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On with a solar power mission

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NEW DELHI: The Union Government has finalised the draft for the National Solar Mission. It aims to make India a global leader in solar energy and envisages an installed solar generation capacity of 20,000 MW by 2020, of 1,00,000 MW by 2030 and of 2,00,000 MW by 2050.

The total expected funding from the government for the 30-year period will run to Rs. 85,000 crore to Rs. 105,000 crore. The requirement during the current Five Year Plan is estimated to be Rs. 5,000 crore to Rs. 6,000 crore. It will rise to between Rs. 12,000 crore and Rs. 15,000 crore during the 12th Five Year Plan.

Implementation will be in three phases. The first phase of solar deployment (2009-2012) will aim to achieve rapid scaling-up to drive down costs. It will spur domestic manufacturing through the consolidation and expansion of on-going projects for urban, rural and off-grid applications. This will involve the promotion of commercial-scale solar utility plants, mandated installation of solar rooftop or on-site photo-voltaic applications in buildings and establishments of government and public sector undertakings. The target is 100 MW installed capacity here.

The Mission will encourage the use of solar applications to meet day-time peaking power requirement that is now met through diesel generation. Further expansion of solar lighting systems through market initiatives including micro-financing, in the rural and urban sectors, is expected to provide access to lighting for three million households by 2012.

In this phase, the Mission will make it mandatory for all functional buildings such as hospitals, hotels, guest houses and nursing homes to install solar water heaters. Residential complexes with a minimum plot area of 500 sq m will also be included.

In the second phase, to be implemented between 2012 and 2017, the Mission will focus on the commercial deployment of solar thermal power plants. This will involve storage options, and the promotion of solar lighting and heating systems on a large scale in market mode. This will be without subsidies but could include micro-financing options.

Finally, between 2017 and 2020, the target is to achieve tariff parity with conventional grid power and achieve an installed capacity of 20 gigawatts (Gw) by 2020. The installation of one million rooftop systems with an average capacity of 3 kilowatts (kW) by the same year is also envisaged.

The proposed strategy of the Mission should help achieve significant reduction in the cost of solar power and create a robust infrastructure for it.