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Plants put Cambodia closer to energy goals

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THE INTRODUCTION of two new power plants in Cambodia last year saw the country inch towards self-sufficiency in its electricity supply even as energy consumption grew 14 per cent, the Mines and Energy Ministry said yesterday.

The Kingdom consumed 8.15 billion kilowatt hours of electricity over the course of 2017, with 20 per cent imported from Thailand, Vietnam and Laos, said ministry spokesman Victor Jona.

By comparison, 2016 saw 7.17 billion kilowatt hours consumed, with 22 per cent of it imported.

The figures amount to a 14 per cent rise in consumption and a 1 billion kilowatt hour increase in local generation.

Jona said the greater production was driven by the opening of a 135-megawatt coal power plant in Preah Sihanouk province as part of a complex of generators with a previous capacity of 270 megawatts, and which is slated to eventually be expanded to 700 megawatts.

The Preah Sihanouk plant, a joint venture project between Cambodia International Investment Development Group and Chinese-based Erdos Hongjun Electric Power Co, was first fired up in late 2014.

Meanwhile, the massive and controversial Lower Sesan II Hydropower

Dam began a test run with two of its eight turbines by the end of 2017 and should be fully operational by October, providing a total 400 megawatts of capacity, Jona said.

Overall electricity production was projected to increase by another 15 per cent by the end of 2018, he said. "Everything has been growing in line with our plans."

The Electricity Authority of Cambodia (EAC) last year supplied electricity to about 14,000 villages, or 81 per cent of all villages in Cambodia, Jona added. About 3.3 million households – or 68.5 per cent of all homes – were provided with some form of electricity.

In 2018, the EAC plans to connect another 5 percent of villages and 4 percent of households, he said.

"Our target is to expand the national grid to all 25 provinces," he said, noting that the grid presently only reached 19 provinces.

Ngeth Chou, a senior consultant for Emerging Markets Consulting, said that while the ministry's plans to increase energy production should result in reduced prices, the long-term impact on the environment was also important for the government to consider.

"We see Cambodia is growing its electrical supply in order to reduce high prices, but this is not sustainable, because our power supply projects are dependent on coal and hydropower, which have serious negative impacts on the environment," he said.