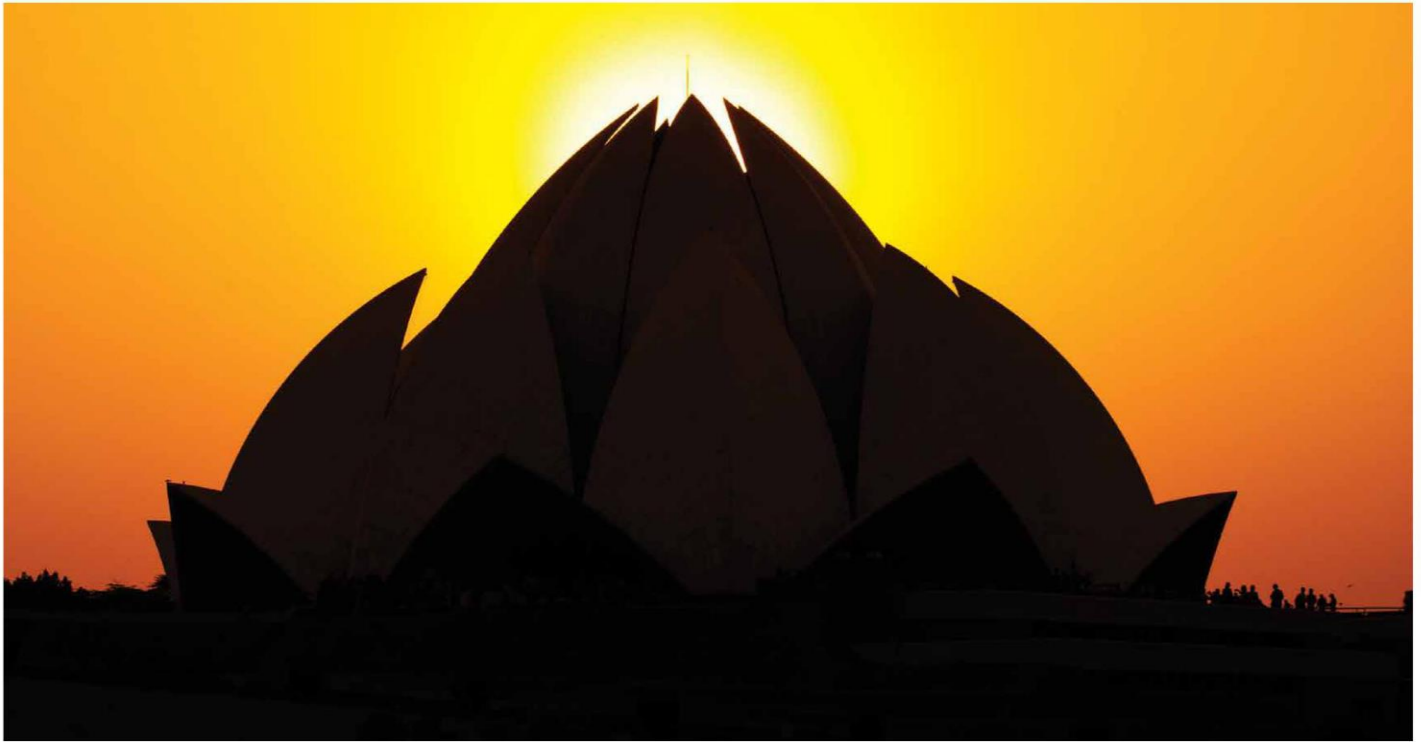


'Constant consultation is key'



The Delhi Solar Power Policy 2016 is evoking mixed reactions. Although a welcome step, the Government will do well to ensure a foolproof mechanism by taking into confidence all the stakeholders, writes *Jyoti Parikh*.

The recent announcement of the solar policy by Delhi Government is a welcome first step. For it to succeed, a number of steps would have to be followed. Unfortunately, the price of electricity has already been reduced -households below 400 kwh consumption



per month get a reduction of 50%. They do not pay high enough, to want to switch to solar energy to save electricity bills. Had the low electricity price been given only to those poor people whose consumption is less than 150 kwh, many more would have come on board. Therefore, the benefits of solar energy to reduce bills are sufficient only for the high end customers, whose effective rate per unit is higher than, say, Rs 5. Those houses with sustained use of three ACs or three large electric heaters and other appliances may still find it attractive to opt for solar energy.

Farm houses around Delhi need to be motivated as they have large spaces available. Some "carrot and stick policies" may help. For example, higher benefits for higher wattage of solar installation can be one such incentive. Raising property tax and giving rebate on solar installations can be another option. The group of houses with maximum solar potential is typically the members of residents' welfare

associations (RWA) in affluent localities. Some discussions should be initiated with them and some model worked out in consultation with the residents.

How do Delhi-zens install solar panels and the structures to support these panels? Are there enough qualified, certified contractors to install solar systems and take the policy forward? The Delhi Government should issue a call for empanelment of these contractors and register them after verifying their credentials. This is not difficult as the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy routinely does it for executing their renewable energy projects. Thus, those who deliver shoddy products or get complaints, lose their license or registration. It is necessary that unsuspecting citizens are not victims of fly by night operators. The empanelled companies should be listed on a website for information.

According to the policy, building by laws

will be amended so that the solar structure is considered as a temporary structure and the height will not be considered towards the total height of the building after the amendments. This is a good step, freeing the public from the hurdles of taking approvals for structures. However, stability of the external structures should be ensured against wind and rain, so that no one is harmed. The registration of approved solar companies should include this as a liability of the contractors.

A lot of different business models need to be encouraged. For example, a third party that takes all the responsibilities of putting up the structures, selling and buying electricity to DISCOMs and transferring it to the households and recovering the bills from them. A flat sum for renting the roof or a flat rate for electricity provided that is lower than the customer's current bill.

Another business model could be that it also sells back electricity to residents at a lower rate than their current average. One such contract was executed for a large public facility in Delhi which was to get electricity at Rs 5 per unit when they were paying a lot more before. As per the policy, all large buildings of the Delhi government will install solar systems and that should give large enough scale for large procurement and reduce the price. If Delhi Government floats a request

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for bids for large amount to kick start the process, it would give the needed incentive to solar entrepreneurs and others will benefit as well.

Thus solar business could be encouraged in a variety of ways and clean jobs could be created within the city. The jobs would include solar engineers, solar business managers, contractors, transporters, etc. followed by repairs and preceded by of course manufacturers or importers. There would be an equal boost to the battery business.

The biggest concern is whether the DISCOMs are taken into confidence. They would lose their well-paying customers and may even end up paying them. If the DISCOMs go bankrupt while supporting solar energy, the Delhi power system could collapse. Considerable analysis is needed to understand the current business of DISCOMs and how they will be impacted.

Dialogue with them is essential.

I have been wondering why solar panels do not have drain pipes at the bottom to collect rain water that falls on the panels so that the water goes into a storage tank. Thus, harvesting solar energy as well as rain water with almost the same structure is possible. We can call it "solarain" harvesting. Then the installers can also avail benefits available for rain water harvesting, making this financially more attractive.

While this solar policy is welcome, it needs inclusive discussions among stakeholders to iron out the edges among the stakeholders. If we can close down the Badarpur plant by promoting solar, we can also breathe easier! 

The Delhi Solar Power Policy 2016 is yet to be notified.

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