

Quality rating of rooftop solar products on cards

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AS numerous solar rooftop products are being rolled out in the country, the Union ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE) is contemplating launching a quality rating system for such products on the lines of the star rating model introduced in consumer goods like air conditioners.

"There are some rating systems but these are intended for the companies, not for the products. We are planning to come out with some quality grading system like the star-rating system for air conditioners. We are working out some mechanisms and will come out with a quality rating system for solar rooftop products," Tarun Kapoor, joint secretary, MNRE told *Financial Chronicle*.

He admitted that a lot of products being sold don't come under the norms of MNRE. "These products are sold directly to the consumers without subsidies but at very low rates. These products are sold in states like Jharkhand and Bihar. In Jharkhand alone, Rs 500-600 crore worth of products have been sold," he added.

Over the past several months, numerous private players through tie-up with Chinese or European firms have been launching solar rooftop products, mainly in the power-starved southern states with lower pricing. Industry experts have been warning that lack of compliance or certifying mechanism would lead to quality issues later as most of the buyers are not aware of technical specifications of products sold in the market.

Since most of the rooftop players were going in for low cost systems, it was gathered that there

would definitely be a compromise on quality beyond a certain cost.

"In India, roof top and off-grid solar systems are attractive given that grid reliability is poor. India can become one of the largest roof-top and off-grid solar power markets globally. In this context global players also have limited experience in handling the issues prevalent in India especially with regards to retail markets targeting households. Here, site-specific issues apart from the grid power quality and charging of batteries both from solar and utility power makes it important to understand the local issues. Otherwise the deployed solar system will not deliver the promised performance and can result in customer dissatisfaction," Sriram Ramakrishnan, CEO, Consul Consolidated told *Financial Chronicle*.

"Today there are no governing standards regarding off-grid and roof-top solar systems which means it is difficult for the customer to compare options being proposed by many players offering systems made up of cheap imported components. Besides the product, issues related to installation and on-going maintenance plays an equally important role on the solar system performance which is not well understood by the proliferation of new start-ups in the market," he added.

However, Ratnadip Bhattacharjee, CEO, ArrayTech Technologies is of the view that customers today are aware of quality issues, and demand the best. "No organisation can actually monitor this on all-India basis. Too much audit and inspection will hinder growth of the industry," he added.

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