

LADAKH MAKES HAY WHILE THE SUN SHINES**JULY 16, 2014**[THE TIMES OF INDIA](#)

Ladakh makes hay while the sun shines

Sushma U N, TNN | Jul 16, 2014, 03:15AM IST

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CHENNAI: A splash of bright blue solar panels amidst the freezing snow-capped Himalayan mountains attempting to generate solar power doesn't quite sound right, does it? Nevertheless, the region could soon house the world's largest solar power plant, with the finance minister Arun Jaitley allocating Rs 500 crore for setting up ultra mega solar power projects across India, Ladakh being one of the locations.

Counter-intuitive as it might be, Ladakh has the highest potential for generating solar power, as a solar panel would generate about 5% more electricity there than in places like Gujarat or Tamil Nadu.

"We are working on the projects, and Ladakh and Kargil together will come to about 7500 MW," Tarun Kapoor, joint secretary, Ministry of New & Renewable Energy said. Discussions regarding the exact locations of the plants, and details on power sharing, land ownership etc are on between the different stakeholders, Jigmet Takpa, Director of the Ladakh Renewable Energy Development Agency, said.

Not just the central government, companies into large solar farms, home lighting systems, and solar products are all looking at Ladakh. "Almost every solar company is looking at coming to Ladakh," Takpa said.

"The reason why all companies are looking at Ladakh is that contrary to what people think, regions with cold weather and sunshine is better for generating energy than a region with high sunshine and hot temperature. Also, because of the remote location, a lot of liquid fuel like diesel is used for power generation in Ladakh, and since solar is cheaper than diesel, solar power would serve as a good source of power generation," said Pashupathy Gopalan, President of SunEdison-Asia Pacific, GCC and South Africa said.

Added to this is the fact that Ladakh is free of dust, and has no clouds, which results in about 320 days of clear sunshine a year.

Ladakh is already home to the world's largest solar-powered telescope and about 30,000 small solar power installations which supply solar power to over 2.5 lakh households.

"The region spreads across over 85,000 km of arid, uninhabited land. Land acquisition is a problem for a lot of solar projects and this issue is not there in Ladakh," said Gagan Pal, VP-Products and Operations, Tata Power Solar.

The only issue in the region is transmission lines as it is a challenge to put up grid which can handle such high capacities. "Solar plants there are connected to micro or mini grids, and a strategy to optimally integrate these with the national grid is required as building grid infrastructure in this region could be expensive" said Vineeth Vijayaraghavan, an industry expert.

However, this issue too is being sorted out considering the potential in the region. "A 1000 kva line is required to transmit power from such a large solar plant and a consortium with equity from the state government, central government, the Power Grid Corporation of India and other private parties will work on putting up the transmission lines. A line for transmitting power from a hydro-electric plant in Ladakh is on, and this will subsequently be done," Takpa of LREDA said.