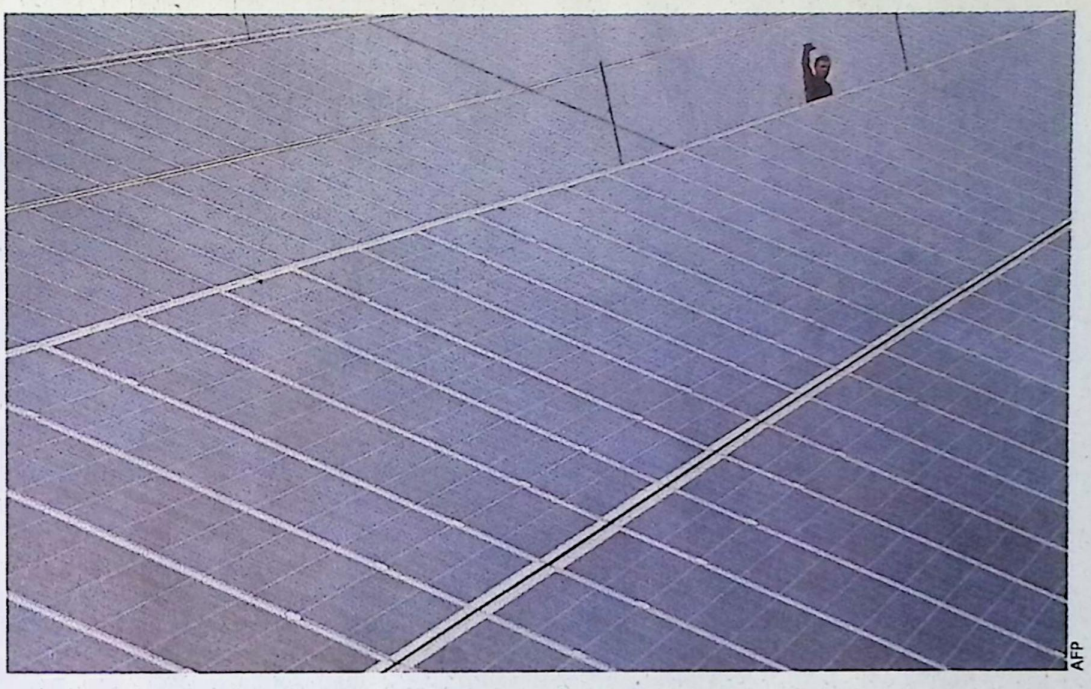

AFP

It takes years to train a nuclear engineer. All the engineers recruited and trained for operation of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant must be paid highly attractive and competitive salaries in order to retain them on their jobs. Contingent plans to fill vacant positions must be kept ready at all times.

The design of the intake structure for condenser cooling system will be a challenging task because of the reduction of the flow of water in the Ganges since the construction of the Farakka Barrage upstream in India, the shifting nature of the main channel of the river and the high content of silt in the water. It is worth recalling that during negotiations with WENESE of Belgium, several designs of the intake structure were suggested by the prime contractor but they could not warrantee their performances. The impact of the proposed Ganges Barrage downstream of the Rooppur site on both water intake system and navigation to the site should also be taken into due consideration.

The transportation of the heavy equipment to the site is closely linked with the project schedule. All heavy equipment must be transported during the peak monsoon period when the water draft is maximum. It must be remembered that if one season is missed for any reason, the whole project schedule may be delayed by one year. Low productivity of the local labour force, unfamiliarity of local project managers with modern techniques of project management like CPM and PERT, civil disturbances, natural calamities, bureaucratic bottlenecks, etc., also contribute to delays in project schedules.

The problems cited above are not insoluble. It is desirable to apprehend the problems in advance so that the negotiating team of BAEC is able to opt for the most viable and economically optimal solution in each case. Looking at the progress made so far in the present negotiations with the Russians, it is quite probable that the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, having been elusive for a very long time, will be a reality and it may be possible to complete the two nuclear plants at Rooppur by 2017-19.

The Rooppur Nuclear Power Project should be the beginning and not the end of the nuclear power programme in Bangladesh. To make nuclear power economic, it is imperative that Bangladesh adopts a long-term nuclear power plan. There are good prospects to build two more nuclear power plants near Chittagong and two around Khulna, each of 1,000 MW, along the coastal belts to be operational between 2020 and 2025. It is time to start planning and looking for suitable sites for the future nuclear power plants in the coastal regions. While all previous governments failed, the successful

implementation of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Project will surely add a new feather to the cap of the government of Sheikh Hasina.

Dr. Abdul Matin is a former Chief Engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission and was involved in the negotiations with the Russians and the Belgians on Rooppur Nuclear Power Project.