

UN ESCAP meeting explores energy access and energy security issues and challenges facing South and South-West Asia

“South and South-West Asia has optimal space for cooperation on energy”

New Delhi (UN ESCAP Strategic Communications and Advocacy Section) – Driven by high economic growth performances of countries in South and South-West Asia, the demand for energy in countries in the subregion continues to increase exponentially, posing numerous challenges, further compounded by volatile world oil prices.

Against this backdrop, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) convened the *South and South-West Asia Subregional Preparatory Consultation Meeting* here, which is one of a series of Asia-Pacific subregional consultations being organized by ESCAP ahead of the ministerial-level Asian and Pacific Energy Forum (APEF) to be held in 2013 in Vladivostok, Russian Federation.

The November 6-7 Meeting brought together around 50 participants from member States in the subregion, to deliberate on common challenges and opportunities in the area of energy security and sustainable use of energy for South and South-West Asia.

In his welcome remarks, Dr. Nagesh Kumar, Director, ESCAP Subregional Office for South and South-West Asia and Chief Economist of ESCAP highlighted the impressive economic performance of the subregion in contrast with its shortcoming on some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). “Globally, nearly 1.5 billion persons lack access to electricity, about 450 million of those live in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.”

“This is an important dimension of deprivation, on par with the lack of access to other basic needs,” he added, while also noting the uneven energy distribution of energy resources throughout the subregion and the largely unexploited potential for cooperation in this particular sector.

According to a study prepared by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) as a background document for the Meeting, countries in the subregion face a number of energy challenges, including energy poverty, lack of available supplies, poor energy infrastructure and transport facilities, a situation which exacerbates social vulnerabilities and inequalities. The study identifies five core areas where these countries can collaborate, such as through improved utilization of unevenly distributed energy resources, the establishment of energy infrastructure and the promotion of renewable energy.

With the exception of the Islamic Republic of Iran, all countries in South and South-West Asia, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Turkey are net importers of fossil fuels (that include crude oil and coal). The heavy dependence on imported oil has placed enormous burden on the limited foreign exchange reserves of these economies. India is currently the fourth largest energy consumer in the world.

The New Delhi Meeting follows similar consultations held in Bangkok for the South-East Asia subregion, in Nadi, Fiji for the Pacific subregion and in Moscow for the North and Central Asia subregion. Representatives of each Subregional Consultation Meeting will present the respective outcomes at the “Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Energy Development in Asia and the Pacific” to be held in Bangkok from 21 to 23 November 2012.

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