# India looks big on alternative energy: expert

Imagine running your computer on a solar energy backup for five hours a day! It's possible, says an expert who sees India as a promising destination for alternative sources of power.

Terence 'Terry' J. Hart, vice chairman and technical director of IT Power India Pvt. Ltd., sees states like Karnataka and West Bengal ahead in the use of alternative energy.

A lot is happening in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu too, and Gujarat is coming up well.

'In Himachal Pradesh, there's micro-hydro and in Uttarakhand there's work going on over the restoration of traditional watermills for power and grain-grinding,' Hart told IANS in an interview.

He estimates that one could run a computer on a solar energy backup -- for five hours a day -- at an installation expenditure of $250.

Hart says while India is seeing 'a very large production' of solar panels with a capacity of 100 MW per year, most of this is exported to Europe, the US and Japan.

'That seems completely ridiculous. But there are policy issues involved. The history here has not been of a free market. Subsidies are offered, for instance, in the case of solar lighting. Without a level playing field, the possibility of commercial-based growth will be killed,' he says.

Hart argues that nobody can compete with subsidised production.

'Once the 100,000 subsidised units are sold, you are back to square one. Subsidy is largely responsible for the lack of growth. There are both state and central subsidies,' he says.

Hart argues that the collapse of gobar gas plants in India was largely due to the huge subsidies involved.

Hart's firm has also been closely working in the field of alternative power.

'We developed a solar powered vaccine refrigerator. It's the first of its kind, which has no batteries. Two of these were installed in the home of the president of India, who wanted to be the first person to buy the same.'

Each is priced at $1,500. These are believed to be the first commercial ones of their kind. It was worked in collaboration with WHO, Unicef, Greenpeace and PATA (Programme for Applied Technology in Health).

India is also working on the phase-out of CFCs over the past six to seven years. Production has stopped, and it is now down to 15 percent of what it was. By 2010 CFC-producing fridges are expected to be completely phased out in India, he says.

IT Power itself has subsidies in 12 countries, two offices in Britain, and 50 staff in India. They do work on solar power, wind power, micro-hydro and ocean energy.

In India, Hart's company is headquartered in Pondicherry, with offices in Delhi and Pune. 'We are just starting up operations in Bangalore,' he says.

But why is alternative power still seen as so illusory in its potential? 'People are out of date (on the possibilities of this technology),' says Hart.

He argues that what is needed really is micro-finance. 'That is finally emerging in India, and it is becoming a vehicle for offering credit to families,' he says, optimistically.

His company has been involved in attempting to convert medical waste in the Maldives into energy, a costly input anyway in that island nation.

*Frederick Noronha* ( © IANS / India eNews)