

INDIA PLANS SOLAR ARMY, TO TRAIN 50,000 PEOPLE NOVEMBER 19, 2014

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AMBITIOUS TARGET

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Workforce to be trained through organizations such as ITIs under government's skill development mission

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NEW DELHI

The government is planning to train around 50,000 people in areas related to solar power—a so-called solar army that would help India achieve ambitious targets in harnessing the power of the sun.

The workforce will be trained through organizations such as the industrial training institutes (ITIs) under the government's national skill development mission. While India has a solar generation capacity of 2,900 MW, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has substantially revised an earlier target of achieving 20,000 MW capacity by 2022 to 1,00,000 MW. This would require an investment of around ₹6.5 trillion over five years.

"For us to achieve this ambitious target, there will be a requirement of land, labour and capital. This 50,000-strong solar army will be provided three to six months training in the solar energy related areas, which will also prepare them for the job opportunities that the sector will have to offer," a government official said, re-

questing anonymity. "On the other hand, they will help meet the sector's demand for a workforce."

Of India's installed power generation capacity of 2,54,049.49 MW, renewable power has a share of only 12.47%, or 31,692.14 MW. India's National Action Plan on Climate Change recommends that the country generate 10% of its power from solar, wind, hydropower and other renewable sources by 2015, and 15% by 2020.

"There is a requirement for technicians. We are trying to work out a plan under the government's skill programme," said a second government official who also didn't wish to be identified.

Skill development is a focus area of the government and the Skilling India mission plans to train 500 million people by 2022 that the government believes would provide a job-ready workforce to several industries. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Rajiv Pratap Rudy took charge of the ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship as minister of state on 11 November.

Queries emailed to a spokesperson for the ministry of new and renewable energy on 9 November remained unanswered.

India launched the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission in 2010, which earlier had plans to add 20,000MW of grid-connected solar power to the country's energy mix by 2022 in three phases.



Power mix: India's National Action Plan on Climate Change recommends that the country generate 10% of its power from solar, wind, hydropower and other renewable sources by 2015 and 15% by 2020.

The BJP made energy security a part of its campaign for the general election.

"To be sure, an industry executive said creating a solar army is not an immediate concern.

"From an on-ground execution point of view, we don't see any immediate manpower concern. Here manpower requirement with respect to setting up of a solar plant, utility or rooftop is largely an amalgamation of fabrication, electrical and masonry skills. The skill upgradation needed is minimal and can be quickly achieved, mostly through on-the-job training. However, at project management level, we feel there is a growing need for qualified manpower, owing to its requirement for specialized

knowledge and training," said Ajay Goel, chief executive officer, Tata Power Solar Systems Ltd. "There is an industry need for stronger focus on identifying the talent and equipping them with project management skills and global best practices."

This comes at a time when India's per capita power sector consumption, about 940 kilowatt-hour (kWh), is among the lowest in the world. In comparison, China has a per capita consumption of 4,000 kWh, and developed countries average around 15,000 kWh of per capita consumption. The centre is trying to increase power generation to meet demand and boost economic growth.

"It saddens us that 67 years

after independence, a quarter of our people are still deprived of as basic a need as electricity," Piyush Goyal, minister for power, coal and new and renewable energy, said at recent India Economic Summit in New Delhi.

The government has identified deserts for exploring the possibility of setting up of solar and wind energy projects. According to a study conducted by state-owned Power Grid Corp. of India Ltd, there is a total available potential of 315.7 GW of solar and wind power in Rajasthan (Thar), Gujarat (Rann of Kutch), Himachal Pradesh (Lahaul and Spiti) and Jammu and Kashmir (Ladakh), with an investment requirement of ₹43.7 trillion spread

over till 2050.

"All this land in the deserts, along national highways, border areas and wastelands can be used for setting up solar power projects," said the first government official quoted above.

Mint reported on 27 August about India's ambitious campaign to promote solar energy through the Indian Army and central public-sector units—providing them with grants on the condition that they source equipment from domestic manufacturers.

The government's strategy to focus on renewables also stems from the fact that India has an energy import bill of around \$150 billion, which is expected to reach \$300 billion by 2030. India imports 80% of its crude oil and 18% of its natural gas requirements.

The government's energy security plans include harnessing renewable sources such as solar energy, biomass and wind power, along with coal, gas, hydropower and nuclear power to bring about an energy revolution in the country.

In a separate development, an agreement was signed between Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Ltd (IREDA) and Exim Bank of the US on Tuesday for a credit facility of \$1 billion.

The centre recently raised the authorized share capital of IREDA from ₹1,000 crore to ₹6,000 crore to cater to the debt requirements of the sector.