

CAAB considers Rajshahi airport runway expansion

- A Monitor Report

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Dhaka : Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh is planning the expansion of Rajshahi Airport's runway.

The move is aimed at facilitating the landing and take-off of Russian jumbo cargo plane carrying nuclear fuel oil for the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant in Ishwardi, Pabna, as per reports.

In a letter on March 20, the Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry asked CAAB to take necessary measures to make the airport operational for the landing, take-off, refuelling and unloading of a Russian cargo jet following a feasibility check.

As a result, CAAB initiated the discussion in the past week.

Reports further said citing the Ministry's Deputy Secretary Ahmed Zamil that they had allowed the Russian Federation to use the airport, however, CAAB would now decide about the construction, expansion

and budgetary issues.

CAAB will be holding further discussions in the coming week.

It is estimated that upgrading the airport would cost around BDT 2,500 crore.

The runway of Shah Makhdum Airport in Rajshahi is currently around 6,600 feet long and 120 feet wide. On the other hand, a typical runway length for a fully-loaded Boeing 747-400 is around 10,000 to 12,000 feet for take-off.

Currently, domestic flights are being operated to and from Rajshahi Airport.

According to reports, CAAB has built a rest house, renovated the airport and established a runway lighting system with an aim to transform it into an international airport.

In 2023, Bangladesh received seven uranium shipments from Russia to fuel the country's lone nuclear power plant, constructed with the technical and financial assistance of the latter.

The Bangladesh Army arranged the transportation of the fuel from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the capital to the power plant in Ishwardi.

However, this takes between six and eight hours by road. If the Russian cargo plane lands at Shah Makhdum Airport, it will take two hours and a half to reach the same destination, said reports citing concerned officials.

Reports also cited CAAB's Member (Operations and Planning) AFM Atiquzzaman saying, they were not only considering the travel distance but also the security of nuclear materials.

Industry insiders claimed, the use of Shah Makhdum Airport in Rajshahi would help transport uranium and its waste to Rooppur power plant without affecting the densely populated capital.