



# “A lot more clarity is required on the net metering policies”

Rooftop solar photovoltaic installations have the potential to address climate change issues by reducing our reliance on conventional fossil fuel based energy. Indian solar players have also geared up to help the country achieve the set target of 175GW by 2022. In an interaction with the Baishakhi Dutta of Electronics Bazaar, Simarpreet Singh, founder, Hartek Solar Pvt Ltd talks about the company's foray into the Indian solar space with the aim to make bigger inroads in the growing rooftop solar domain.


**EB: Do highlight the current situation in the Indian solar industry**

Fundamentally, right from when the National Solar Mission (2011) was set up, the plan was to install 20GW by 2020. Then in 2014, this target was further revised to 100GW by 2022, out of which 60GW was to be installed on land and 40GW on rooftops.

At present, India has already installed a capacity of 20GW, which is well ahead of the original time frame. Apart from this, a capacity of 15GW - 20GW is in the pipeline. Overall, the sector has come a long way and solar is now cheaper than thermal power, with the current tariffs being low. Regarding technology, per se, the solar sector has really ramped up.

**EB: What are the ongoing trends in the Indian solar industry?**

One trend is that rooftop solar is finally taking off. Out of the targeted 40GW from rooftops, practically nothing has been achieved, as such, except for installations adding up to a meager 2GW-3GW. So this year, you will have seen that rooftop solar has picked up pace. Another domain

 **SIMARPREET SINGH**, founder, Hartek Solar Pvt Ltd

that has picked up momentum is the solar parks. Two to three years back, there was the persistent problem of building the grid infrastructure. It's been only two years since the concept of solar parks was introduced.

Operational maintenance is something that we have been speaking of at Hartek for the last four to five years. Solar installations are a long term asset but sadly, no one is talking about maintaining these assets over extended periods of time. Therefore operational maintenance is a big trend that will soon emerge either this year or the next. So these are the three major business trends that we foresee driving the solar market in the coming days also.

**EB: Kindly walk us through Hartek Group's current business model and sales strategy.**

The Hartek Group comprises three legal entities, i.e., Hartek Power Pvt Ltd, which is the infrastructure arm of the company that does the turnkey engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contracts for power substations.

The second one is Hartek Solar Pvt Ltd—the rooftop solar arm of the company. It sets up rooftop solar installations in residential and commercial buildings throughout the country. This arm has three wings - solar rooftop projects, energy storage and electric charging infrastructure for EVs, the last of which will be coming up very soon.

The electric charging infrastructure is something that is on our business expansion list. Hartek also has a very strong smart city initiative. We have been knocking on the doors of various municipal corporations, trying to put up a prototype. So before government tenders come out, we are building capacities and the technical know-how. So this is one very important area that we are going to focus on in the coming days.

The third part of the Hartek Group is the manufacturing entity, called Hartek India Pvt Ltd, which is part of our backward integration for Hartek Power and for which we have a technological joint venture with Schneider Electric. We manufacture medium voltage switchboard panels under the brand name Hartek. These

are used in many substations, solar power plants and all other kinds of power plants across the country.

**EB: What was the idea behind launching the solar van service in Chandigarh?**

A big developer putting up a solar project will obviously have the technical know-how since there will be a lot of engineers to take care of the project. But when you put up solar panels on a residential rooftop, it is not necessary for a home owner to be technically sound enough to maintain the panel, in the long run. For any kind of technical issue, one needs to contact an expert technician. Our aim was to ensure that every household should be well connected with reliable, sustainable and affordable solar power. Since the residential solar segment has not been targeted that much, we wanted to tap this opportunity.

**EB: What service does the solar van deliver and whom does it cater to?**

The core essence of the solar van is to be close to the residential client in case of any issue. There is an inbuilt solar panel in the van, along with an inverter. So if we get a call that something needs to be changed, our trained engineer who goes in the van will do the needful, then and there. That is the kind of excellence in service that we are trying to bring in with the help of the solar van. Moreover, the solar van is an electric vehicle. With it, we are also aiming to educate people about facts like at what intervals the panel needs to be cleaned. Therefore the solar van is always on the move throughout the city and in this way, we keep educating college students and home owners, from time to time.

**EB: Do you have any plans to expand the solar van service into other parts of India?**

In a couple of months, many cities will get the facility of the solar van. Our focus is to start off with all the smart cities and all those metros where rooftop solar is mandatory. In Chandigarh, the administration has made it mandatory that every building

and every canal side house must have rooftop solar or else a fine will be imposed. That's why we started off with the solar van here and gradually built a database of distributors and dealers across the country.

**EB: How do you plan to expand this business further?**

There are huge opportunities in the solar rooftop segment, going forward. Every industry, commercial building and residence has a roof. So we are going to add about 10MW of capacity every year in solar rooftops across India. That is going to be our target.

**EB: What is Hartek's vision, going forward?**

Our vision is very clear. We aim to systematically build infrastructure and products in this particular space. Our entire focus is to work very closely with the customers and provide them with the right technology solutions. We are working with the latest technologies and integrating them into the infrastructure to provide a smart project to our customers.

**EB: Any particular suggestions to the government on how to further promote solar energy usage in the country?**

When we talk about the solar sector, the government is doing an absolutely great job in marketing the sector, which has actually created demand out of nothing. My only suggestion is that regarding the safeguard duty and the GST clearance, it's high time that the government intervenes and gives some clarity to the issue - on whether rooftop solar will come under the 5 per cent or 18 per cent bracket, since this issue has been pending from a long time.

In terms of tenders, the government has been very bullish and quick. On the other hand, rooftop solar is the future. A lot of clarity is required on the net metering policies. In Tier 1 cities like Delhi and Chandigarh, people now have some idea about how this segment works but if you penetrate further inside a state, a lot of clarity in the net metering policies is required. So, these are the basic points that need to be addressed by the government for the smoother functioning of the solar sector in India. **EB**