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(CANDU) in Karachi in West Pakistan, was signed with Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. (AECL) without any feasibility study, even though there was a cabinet decision to build the first nuclear power plant in Pakistan at Rooppur. Several senior engineers and the Project Manager of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Project were transferred to the Karachi Nuclear Power Plant (KANUPP), thus crippling the Rooppur project.

In 1968, PAEC received a proposal from V/o Technopromexport of Moscow to supply a 400 MW nuclear power plant for Rooppur. While the Russian proposal was being evaluated, WENESE, a subsidiary of Westinghouse of USA based in Brussels, sent a proposal to supply a 200 MW nuclear power plant. This offer appeared to be more attractive than the Russian one in view of the small size of the grid in the western zone of East Pakistan and some unresolved safety issues of the Russian reactor. It may be mentioned here that the proposed Russian reactor did not have any containment building, an essential safety feature designed to contain any release of radioactivity to the atmosphere in case of a nuclear accident. All the terms and conditions of the supply, construction and erection of the nuclear power plant were finalised with WENESE and the contract was due to be signed in early 1971. A large group of fresh engineers were recruited, all from East Pakistan and trained at the Pakistan Institute of Nuclear Science and Technology (PINSTECH) in Islamabad to operate the nuclear plant.

As a general election became due in Pakistan at that time, the Belgians were waiting to see the outcome of the election. The political situation in East Pakistan changed rapidly soon after the general election, culminating in the war of liberation. Eventually Bangladesh emerged as an independent state after the surrender of the Pakistani forces on December 16, 1971.

The situation in the power sector changed rapidly in Bangladesh after independence. The power demand, instead of growing, initially fell due to the destruction of the industries and other physical infrastructures during the war. As a result, the power system had more than 60 percent reserve generating capacity in 1973. Addition of a nuclear power plant to the grid under such circumstances was out of the question. Consequently, the Belgians showed no further interest in the Rooppur project. I was later told by a retired Bangladeshi diplomat that the Belgian proposal was nothing but a ploy by USA to kill the Russian proposal in order to keep Pakistan away from probable Russian influence during the cold war era.

Most of the Bengali nuclear engineers and scientists who had become stranded in Pakistan during the war gradually started to return to Bangladesh, initially through Afghanistan and India and later through official repatriation. With no prospect of construction of a nuclear power plant in Bangladesh in the near future, most of the trained nuclear engineers started to leave the country for jobs abroad. Some of them went to Canada and built nuclear power plants in Argentina, South Korea and Rumania. Only a small group of nuclear engineers stayed back around the research reactor at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment (AERE) at Savar or at the headquarters of the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) in Dhaka.

Except some feasibility studies and half-hearted negotiations with reactor vendors, no serious attempt was made by any government