Conference on “Enhancing Energy Cooperation in the BIMSTEC Region”

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Experts discuss interconnected electricity grid to boost renewable energy trade in BIMSTEC region

An interconnected grid is key to increase energy trade and help bring round-the-clock electricity access in Asia

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New Delhi: Global energy experts have gathered in Dhaka to discuss the implementation of an interconnected regional electricity grid and commencing multilateral energy trade among the member countries of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). The discussions are part of a two-day conference on Enhancing Energy Cooperation starting today.

Industry representatives and stakeholders from BIMSTEC countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand have gathered at the conference, jointly convened by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and BIMSTEC. Regional energy cooperation is aimed at replacing fossil fuel imports by switching to non-fossil fuel generation such as wind, solar and hydropower.

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Increased access and availability of electricity is of particular relevance to the BIMSTEC region as some of its member countries are still in the process of attaining 100 per cent energy access to their people. The region is also home to a population of 1.55 billion and is among the fastest growing regions in the world, with a combined GDP of US$ 3.75 trillion.

This region is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and it is heavily dependent on energy imports. BIMSTEC wants to promote energy security in the region by promoting power trade and development of clean energy resources such as hydropower and renewable energy,” M. Shohidul Islam, Secretary General of BIMSTEC said.

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In 2018, the grouping signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the establishment of grid interconnection to facilitate electricity trade among member countries through a region-wide grid, in an effort to reduce import dependence and move towards energy sufficiency.

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Being geographically interconnected, the region allows re-routing of new high capacity transmission lines through another country, such as the India-Bangladesh Power Corridor, with repeated transportation capacity of 6,000 MW of power from India’s north west through Bangladesh to Indian load centers.
BIMSTEC Secretariat in collaboration with the South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy Integration (SARI/EI) of USAID organized the two-day event at its office in the capital.

Coordinated regional grid connection would help attain the continued growth in power generation among the member countries of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-
Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), experts and policy-makers said on Tuesday.

Governments of the member countries of the regional block must focus on renewable energy to ensure sustainable development in the BIMSTEC region, they suggested while addressing a conference on "Enhancing Energy Cooperation in the BIMSTEC Region".

BIMSTEC Secretariat in collaboration with the South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy Integration (SARI/EI) of USAID organized the two-day event at its office in the capital.

Prime Minister’s Energy Adviser Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury said it was high time BISTEC had a regional power grid as part of energy operation among the member states.

“Such an electricity network will not only ensure quality supply of power at a lower cost, but also enhance energy efficiency,” he said.

“It is not that some of the BIMSTEC members will export electricity to other members. Rather the proposed grid will smoothen export and import of electricity,” he said.

For instance, the country could export electricity to Nepal during winter when the demand for power drops significantly, he said, adding: “On the other hand, Bangladesh needs more electricity during summer when it can import from Nepal.”

“Without funding, regional grid will never be possible,” he asserted.

The BIMSTEC is a regional block, comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

On 31 August 2018, the member countries struck a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for installing the BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection to enhance energy cooperation among them.

BIMSTEC Secretary General M Shahidul Islam said the platform could play a massive role in establishing an integrated power grid for the region.

Moderating a session, former foreign secretary Farooq Sobhan said the BIMSTEC role was crucial to steer the region’s economic growth.
"In the era of climate change, we also need to focus more on renewable energy for sustainable growth and energy," he observed.

USAID’s Bangladesh Mission Director Derrick S Brown, India’s Joint Secretary at Ministry of Power Tanmay Kumar, Babu Raj Adhikari of Nepal’s Energy Ministry, Sri Lankan Additional Energy Secretary Merrillie Goonetilleke, and Myanmar Oil and Gas Planning Department Director Tin Zaw Myint, among others, spoke at the program.

Dhaka Tribune is the media partner of the conference.

India is top with more than 98 per cent of coal resources, followed by Bangladesh 1.2 per cent among member countries of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

A report released from the BIMSTEC headquarters in Dhaka during a conference on energy cooperation on Tuesday said India also tops on all energy resources--oil, gas, biomass, hydro in the BIMSTEC region.

The report also showed that the BIMSTEC region has 323,504 million tonnes of coal, 664 million tonnes of oil, 99 trillion cubic feet of gas, 11,346 MT of biomass, 328 GW of hydropower and 1,117 GW of renewal energy.

Of these resources, India has 319,020 MTS of coal, 600 MTS oil, 45.5 TCF gas, 4,150 MT biomass and 145 GW hydro and 1,000 GW renewable energy respectively.

In renewable and biomass resources, Myanmar is second with 1000 GW and 3,303 MTS biomass after India among seven member countries.

The report ‘prospect of regional energy cooperation and cross-border energy trade in the BIMSTEC region showed that India has 319,020 million tonnes of coal, followed by Bangladesh 3,300 MTN and Thailand 1,063 MTN.

While inaugurating the two-day conference as the chief guest, Prime Minister’s Advisor on power, energy and mineral resources Dr Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury said the prospect of regional energy cooperation and cross-border energy trade has been getting focus to ensure need-based energy supply in the member countries.

He also stressed the need for implementing the memorandum of understanding signed to establish the BIMSTEC grid interconnection during the summit held in Kathmandu, Nepal in August 2018.

The MoU entered into force on 07 April 2019.

The conference organised by South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy Integration (SARI/EI) and US AID aiming at strengthening energy security in BIMSTEC region, was also addressed among others by BIMSTEC Secretary General M Shahidul Islam, Mission Director of USAID Bangladesh Derrick S Brown and SARI-EI Project Director Pankaj Batra.

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ADB, AIIB keen to invest in BIMSTEC regional power grid: PM’s energy adviser

Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) are interested in investing in BIMSTEC regional power grid, Prime Minister’s Energy Adviser Dr Tajul Bodi Chowdhury has said.

He was speaking after the inauguration of a conference on enhancing energy cooperation in the BIMSTEC region at the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka today.

BIMSTEC – that comprises of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Thailand – signed a memorandum of understanding on establishing a regional power grid in 2016.

“What we need now is the investment,” Dr Tajul told reporters.

The integrated power grid can help improve energy efficiency, meaning that energy will be low cost and people can avail uninterrupted power connectivity, he added.

"It’s not that one country will be the only exporter and the other country will be the only importer. We can actually complement each other,” Dr Tajul said.

For example, Nepal and Bhutan that have hydropower can export power to Bangladesh in summer when their production is higher. On the other hand, Bangladesh can export power to Nepal and Bhutan in winter when their demand is higher, he added.

If there is regional integration, the possibilities of conflicts also come down, he said.

He hoped that the Rohingya crisis would end and Bangladesh and Myanmar would become good friends and be part of the regional cooperation.

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation organised the two-day conference with support from USAID, South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy Integration (SARI) and Integrated Research and Action for Development.
Dev partners urged to mobilise investment for power trade in Bimstec

Bimstec wants to promote energy security in region, says SG

Prime Minister’s Energy Adviser Dr Tawfiq-e-Eliani Chowdhury on Tuesday called upon development partners to mobilise investment and create an enabling environment for power trade in the Bimstec region.

He emphasised that Bangladesh has made substantial investment in creating infrastructure for power trade with India and is in discussions with Nepal and Bhutan for bilateral power trade.

While addressing the inaugural session of a two-day conference on ‘Enhancing Energy Cooperation in the Bimstec Region’ at the Bimstec Secretariat here, Dr Tawfiq also mentioned about Bangladesh’s eagerness to expand energy trade with Myanmar.

Government officials, diplomats, energy experts and think tanks from Bimstec Member States attended the conference.

The speakers emphasised the need to harmonise the operational, legal and regulatory frameworks of the Bimstec countries for implementing an interconnected regional electricity grid.

Emphasising the importance of increased regional cooperation in the energy sector in the region, Bimstec Secretary General Ambassador M Shakilul Islam said the region is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and it is heavily dependent on energy imports.

"Bimstec wants to promote energy security in the region by promoting power trade and development of clean energy resources such as hydropower and renewable energy," he said.

USAID Mission Director to Bangladesh Derrick B Brown said USAID is fortunate to partner with Bimstec, to address some of the common critical issues, such as to create an enabling environment that supports cross-border power trade, establishment of power market, and create consensus and support from the key decision-makers and stakeholders.

Bimstec, a regional organisation with its permanent Secretariat in Dhaka, brings together seven countries from South and Southeast Asia — Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Myanmar — to promote regional cooperation for rapid economic development.

In 2018, Bimstec concluded a Memorandum of Understanding for the establishment of the 'Bimstec Grid Interconnection' to facilitate electricity trade among member countries through a region-wide grid to achieve energy sufficiency.

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (Bimstec) Secretariat in collaboration with USAID-funded programme titled South Asian Regional Initiative for Energy Integration (SARIIE) is hosting the two-day conference on enhancing energy cooperation.
3,000 kilometre long power grid from Myanmar-Thailand to India: BIMSTEC

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is working on connecting about 3,000-kilometre long power grid from Myanmar-Thailand to India. This was announced by the Energy Adviser to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Dr. Tawfiq-E-Elahi Chowdhury while inaugurating the energy conference of BIMSTEC in Dhaka today.

He said that the grid connectivity would ensure better capacity utilization by complementing member country’s demand and supply situation. He said, consumers will also benefit as the price of electricity will come down and they will get uninterrupted power supply.

The Adviser said that Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) are interested in investing in BIMSTEC regional power grid. BIMSTEC countries had signed a Memorandum of Understanding for establishing a regional power grid in 2018. He said that Bangladesh is in discussions with Nepal and Bhutan for bilateral power trade. He further said that regional energy integration will help build an integrated system in the region.

BIMSTEC is a regional grouping with seven countries from South and Southeast Asia including Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan. It aims to promote regional cooperation for rapid economic development.
BIMSTEC seeks integrated regional power management

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Day of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) on Tuesday launched an energy conference in Bangladesh capital seeking effective ways for integrated power management among regional nations through enhanced cooperation.

"The BIMSTEC is working on connecting about 3,000 kilometre-long power grid from Myanmar-Thailand to India," Bangladesh prime minister’s energy affairs advisor Tawfiq-E-Elahi Chowdhury said opening the event.

"(The proposed) grid connectivity among the (BIMSTEC) nations could ensure capacity or load factor utilisation through complementing each other on the basis of the member countries' energy demand and supply status," he added.

The connectivity will also enhance the efficiency of the energy by reducing the electricity cost for the consumers and ensure uninterrupted quality electricity supply for industrial and commercial sectors maintaining stability in the power sector.

Talking to newsmen later on the sidelines of the conference, he said two of the BIMSTEC members, Nepal and Bhutan, have high hydropower potentials, but the countries face power deficiency during the lean seasons.
Chowdhury said Bangladesh could supply power to the two countries during the time of their need and in exchange import their hydropower during the monsoon.

He, however, said fluctuation of Bangladesh’s existing power transmission and distribution network currently appeared to be barrier for electricity swapping with other countries but “we are trying to improve the transmission and distribution network.”

Besides, the journey towards building regional energy integration, will help build an integrated system and economic zone in this region reducing the inter-conflict among the member state of the organisation, Chowdhury said, adding when the countries are inter depended on each other, the conflict is reduced in a great extent.

Noting that no political issue is permanent, he said, “We want that Myanmar should resolve the Rohingya crisis. I believe, once the disputes between Bangladesh and Myanmar are settled, we could take the power grid connectivity to Thailand from Myanmar”.

BIMSTEC secretary general M Shahidul Islam delivered the welcome address in the inaugural function while mission director of USAID, Bangladesh, Derrick S Brown spoke, among others.

Project director of the South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy Integration (SARI/El) Pankaj Batra gave vote of thanks.
BIMSTEC experts begin outlining regional power grid strategy

A two-day regional conference on enhancing energy cooperation kicks off at the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka’s Gulshan on Tuesday. Photo: Mahmud Zaman Ovi

Experts from the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation or BIMSTEC have begun discussions to outline a strategy to create a regional power grid.
The two-day conference aimed to increase cooperation in energy kicked off on Tuesday at BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka.

"Today we’re discussing how to connect the grid," the Prime Minister’s Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Advisor Tawfique-E-Elahi Chowdhury said on the inaugural day of the conference.

"If we can set up connectivity in the 3,000 km area of the region, then it will enhance the capacity of all the regional countries. Increased capacity means lower cost for the consumers."

The import and export business will open up more once the power grid in the regional countries are connected, said the advisor.

For example, if we import hydropower from Nepal, they can supply us during summer and monsoon when we have higher demand and they have higher production. On the other hand, we can export power to them in winter when they have high demand.

"We can utilise the power capacity and load factor completely if we can complement each other this way."

"We want quality power ensured for our commerce and industries; we want good voltage and uninterrupted power supplies. The standards will go up if we can create interconnectivity," added Tawfique-E-Elahi.

He called for exploring the opportunities to invest in power production.

Interconnectivity of the grids will enable the countries in the region to import or export power according to their needs, said BIMSTEC Secretary General M Shohidul Islam.

"It means a country will be able to both import and export according to its needs. If it needs to import power in winter and export in summer, it can."

Beside the distribution of power, the experts also discussed the strategy for power production, said Shohidul.

"It will be easier to invest in power production if the regional grid interconnection is big. The investment may come from the region or beyond."

The secretary general highlighted the signing of a memorandum of understanding between seven countries in 2018 to establish the ‘BIMSTEC grid interconnection.’

"It reflected the strong political will of the countries. The next step is to discuss the technical side for implementing the MoU clauses," he said.

A BIMSTEC grid interconnection committee composed of experts in the power sector in member countries has been formed, he said, adding the committee will meet shortly.

BIMSTEC and South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy Integration jointly organised the conference titled ‘Increase Cooperation in the Energy Sector in BIMSTEC Region.’

Seven member states of BIMSTEC and other invitees will take part in the four working sessions of the conference.