

'Bangladesh and India are integral to each other'

Bangladesh and India should comprehensively discuss issues like water sharing, cross-border power trading and energy security, to build stronger ties, says TAWFIQ-E-ELAHI CHOWDHURY, advisor to Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Here to attend the annual Delhi Sustainable Development Summit organised by The Energy and Resources Institute, he told *Piyali Mandal* there were several fruitful proposals, such as a gas pipeline from Myanmar to India across Bangladesh. Edited excerpts:

Q&A

TAWFIQ-E-ELAHI CHOWDHURY

Advisor to Bangladesh Prime Minister

What are the areas where India and Bangladesh can work together?

Geographically and ecologically, Bangladesh and India are not only connected but also integral to each other. Three of the mightiest rivers flow (from

India) through Bangladesh, carrying 1 billion tonne of sediment every year. Rivers are our lifeline. Our countries are connected through rivers, which means our lives are intertwined.

So, it is a question of nurturing, developing and mutually benefitting from those resources. There are pressures on resources and we, being poor countries, not only have demand on resources but also have to address the political responsibility of increasing income, making it more equitable, uplifting lives of the poor. These are common goals of both

countries.

Can you elaborate?

These goals involve extensive use of resources. This is where we need to find a way. Ways by which our political demands are also met. This includes harnessing the water resources, benefiting from the knowledge in other resources like farming technology, fishing, and efficient use of water, wet land and dry land irrigation. More, we can cooperate in power and renewable energy.

You mentioned cooperation in water resources. What is the development on that?

India and Bangladesh have 56 common rivers, sharing water resources. There is need for more comprehensive talks on water sharing. Recently, a secretary-level delegation held bilateral talks for sharing water from the Teesta and Feni rivers. There have been small movements towards entering into



'Our two countries have common goals, involving extensive use of common resources. We have to find a way which satisfies political demands, too'

comprehensive bilateral pacts for sharing of water resources.

What about power and energy?

India and Bangladesh are a part of the South Asia electricity grid, which proposes cross-border trading of power. The cooperation will facilitate Bangladesh to import 200 Mw to meet demand. However, we need to work on a lot of issues like physical connectivity of the grid, price of the imported electricity and others. We are working on the contours; the initial cap of importing 200 Mw can go up to 500 Mw. We are also in dialogue to see whether electricity can be traded through the Tripura border.

What are the initiatives on renewable energy?

During this visit, we have met India's renewable energy minister, Farooq Abdullah. We are trying to find ways on how we can partner with India.

India has gone a long way in terms of renewable energy. We have also created a small niche for ourselves. Our focus has been on solar energy. By the end of this year, there will be a million solar home systems in Bangladesh.

Which other areas are you are looking at?

Bangladesh and India should negotiate over the proposal for a pipeline across its territory that would take natural gas from Myanmar to India. It will be a shorter transmission route and a win-win situation for Myanmar and India. Bangladesh will also stand to benefit in a number of ways by the construction of this pipeline. These include revenue earning from granting a right of way to the pipeline, wheeling charges over the transmission and ensuring our energy security.