Biman extends consultant bidding deadline by four days

TASNEEM TAYEB

Biman Bangladesh Airlines has extended the deadline to submit bids for consultancy services for its massive fleet expansion by four days -- a move procurement experts say still falls short of the time needed to prepare comprehensive proposals.

A revised request for proposals (RFP), published on October 29, sets November 6 as the new submission deadline instead of November 2, increasing the submission period from eight to 12 calendar days.

Biman now plans to choose the consultant and start work by November 12 instead of November 8. This gives the airline just six days after bids close to make its choice.

The airline has extended the deadline for the final comprehensive report by a month, from January 15 to February 15, 2027. The draft report and presentation are now due on December 14 instead of

SEE PAGE 9 COL 3



The rear carriage of the Neelsagar Express derailed in Tangail's Mirzapur yesterday morning, halting train operations and stranding passengers at various stations between Dhaka and the northern region. Rail connectivity on the route was restored five hours later after the carriage was salvaged.

PHOTO: STAR

Freedom fighters protest obstruction of Posari's burial

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Pirojpur*

Freedom fighters in Pirojpur formed a human chain yesterday protesting the obstruction of a guard of honour and burial of listed freedom fighter Manik Posari.

The Pirojpur Sadar Upazila Command of Bangladesh Muktijoddha Sangsad organised the programme in front of the District Muktijoddha Complex Building around 11:00am.

Ahmed Shahidul Huq alias Chan, convener of the district freedom fighters' command, said Posari was a gazetted freedom fighter who transported refugees and freedom fighters to and from India through the Sundarbans. He condemned the obstruction and demanded exemplary punishment for those responsible.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs has formed a high-level committee to investigate the incident and verify the authenticity of Posari's freedom fighter certificate.

Posari, 87, a listed freedom fighter and complainant in the war crimes case against former Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delwar Hossain Sayeedi, died on October 24 in Tungipara, Gopalganj, where he had been living away from home over safety concerns.

Some alleged Jamaat activists objected to his receiving a guard of honour and being buried in Pirojpur. Despite the objections, he was given a guard of honour at Pirojpur Police Lines that afternoon.

Later that evening, some people filled in the grave at his family graveyard in Chitalia village. Posari was finally buried around 2:00am on October 25 under police protection. Jamaat, however, denied obstructing his burial but acknowledged opposing the guard of honour.

Ex-airman found

FROM PAGE 1

His name came to the fore following allegations that he had circulated a video clip purportedly showing ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina leaving the country by aircraft from Kurmitola Airport on August 5, 2024.

Tahsif went missing on Tuesday evening after leaving his Uttara home to meet a friend. His body was found floating near Rajabari Ghat in Tongi on Wednesday afternoon.

His father said Tahsif was cheerful and sociable and had spent Tuesday shopping for his mother. "Suicide is out of the question. He was a person with a very pleasant personality."

He said Tahsif had worked hard to become a commissioned officer, completing several courses during his career.

The father said he was unaware of any threats against his son, although Tahsif occasionally mentioned feeling anxious without explaining why.

Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed yesterday declined to comment on the death before the initial investigation and autopsy findings.

"I don't want to comment on this matter right now. There needs to be an initial investigation, and an autopsy is being conducted. We will speak after learning all the details," he told reporters at the Bangladesh Police Academy in Sarda, Rajshahi.

Tahsif's father said his son left home on Tuesday evening after a junior friend, Dip, called him downstairs. He told his mother that he was going to meet the friend but never returned.

Speaking to the press, Dip said they first went to a workshop to repair Tahsif's motorcycle and later had dinner at a restaurant in RUAP Commercial Complex Market in Uttara.

They parted around 11:30pm. "After leaving the restaurant, he went somewhere for his personal work, while I returned home," Dip said, adding that they occasionally met and ate together.

Dip graduated from a private university and worked with a security company.

At 1:35am on Wednesday, a message came from Tahsif's phone to his mother, reading, "Mommy, I'm coming," after his mother had called him several times, said his father.

That was the last message the family received from him.

A relative said Tahsif's bike was also missing. Police were provided details and photographs of the vehicle.

As the family searched for Tahsif, his father went to Turag Police Station on Wednesday afternoon. He said police initially told him that there was no bad news and asked him not to worry.

At 5:15pm, the Uttarkhan police called him, confirmed his son's identity, and informed him that a body had been found in the river.

Enayetul said his son did not usually visit the area where his body was found.

"I don't know who killed him or why," he said, urging the government to investigate the death and identify those responsible.

Khokon Mia, 50, in-charge of Rajabari ferry terminal, said he first spotted the body floating towards the ghat from the western side of the river around 2:00pm on Wednesday.

The body was lodged against a speedboat among four moored near the terminal. It remained there for several hours before police arrived, he told The Daily Star.

According to the inquest report prepared by Sub-Inspector Mostafizur Rahman of Tongi River Police Outpost, the body was recovered around 5:45pm.

The report noted blood coming from Tahsif's nose, a swollen abdomen, and both hands bent forward towards his head, with his fists clenched. However, it recorded no external injury marks.

Tahsif was wearing a black, full-sleeved Panjabi, and white trousers. Police also found a wristwatch and an iPhone, which helped establish his identity.

Talking to this newspaper, Abdullah Al Mamun, superintendent of Dhaka district river police, said the cause of death could be determined only after the post-mortem report. Further legal action would depend on complaints from the family, he said.

Nashat Jabin, head of the forensic medicine department at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, said samples, including a DNA sample, had been collected for testing.

She said detailed findings would be available in the autopsy report.

VIDEO CLIP

When asked yesterday whether the death was linked to the video clip of Hasina, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed declined to comment.

In a YouTube podcast titled "Speak with Rashid", uploaded three months ago on July 21 this year, Tahsif was asked whether he had lost his air force job for filming the video.

"Could be," he replied, without directly confirming that he had filmed it.

"Even if I did record the video or share it, I want to ask: what is the proof they have? And it could also be that this is the reason I am no longer in the air force," Tahsif said in the podcast.

In a Facebook post, Tahsif's maternal cousin Moshfeka Jahan claimed that Tahsif had only shared the footage, which had been filmed by a colleague, and that intelligence agents continued monitoring him even after his retirement.

"My brother was murdered. What was his fault? Sharing the video of Hasina fleeing? He did not even film it himself; he shared it as a citizen."

Moshfeka later edited the post and locked her profile.

The Daily Star, however, could not verify the claim independently.

In a statement on August 4, 2025, the Inter-Services Public Relations Directorate said Tahsif and another officer had been retired under different circumstances, following due process in accordance with the BAF's laws and regulations.

The statement, issued in response to a report alleging their links to a foreign intelligence agency, rejected the allegation but did not explain the reasons of their retirement.

He was sent on retirement in September 2024, according to sources.

Tahsif's father Enayetul, however, said the family had been informed that his son was dismissed from the BAF on disciplinary grounds.

After leaving the BAF, Tahsif worked at the Bangladesh Cricket Board and Netra News before most recently joining Virgo Tobacco, the father said.

A source at the news portal said Tahsif worked as a security adviser to its editor-in-chief, Tasneem Khalil, in late 2024 and early 2025.

Following the autopsy yesterday, Tahsif's body was taken to his home around 4:00pm. He was buried at the Uttara Sector 12 graveyard after a janaza at a local mosque.

His father said the family would decide whether to file a case after completing the burial.

[Our Gazipur correspondent contributed to this report.]

Many banks 'on verge of collapse'

Says National Prof Mahbub Ullah

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's banking sector is "very weak" and "fragile", with many banks "on the verge of collapse", National Professor Mahbub Ullah said yesterday.

The situation is "very unfortunate" for the people, the economy and the country, he said at the Annual Banking Conference, organised by Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management in Dhaka. Barkat-E-Khuda, a former professor of economics at Dhaka University, presented the keynote on the major problems facing the banking sector.

Prof Mahbub said banking is only one part of a wider crisis spanning governance, economic management, trade, education and health. The root, he argued, lies in the character of the state, with a handful of "oligarchs" extracting the gains, and rulers treating the state as their private property.

"We speak about privatisation of industry, privatisation of banks, but could you ever imagine that the state itself could be privatised? Unfortunately, our state has been privatised," he said.



A lack of meaningful social or cultural change even after an uprising every 10 to 15 years since independence led to accumulating frustration, Prof Mahbub said. Uprisings alone are no solution, he added, as they need dedicated leaders, an ideological frame, and a clear programme for national rejuvenation.

In the banking sector, the government's heavy dependence on borrowing to finance its deficit is crowding out private-sector credit, Prof Mahbub said.

He cautioned that repaying the loans and interest would be a serious challenge.

Citing the weak tax-GDP ratio, he said the country is failing to mobilise domestic resources. "This should serve as a red signal for the government."

He called on the authorities not to indulge the oligarchs again on the belief that the economy cannot run without them. "This time the economy has been thrown off the rails; next time it may be thrown into the river," he cautioned.

The solution lies in both the economy and the polity, Mahbub said, and a healthy banking sector would emerge only if political and economic corrections went together. Democracy and accountability must be given a chance to function.

"We cannot expect a solution overnight," he said. Even China, despite its success, struggles with non-performing loans, he noted, but those stemmed from a mismatch of demand and supply. "When you make deliberate mistakes, it becomes very difficult to correct them."

Bangladesh gets 3 more years for LDC graduation

FROM PAGE 1

The Smooth Transition Strategy (STS) is a good document but may need revisiting in some areas given the additional three years, he said. The extra time offers a chance to shift from a preference-driven economy to one driven by investment and competition, but Bangladesh must cut the cost of doing business and improve the business environment.

Major trading partners such as the European Union will also extend their preparatory periods by three years, he said. Bangladesh should develop other promising sectors, such as pharmaceuticals, not just RMG.

Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said the extension was good news but challenges remained.

Bangladesh must develop infrastructure and carry out key reforms so local industries can compete in the EU even after tariffs return.

"The country can be called well prepared when it can compete despite EU tariffs," he said, adding that the ultimate goal should be a free trade agreement with the EU that protects Bangladesh's interests.

Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of the Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID), said the extension would provide valuable time, "but time by itself will not improve our readiness".

The government and private sector should use the three years to act on a few urgent priorities, with clear responsibilities, deadlines and public reporting.

"Restoring macroeconomic stability will be extremely critical to protect export competitiveness," he said.

Persistently high inflation is pushing up domestic costs and appreciating the real exchange rate against major competitors, weakening exporters. Bringing inflation down must be an urgent part of the transition, and it is not the time to target high growth through expansionary policies.

Securing a trade arrangement with the EU, Bangladesh's largest export market, should be an early priority, he said. Although three more years of duty-free access will follow the new graduation date, early negotiations would give businesses greater certainty and time to adjust.

Export diversification should also be a priority, Razzaque said. Bangladesh now has three more years to provide export subsidies under LDC flexibilities, and the government should use this time to support new export sectors in ways that encourage investment and competitiveness.

Rationalising the tariff structure would also help but has received limited attention, partly because of the National Board of Revenue's revenue concerns. Policymakers should bring these together into a clear package of incentives and corrections.

Md Fazlul Hoque, administrator of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said preparations are progressing well, with the government and private sector working together, but time is running fast even with an extension, so preparation must be long-term.

He also advocated graduation beyond apparel, with diversified exports and adequate importance for RMG.

Bangladesh was set to graduate this year after meeting all three criteria (per capita income, human assets index (HAI) and economic vulnerability index (EVI)) twice since 2018 under UN triennial reviews.

It earlier got a two-year extension because of Covid-19. In the 2024 review, the GNI per capita threshold for LDCs was $1,307, against Bangladesh's $2,684, according to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The HAI threshold was 59.6, against Bangladesh's 77.5; the EVI threshold was 40.6, against 21.9.

DECADES OF PROGRESS UNDER STRAIN

In its extension request submitted to the UN in February, Bangladesh cited global trade volatility, geopolitical tensions, inflationary pressures, and supply chain disruptions.

It also cited the recent Middle East crisis, uncertain global energy supplies and changes in the international trading environment as factors affecting its readiness.

Bangladesh, the largest LDC and biggest beneficiary of support measures, faces a uniquely complex transition amid political uncertainty and prolonged economic crisis, a UN report published in April said.

It listed shocks from 2017 to 2026: climate vulnerability, the Rohingya crisis, a macroeconomic downturn predating the regime change, Covid-19, the political transition, the Russia-Ukraine war, inflation, and balance-of-payments pressures.

The report said Bangladesh remains poorly prepared. Nearly 75 percent of exports depend on LDC-specific duty-free access, and UNCTAD estimates losses of over $17.5 billion in annual export earnings after graduation. Only limited mechanisms are secured: the UK's Developing Countries Trading Scheme and deals with Japan and South Korea, neither yet enforced. A preferential agreement with Bhutan was signed in December 2020, and talks continue with nearly a dozen partners.

EU market preparedness is the weakest link, with no preferential apparel access and new EU-India and EU-Vietnam trade deals intensifying competition. Bangladesh is also unprepared for losing WTO flexibilities on export subsidies and TRIPS obligations, which will require stronger intellectual property enforcement. Domestic readiness on logistics costs, compliance, energy and diversification remains inadequate.

Private investment has weakened, with capital machinery imports falling from $5.1 billion to $2.8 billion between 2019 and 2024. Nearly 1.9 million jobs were lost in 2023-24, disproportionately affecting women. Bank non-performing loans have hit 35 percent. Revenue is just 6.8 percent of GDP and interest payments consume 36 percent of tax revenue, raising debt distress risk from low to moderate.

Concessional finance will not end abruptly, but terms are tightening and LDC-specific windows shrinking amid falling global aid.

Weak project management, poor revenue mobilisation, rising debt servicing and limited fiscal space constrain its use.

Coordination gaps and delays have hindered transition financing; STS implementation has been slow, with limited private sector engagement, weak inter-ministerial coordination and unclear financing.

The UN has stressed, including under the Doha Programme of Action, that graduation should not disrupt development.

Bangladesh is a critical test case for sustainable progress, the report said.

Rooppur gets clearance for power generation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Pabna*

Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant has received regulatory clearance to advance Unit 1 to Stage C, paving the way for power startup and the gradual commencement of electricity generation at the country's first nuclear power plant.

Bangladesh Atomic Energy Regulatory Authority (BAERA) approved the move today following satisfactory results from Stage B-2.

"With the expected results in the B-2 stage, we have allowed Unit 1 to advance to the 'C' stage to launch the power startup," BAERA Chairman Md Mahamudul Hasan told The Daily Star yesterday afternoon.

He said the project authority would determine the startup date.

During Stage C, reactor power will be increased gradually to produce steam, drive the turbine and generate electricity. Generation capacity will be raised in stages, with BAERA monitoring the process to ensure safe operation.

Unit 1 initiated its first fission reaction on October 11, officials said.



Dr Md Zahedul Hasan, managing director of the Nuclear Power Plant Company of Bangladesh Ltd (NPCBL), said the unit would undergo systematic operational testing after power startup to demonstrate its safety, stability and reliability before regular electricity generation.

A key milestone would be synchronising the generator with the national grid and ensuring stable electricity supply, he added.

Successful completion of Stage C would allow the unit to advance to the Pilot Operation stage, subject to satisfactory test results and regulatory and commissioning requirements.

Dr Mohammad Shawkat Akbar, a former project director of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant and former chairman of the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC), described Stage C as a transitional phase.

"During the B-2 stage, the fission reaction was limited to the primary circuit, resulting in limited heat. But in the 'C' stage, we must gradually increase heat to generate steam in the secondary circuit. At first, the reactor pressure will be increased from 1 percent to 5 percent, and then raised gradually," he said.