



Asian Productivity Organization “The APO in the News”

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South Asia must join hands for energy security, says Bangladesh foreign minister



Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali (file photo).

South Asian countries “must join hands” to ensure energy security currently in “a challenging state” due to rapid economic growth and burgeoning populations, Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali has said.

Japan’s support would be “crucial” in this regard because of its “long experience and technical excellence” in the region’s energy sector he said in a conference on Wednesday.

"In most South Asian countries, the sources of energy are scattered across the borders. None of us have been able to harness the full potential due to lack of technology and expertise," he said.

"We must improve our regional energy cooperation and inter-connectivity and also use our country-specific comparative advantages," he added.

He said, Bangladesh, which was on track to achieve an installed capacity of 24,000 MW by 2021, was looking at its own energy security "through the prism of regional energy security" for sustainability.

The Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) organised the conference on "Energy security in South Asia, relevance of Japanese experience" at its auditorium with the support of the Japan Foundation.

Japanese Ambassador Masato Watanabe was present at the meet.

The conference is aimed at a better understanding of the future framework of energy security in South Asia facing soaring demand.

An uneven sharing of energy resources and energy distribution in the region were a "common phenomenon", the minister said.

Despite the progress in strengthening infrastructure and diversifying energy mix, he said, "our current energy policies still suffer from over-dependence on fossil fuels".

"Sustainability of energy security while improving our competitiveness should, therefore, be the overriding focus".

He said to achieve an installed capacity of 24,000 MW by 2021, Bangladesh, apart from its national efforts, was also relying on sub-regional and regional cooperation as well as on bilateral cooperation with its development partners.

Bangladesh and India are working to augment power supply through the Bheramara-Baharampur grid inter-connection from 500 MW to 1,000 MW and set in motion the supply of 100 MW of power from Tripura to eastern Bangladesh.

The work on the 1,320 MW Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Plant at Rampal is currently in progress.

Besides, a number of other power projects are in the pipeline, including the transmission of power from North-east India to mainland India through Bangladesh by constructing a high-voltage grid line with suitable power tapping points at Barapukuria in Dinajpur.

At the sub-regional and regional levels, power-sharing efforts are on through cooperation among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN), and the SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation (Electricity).

The text of an MOU for establishment of BIMSTEC Grid Inter-connection has been finalised recently.

"These would go a long way to obtain 3500 MW of electricity under regional cooperation as envisaged in our Power System Master Plan," he said.

He said Bangladesh would always remain "open" to supporting energy initiatives that would ensure "adequate and consistent diversification".

The initiatives that Bangladesh has taken already are "proof" of this.

In this context, Japanese experience in energy conservation could be relevant, he said.

Asian Productivity Organization (APO), with help from the Japanese Ministry of Economy and Trade, is assessing the need for giving technical know-how on future energy conservation activities in Bangladesh and other partner countries in South Asia.

Energy is a crucial area of cooperation between South Asian countries and Japan.

Like India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, Japan has been assisting Bangladesh in the power sector for long.

Matarbarhi coal-fired project is the latest mega-project being built with Japanese support.

"Such assistance is expected to address increasing energy requirements in Bangladesh and help the country reduce green house gas emissions," the foreign minister said.

"We deeply appreciate Japan's generosity".

He hoped that Japan would extend greater help by providing the necessary tools and techniques to streamline energy management in the region.