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**Photovoltaic, solar energy answer to power crisis**

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MANGALORE: The World Bank estimates that 2 billion people around the world live without basic amenities, including electricity. These deprived people are largely from the rural areas of less developed countries.

These people have to rely on other forms of energy, such as candles, batteries, wood, paraffin and kerosene for fuel. Some of these products are undependable and expensive, especially in the remote areas, besides being unsustainable and inefficient.

Using photovoltaics is very often the only means of supplying electricity to remote areas. Photovoltaics offer many advantages over traditional power sources, both in terms of benefits for users and for the environment. Solar energy is an everlasting source of energy.

In this direction, the Royal Dutch/Shell Group is in the process of establishing a fifth core business, by investing more than half a billion US dollars over the next five years in renewable resources.

Renewable sources are expected to provide between five per cent and 10 per cent of the world's energy within 25 years, perhaps rising to 50 per cent by 2050.

Shell Renewables India (SRI) managing director Arvind Vij

told The Times of India, according to estimates, production costs of photovoltaic panels would come down by 40 per cent by 2000. Between 2005 and 2010, a kilowatt hour of electricity generated from photovoltaic panels would be 70 per cent cheaper than what it is today.

As economics improve, renewable energy sources are expected to provide five per cent to 10 per cent of the world's energy within 25 years and this could rise to 50 per cent by mid-century, he said. In this regard, Shell Foundation had sponsored a series of workshops called 'Sunergy 2000' in the southern part of India. SIR has been targeting the district headquarters, where the need is much more acute. Sunergy is aimed at orienting participants on various salient features of non-conventional energy and its relevance as a power source to rural households.

Considering the fact that solar photovoltaics involve relatively high initial investment, Sunergy will encourage bankers to offer more loans at attractive rates of interest.

The presentations and case studies to be shared at the meeting are expected to evolve practical and commercially viable schemes that bankers can adopt in increasing flow of credit in the sale of photovoltaics.

Arvind Vij says that renewable energy sources such as solar energy have the power to create new surges of wealth and wellbeing in villages and towns that remain unconnected to the state grid.

Vij said that SRI's Rural Electrification team offers complete solutions package, starting with site surveys, establishment of financial arrangements, in co-operation with local institutions. Such a package consists of a specific system design for the local requirements, supply of state-of-the-art hardware, total system installation, commissioning and high quality after-sales service.