

India taking lead to promote regional approach to energy: Foreign Secy

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File photo of Harsh Vardhan Shringla

assiduously to promote the sub-region comprising itself, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar as an energy hub, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said on Wednesday.

In his remarks at the inauguration of the South Asia Group on Energy (SAGE) at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), Shringla said the role of energy in the development matrix is well known and our region, in particular, requires enormous amounts of energy for an accelerated transition to a developed region.

"Yet, we need to be cognizant of the challenges posed by climate change," he said.

"Against this backdrop, we are working assiduously to promote the sub-region comprising Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and India as an energy hub. I should also add Sri Lanka to make it a full regional integration," Shringla said.

Be it conventional sources, hydropower, solar, wind or even petroleum products, India is taking the lead to promote a regional approach to our energy needs, he said.

Being the largest producer and consumer of energy in the region, it is natural for India to be the epicentre for any energy initiative in the region.

"We have to make energy affordable, accessible and clean," he said.

"As you would have noted, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, there has been a discernible shift away from a national approach to one that encompasses our neighbours. Our neighbourhood first policy is visible in action on the ground," Shringla said.

Regional and sub-regional energy integration is a manifestation of the prime minister's 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas' vision being extended to our neighbourhood, he said.

"We are promoting easier movement of hydrocarbons across the region. South Asia's first cross-border petroleum products pipeline from Motihari in India to Amlekhgunj in Nepal was remotely inaugurated by the two Prime Ministers in September 2019," he said.

This has since led to savings of Rs 1 billion for Nepal Oil Corporation, he said.

"We are now looking to expand this project to Chitwan, and also construct a new pipeline connecting Siliguri and Jhapa in Nepal," Shringla said.

Energy connectivity is one of the most dynamic sectors of cooperation in India's relationship with Bangladesh, he noted.

"We are constructing the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline from Siliguri to Parbatipur in Bangladesh for supply of high speed diesel. Our PSUs (OVL & OIL) have invested nearly USD 24.26 million in two shallow water blocks (SS04 & SS09) in Bangladesh," the Foreign Secretary said.

With Myanmar, India enjoys a robust and expanding partnership in the area of energy cooperation, he pointed out.

With investments of over USD 1.2 billion, Myanmar has the highest Indian investment in any country in South East Asia in this sector, he said.

"With Sri Lanka, we have been pursuing several projects in the energy sector, such as the establishment of an LNG-based power plant at Kerawalapitiya in Sri Lanka with an initial capacity of 300 MW," he said.

There is strong potential for collaboration in harnessing wind energy in Mannar region in Sri Lanka, he said.

India has also offered a USD 100 million Line of Credit for the development of solar power projects, which will help massively scale-up solar power production and deployment in Sri Lanka, Shringla said.

"I would like to add that energy is one of the key areas of cooperation identified under the BIMSTEC framework. An MoU on the establishment of BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection was signed during the 4th BIMSTEC Summit held in August 2018 and came into force from April 2019. A BIMSTEC Energy Centre is currently being set up in Bengaluru with financial support from India," he said.

Shringla also noted the SAARC Framework Agreement on Energy Cooperation in Electricity was signed at the 18th SAARC Summit in November 2014 in Kathmandu.

"In the absence of ratification by Pakistan, the Agreement is yet to come into force. Separately, India had also proposed to undertake a project for electrification of one village in each of the SAARC Countries using solar energy," he said.

"Turning to Bhutan, which is estimated to have hydro power potential of 30 GW, around 1.8 GW of hydropower is imported from Bhutan annually. The 720 MW Mangdechu Project was inaugurated during the visit of our Prime Minister to Bhutan in 2019, taking total installed capacity of hydropower projects developed with GoI assistance to over 2100 MW," he said.

The Punatsangchhu-I and II projects, as well as the 600 MW Kholongchhu project, are currently under implementation, Shringla said.

There has been a renewed emphasis on clean energy, both in terms of technological advances and in large-scale adoption and deployment, he asserted.

Noting that regional energy interconnection often involves multiple stakeholders, government agencies and autonomous bodies, Shringla said, "We need to look at ways to achieve greater connect between these bodies at the regional level, as well as steps to strengthen and enhance the regulatory frameworks.