

‘Green energy plans key to averting power crises even in short term’

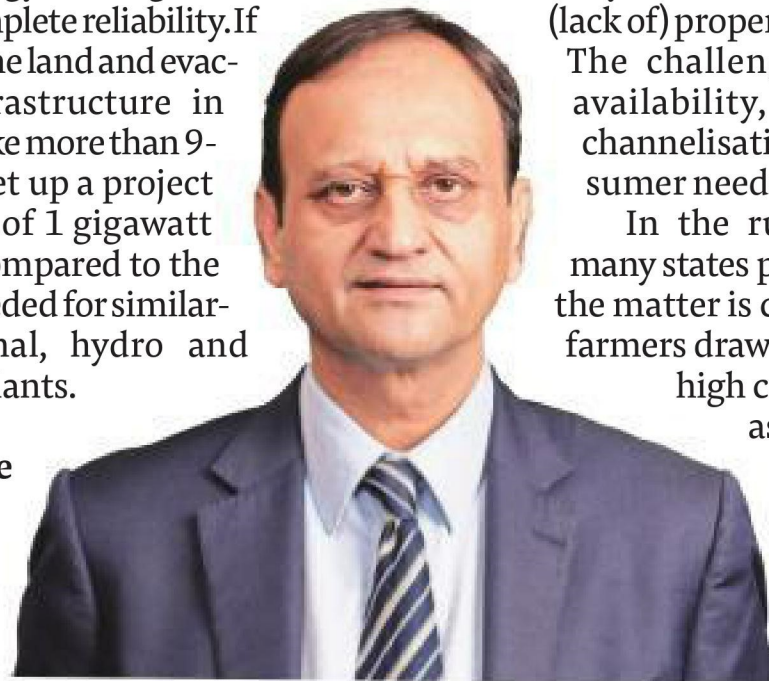
If the government and renewable energy companies take steps in unison, the problem of power shortage will cease to exist by next year, says Ashish Khanna, president — renewables at Tata Power, in an interview with Vikas Srivastava. If land and evacuation infrastructure is provided, large renewable projects with a capacity exceeding 1,000 megawatts can be set up in 9-10 months against several years taken by coal, hydel or nuclear projects, Khanna says. He also explains how the investments of ₹4,000 crore committed by BlackRock Real Assets, together with Mubadala, will aid Tata Power's ambitious green energy plans. Edited excerpts:

India is facing a severe coal and power shortage. How do you see the renewable energy sector helping to avert such crises in future?
Without taking away the importance of fossil fuel for base-load power generation,



renewables — wind and solar power — could be developed as an alternative to meet the peak load demand in the country. The demand is maximum during the day and around the evening. Except for early mornings, renewable energy can be generated with complete reliability. If we have the land and evacuation infrastructure in place, it won't take more than 9-10 months to set up a project with a capacity of 1 gigawatt (GW) or more compared to the several years needed for similar-capacity thermal, hydro and nuclear power plants.

What are the immediate steps that could be taken to tackle the issue?



If we address the residential and industrial demand through rooftop solar with storage, and agricultural demand through solar pump schemes such as KUSUM — a large part of the issue can be resolved. Many of these activities are already underway, but the issue is (lack of) proper implementation. The challenge is not power availability, but its proper channelisation to cater to consumer needs.

In the rural areas, where many states provide free power, the matter is complicated when farmers draw more water using high capacity pump sets as they are unsure at what time the power will be supplied. Also, since there are no meters to track the elec-

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tricity supply in such cases, it leads to higher transmission and distribution losses.

Installation of solar pumps can provide power at one's convenience during the daytime. Similarly, proper implementation of net metering and open access in several states can address the problem of shortage. If we move with a plan for a year on renewable targets, I am confident the issues we are facing

today will not be there in the next year.

Tata Power had sought support under the solar PLI scheme under the first tender. As the tender is going to be revised, will you stick to the plan?

We are firm on our plan to set up 4.5 GW each of cell and module manufacturing capacity by FY24. A couple of locations have been identified the due diligence on the availability of water, state subsidy, power availability etc is going on. We hope to finalise one location by next month and the total investment for these plants would be ₹3,400 crore.

Domestic manufacturers have raised module prices after the imposition of import duties on April 1. What has Tata Power to say on that?

At Tata Power, the entire capacity is utilised internally. At present, we produce around 850 megawatt (MW) of cells and modules and even after we reach 4.5 GW

capacity by next year. The entire capacity will get used internally by our generation and EPC projects. Rather, we may have to look at imports to meet our requirements.

What are your medium-term plans for renewable capacity addition?

We plan to have 15-20 GW renewable energy capacity by FY27. In FY23, we will achieve 4.5 GW and thereon we will add 2 GW every year.

How do you see the investments committed by BlackRock Real Assets-led consortium, including Mubadala Investment Company helping your expansion plan?

Mudabala has come on board as a minority investor and they bring a great deal of external perspective. They have the advantage of having invested all over the globe at a GW scale. It's important to see how the world has moved, as there are many countries far ahead of us. It's important to learn from them.