

AAI to seek airport contracts in International Solar Alliance member nations



File picture of Cochin International Airport Limited. (bloomberg)

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- AAI plans to showcase Kerala’s Cochin International Airport Ltd—the first airport in the world to run fully on solar power
- This comes in the backdrop of China’s attempt to co-opt countries into its ambitious One Belt One Road initiative

State-run Airports Authority of India (AAI) plans to leverage International Solar Alliance (ISA) to help land airport contracts in member countries, by showcasing Kerala's Cochin International Airport Ltd (CIAL), which is the first airport in the world to run fully on solar power.

India has been trying to land solar power project contracts in ISA member countries against the backdrop of China’s attempt to co-opt countries into its ambitious One Belt One Road initiative.

“The ISA secretariat has launched the corporate partner scheme, wherein corporate organizations across the globe can get corporate partner status, subject to approval of the ISA assembly, after contributing \$1 million to ISA’s corpus fund,” said ISA’ director general Upendra Tripathy in an interview with Mint.

With clean energy projects comprising more than a fifth of its installed power generation capacity, India has been leveraging its solar energy credentials to build solar projects overseas.

“In third assembly of ISA, Airports Authority of India (AAI) shall become corporate partner of ISA and intends to actively contribute to accelerate solar deployment in ISA member countries,” Tripathy said.

An AAI spokesperson didn't comment on the development.

A senior AAI official requesting anonymity said that the state-run company has plans to develop airports in foreign countries, especially ones in the neighbourhood.

"AAI has the expertise to develop world class airports even outside India. Given an opportunity, AAI will take up such projects in future, and bid as competitively as the private companies," the official added.

In the past, AAI had signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of External Affairs for preparing a detailed project report (DPR) for developing airports at Kalay in Myanmar and Palaly in Sri Lanka. However, these plans haven't gained traction.

ISA is holding its third assembly virtually from 14 to 16 October and has 70 countries as members. European, Nordic and West Asian countries are also expected to become members of ISA, which was launched at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in November 2015.

“ISA is currently supported by 14 corporate partners (including 12 public sector enterprises) which have provided contributions towards ISA corpus fund as well as supported in project management of ISA programmes in member countries,” Tripathy said.

From helping state-run NTPC Ltd to secure solar projects in 47 of least developed and small island developing member countries of ISA, to being appointed the nodal agency for implementing India’ global electricity grid plan, the first treaty-based international government organization headquartered in India has become a significant foreign policy tool.

A case in point is Sri Lanka, where state-run NTPC Ltd plans to set up a solar power park. NTPC also plans to help Gambia and Malawi develop solar power parks and is eyeing project management consultancy contracts in Sudan, Mozambique, Egypt, Uganda, Rwanda and Niger. India's largest power generation utility recently got such contracts in Mali and Togo.

Tripathy added that the ‘Coalition for Sustainable Climate Action’ (ISA-CSCA) initiative would enable strategic partnerships between investors and policymakers in the member countries of the alliance to promote the role of public and private sector financing in sustainable development.

India and France have front-ended attempts to set up ISA, which has become India’s calling card on climate change, with France terming it as a "political project".

The ISA Secretariat in coordination with **Brickwork Analytics** has also prepared the feasibility study report for setting up a World Solar bank, that will be presented in the virtual assembly.

India has also been trying to leverage ISA to execute the ambitious ‘One Sun One World One Grid’, which seeks to transfer solar power generated in one region to feed the electricity demands of others and India’s aim of becoming an electricity exporter. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been championing the global electricity grid plan.

According to the partnership agreement inked between the ISA, India' ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE) and the World Bank, the ISA will manage the bid process management and the global grid’s implementation plan.

The global grid plan is spread across three phases. The first phase deals with the Middle East-South Asia-South-East Asia (MESASEA) interconnection for sharing green energy sources such as solar power. The second phase deals with the MESASEA grid getting interconnected with the African power pools; and the third and final phase is on global interconnection.