

# Rooppur gets design, construction licence

'Country now in world's nuclear club'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission yesterday formally received the design and construction license of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant Unit-1, paving the way for the main construction work.

The commission received the license 'with some conditions' from Bangladesh Atomic Energy Regulatory Authority (BAERA) at a ceremony in the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Dhaka hotel in the capital.

Talking to journalists, NPP Project Director Dr Shawkat Akbar said having the license proves that the nuclear power plant and its technological components are safe and it gives project authorities the legal go ahead with the construction.

"From today, we have the legal authority to start the main construction," he added.

The design and construction licenses have been prepared by BAERA with the help of experts from International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Russia and India after evaluating all the regulatory documents.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will formally inaugurate the main phase construction on November 30, Shawkat said.

Russia's state-owned Rosatom State Atomic Energy Corporation will implement the project. It will be the most expensive project in the country.

As per Rosatom's plan, construction of the first plant is expected to be completed by 2022. Earlier, Bangladesh and Russia inked a number of deals for the construction of the two nuclear power plants with each set to have 1200-megawatt capacity.

Speaking at the ceremony, Minister for Science and Technology, Yeafesh Osman said that after receiving the license, Bangladesh has now entered "the world's Nuclear Club".

The NPP is a dream project for the whole country and it proves that Bangladesh can do it, he said, urging the atomic energy commission authorities to dedicate themselves fully to the project while maintaining due transparency.

"It's a rare chance for the atomic energy commission to prove the country's ability," the minister added.

Last year, 10 eminent citizens of the country called upon the government to cancel the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant deal with Russia as the project involves potential environmental risks. Green activists had also protested the decision.

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Photographers help a Rohingya refugee to come out of Naf River as they cross the Myanmar-Bangladesh border in Palongkhali, in Cox's Bazar on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Taking on taboos

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Population and Reproductive Health, with her name included on a list of the 120 'next generation' family planning leaders worldwide.

Erina's seminars on issues like reproductive health have been, for many participants, eye-opening. "I didn't know infertility isn't a weakness but solely a medical condition," says Taslima Akter, 23, a cook from Sreemangal. "When I couldn't conceive, I was tortured at home and ultimately had to divorce. If I'd known more, I would've asked my husband to undergo medical tests; the doctors said I had no fertility problem."

"When I was in class six our teacher used to skip over topics like menstruation," says Nowshin Jannat, now in class eight. "We were informed about menstrual hygiene but nobody explained that menstruation is about being physically ready to give birth. After attending a session I know better. We shouldn't feel shy. I ensure friends are well-informed, especially those who would bully others."

"I used to feel uneasy to talk about my body, the reproductive organs and changes like new hair growth," says fourteen-year-old madrasa student Akbar Alam. "I used to retreat and ignore people because of the changes I was going through. At a session on reproductive health, I came to understand these are natural changes. Knowledge can help us understand ourselves."

Sylhet housewife Sabina Baksh meanwhile says she found it difficult to answer her son's questions. "Once he asked about sanitary pads and I told him it wasn't his cup of tea," she says. "Another day he asked about condoms and I slapped him. After reading Prescription Bangladesh's scientific resources, I've started talking to him properly. I can't mention every detail directly but I try to make it normal to discuss. I want

him to appreciate this is a natural part of life."

"From an education and mental health standpoint," notes Erina, "it makes sense for adolescents to be informed. Traditionally young people don't speak openly about pubescence with families, teachers or friends. It's not a tendency restricted to rural areas. Sex education can challenge unhelpful taboos."

"Erina's project has value," remarks BRAC University microbiology professor Dr M Mahboob Hossain. "All parents should take imparting sex education to sons and daughters seriously. Adolescent lives can easily derail without proper knowledge."

On a personal note, Erina says that despite the very real challenges of being raised as a girl in a country like Bangladesh, these shouldn't be an excuse not to "work outside the box."

"In my case I am blessed by one superman," she says. "Along with other family members, my father has unconditionally supported me."

"I didn't raise my daughter to be a traditional girl," says Erina's father, trader Sahid Hossain Iqbal. "I hoped she could be a human being who can reach the peak of success as much as any boy. I'm so proud of her. To work on such sensitive issues is really courageous."

Erina's mother is likewise impressed. "She'll always be my baby girl," says Rawsan Iqbal. "Even after her graduation I made her tiffin meals. Sometimes I'm still struck with wonder to see her in the media. But I'm really happy she can represent our country. I hope she can bring lots of success to Bangladesh. My contribution is really paying off."

Alongside her personal project, Erina has been working with an international research firm; and recently she left for Germany to pursue a Master's degree. "I hope to return to Bangladesh and dedicate myself to health science," she says.

## Responsibility lies with Myanmar

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government of Myanmar ... safe and secure repatriation is the best possible way to resolve the crisis," the US official said at a press conference in the city.

"Part of bringing people back to Rakhine State requires these people be allowed to return to their land .... And for those whose villages are burnt, quick efforts need to be made to restore their homes and their villages," he added.

Asked about Myanmar's dillydallying in repatriation, he said no matter how frustrating the talk is for either side, it has to go on and the US will do whatever it can to keep it continuing.

Henshaw's visit comes as the US lawmakers have proposed sanctions against Myanmar's military in some of the strongest efforts yet by Washington to pressure the Southeast Asian nation to end abusive treatment of the Rohingya minority.

House Republicans and Democrats introduced legislation that would curtail assistance or cooperation with Myanmar's military and require the White House to identify senior military officials who would have US visa bans imposed or reimposed against them.

A bipartisan group in the Senate, including Senate Armed Services Committee chairman John McCain, introduced their bill Thursday.

It calls for renewal of import and trade restrictions on Myanmar, including re-imposing a ban on jade and rubies from the country.

"Our legislation would hold accountable the senior military officials responsible for the slaughter and displacement of innocent men, women and children in Burma, and make clear that the United States will not stand for these atrocities," McCain said in a statement.

House Democrat Eliot Engel said lawmakers wanted to send a "clear message" with the targeted sanctions, both to the military and the civilian leadership, about the violence that has left hundreds of people dead.

"This violence must stop, perpetrators must be held accountable, and there must be meaningful civilian control over Burma's military and security forces," Engel said.

Lawmakers also want Myanmar's military to ensure safe return of refugees displaced from Rakhine.

"There will be consequences for their crimes against humanity," said Senator Ben Cardin, a Democratic sponsor of the bill.

But efforts to bring sanctions and accountability through the Senate ultimately rest on the majority leader, Mitch McConnell, a longtime supporter of Suu Kyi.

McConnell has thus far sided with those wary of anything that could undermine her position, destabilise the country and diminish the newly installed democratic government.

Henshaw, acting assistant secretary for the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, said his country will constantly evaluate the situation to issue sanctions against Myanmar.

"We will constantly evaluate the situation to make those decisions. The congress has given us a number of tools, which we can use."

The US official led a seven-member delegation to Myanmar from October 29 and then came to Bangladesh to visit the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar and discuss the issue with officials of Bangladesh and international organi-



Simon Henshaw

sations.

Stating that there are disturbing reports of atrocities in Myanmar, he said the US calls on full investigation of those reports of violence that sent Rohingyas fleeing to Bangladesh in last two months.

"We also call on Myanmar government to allow access to press and international organisations so they too can see the situation on the ground," he told the press at the American Club.

"Over 600,000 people moved to Bangladesh not just because they wanted to move. Something serious definitely took place in Rakhine State. And we have made clear our views on this," he said describing his talks with Myanmar officials.

The US delegation told Myanmar government that it is their responsibility to restore security and stability in Rakhine for a voluntary and safe repatriation of the Rohingyas.

"It is their responsibility to investigate the reports of atrocities and bring those who committed crimes to accountability," said Henshaw.

Finally, he added, reconciliation between groups in Rakhine -- political reconciliation must be there for return of the refugees.

"We believe the best solution is the return of Rohingya people to their land. It is assuring that the government of Myanmar is taking steps to discuss in turn with your government."

Henshaw also noted that the Rohingya issue is very "complex".

"There are some political issues inside Burma [Myanmar]. It involves the fact that the country is going through military-civil democracy

process. So, all these are very difficult and complex issues."

In another development, the EU Commission's humanitarian aid chief has acknowledged the plight of the oppressed Rohingya as likely constituting "ethnic cleansing".

Speaking to Euronews late Friday, EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid Christos Stylianides said he was "shocked by the magnitude of needs" of the Rohingya he saw on a two-day visit to Bangladesh last week.

"We have to persuade the Myanmar government that it's just human rights, fundamental rights for any person, for any human being. I agree with UN Secretary-General Guterres that maybe the only description for this situation is ethnic cleansing."

**SHOCKING, APPALLING**

Talking about his visit to refugee camps, Henshaw said the situation is shocking and appalling and it is hard not to cry hearing the stories of sexual abuses, murders and other atrocities.

"Six hundred thousand people moving in a two month-period is something that I haven't seen in my four and a half years of time in this job," he said, but appreciated Bangladesh's efforts in sheltering and helping them.

Spokesperson of the US State Department Heather Nauert and US Ambassador to Bangladesh Marcia Bernicat were present at the press conference.

Nauert said Rohingya crisis has the top attention of the officials in Washington -- "not just at the State Department but at the White House."

She said US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson would visit Myanmar on November 15 and discuss the issue.

[With inputs from AFP, Reuters, NBC News, BSS and Anadolu Agency]

## Some veggies

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residue limit.

Of the 30 cauliflower samples, 12 had pesticide residues while one eggplant was found contaminated.

The vegetables had residues of Chloropyrifos and Dimethoate brands of pesticides, which are used for killing insects and worms. Introduced in the 1950's and 60's by two US companies, they attack the nervous system of pests and are rated highly toxic and hazardous.

Referring to a World Health Organisation (WHO) estimate, an earlier IPH report had said there were three million global cases of acute and severe pesticide poisoning with some 220,000 deaths every year, the majority of which were in developing countries.

The IPH could not offer any country-specific statistics.

It also carried out tests on samples of noodles, edible oil and snacks sold outside schools.

It found less than desired level of proteins in 13 out of 55 noodle samples of different brands.

The IPH also found compromised quality in samples of mustard and soybean oil, and ghee. The moisture and fatty acid levels of many edible oil samples were not up to the mark.

IPH report.

The IPH's tests on street food revealed that the majority of jhalmuri, fuchka, velpuri samples had higher than permissible levels of coliforms (bacteria) and yeast moulds.

Interestingly, pickle samples fared much better in terms of food safety.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Prof Shahnila Ferdousi, head of the National Food Safety Laboratory, said their test results reflected that all stakeholders of safe food need to be more active in ensuring food safety from farm-to-fork.

She referred to their previous study that had also showed concentration of pesticides in different vegetables. She hoped more awareness would be created among farmers about judicious and proper application of pesticides.

Prof Shahnila considered the role of Bangladesh Food Safety Authority to be crucial and told The Daily Star that IPH has shared its findings with the authority.

With the support of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the food safety lab was established and subsequently declared as the national reference laboratory by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The Food Safety Act, 2013, came into being hard on the heels of a nationwide outcry over unbridled food adulteration. The government formed the laboratory in February 2015, with a promise to give consumers relief from toxins and contaminants in food.

## China recipe not working

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mediation between the two countries to resolve the crisis.

But, the continuous Rohingya influx into Bangladesh since last August after fresh violent military crackdown on them shows the Chinese recipe is not the right one.

Moreover, the Myanmar government's latest devious offer to take back only a few thousand Rohingyas through verification shows the ineffectiveness of the Chinese recipe.

Naypyidaw announced that repatriation of the Rohingyas must be done on the basis of verification of the refugees in line with the criteria agreed on by the two countries in a joint statement in 1992.

If the 1992 agreement is followed, only around 14,000 Rohingyas may get the chance of repatriation, if at all. As the Kofi Annan Commission set up by Suu Kyi this year reported that around 4,000 Rohingyas out of one million have been recognised as citizens or naturalised citizens. Around 10,000 more Rohingyas got national verification cards considered as a preparatory step towards citizenship. But the reality is that more than six lakh Rohingyas have already arrived in Bangladesh since August 25.

There is more of Myanmar's devious tactic. It has estimated it can take back only a handful of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh per day through verification under the 1992 agreement, according to a report in the Irrawaddy on Monday.

"We can only process about 150 [refugees] in a checkpoint per day as we have to scrutinize and check their information," said U Myint Kyaing, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population.

This means even if Myanmar agrees to take back more Rohingyas through bilateral efforts, the repatriation will be a lengthy process. Nobody knows when it will be completed.

The Chinese ambassador in Dhaka on October 29 however hoped for a peaceful resolution to the crisis soon. He also said: "We hope our two brothers will sit down and solve this problem. I did see that there's some visible progress in terms of discussion."

Earlier, in April this year, Chinese special envoy Sun Guoxiang, who visited Dhaka, urged Bangladesh to resolve the row with Myanmar bilaterally. He also said Beijing stood ready to help in the matter. The envoy urged Bangladesh not to internationalise the issue.

Six months down the line the special envoy visited Dhaka again last week with the same messages.

China has also been opposing foreign interference in Myanmar. Its policy has made the UN Security Council unable to take any action against the Myanmar military although the forces have been accused of conducting ethnic cleansing on the Rohingya.

In October last year, the Myanmar military launched a crackdown on Rohingyas that forced around 90,000

to cross border into Bangladesh. In February this year, China offered itself as a mediator between Myanmar and Bangladesh to resolve the crisis.

The Myanmar government has rejected the mediation offer. But China did not reassess its stance; rather it has kept backing Myanmar and insisting on resolving the crisis through bilateral means.

In March this year, China, backed by Russia, blocked a short UNSC press statement on Myanmar which would have "noted with concern renewed fighting in some parts of the country and stressed the importance of humanitarian access to all affected areas".

After eruption of the ongoing violence on August 25, the UNSC sat at a close-door meeting at the end of August and discussed the situation. But the Chinese ambassador strongly opposed UN's involvement.

In the wake of global outcry against the atrocities, China and Russia allowed the Security Council to issue only a press statement urging Myanmar to end violence against the Rohingya. But due to their opposition, the statement was not strongly worded.

China and Russia again did not pay heed to the global outcry at the end of September's open meeting held amid exodus of Rohingyas to Bangladesh from Rakhine state of Myanmar and the UN chief's call for taking strong action.

Sticking doggedly to their stances,

Beijing and Moscow rather questioned the UNSC's jurisdiction to take any measure and argued that any interference would worsen the situation in Myanmar.

China's deputy UN ambassador condemned "recent violent attacks" in Myanmar but said "there is no quick fix" to the plight of the Rohingyas.

In 2007 and 2009, China backed by Russia also killed measures in the UNSC. The draft resolutions would have urged Myanmar to ease repression and release political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

China, whose investment in Myanmar reached \$18.53 billion up to January 2017 and considers Myanmar an important tool in its One Belt, One Road initiative, ignored the fact that its "strategic partner" Bangladesh is suffering because of the ethnic cleansing in Myanmar.

It has already become clear that the Chinese recipe for resolving the Rohingya crisis bilaterally could not improve the situation. One thing is however evident that China's policy keeps benefiting the Myanmar military, not Bangladesh, though the latter has been bearing the burden of the Rohingyas.

If China is sincere in wanting a resolution, it needs to make fresh efforts to change Myanmar's attitude towards the Rohingya. Beijing needs to intervene out of humanitarian concern and focus less on mere economic and commercial interests in Myanmar.