INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE

Countries located between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn are largely counted as developing countries. These countries are also confronted by a significant scarcity of fossil fuel resources as compared to their energy needs. However, on the flip side, these countries also receive copious amounts of solar radiation as they are bestowed with more than 300 sunny days in a year. This opens up huge possibilities for cost effective utilisation of solar radiation for meeting energy needs. These countries share aspirations to ensure universal energy access, energy equity and affordability. In June 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi envisioned an initiative for bringing solar resource rich nations together for mutual cooperation to upscale the utilisation of their solar energy generation potential. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, India initiated an ambitious effort to create a new international organization that can contribute towards achieving the common goal of increasing utilization and promotion of solar energy and achieving universal energy access at affordable rates. The outcome was the establishment of the International Solar Alliance (ISA). It was a manifestation of the common desire to significantly augment harnessing of solar energy, make joint efforts towards technology development, and mobilize investment in the solar sector in order to promote energy security and universal energy access.

ISA was jointly launched by the Prime Minister of India, and the President of France, on 30 November 2015 at Paris, France on the side-lines of the 21st Conference of Parties (CoP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. 121 solar resource rich countries lying fully or partially between the Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn were prospective members. ISA was widely hailed as an ambitious, audacious and game-changing initiative. Prime Minister Modi, in his inaugural address at the World Sustainable Development Summit on 15 February 2018, hailed ISA as the single most important global achievement for combating climate change after the Paris Climate Agreement.

The Framework Agreement of ISA was opened for signatures in November 2016. On 6 December 2017, with 15 countries ratifying the Framework Agreement, ISA became the first treaty based international inter-governmental organization headquartered in India. The Founding Conference of ISA was held on 11 March 2018 in New Delhi. It was jointly hosted by the Prime Minister of India and the President of France. In October 2018, the first Assembly of the ISA was held in New Delhi. As of now, 74 countries have signed the ISA treaty and 51 of them have already ratified the same.

CHALLENGES

The overarching objective of the ISA is to collectively address key common challenges to the scaling up of solar energy in ISA member countries. It also aims to undertake joint efforts required to reduce the cost of finance and technology, to mobilize more than US $ 1000 billion of investments needed by 2030 for massive deployment of solar energy to pave the way for development and adoption of new technologies. This objective will be addressed through aggregation of demand to enhance market leverage, mobilising investments, credit enhancement, risk mitigation of investments in solar products and projects, facilitating deployment of existing solar technologies at scale, promoting collaborative solar R&D and capacity building etc. ISA has been positioned to help create the conditions that would make funding, developing and deploying solar applications on a large scale a reality. In a short time since its inception, it has emerged as a truly international body putting the spotlight on ideas, advances, and technologies from across the world, not just from the dominant players.

ISA is a concerted and co-ordinated effort to enable these countries to improve the lives of their people through application of solar technologies in a cost-effective manner. By joining hands, these countries, primarily from the global south, are set to work together to find locally appropriate solutions, aggregate demand to make the technology affordable and access financial resources necessary for large scale deployment. ISA will assist member countries in drafting solar policies; development of standards; specifications and test protocols for solar energy systems; encouraging collaborations in solar resource mapping; and the deployment of suitable technologies; and also addressing various aspects of the capacity building requirement.

ISA is key to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and has the potential to script transformational change that entails a shift to more sustainable systems of energy production and consumption while bringing millions of those sub-served by modern energy into the fold. ISA will act as the fulcrum for implementing Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement.

OBJECTIVES

- TO COLLECTIVELY ADDRESS KEY COMMON CHALLENGES TO THE SCALING UP OF SOLAR ENERGY IN ISA MEMBER COUNTRIES.
- TO UNDERTAKE JOINT EFFORTS REQUIRED TO REDUCE THE COST OF FINANCE AND THE COST OF TECHNOLOGY.
- SIGNIFICANTLY AUGMENT HARNESSING OF SOLAR ENERGY.
- MAKE JOINT EFFORTS TOWARDS TECHNOLOGY.
- MOBILIZE INVESTMENT IN THE SOLAR SECTOR IN ORDER TO PROMOTE ENERGY SECURITY AND UNIVERSAL ENERGY ACCESS.

INNOVATION

ISA has been quite innovative and marks a departure from the existing international bodies active in the renewable space. It has been positioned to help create the conditions that would make funding, developing and deploying solar applications on large scale a reality. ISA is expected to create an altogether new and innovative platform that is going to assist the developing countries in framing of regulation and standards, consultancy support for bankable solar projects, concessional and low-risk finances. This apart, the ISA is expected to be a vehicle for technological collaboration, technology exchange and transfer.

INDIA AND ISA

India has recognised ISA's judicial personality by entering into Headquarters Agreement with ISA and provided immunity at par with UN organizations. India has offered to meet ISA Secretariat expenses for initial five years. This will help unfold ISA's potential for undertaking solar energy Programmes and activities among ISA member countries in a concerted manner. India's initial support has also set an example that will inspire other countries to contribute in different ways, including technology, finance and knowledge sharing.

In a world with overlapping interests, groupings, and international diplomacy, establishing a treaty based international organization in around two years has been unprecedented. India considers ISA a major initiative for putting solar energy in the global agenda and will continue to work for realizing the ISA vision of promoting energy security and achieving universal energy access at affordable rates. The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy and the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India have been spearheading this Indian initiative under the leadership of the Prime Minister of India.