigger another wave of panic, similar to the turmoil caused by the five bank mergers earlier.”

“Whenever the market starts to recover, fresh negative news pulls it back into the red,” he added.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the DSE, fell roughly 400 points in the two weeks leading up to mid-November, dropping below 5,000 points for the first time in months, after regulatory announcements that shareholders of the merged banks were unlikely to get anything from their stake.

Though the index briefly rebounded past 5,000 points last week, it tumbled again after the NBFI liquidation news, closing at 4,914 points yesterday.

NO RECOVERY FOR SHAREHOLDERS

Shareholders of the selected NBFIs are also unlikely to recover any value from their shares.

The underlying concern is the net asset value (NAV) of the affected NBFIs – the difference between a company's assets and liabilities. Most of the eight listed firms have deeply negative NAVs, meaning their debts far exceed their assets.

As per the existing laws and rules, when assets are sold to repay creditors, ordinary shareholders are likely to get little or nothing, as they sit at the bottom of the payout hierarchy.

Financial reports show seven of the eight listed NBFIs have an average NAV of negative Tk 95 per share. Only Prime Finance had a marginally positive NAV of Tk 5.31 per share in 2023.

For small investors, it is another chapter in a difficult period. Although Bangladesh Bank has already taken a decision to wind up the listed firms, trading of these stocks remains operational at the stock exchanges.

Shahjahan Mia, an investor, said, “I still don't know if shareholders of the NBFIs will get anything back with the liquidation or not.”

“It is unfair to punish general shareholders for the wrongdoings of sponsors of the companies,” he added.

He called for taking strict action against sponsors of the NBFIs who

were involved in fund embezzlement. For the benefit of stock investors, he urged the government to give some support.

LOST CAUSES

According to BB data, the eight NBFIs accounted for 52 percent of the sector's Tk 25,089 crore in defaulted loans at the end of last year. Twelve institutions alone carried 73.5 percent of all bad loans in the sector.

“This situation had been building for years,” Saiful Islam, president of the DSE Brokers Association of Bangladesh, told The Daily Star recently.

“We warned that a financial crisis was brewing because banks and NBFIs were being drained. Their toxic loans grew so large that they had nothing left to rebuild with. Now, with liquidation coming, small investors are being hit hardest,” he added.

Islam said many investors were misled because financial statements did not reflect the true extent of the problems.

“Auditors and credit rating agencies must be held accountable. Regulators, too, cannot avoid responsibility,” he added.

In January, the central bank classified 20 NBFIs as financially “red category” – meaning they had dangerously high defaulted loans and weak capital positions – and asked them to justify why their licences should not be cancelled.

Nine failed to provide satisfactory answers and have been put on the initial liquidation list.

Remittance

FROM PAGE B1

In fiscal year 2024-25, remittance inflows crossed \$30 billion for the first time, rising by a record \$6.4 billion. Previously, the highest remittance received by Bangladesh was \$24.8 billion in fiscal year 2020-21.

The country's foreign exchange reserves are now stable, supported by factors including high remittance inflows. As of November 27, forex reserves stood at \$26.40 billion, up from \$18.73 billion in the same period last year, according to Bangladesh Bank data.

Bankers said the growing remittance trend has helped boost forex reserves.

In November, Islami Bank Bangladesh received the highest remittance at \$606 million, followed by Agrani Bank with \$241 million, Janata Bank with \$228 million, and Trust Bank with \$147 million, the data showed.

Reserves, remittance

FROM PAGE B1

followed a similar mid-year slowdown before improving later.

Import payments remained unstable, marked by a sharp contraction in June 2025 – the lowest in the series – followed by a rebound in July and renewed fluctuations through September.

These shifts reflected global demand changes, domestic import rules, and commodity price movements.

Despite trade volatility, the report said rising reserves and strong remittances contributed to an improving external position as Bangladesh entered late 2025.

The report noted that the economic outlook is cautiously optimistic as the country approaches its February 2026 general election, with the Asian Development Bank forecasting GDP growth of around 5 percent in FY26, supported by remittances and exports.

However, risks including persistent inflation, weak business confidence, and a fragile banking sector could weigh on demand and investment.

Election-related spending and potential disruptions may also pressure inflation and the foreign exchange market.

Renewable energy reforms

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“The current tariff is based on a dollar rate of Tk 85, while the actual rate is Tk 122.”

Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan, adviser to the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, joined virtually and explained that the absence of implementation agreements in new tenders reflects a conscious shift towards direct procurement.

“This is not project finance; it's service procurement,” he said, adding that reliance on competitive tariffs provides a stronger financial safeguard than legacy legal guarantees. “Government liabilities from past IAs reached \$3.2 billion. We're moving away from that.”

He stressed that competitive bidding would ensure affordability. “If tariffs are reasonable, utilities can pay. But no utility can absorb Tk 21 per unit.”

Clinton Pobke, deputy head of mission at the Australian High Commission, praised the repeal of the 2010 Special Act as a vital step.

Noting Australia's ongoing support through think-tank collaboration, policy development with the World Bank and IFC, and private sector engagement, he also said, “Evidence-based policies can lead to higher growth, more jobs, and better environmental outcomes.”

David Hasanat, president of the Bangladesh Independent Power Producers' Association, called for a more realistic, business-friendly procurement approach.

“You can draft perfect policies, but without proper implementation, they'll fail like a banker with no returns,” he said, noting that policy comparisons with countries like Saudi Arabia overlook differences in solar radiation and efficiency.

“Unlike India, where non-farming land acquisition is streamlined, we face legal and bureaucratic delays,” he added.

Han Kun, president of the Chinese Enterprises Association in Bangladesh, stressed the importance of enabling policies, particularly sovereign guarantees, to attract foreign investment.

“In the last 10 years, Chinese investors accounted for 55 percent of 8,000 MW in private power additions. Yet Bangladesh's renewable share remains below 3 percent – far behind Vietnam (6.3 percent) and Cambodia (61 percent),” he said.

Kun warned that without guarantees against currency fluctuations, payment delays, and repatriation risks, investors would remain hesitant. “Government-backed guarantees are crucial to build trust and secure competitive financing in the renewable energy sector,” he added.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Ref No. 45.00.0000.10000922.2025.3375

Date: 01-12-2025

Re-Tender Notice

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenders will be accepted in e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, please register on e-GP System Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>). For more details, please contract support desk contract numbers. e-Tender are invited in e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Dr. Maung Ting Neo, Superintendent, Cox's Bazar 250 Bed District Sadar Hospital, Cox's Bazar for the Procurement of:

Tender Id	Name of goods	Scheduled tender/proposal publication date and time	Tender/proposal last selling date & time	Tender/proposal closing/opening date & time
1180761	Procurement of Medicine (Non-EDCL) FY: 2025-2026 (Group-A)	02-Dec-2025 10:00	30-Dec-2025 11:00	30-Dec-2025 13:00
1180764	Procurement of MSR (Instruments) FY: 2025-2026 (Group-B)	02-Dec-2025 10:00	30-Dec-2025 11:00	30-Dec-2025 13:00
1180765	Procurement of MSR (Chemical Re-agent and X-ray Film) FY: 2025-2026 (Group-C)	02-Dec-2025 10:00	30-Dec-2025 11:00	30-Dec-2025 13:00
1180768	Procurement of MSR (Gauze, Bandage & Cotton) FY: 2025-2026 (Group-D)	02-Dec-2025 10:00	30-Dec-2025 11:00	30-Dec-2025 13:00
1180769	Procurement of MSR (Linen Items) FY: 2025-2026 (Group-E)	02-Dec-2025 10:00	30-Dec-2025 11:00	30-Dec-2025 13:00
1180770	Procurement of MSR (Furniture) FY: 2025-2026 (Group-F)	02-Dec-2025 10:00	30-Dec-2025 11:00	30-Dec-2025 13:00

e-Tender details can be downloaded on e-GP System Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for pursuer. e-Tender will be accepted only as stated in above list; accepted tenders will be opened online immediate as stated in above list.

01.12.25

Dr. Maung Ting Neo
Superintendent
(Deputy Director)
Cox's Bazar 250 Bed District Sadar Hospital

GD-2610

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Local Government Engineering Department
Office of the Upazila Engineer
Upazila: Gowainghat, District: Sylhet
www.lged.gov.bd

Memo No. 46.02.9141.000.14.001.25-628

Date: 30.11.2025

e-Tender Notice

e-GP Tender Notice Number: 02/2025-26

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the Procurement of following works:

Tender ID No.	Description of work	Tender/proposal document selling/downloading date and time	Tender/proposal closing date and time	Method of tender
1187457	e-Tender/PEDP4/SYL/GOA/2025-26/W15A-02204 Construction of Head Teacher Room with attached Toilet of Boleswar Govt Primary School under PEDP-4.	18-Dec-2025 12:00	18-Dec-2025 14:00	OTM

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP Portal have to be deposited through online at any branches of registered bank.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)

The Tender Notice will be available on the website: www.lged.gov.bd

Hasib Ahmed

Upazila Engineer
Gowainghat, Sylhet
E-mail: uc.gowainghat@lged.gov.bd

GD-2609



Wouter van Wersch

Airbus wants Biman to consider aircraft deals on merit, not politics

Says Wouter van Wersch, executive vice president of the plane maker

RASHIDUL HASAN

Airbus, Europe's largest aeronautics and space company, wants Bangladesh to evaluate Biman Bangladesh Airlines' aircraft procurement based on the merits of the offers rather than political considerations, amid reports that Bangladesh has placed an order for 25 Boeing aircraft as part of a trade agreement with the United States aimed at reducing additional tariffs.

"The decision should be based on the offers, not politics. We want Biman to take the decision based on fact, based on commercial, technical and capacity-building value," Wouter van Wersch, executive vice president (International) of Airbus, said in an interview with The Daily Star and two other aviation reporters of Bangladesh during a visit to Dhaka last week.

He was accompanied by Edward Delahaye, vice president and head of customer accounts for India and South Asia. They also met top government and Biman officials during the short trip to pursue Airbus' offer.

Asked whether the EU would put political pressure like Boeing, Wouter said, "There is no political pressure. Airbus is an important European company, and Bangladesh-Europe relations are strong. That is why ambassadors speak up. They support us in many countries, not only Bangladesh."

Their visit came shortly after ambassadors and high commissioners from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the European Union in Dhaka jointly pressed the government to consider Airbus aircraft for Biman at a programme in early November.

Asked whether the EU would put political pressure like Boeing, Wouter said, "There is no political pressure. Airbus is an important European company, and Bangladesh-Europe relations are strong. That is why ambassadors speak up. They support us in many countries, not only Bangladesh."

"They are advocating for a fair, transparent evaluation – the same as we are. The decision must be based on the merits of the offers."

When asked whether the EU is using its export leverage to pressure Bangladesh to buy Airbus and reduce the trade deficit, he said, "Europe wants a level playing field and a factual evaluation. We do not want the aircraft choice to be political. The decision should be based on the offers, not politics."

Biman's fleet is currently dominated by Boeing, with 14 of its 19 aircraft from

TAKEAWAYS FROM INTERVIEW

PROPOSAL

Airbus has submitted a fresh proposal for 14 aircraft, fully aligned with Biman's specifications and deadlines

Airbus claims they offer strong value and profitability potential

FLEET STRATEGY

Introducing Airbus will not be more expensive, even with a mixed fleet

Mixed fleet is manageable – around 80 airlines have transitioned from Boeing to Airbus successfully

LEASING & DELIVERY

If selected, Airbus is ready to help arrange leased aircraft immediately as a bridge until delivery slots open

Lead times are long due to high demand, so they urge Biman to decide early to secure slots

POTENTIAL

Bangladesh aviation has strong growth potential, with rising traffic and new terminal

Biman can handle more than 25 aircraft

A350-900 is the only aircraft capable of Dhaka-LA or NY non-stop, carrying more passengers and cargo efficiently

the US manufacturer. Airbus recently submitted a fresh proposal to sell 14 aircraft to the national carrier.

Earlier in August, Bangladesh agreed to buying Boeing wide-body aircraft as part of a trade agreement with the United States aimed at reducing additional tariffs. According to media reports, citing commerce ministry officials, an order for 25 Boeing aircraft has been placed with the first aircraft expected by 2029.

Meanwhile, several experts have pointed out that when fleet expansion decisions are shaped by diplomacy rather than technical assessment, airlines often face downstream challenges: mismatched aircraft sizes, underutilised wide-bodies, expensive maintenance obligations, and gaps in route planning.

Biman's own experience over the past decade illustrates this. The airline has historically operated a mixed Boeing fleet but struggled with underutilisation of certain wide-body aircraft due to lack of long-haul flights and pilots.

About expert criticism that a mixed fleet of Boeing and Airbus aircraft would burden Biman, Wersch said, "Even if Biman continues with Boeing, they would still need training for new aircraft. We have helped about 80 airlines transition from Boeing to Airbus. Our cockpit commonality – from A321 to A350 – saves significant cost because pilots can fly multiple types."

He added, "If Biman chooses a mixed fleet, we are ready. Many airlines operate mixed fleets, but Airbus offers major efficiency advantages due to cross-type commonality."

The Airbus executive also discussed aircraft availability before delivery. "We always do that with every customer. Our leasing team in Toulouse works closely with all major lessors who operate

Airbus aircraft. We can help build a solution to source capacity before our own delivery slots."

"If Biman selects Airbus, we will push and convince lessors to provide aircraft as a bridge until our deliveries start. We are not a lessor, but we will facilitate availability depending on what lessors have," he added.

Asked how long it will take to secure leased aircraft, Wersch said, "If Biman selects Airbus aircraft, we are ready to work with lessors to secure earlier capacity and bridge the gap until our aircraft arrive."

On the A321neo and A350, he said their success contributes to longer lead times. "That is why we encourage all customers, including Biman, to decide early to secure delivery slots."

About the difference between Airbus' previous and latest proposal, he said, "We cannot go into commercial details. However, the number remains 14. We follow Biman's requirements fully."

He added, "We provide the correct economic and commercial conditions, and we believe our products bring strong value and profitability potential for Biman."

Asked whether the interim government can progress with the Airbus proposal, Wersch said, "We cannot comment on the government. Biman is our customer, and we are counting on them to progress the deal. We have seen the same information in the media about political decisions. What matters to us is that our offers are evaluated on their merits."

On whether Biman needs more aircraft beyond the 25 it intends to buy from Boeing, he said, "Regarding the market's perspective the answer is yes. The market is big enough. Bangladesh has significant traffic.

The presence of Emirates, Qatar,

Kuwait, Saudia, Turkish – all operating large aircraft to Dhaka – shows the market is strong. Biman can take a larger share."

The senior Airbus official added that with the right aircraft and the new Dhaka terminal, "Biman can compete better... there is room for more than 25 aircraft. We believe in the growth potential of Bangladesh aviation. With the new terminal and the right fleet, Biman can grow significantly."

On the A350-900's cost-efficiency, fuel economy, and safety, he said, "Absolutely. It has the lowest seat-mile cost due to advanced aerodynamics, materials and engines. The cabin is award-winning and wider than the 787. Its range is also superior. The A350-1000 is the longest-range aircraft in the world."

"For Dhaka-Los Angeles or Dhaka-New York, the A350-900 is the only aircraft that can do it non-stop," he explained. "The A350-900 can fly the route non-stop with more passengers and more cargo. The 787 cannot do this today without a technical stop. Flying direct saves fuel, time and operational cost."

He also highlighted opportunities beyond commercial aircraft, including Earth observation satellites and potential additional units of the C295 transport aircraft. "Our defense products have been operating in Bangladesh for more than 10 years, and we continue supporting them," Wersch said.

He added that Airbus works with both Army Aviation and the Air Force. "The Army Aviation operates two C295s. Discussions continue, but we cannot disclose defence details. You can say that Airbus is ready to help Army Aviation increase its capabilities. Discussions on Earth observation are ongoing."

Forensic audits for trustworthy governance

MD TOUHIDUL ALAM KHAN

With over three decades in Bangladesh's banking sector, I've witnessed its resilience, potential, and persistent weaknesses. Although long regarded as the backbone of the economy, the sector has seen public trust fade as scandals like loan defaults and money laundering exposed serious flaws.

Restoring faith requires zero tolerance for corruption, with forensic audits to hold wrongdoers accountable and functional audits to strengthen internal operations. But audits alone aren't enough – there must be real consequences for misconduct. Only through firm action and meaningful reform can we rebuild a financial system that is transparent, resilient, and trustworthy.

Having spent much of my career in banking and as a cost and management accountant, I've often seen people use forensic and functional audits interchangeably, unaware of their distinct purposes. Forensic audits are like surgical tools with sharp investigative features. They dig into specific transactions to uncover fraud, embezzlement, or regulatory breaches, answering who did what and how. These audits expose offenders behind major scandals, like the Hallmark loan scam, where tracing illicit fund flows was essential to holding persons accountable.

Functional audits, by contrast, are like diagnostic check-ups. They don't just search for wrongdoers; they assess whether systems work as they should. These audits reveal enablers of misconduct, such as weak internal controls, outdated protocols, or poorly enforced compliance. While forensic audits uncover the damage, functional audits help prevent it. Together, they form a powerful duo – one reveals the rot, the other covers the cracks.

However, uncovering problems means little without action. Investigative reports often lie untouched because institutions lack the will and courage to act. Zero tolerance must be enforced, and audit findings must lead to real accountability. That means identifying individuals instead of broadly blaming "the system." Consequences should include legal action, asset recovery, and blacklisting when necessary.

Zero tolerance also requires transparency; keeping audit results hidden to protect reputations only intensifies public distrust.

To build a sustainable, audit-centric ecosystem, institutional reforms are essential. Auditors must be trained in forensic techniques and equipped with digital tools to match modern financial crimes. Whistle-blowers must be protected, audit independence ensured, and implementation of audit recommendations mandated within strict timelines. Regular functional audits of IT systems, loan approval processes, and compliance mechanisms should be the norm. Automating loan disbursements can reduce fraud risks linked to human discretion.

A transparent and accountable banking sector is not just good policy; it is the foundation of a stable economy. When the system is clean and reliable, foreign investors take notice, borrowing becomes cheaper, and the economy benefits. As a service provider and depositor, I know how important it is to feel that savings are safe and that the system won't collapse under hidden corruption or mismanagement. Building such trust requires strong regulations, consistent oversight, and experienced, principled leadership – people who value institutional integrity. That is how Bangladesh can build a banking culture rooted in accountability and long-term stability.

Bangladesh's banking sector stands at a crossroads. The choice between inaction and meaningful reform is clear. Building an audit-centric culture isn't only about catching offenders; it is about preventing offences before they begin. Bangladesh Bank, the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission, and other regulators have already taken steps to conduct authentic audits without hesitation. Banks must prioritise ethics over short-term gains, and civil society must demand accountability. A balanced combination of rigorous forensic audits, efficient functional audits, and immediate action against misconduct can guide the sector toward integrity. It is now an urgent demand to act for a sustainable banking framework.

The writer is managing director & CEO of NRBC Bank PLC



A scammer dies, but the rot in Bangladesh's banks lives on

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Before 2010, Hall-Mark was a little-known business group. It came into the spotlight over the following two years and ultimately became a household name due to a loan scandal involving more than Tk 3,500 crore.

It was the largest loan scam involving state-run Sonali Bank at the time, which shocked many and sparked a huge public outcry.

One of the masterminds of the scam, carried out using fake documents, was Tanvir Mahmud, then managing director of the Hall-Mark Group.

He had been serving a life sentence in Dhaka Central Jail for his involvement in the scandal. On November 29 this year, he died while undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

He may be gone, but the effects of the loan irregularities still linger. Since then, the country's financial sector has witnessed even larger scams – one after another – creating a ripple effect, deepening the crisis, and ultimately victimising thousands of depositors.

Sonali Bank has still been unable to recover the loan, carrying this burden year after year. The banking sector is now heavily burdened by widespread irregularities.

After Hall-Mark came the BASIC Bank loan scandal, the Janata Bank-AnonTex loan irregularities, the Padma Bank loan anomalies, the PK Halder scam, and the S. Alam loan



Tanvir Mahmud

irregularities, which have reached an entirely different magnitude.

Tk 4,500 crore was swindled during the BASIC Bank scam between 2009 and 2013, while PK Halder and his associates siphoned off Tk 10,000 crore.

The Crescent Group swindled Tk 1,746 crore, while Tk 3,500 crore was involved in the alleged scam by Md Mahabubul Haque Chisty and his associates.

Due to the massive scale of scams and irregularities, defaulted loans have reached a record Tk 6.44 lakh crore – 36 percent of total disbursed loans, data show.

Distressed assets, including rescheduled and written-off loans, stand at Tk 9.5 lakh crore. Not only that, a number of banks are now unable to repay depositors, while at least 16 banks are unable to disburse new loans.

Amid this situation, the interim government

has taken the initiative to merge five banks and liquidate nine non-bank financial institutions in the interest of depositors.

The Hall-Mark scandal is often described as a blessing in disguise for Sonali Bank, as it made the state-run bank far more cautious.

In the years that followed, while massive loan irregularities hit other state-owned and private banks, no major scandal occurred at Sonali Bank.

However, the bank is still bearing the burden of Hall-Mark's liabilities. Sonali Bank has not been able to sell the collateral it collected against the group's loans.

Contacted, Md Shawkat Ali Khan, managing director and CEO of Sonali Bank, told The Daily Star that the bank has identified and taken possession of 134 acres of Hall-Mark's land. Efforts are underway to determine how these assets can be sold, he added.

"We have already spoken with BIDA (Bangladesh Investment Development Authority) so they can bring in foreign buyers and facilitate the sale. We have also proposed that the government consider taking over the land," he said.

Hall-Mark's current liabilities at Sonali Bank total Tk 2,500 crore, while the bank has so far recovered only Tk 13 crore in cash.

Khan added that the financial health of the bank has improved due to its cautious approach since the Hall-Mark scam.

Airbus says most of its recalled jets now modified

REUTERS, Paris

Airbus fleets were returning towards normal operations on Monday after the European planemaker pushed through abrupt software changes faster than expected, as it wrestled with safety headlines long focused on rival Boeing.

Dozens of airlines from Asia to the United States said they had carried out a snap software retrofit ordered by Airbus, and mandated by global regulators, after

Airbus said the vast majority of around 6,000 of its A320-family fleet affected by safety alert had been modified, with fewer than 100 jets still requiring work

a vulnerability to solar flares emerged in a recent mid-air incident on a JetBlue A320.

Airbus said on Monday that the vast majority of around 6,000 of its A320-family fleet affected by the safety alert had been modified, with fewer than 100 jets still requiring work.

But some require a longer process and Colombia's Avianca continued to halt bookings for dates until December 8.

Sources familiar with the matter said the unprecedented decision to

recall about half the A320-family fleet was taken shortly after the possible but unproven link to a drop in altitude on the JetBlue jet emerged late last week.

Shares in Airbus were down 2.1 percent in early trading in Paris.

Following talks with regulators, Airbus issued its 8-page alert to hundreds of operators on Friday, effectively ordering a temporary grounding by ordering the repair before next flight.

"The thing hit us about 9 p.m. (Jeddah time) and I was back in here about 9:30. I was actually quite surprised how quickly we got through it: there are always complexities," said Steven Greenway, CEO of Saudi budget carrier Flyadeal.

The instruction was seen as the broadest emergency recall in the company's history and raised immediate concerns of travel disruption particularly during the busy US Thanksgiving weekend.

The sweeping warning exposed the fact that Airbus does not have full real-time awareness of which software version is used given reporting lags, industry sources said.

At first airlines struggled to gauge the impact since the blanket alert lacked affected jets' serial numbers. A Finnair passenger said a flight was delayed on the tarmac for checks.

Over 24 hours, engineers zeroed in on individual jets.