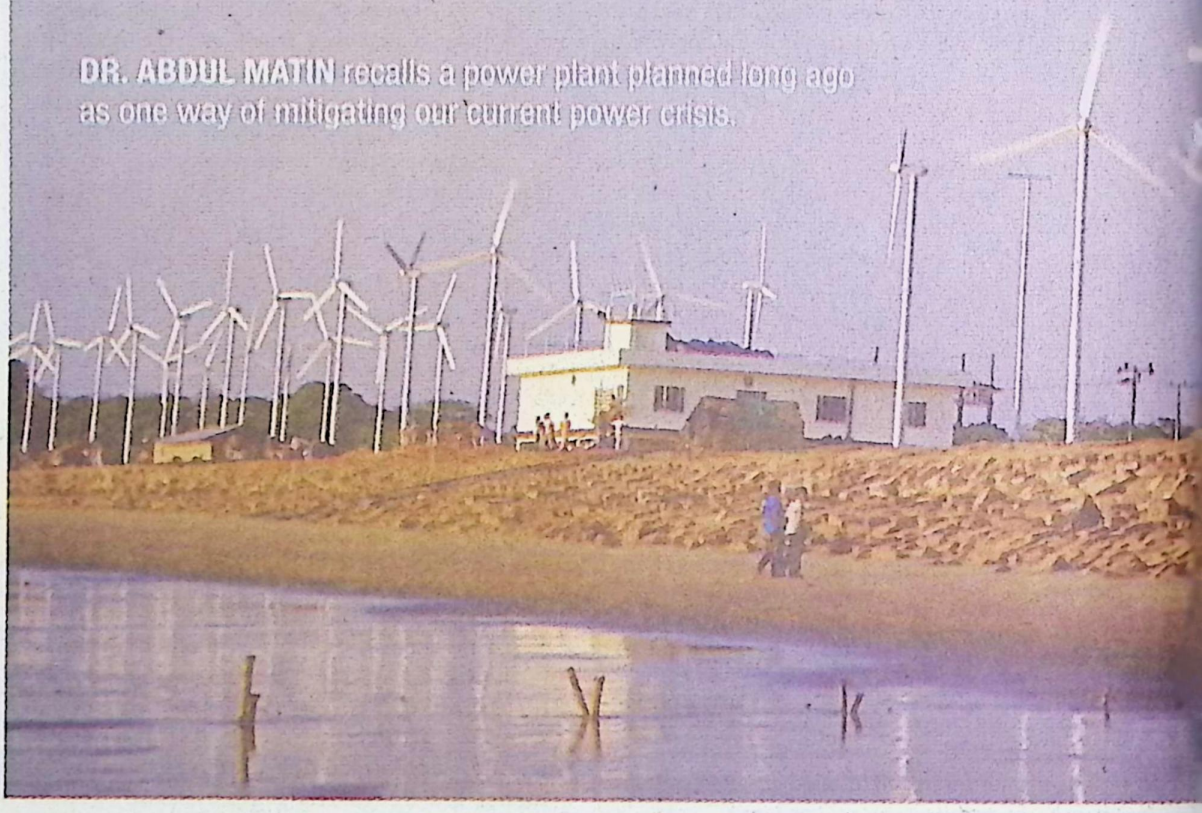
How Long will Rooppur Remain Elusive?

DR. ABDUL MATIN recalls a power plant planned long ago as one way of mitigating our current power crisis.



CONCEIVED in the early 1960s but not yet delivered! The name of the unborn baby is Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (RNPP). For nearly 50 years, there has been so much talk about this plant, at home and abroad, that many people believe that the plant already exists! In fact, it survived only as a project with a sad history of an elusive nuclear power plant. Thanks to the initiative taken by the present government, there has been a renewed hope of implementation of the project recently.

A site for the first nuclear power plant in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), then a province in Pakistan, was selected in a remote village called Rooppur in Pabna district in the western zone. There was no natural gas or any other indigenous energy resource in that zone at that time. Two independent electric power grids were built in the two zones of the province without any interconnection between them. The site at Rooppur, downstream of the Hardinge Bridge over the Ganges (Padma), was thus a natural choice for a nuclear power plant. Approximately 105 ha of land were acquired for the plant and an additional 12 ha, close to the plant site, for residential purpose. A group of engineers and scientists were recruited by Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) and sent abroad for higher studies and training to build and operate the plant.

Initial negotiations started in the early 1960s with a US supplier for a 50 MW nuclear power Plant at Rooppur. As time passed, the reactor vendors were changed, the size of the power plant was increased and some feasibility reports were prepared, but no contract was signed. The reason was very simple. The Government of Pakistan was not serious about this project. In the mean time, the contract for the construction of a 125 MW Pressurized Heavy Water Reactor