

SURE POWER: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA'S SOLAR STRATEGY

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Distribution of Key Natural Resources - Energy Resources of the World

Prime Minister [Narendra Modi's stated resolve to tap the energy of the sun](#) to substantially power the economy and everyday life is to be welcomed, because it could help chart a green deal for the future. He restated the case for greater reliance on solar power, for energy and as a path for self-reliant industrialisation, at the inauguration of a 750 MW photovoltaic project at Rewa, in Madhya Pradesh last week. But as he would recognise, the idea of building a domestic solar manufacturing industry that delivers increasing volumes of quality photovoltaic cells, modules and associated equipment is long in the tooth. India's installed base of this green power source is about 35 gigawatts (GW), and its projected addition of capacity until 2024 in a COVID-19 affected future is estimated by the industry to be of the order of 50 GW. Viewed against the goals set five years ago for the Paris Agreement on climate, of installing 100 GW of solar power by 2022, there could be a sharp deficit. Combined with low domestic cell manufacturing capacity at 3.1 GW last year, and heavy reliance on China, high ambition must now be supported by aggressive official policy. The Chinese story is one of a steady rise from insignificant manufacturing capability in the 1990s, to virtual dominance through active government support in identifying and acquiring top technologies globally, importing critical raw materials such as polysilicon, acquiring solar manufacturers abroad, and investing in third countries with ready capability. Importantly, the domestic market was treated with great importance while promoting exports.

The pandemic presents a critical opportunity for India to plan a green deal, on the lines of what the EU has committed itself to: that future growth and employment should align itself to environmental and sustainability objectives, particularly in energy production, away from dirty fuels such as coal. There is no better time than now to make solar energy a strategic sector, giving it as much importance as defence. As the architect of the International Solar Alliance, which attracted about 120 nations at its launch, India needs to show leadership to advance the manufacture and absorption of solar photovoltaic infrastructure in low- and middle-income countries. The key requirements are integrated policies fully supported by States. Industry must get help to set up facilities and avail low cost financing — both important elements in China's rise — and be able to invest in intellectual property. A forward-looking programme should also look at emerging trends in deploying solar innovatively. These include newer technologies such as aesthetic photovoltaic window and roof tiles for buildings, multi-role urban structures, and greater use of residential and commercial buildings to deploy more panels. Rapid progress requires a strategic shift to aid competitive domestic manufacturing.

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