

AJAY GOEL, CEO, TATA POWER SOLAR
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RENEWABLE WATCH

Management consultants McKinsey & Company often encourage their associates to leave the rarefied confines of their conference rooms and get down and dirty in the actual world of business. Many do not take the plunge. Ajay Goel, based in the US, was one of the few who decided to take the leap and move to the world of clean energy. He joined Brightsource Energy, a leading global solar thermal company. Later, he moved to MEMC/Sun-Edison as vice-president. In this role, he helped expand the company's solar business globally, tenfold, in less than three years by increasing its presence in South America, Europe and India. "I had to drive a lot of innovation. It wasn't easy but it was satisfying."

On joining Tata Power Solar two years ago, he and his family had to decide not just about the job but also about moving back to India. His entire professional life was spent in the US. His wife of 21 years, Lalima, had to give up her job and their son Advik, at age 13, had to adjust to a new city and school. "It was not an easy decision but once the family realised my commitment to the industry, they fell in step with me," he says.

The challenge of working in India turned out to be a relatively smooth journey. Says Goel, "The Tata Group abides by the same set of core values as McKinsey and honestly, it felt like coming home. Given that the Tata Group is a global conglomerate, with more than half its revenues coming from outside India and a very global workforce, the adjustment of moving from the US to India was minimal." In fact, Goel's first job after graduating in electrical



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engineering from IIT Delhi was with Tata Consultancy Services, where he worked for two years before leaving for the US in 1993. (Later, he did his MBA at the University of Chicago.)

Goel feels exhilarated when he thinks of solar energy's power to be a "disruptive innovation" in the way the world produces energy, and how people can produce and consume electricity. For instance, Germany, not a sunny country, gets a third of its generation from solar, thanks to rooftop solar plants. What excites him is the idea of extrapolating this kind of experience to India's power-deficit economy and then watching the extraordinary benefits roll in. What is needed is clarity of direction in execution. "In the JNNSM, we have an admirable vision, but have had no consistent direction. Most investors want to see a consistent policy so that they can make a strong business case," he says. He is optimistic about India's future. The election verdict, replacing the old guard with a new team, is, he says, a sign of a "maturing democracy" and a rejection of a whole set of ineffectual policies. ■