

Bangladesh eyes major Boeing deal amid final push to avert tariff hike

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Dhaka: As Bangladesh prepares for high-stakes trade negotiations in Washington, the government is set to place a significant aircraft order with Boeing in a bid to strengthen diplomatic ties and avert a looming US tariff on exports.

A top-level delegation, including Commerce Adviser SK Bashir Uddin, National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman, Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman, and WTO Wing Director General Nazneen Kaiser Chowdhury, flew to the US on July 28 for crucial meetings with the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) scheduled for July 29 and 30, with a possible follow-up session taking place on July 31.

Sources close to the talks revealed that the government intends to order 25 new aircraft from US aerospace firm Boeing—a move seen as a goodwill gesture as Dhaka seeks exemptions or reductions from a

proposed 35 percent reciprocal tariff set to be enforced from August 1.

Commerce Secretary Mahbubur Rahman confirmed the planned order, framing it as part of Bangladesh's broader strategy to secure favorable trade terms. "We have moved forward with an order for 25 Boeing aircraft," he said to the media. "India and Vietnam have pursued similar strategies—India ordered 100, and Vietnam also placed a large order—as part of their own tariff negotiations."

Rahman added that Bangladesh is pushing for a lower rate than the 26 percent reportedly offered to India and the 20 percent already set for Vietnam. "We believe Bangladesh's case merits a more lenient duty," he said.

Not final yet

The order, however, is still in the preliminary stage. According to government procurement rules, all major acquisitions must be approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs and the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase.

"We have initiated the order but haven't formalized the purchase. Due diligence and legal procedures will follow," the Commerce Secretary explained. "Delivery timelines have been requested from Boeing, but global demand could delay shipments."

He also noted that the purchase aligns with long-term plans to expand Biman Bangladesh Airlines' fleet. "We already have 14 Boeing aircraft in service. This order continues our strategy to meet growing aviation demand."

Biman not fully in loop

Despite the magnitude of the deal, officials at Biman Bangladesh Airlines appear to have been only informally notified. The airline's spokesperson said, "We have not been officially informed about this development."

Another official from Biman said the airline's internal committee is still reviewing aircraft proposals from both Boeing and Airbus. "The government decision came abruptly—the committee hasn't concluded its evaluation yet," the representative noted.

Airbus still on radar

It may be mentioned here, earlier, in 2023, Biman announced plans to acquire 10 Airbus aircraft—marking a departure from its traditionally Boeing-heavy lineup. During French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to Dhaka last September, Bangladesh reaffirmed its commitment to buying Airbus A350 widebody jets, which Macron publicly acknowledged.

At a June press briefing, Biman's MD said both Airbus and Boeing had submitted updated proposals, but new deliveries are unlikely before 2031. To bridge the gap, Biman is currently working on leasing two aircraft in the short term.

While Boeing appears to have secured the immediate order, Secretary Rahman clarified that the decision is not exclusive. "Choosing Boeing now does not preclude future acquisitions from Airbus or others," he said. "This is a strategic move—both diplomatically and economically."

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