WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY
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Window of Opportunity

Key highlights of the REI Expo 2014

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The Renewable Energy India (REI) Expo, which is regarded as one of Asia's most influential events, was held on September 3-5, 2014 in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh. It provided a platform to policymakers and private players to exchange information about the current and future trends of, and expectations from the renewable energy sector. The eight edition of the event attracted more than 500 exhibitors, 12,000 trade visitors and 1,000 conference delegates from more than 35 countries. The event gathered a diverse audience of industry leaders, ministers, academicians and observers who discussed their views on the current growth rate of the renewable energy market of India along with their key concerns, hopes and expectations.

The three-day event featured several insightful sessions such as discussions on the potential of solar energy as a game changer, offshore wind as the new frontier, the need to encourage the geothermal energy segment for energy security, unexploited opportunities in the bioenergy segment and the emerging new business opportunities in the renewable energy sector in India.

While hosting a key session on the renewable energy growth scenario in India, A.K. Jain, Advisor, Energy, Planning Commission, discussed the India Energy Security Scenarios (IESS) 2047 model, and webtool that was recently launched by the Commission. Under the model the Commission has forecasted the expected contribution of renewable energy sources in meeting the country's power demand and projected various practical scenarios that can take place in this regard by 2047. He highlighted that, "The IESS 2047 is a complete body of work and since it can be easily used as a webtool, the common people will be able to understand India's energy choices and prospects in a much better way."

The renewable energy segment has witnessed significant growth in the past two to three years. This has also expanded the related equipment manufacturing base in the country. In this regard K.N. Sreevatsa, vice-president and head, LBU power conversion, discrete automation and motion division, ABB India Limited, shared his views and said, "The Indian renewable energy market for manufacturers like ABB looks very positive and upbeat overall, especially the solar energy segment, which is likely to be a 2 GW market in 2014 and 3 GW in 2015. With enhanced benefits and generation-based incentives (GBIs) being offered by the government, the wind energy segment is also gaining momentum. To expand the manufacturing base further, policy support for increasing the localisation and indigenisation of the product is required in India."

In a panel discussion on India's Changing Windscape: New Business Opportunities, the panelists discussed the upcoming opportunities in the wind energy segment, especially after the announcement of the new GBI scheme. While all the speakers

were positive about the growth of the wind energy sector in India, some pointed out the problems related to the evacuation network (especially in Tamil Nadu) as a key deterrent. The need to establish a reliable and smart power transmission network for the higher integration of the renewable energy segment was also discussed by other participants in the event.

The India Smart Grid Forum also hosted three sessions during the event to discuss the objectives and goals of the National Smart Grid Mission of India, smart grid pilot projects in India and the need to establish a smart grid for renewable energy projects. In this regard Rajaram Pai, business leader, DuPont Electronics & Communications and Photovoltaic Solutions, South Asia, stated, "After receiving the initial push from the central government, now the state governments are ready to play a big role in the future growth of the solar industry in India. In this scenario, the focus should also be on the establishment of a reliable power transmission network at the state level and its effective synchronisation with the national grid."

Some players also showed their concerns regarding the uneven growth of various segments of the sector, especially the decentralised one. In this regard, Ajay K. Goel, chief executive officer, Tata Power Solar, pointed out the need to adopt a more holistic approach while devising the policy framework to encourage the growth of all types and capacities of solar projects in India rather than concentrating only on the utility-scale market. He said, "India has a vast solar rooftop and off-grid potential. As per our experience, contrary to the general belief of the requirement to reinforce roofs for solar projects, the main challenge being faced by the industry is to find out the right structure for leasing out the roofs for 20-25 years. Thus, more efforts to resolve these issues are required. The consistent growth of all the subsegments will not only provide a good power generation capacity addition in the country but also create significant employment opportunities." Another area where he thought that the government should focus on is the rising gap between the levellised cost of power and the landed cost of power. According to Goel, "The government should stop considering the cost of renewable energy from the point of view of generators and start considering the cost of setting up of power transmission and distribution network and other charges incorporated by the power distribution companies before setting up the power tariffs for consumers while formulating the solar policies."

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Another area that requires attention in the Indian renewable energy sector is the rising concerns regarding the reliability, sustainability and quality of solar and wind energy projects, which are being guaranteed to remain operational for about 20-25 years. The government has successfully managed to set standards and compliance requirements for solar and wind power projects; however, their implementation remain a challenge. Although the majority of the equipment suppliers in India are meeting the stringent quality requirements and are at par with other global manufacturers, a lot more can be done for improving the quality of equipment installation techniques, logistics infrastructure and the yield estimation methodologies of the developers for both wind and solar plants. According to Peeyush Gupta, director, sales and marketing, South Asia and Middle East, UL India Private Limited, "There is also a requirement for a well-defined policy for quality control for manufacturers and project developers to have a reliable and sustainable product supply chain for the renewable energy market in India. Our experience worldwide shows, that if efforts are not put in for ensuring the quality, reliability and sustainability of these products from a long-term perspective, people start losing their confidence in the industry. Further, given the country's renewable energy potential, more ambitious targets for the sector are required in India. With the right kind of policy framework, a lot more can be achieved in this sector."

The event witnessed a good mix of domestic and international participants. This year eight countries – Japan, Italy, Germany, the USA, Europe, Taiwan, Canada and Belgium – set up their pavilions at the expo. The key highlight of the event this year was the "start-up" pavilion, which allowed budding entrepreneurs with limited budgets to build their business portfolios. Under this, Sire India, Genforce Solutions, Environment First Energy Services, Omkar Clean Energy Services, Patny Solar Solutions, SunTap TIF Energy, Graspe Enterprises, Wattmon, Auroville Energy Products, Kalisons Telventn and Akhil Brothers had set up their stalls.

The expo, which is an annual event, provides an opportunity to the industry to access innovations and launch new products. Some of the key products launched during the expo were Duo-Max solar module series by Trina Solar, AnantUrja (12 V) and Surya Dhani (3.25 V) by SunSwitch and Conext CL and Conext XW+ by Schneider Electric.

The renewable energy sector in India, has shown tremendous growth over the past few years, especially in the wind and solar energy segments. The central as well as the state governments played an active role, and not only invested in these projects but also encouraged private players to participate. The expectations of the players from this sector have increased further with the new government in power. In this scenario, events such as the REI Expo provide an effective platform to encourage more private and public participation for the expansion of the renewable energy market in the country. ■