

SP Group eyes more links with region to tap clean power

NEW YORK • Singapore's state-owned power grid operator wants to build more connections to neighbouring countries to tap their greater potential for renewable energy.

Countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia have ample spare land for solar panels and enough wind to power turbines, both things that Singapore is lacking, SP Group chief executive Wong Kim Yin said in an interview recently.

Building transmission lines to connect the countries and using renewable energy credits to facilitate power trading can allow the island nation to use clean power even if it cannot produce it.

"One of the possible ways of tapping renewable resources is actually working with our neighbours," Mr Wong said on Bloomberg Television. "Some physical regional interconnects will help Singapore in that department."

Singapore faces two challenges in getting more green power.

The first is that producing clean energy for its densely populated urban areas requires a large amount of open land, a problem shared by grids globally as they

seek more carbon-free electricity.

The second, which is unique to its city-state status, is that its borders are national boundaries.

The idea of connecting power plants and customers across Southeast Asia has been pursued for more than 20 years, but stymied by issues including lack of government coordination and infrastructure funding. However, that could be changing.

Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing last Tuesday included regional power grids as one of four measures that Singapore will explore to help decarbonise its power sector, which is almost entirely reliant on imported natural gas.

Also last week, Malaysian Energy Minister Yeo Bee Yin said that the country is in discussions with Singapore on cross-border power supplies, and expects to complete 550MW of new grid connection capacity this year and a similar amount next year.

Mr Wong said that legislation limits the use of Singapore and Malaysia's existing power connections to only emergencies.

A bilateral government agree-



SP Group's underground transmission cable tunnel system that brings electricity to consumers. The power grid operator is looking to build transmission lines to neighbouring countries and using renewable energy credits for power trading to obtain green power for Singapore's use. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

ment could immediately allow trading across those lines and start a movement towards wider international connections, he added.

Malaysia already has links to Thailand, which is also connected to Laos, so eventually Singapore could invest in hydropower dams in Laos and use renewable energy credits to receive the same amount of electricity from Malaysia, he said.

Even if the power Singapore receives is not necessarily generated by renewables, the net effect for the region would be more carbon-free electricity.

Mr Wong also discussed a few other green proposals.

SP Group is trying to speed up the transition to electric vehicles in Singapore by building 1,000 charging stations by the end of next year, from about 200 now.

The company is focusing on large fleet owners, as electric vehicles are more cost-efficient than traditional ones, even without subsidies, if they travel at least 80km daily, Mr Wong said.

In the long run, technologies including nuclear fusion and hydrogen might be able to provide more carbon-free energy for Singapore, Mr Wong added.

He sees them as potential options in 15 years or more, but both need more development to make them safer and cost effective.

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