

IAEA will oversee nuclear plant's safety: Minister

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The government will prioritise safety in setting up the nuclear power plant in Pabna's Rooppur, said State Minister for Science and Technology Yafesh Osman on Monday.

“International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will oversee safety at each level of installing the plant. And during (Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's recent) visit, Russia has assured us of ensuring safety of the project,” he said at a programme in Dhaka.

Bangladesh and Russia inked an agreement during the Prime Minister's Moscow visit this month to set up the plant. Under the agreement, Bangladesh will get \$0.5 billion loan from the Eurasian country for research and developing technical abilities for the project.

“We're doing ‘theoretical exercises’ with the project. Now, the persons related to the project will have to get in the field for ‘practical’ works,” Osman said.

At a press conference on Jan 23, the Prime Minister hoped to start construction of the 2,000 megawatt plant by September this year.

The plant will be set up using third-generation Russian technology, which has a five-layer safety measure.

Bangladesh had signed a contract with Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom in November 2011 for assistance in the project.

Osman said Moscow assured Dhaka of safety in the project. “Everything lies in trust. One cannot get any trustworthy work without trusting (someone). Now, we've handed over the project to the young generation. They'll take it forward,” he said.

The Minister said the government is taking various initiatives to raise awareness among the people about the plant.

He said ‘there is nothing to hide’ in the project and that he had never got any hint of exchange of ‘commissions’ centring it.

“We want the people of the country to know about the project. It’ll not be easy to confuse the people if they know about it (nuclear plant project). An information centre will be opened at Bhasani Novothearte and roundtable meetings held for raising awareness,” Osman said.

Dr Shawkat Akbar, Director of Nuclear Power and Energy Division (NPED), said the ‘safety perimeter’ of the plant has already been assured. It has been proved that a nuclear project can be undertaken in the area.

He hoped the plant construction would start within May-June this year.

Several speakers at the programme said there is nothing to worry over the project. Rather, they said, the plant would be an opportunity for Bangladesh.

On Wednesday, the Prime Minister said Rosatom Director General Sergey Kirienko had called on her on Jan 16 in Moscow to discuss possibilities of starting the work on the Rooppur project this year.

The next two years will be spent on technical evaluation to determine the actual cost of the plant.

The government estimates that setting up of each reactor in the plant will cost between \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion.

The Russian government will provide fuel for the plant and take back the radioactive fuel waste of the reactor under the agreement.

The plant is expected to be in operation for 60 years which, according to Osman, may be extended for another 20 years.