



As the first-phase work at the Rooppur plant site is over, now it's time for the second phase -- preparing the ground for building infrastructure. The photo was taken last month.



PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TAPU

Nuke power plant cost up three times

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be required for the project," said State Minister for Science and Technology Yeafesh Osman, who has been spearheading the project since 2009. "As of now, we are trying to understand the components of construction."

But similar power plants being built by Russia in different countries are coming with a price tag between \$10 billion and \$13 billion.

In December last year, Russia's state-run nuclear power company Rosatom signed an agreement to build a 2,000MW nuclear plant in Jordan for \$10 billion.

However, despite such a high cost, electricity generated at the Rooppur plant would actually be cheaper than that of coal-fired plants and a little costlier than that of gas-powered plants. This low cost is due to comparatively cheaper fuel and a long plant life.

"We will not accept any unrealistic pricing for this project," said Yeafesh Osman when asked if he was aware of the global price trend.

"The IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] is with us and there is an international practice. We will do our part of exercise before we conclude the financing negotiations in November."

With technical assistance from the IAEA, Bangladesh has already taken a few major steps towards implementing the country's first nuclear power project. Under a \$500 million Russian loan, Rosatom began various studies since mid-2013 and completed several pre-construction steps.

The nuclear power project was conceived in the sixties and its site was selected on the bank of the Padma river in Rooppur back then.

However, there had been almost no progress in this regard, thanks to a lack of political will, until the Awami League came to power in 2009 with a pledge to implement the project. It is now one of the government's top-priority projects.

Last year, additional land was acquired at the plant site as the river had moved away from the original site in the last four decades.

Once operational, the plant would ensure significant energy diversity for the country which has so far been largely dependent on gas-based power. As the country's gas reserve is depleting fast, the government decided to build large coal-fired and nuclear power plants to ensure that the country's economic growth is not obstructed by an electricity

crisis.

WHY THE COST HIKE?

"There is no universal answer to this simple question: What is the cost of an NPP [nuclear power plant] construction?" Alexander Uvarov, editor in chief of independent information site atominfo.ru told The Daily Star. This paper approached Rosatom with the query. The local office of the Russian company then forwarded Uvarov's message to The Daily Star.

According to Uvarov, the construction costs vary since all nuclear power plants are tailor-made.

Uvarov noted that type of reactor, site conditions and safety requirements directly affect the price. Using a powerful reactor would make each kilowatt of electricity cheaper than that of smaller reactors.

If the plant is located in an earthquake zone, the construction cost would go high. Additional safety installations would also add up to the cost.

In addition, lack of qualified nuclear power engineers, enterprises, employees would increase the project cost.

"So, what is the cost of an NPP construction? The French will remain for a long time global leaders in terms of [high] cost. Their reactors, which they build in France and

Finland, will cost about 8.5 billion euro ... Other nuclear technology suppliers still try to keep down the cost ranging between 4 and 6 billion dollars per reactor," he said, adding that in case of Rooppur, the price could be determined only after all terms and conditions for construction and development of nuclear infrastructure are finalised in the general contract.

3RD GEN REACTOR

Through the last two year's exercise, the government and Rosatom have agreed to use two units of Russia's latest third generation water-water-energetic reactor VVER-1200 in Rooppur. The first one would be installed by 2020-21, and the second one a few years later, while the physical construction of the plant begins next year.

The VVER-1200 has a service life of 60 years which makes the power generation cost very cheap. This reactor has four layers of safety, including core melt trap (or core catcher), passive system for heat removal from the reactor, and passive system for heat removal from the steam generator.

The core melt trap is the top safety feature to minimise consequences in case of severe accidents. Rosatom will supply the nuclear fuel and take care of the spent fuel rods.

Govt to reclaim 800 acres

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The land is on the chars of the Padma which has moved two kilometres from the original site of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (RNPP) in the last five decades. The original site of 262 acres by the Padma was acquired in 1961.

The settlement department has completed a survey of the chars. A new mouja named Roopkonika would be introduced in the area by a gazette notification, Md Rafikul Islam Selim, upazila nirbahi officer of Ishwardi, told The Daily Star.

The upazila administration has already made announcements in the area over loudspeakers asking the illegal occupants to clear the chars for smooth implementation of the project, he added.

The BAEC secretary early last year had written to the deputy commissioner of Pabna, requesting him to free the land for the project.

It would enable the project authorities to build a cooling tower and several safety and security installations, according to BAEC officials.

Top officials of the land and science and technology ministries last year visited the site, around 25km from Pabna town, to see the progress of the scheme.

COMPENSATION FOR PUBLIC LAND?

Land-grabbers have been in possession of the chars for over 30 years. Claiming

the ownership of the chars, they are now even demanding compensation for the land.

Visiting the area in early April, this correspondent saw agricultural activities in the chars.

Local resident Rabiul Islam said, "There is a litchi orchard in my four bigha land near the power plant site. I inherited this property from my relatives. The government should pay me compensation for the land if it wants to acquire the land."

Muktar Hossain, a Jubo League leader of Pakshey union, said 273 farmers are the "real owners" of the most of the land. He demanded the government adequately compensate the farmers for their crops and land if it wants to use the land for the power plant.

He claimed of owning over 100 bighas of land there.

Faunque Ahmed, additional deputy commissioner (revenue) of Pabna, said no question of compensation arises as the Padma char is public property.

Shawkat Ali, then assistant commissioner (land) of Ishwardi, in a letter last year gave permission to the project authorities to use the char land.

ABM Ruhul Kuddus, officer in charge of RNPP site office, said although they had the permission to use the land, the occupiers were still there. Illegal occupation of the land is impeding the project's progress, he added.

Spare justice seekers harassment

Chief Justice to judges, lawyers, others

BSS, Dhaka

Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha yesterday urged all concerned, including judges and lawyers, to be more sincere and responsible for ending harassment of justice seekers.

He made the call while speaking as the chief guest at a seminar titled "Role of Bar and Bench in establishing rule of law" organised by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB) at Supreme Court Ainjibi Samity.

Justice Sinha said the justice seekers got defeated in 60 to 70 percent of the cases only due to flaws made by the lawyers. "A lawyer is the architect of a case. A case will be designed as per the wish of the lawyer," he mentioned.

He said some lawyers don't pay much attention to the information given by his or her client.

The chief justice alleged that lawyers do not remain present after lunch time at lower courts. "If there is a strict judge, the lawyers start to stage a movement to remove that judge. If the situation goes on like this, the backlog of cases will continue to increase."

He said he had already issued an order that a case would be dismissed, if the lawyer was absent.

Noting that there are 28,30,000 pending cases at the lower courts, he said training programme needs to be conducted for the judges to reduce the backlog of cases.

Justice Sinha urged the journalist to write about the judiciary system after acquiring proper knowledge. "Do criticism and find out the truth. But don't make misleading explanation."

HRPB President Advocate Monjil Morshed presided over the seminar.

Cops for ban on Ansarullah Bangla team

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The police headquarters has suggested that the government ban Ansarullah Bangla Team, believed to be involved in some recent attacks on secular bloggers and writers.

In a letter sent to the home ministry on Tuesday, the police headquarters termed the outfit "a very dangerous one" and proposed taking steps for imposing the ban on it with a view to curbing its radical activities, said a senior police official.

If banned, Ansarullah Bangla Team would be the sixth such organisation to be outlawed for militant and anti-state activities in the country.

The other five are: Hizb ut-Tahrir, Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Harkatul Jihad Bangladesh (Huji), Jagrata Muslim Janata of Bangladesh and Shahadat-e Al-Hikma. "We have proposed to ban

Ansarullah Bangla Team referring to [some recent] attacks on bloggers," Assistant Inspector General Mahfuzur Rahman told The Daily Star last night.

He said four members of the outfit had already given confessional statements in blogger Rajib Haider murder case.

Police claim that during investigation they also found Ansarullah Bangla Team's involvement in February's killing of writer-blogger Avijit Roy.

The proposal for the ban came at a time when three bloggers and writers have been killed in less than three months.

Police say militant outfits are behind the murders but have failed to arrest the killers or dismantle the outfits.

Meanwhile, a retired police officer, wishing not to be named, said, "The ban on Ansarullah Bangla Team will not make any difference as long as those making the planned attacks on bloggers one after another are not stopped."

Of the banned outfits, Hizb ut-Tahrir, JMB and Huji are still active in the country. They have opened new fronts or are secretly working with little-known militant organisations, according to investigators.

'I want to go back to my mother'

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and Rohingya from Myanmar were plucked to safety Friday from their sinking boat and the waters by Indonesian fishermen.

"I want to go back to my home, I want to go back to my mother," he said, speaking from a building where some of the migrants were being housed in the city of Langsa, on the northeast coast of Sumatra, after recounting an ordeal that lasted almost two months.

The emaciated teenager, who comes from a poor farming family, wept as he talked on a mobile phone to his mother for the first time since he left southern Bangladesh, an AFP reporter said. His mother could be heard weeping on the other end of the line.

Those rescued from his vessel were among 900 migrants saved in one day alone in the same area, the latest harrowing episode in Southeast Asia's migrant crisis that has been precipitated by Thailand's move to crack down on busy people-smuggling and -trafficking routes.

Huge numbers of migrants have arrived in Malaysia and Indonesia in recent days, as they are abandoned, and thousands more are thought to be stranded at sea. International pressure is building for swift action, with the United States joining calls for the region to open its ports.

Some of the grimmest tales so far have emerged from Absaruddin's boat.

After weeks at sea, it was abandoned last week by its crew and then pushed between Malaysia and Indonesia, whose navies were unwilling to let it enter, a stark illustration of what Human Rights Watch has called deadly "human ping pong".

As supplies ran low, fierce fighting broke out between the Bangladeshis and Rohingya, a persecuted Muslim minority in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar, with many being thrown overboard or choosing to jump. The



Absaruddin, a 14-year-old rescued migrant, breaks down while speaking to his mother in Bangladesh from a shelter in Kuala Langsa of Indonesian Aceh province yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

vessel was sinking by the time fishermen spotted it and came to its aid.

Several survivors have referred to many people having drowned and been killed in the violence on board. The Rohingya and Bangladeshis, who are being housed in separate buildings in Langsa, both claim the other side started the fighting.

Absaruddin said among those believed killed were two of his relatives, his young uncle Mainuddin and another relative, Nobil Hossain, who were also kidnapped.

After a starving Mainuddin, 16, begged for more food, the crew instead started beating him, and then started on Hossain, 18, when he tried to intervene. They then threw them into the sea.

"I heard them saying 'Please save us'. We could not do anything," Absaruddin said. "I was too young to protest, I cried and cried and prayed and prayed."

For Absaruddin, one of six children, the ordeal started when he went with his two relatives and a friend from his village to the town of Teknaf, on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

As they ate breakfast, they were asked by some strangers to go to a garden, where they were tied up with ropes, beaten and taken to the overcrowded migrant boat.

At first they were given two meals a day of rice and fresh water but then they were only given biscuits and forced to drink sea water.

"I think about 100 people died of starvation and their bodies were thrown out to sea," Absaruddin said.

He said that on Thursday, as they floated not far off the coast of Indonesia's Aceh province, violence erupted and the Rohingya, armed with weapons including guns and sharp objects, turned on the Bangladeshis.

"They beat us and then many of us jumped into the water for safety," he said, adding that he floated by clinging onto a plastic water container until he was saved. His friend who was on the boat was also rescued but was now ill, he added.

Speaking from Bangladesh, Absaruddin's brother Jalaluddin confirmed he and the other three had gone missing.

While the Rohingya are fleeing persecution, the Bangladeshis are trying escape deep poverty.