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ADB calls for regional energy projects as Asia faces growing power security challenge

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Countries across Asia and the Pacific must accelerate cross-border energy projects and strengthen regional cooperation if they are to meet soaring electricity demand and improve energy security, according to Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masato Kanda.

Speaking at the opening of the Asia Clean Energy Forum (ACEF) 2026 in Manila, Kanda warned that recent geopolitical instability and rising energy demand have exposed vulnerabilities in the region's power systems, making large-scale regional energy infrastructure projects increasingly critical.

"We must build a power system that connects our economies, strengthens our resilience, and delivers energy across the region," Kanda told delegates. "Delay will mean higher prices, weaker growth, and lost opportunities for millions of people."

His remarks come as Asia and the Pacific faces a significant energy delivery challenge. More than 350 million people still have limited access to electricity, while over 53 million remain entirely without power. At the same time, energy demand across the region is forecast to almost double by 2030, driven by economic growth, urbanisation and the rapid expansion of power-intensive technologies such as artificial intelligence and large-scale data centres.

A regional megaproject approach

At the centre of ADB's strategy is the Pan-Asia Power Grid Initiative (PAGI), a long-term programme designed to transform how electricity is generated, transmitted and traded across the region.

Rather than relying on isolated national projects or bilateral interconnection agreements, PAGI aims to

create a coordinated regional power network capable of moving electricity across borders and integrating renewable energy resources at scale.

From a project management perspective, PAGI represents one of the most ambitious infrastructure programmes currently being developed in the region.

By 2035, the initiative is expected to mobilise approximately $50 billion in investment, with ADB contributing half of the required financing. The programme includes plans for 22,000 circuit kilometres of transmission infrastructure, integration of 20 gigawatts of renewable energy capacity, a 15% reduction in power sector emissions and the creation of an estimated 840,000 jobs.

Complexity on a continental scale

For project leaders, the initiative highlights the increasing complexity of modern infrastructure delivery.

Cross-border energy projects require alignment between governments, regulators, utilities, investors and transmission operators across multiple jurisdictions. Success depends not only on engineering delivery but also on governance, stakeholder management, regulatory coordination and long-term programme controls.

The scale of the proposed transmission network means project teams will need to manage multiple interconnected projects simultaneously while ensuring technical standards, delivery schedules and operational requirements remain aligned across national boundaries.

The programme also reflects a growing shift towards systems thinking in infrastructure delivery. Rather than viewing projects as standalone assets, energy planners are increasingly focusing on how networks, markets and technologies interact as part of a wider ecosystem.

Energy security driving investment

Recent disruptions to global energy markets have reinforced the importance of resilient energy infrastructure.

The conflict in the Middle East has highlighted the risks associated with supply interruptions and price volatility, particularly for economies heavily dependent on imported energy. Regional power connectivity offers an alternative approach by allowing countries to share generation resources, improve system flexibility and reduce dependence on individual energy sources.

For rapidly growing economies, the ability to access reliable electricity will also be essential to supporting industrial development, digital transformation and job creation.

Clean energy and economic growth

The proposed power grid is expected to play a significant role in accelerating renewable energy deployment across Asia and the Pacific.

Many countries possess abundant renewable resources but face challenges in integrating intermittent generation into existing electricity systems. Regional transmission networks can help address this issue by allowing surplus renewable energy to be transferred across wider geographic areas, improving grid stability and reducing curtailment.

The initiative therefore combines two increasingly important project objectives: strengthening energy security while supporting decarbonisation goals.

Delivering the next generation of infrastructure

For the project management profession, PAGI demonstrates how infrastructure delivery is evolving beyond individual projects towards programme-scale transformation.

Success will require expertise in portfolio management, stakeholder engagement, risk management, governance and international collaboration on a scale rarely seen in traditional infrastructure programmes.

As Asia’s energy demand continues to grow, the ability to successfully deliver complex, multi-country infrastructure programmes may prove just as important as the technologies that power them.

The challenge facing the region is no longer simply generating enough electricity. It is building the interconnected systems capable of delivering reliable, affordable and sustainable power to hundreds of millions of people while supporting long-term economic growth.

If realised, the Pan-Asia Power Grid Initiative could become one of the most significant energy infrastructure programmes ever undertaken in the region, creating a new model for cross-border project delivery and regional cooperation.