

Rosatom to Build Bangladesh's First Nuclear Power Plant

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October 02, 2013

The  **Moscow Times**

A subsidiary of Rosatom signed a contract with the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission on Wednesday to design the Rooppur nuclear power plant, the first of its kind in a country plagued with electricity shortages.

Scheduled for completion by 2020, Russia may also provide up to \$10 billion for the plant's construction.

Only half of the territory of Bangladesh, which has a population of 150 million, has access to electricity. Mostly relying on natural gas for power generation, the country's existing generating facilities are unable to meet demand.

Bangladesh has been eyeing the massive generating capacity that nuclear sources could bring for 50 years.

China and South Korea had earlier offered to provide both financial and technical support to build a nuclear power plant in the country, but it was Russia who finally got the green light on the deal.

The ice broke in January when Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina met with President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. The two signed an intergovernmental agreement to provide a \$500 million Russian loan to finance engineering surveys, design and personnel training for the future Rooppur power plant. Another loan of about \$1.5 billion was discussed to fund construction.

Russia inherited good relations with Bangladesh from the Soviet Union, which supported the country's independence from Pakistan in 1971.

Rosatom has also proved a successful exporter of nuclear technology, working as far afield as China, India, Iran, Turkey and the Czech Republic.

The Rooppur facility is to be built on the eastern bank of River Padma, 160 kilometers northwest of Bangladeshi capital Dhaka.

It will be equipped with two nuclear reactors with a combined output of 2000 megawatts. The plant should start generating energy in early 2020.

Although the total cost of the project is still not final, the price may be as high as \$10 billion.

Russia may end up footing this bill, a spokesman for Rosatom told the Nuclear.Ru news agency Wednesday, paying out the sum in the form of an intergovernmental loan on preferential terms. This kind of loan was granted to build Belarus' nuclear power plant, the spokesman said.

Providing loans to build nuclear facilities abroad is common practice, said Alyona Yakovleva, head of Russia's Nuclear Energy Society, and in the long run, as in other countries, the money should be paid back.

"The service period for the type of power plant planned in Bangladesh is a minimum of 60 years, over which the country will gradually pay down the loan. Moreover, Russia will provide the uranium for the plant and will dispose of the used reactor fuel, services to be paid for by Bangladesh," Yakovleva said.

But Bangladeshi bloggers and media reports have voiced concern over the impact that such a plant could have on the environment.

According to the reports, the River Padma will not be able to provide a sufficient water supply to cool down the reactors, which may cause an accident. Also, there are no specialists in Bangladesh to operate such an advanced and potentially dangerous facility.

"Rosatom will not only build the unit but will also provide assistance and train specialists in Bangladesh, a typical turnkey deal it offers for projects abroad. So safety should not be an issue," said Ilya Platonov, head of Nuclear.Ru.

Moreover, specialists can be trained during construction, and Rosatom can further monitor

their operation in the first years after the launch, said a spokesman for AtomStroiExport, the Rosatom subsidiary that will do the work.

As for the water supply — the contract signing was preceded by a feasibility study of the site and examination of a possible impact the plant could do to the environment, the spokesman said.

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