



Rooppur power project seeks Tk 25,593cr cost hike

Higher allocation for components, weaker taka cited for the increase

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The cost of the Rooppur nuclear power plant is set to rise by Tk 25,593 crore, pushing the total outlay to Tk 138,685 crore and extending the completion deadline to 2028.

The revised proposal is expected to be placed before the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council today, with Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus will chair the meeting.

If approved, the first revision will lift the 2,400 MW project cost from Tk 113,092 crore, an increase of about 23 percent. The original deadline of the country's first nuclear power project was December 31, 2025.

The project was initially approved in 2016, with around 90 percent of the funding coming from a soft Russian loan.

According to Planning Commission documents, the cost escalation is driven mainly by higher allocation for project components, adding 10 new ones, and the depreciation of local currency taka against the US dollar.

As Bangladesh's first nuclear project, limited prior experience led to an underestimation of costs related to maintenance, spare parts and advisory services, it said.

The documents mention that the combined allocation for 38 components has been increased in the revised development project proposal, including expanded facilities at the residential bloc Green City.

Besides, additional requirements emerged during the long implementation period, contributing to higher costs.

AT A GLANCE

Project taken in July 2016 | Initial project cost: Tk 1.13 lakh crore | Initial deadline: Dec 2025

MAJOR REASONS BEHIND COST HIKE

Taka devaluation against dollar

Rising costs of 38 components

FIRST REVISION

Cost now: Tk 1.38 lakh crore | New deadline: June 2028



The Ministry of Science and Technology, the implementing agency of the nuclear power plant, also cited the sharp fall in the exchange rate from an original assumption of Tk 80 per dollar, alongside the exhaustion of allocations for advance payments, customs duty and value added tax (VAT).

Delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war and international sanctions on some Russian banks have led to extensions of both the loan agreement and the construction timeline, it said.

"The dollar exchange rate was Tk 80 when the project began in 2016; it has now reached Tk 122.40. This shift is the primary driver behind the cost increase," said Project Director Md Kabir Hossain.

He said that despite the higher overall cost, the project saved Tk 166 crore from the government exchequer. While expenditures increased in 34 components, allocations were reduced in 49 others.

FUEL LOADING AT UNIT-1 LIKELY IN FEB

Of the two units at the plant, construction work at unit-1 was completed last year. However, the unit has not yet entered operation due to the incomplete technical testing process.

Following a recent site visit, senior government officials said fresh nuclear fuel loading for unit-1 is likely to begin in the last week of February this year, subject to the Russian side completing its final requirements.

"Our preparations for fuel loading are complete. The Russian side expects to begin loading at unit-1 in late February, and we are hopeful the plant will be ready within this timeframe," Md Anwar Hossain, secretary at the Ministry of Science and Technology, told The Daily Star last week.

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Govt debt jumps 28% to Tk 7.45 lakh crore in FY25

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The outstanding balance of government debt through the issuance of different securities, mainly treasury bills and bonds, increased further in fiscal year 2024-25, as authorities borrowed more to cover budget deficits amid sluggish revenue collection.

At the end of FY25, the total outstanding balance of government securities rose 28 percent year-on-year to Tk 744,850 crore, according to a Bangladesh Bank (BB) report on government securities published on Thursday.

Of the amount, outstanding debt from treasury bonds was Tk 518,995 crore, which increased 27 percent year-on-year.

At the same time, outstanding debt through treasury bills grew 31 percent to Tk 175,131 crore.

Including other securities, such as Shariah-based sukuk bonds, the total outstanding amount of government debt rose to Tk 768,850 crore—12.92 percent of Bangladesh's gross domestic product (GDP)—at the end of June 2025.

The BB said the increase in debt from the banking sector was significant, driven by policy measures to reduce non-tradeable securities such as savings certificates, as well as higher financing needs related to budget implementation.

The BB said the banking sector was the leading investor, accounting for 68.87 percent of total outstanding securities, followed by 12.03 percent held by long-term investors such as insurance companies, trust funds, and provident funds.

Individual investors held 1.14 percent of the total outstanding amount.

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Govt mapping plots to reduce arable land loss

New land use ordinance rolls out the digital system as country lost 2% cropland in 2015-2023



An excavator carves into farmland in Rajshahi, where arable land is increasingly being turned into ponds or being sold as plots for real estate development. To protect farmlands, authorities are classifying arable land nationwide under a new ordinance. PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

SUKANTA HALDER

The authorities have begun classifying all the country's land into 18 categories under a zoning model to reduce the loss of arable land caused by unplanned industrialisation and urbanisation, and to ensure national food security.

Under this zoning, a colour-coded, geo-referenced digital map is being developed, with arable lands marked green.

Officials say the system will make land-use information scientific, transparent, and easily accessible at national, district, and upazila levels.

The Land Use Control and Agricultural Land Protection Ordinance, 2026, which

was issued on January 19, mentions such land classifications to ensure region-based planned land use. It says maps may be prepared either for the entire country at once or gradually, prioritising specific regions or land uses.

The maps will be updated every ten years. Apart from arable lands, the zoning will also protect hills and forests, according to ASM Saleh Ahmed, senior secretary at the Ministry of Land.

Ahmed said that the project, which initially progressed slowly, has gained momentum. Zoning has been completed in 50 upazilas, and the target is to cover all 495 upazilas by 2027.

As the ordinance has taken effect, the

government will now prepare, maintain, and regularly update the zoning maps and associated databases to protect agricultural land, he added.

The ordinance applies nationwide, except for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, including Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrachari.

The ordinance says research from the Soil Resource Development Institute will guide the mapping process.

According to Bangladesh Environmental Statistics 2024, released by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the country lost around 2 percent of agricultural land between 2015 and 2023. This is roughly 1,470 square kilometres.

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Telcos get one week to submit plan on data price cut

MAHMUDUL HASAN

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has asked all mobile network operators to submit reports within a week detailing the measures they are taking to reduce data package prices, amid growing public concern over rising mobile internet costs.

The directive came on Wednesday, following meetings between the regulator and mobile operators in December and earlier this month.

According to an official document, a meeting chaired by BTRC Vice Chairman Md Abu Bakar Siddique reviewed the progress of initiatives announced earlier this month to lower data tariffs.

During the meeting, the director general of BTRC's system and service division highlighted that, despite previous instructions, mobile data prices have risen significantly in recent months.

Vice Chairman Siddique said the sharp increase in data package prices has placed a financial burden on consumers. "Considering public interest, mobile operators must take necessary steps to lower data package prices," he said.

He added that the issue has drawn attention at the highest levels of government.

According to the meeting minutes, Siddique mentioned clear instructions from the government, including from the chief adviser's special assistant, to bring down data prices.

He also warned that if operators do not act effectively, BTRC will intervene in line with government directives.

In response, mobile operators said rising operational costs are the main reason for recent price hikes. They pointed to inflation, higher network maintenance costs, and increased foreign exchange rates, which have made imported equipment and investments more expensive.

The operators, however, assured the regulator that they are working on ways to reduce data prices and requested separate meetings with BTRC to explain their proposed actions and possible tariff changes in detail.

Following the discussion, Vice Chairman Siddique instructed all operators to submit written reports within a week, outlining the steps they have

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