

SOLAR POWER lights little lives

HANDE'S VISION
Selco head Harish Hande told TOI from Boston that he'll work towards bringing down cost of sustainable energy in the long run. "It is still very expensive. But compared to the cost that the environment is paying, it's much less. I want to use the Magsaysay award for students who want to pursue good sustainable energy projects but aren't able to do it," he said.

TOWARDS A BRIGHT FUTURE: Selco managing director Harish Hande at a solar-powered school in Sirsi, Karnataka. The company plans to cover 1,000 schools in the next three years

Jayashree Nandi | TNN

Bangalore: Many rural school students in Karnataka who don't have electricity in their homes do homework with the help of a solar light. They carry a portable battery that they charge in their school. Later, they light the lamp at home. Soon, more such students will bask in the glory of energy independence. They'll hardly

need to fret about unpredictable grid supply. This is the story of hope that brought Solar Light Private Ltd (Selco) founder Harish Hande the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay award. Selco in Karnataka is a unique business model — a social enterprise, a concept that is neither an NGO nor a corporation. It links poor homes that run without electricity to banks that can give them loans for the solar lighting

Ten Schools Have Been Covered So Far Under Selco's Solar Project



ALL SET: A technician installs a solar panel

system. A two-light system, for instance, costs between Rs 10,000 and 12,000; a single-light one is Rs 6,500. Customers pay off the loan in two to five years with interest rate of 5% under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission.

DARK NIGHTS NO MORE

From 1995 to date, Selco has provided solar lighting to 1,25,000 homes. Every year they cover 10,000-odd rural homes. "Solar lighting in houses is our main project. When we started in Karnataka, this became the source of reliable power for many villages," said Prasanta Biswal, Mission Projects, Selco.

When customers can't afford the lighting system, the company facilitates their relationship with the bank and customizes repayment of loans. Selco has tie-ups with 10 banks in Karnataka. In fact, 85% to 86% of its customers bank on these loans. Only rich farmers have been able to afford a full cash-down payment.

LIKE MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME

Selco's school project is modelled on the lines of the mid-day meal scheme that gives an incentive to students to go to school. "Many do not have power even during exams. We wanted to deal with this issue in rural areas. So we started the solar lighting system in school and gave a small solar light to students. A student can charge the light and use it for studies after dusk," explained Prasanta. Every student pays a token operational cost of Re 1 every day or around Rs 20 per week, while the cost for panels and lights is borne by Selco. With around 60 students, 10 schools have been covered under this project so far. The company plans to cover 1,000 schools in the next three years.

These products are more popular in Dakshin Kannada — Udipi, Kundapur, Puttur and Sulia, in particular.

Folklore varsity gets first VC

Bangalore: Ambalike Hiriyan, former director of Kuvempu Institute of Kannada Studies, University of Mysore, has been made the first vice-chancellor of the new Karnataka State Folklore University. Hiriyan (59), who specializes in structural analysis and theoretical folklore, was earlier special officer of the folklore university which will come up at Shiggaon, Haveri. His will be a four-year term. Touted as India's only university dedicated to folklore, it will teach the culture of Kannada-speaking people and Dravidian language, encourage research in folklore, besides acting as a catalyst in development of marginalized communities and tribes in Karnataka. TNN

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Mugging masters, beware Cab Drivers To Be Videographed In Isolated Areas

Rajiv Kalkod | TNN

Bangalore: Alarmed by the increasing number of mugging cases at night, particularly on the outskirts, police have started screening cab drivers and passengers who cross such desolate places. Drivers will be videographed to prevent them from committing offences.

Police said in most of the recent robberies on the outskirts and on ring roads, the offenders happened to be cab drivers and passengers travelling with them. The drivers, on the pretext of offering a drop, take passengers to isolated areas before looting them of their valuables and cash.

"We will videograph cab drivers found under suspicious circumstances," said joint commissioner of police (crime) Alok Kumar. The city has 35 check points as of now.

Night-beat officers will carry handycams and film cab



UNDER POLICE WATCH

A visible rise in the number of mugging cases has put cops on their toes. Police say in most of the recent robberies, offenders happened to be cab drivers and passengers travelling with them

drivers as well as passengers waiting in isolated areas and junctions. "This to avoid mugging by drivers and those who pose as passengers," Kumar explained.

"Many are falling prey to these offenders. We request commuters to take precautionary measures before taking a lift from strangers. Despite reports of repeated instances of mugging, people board cabs and subsequently fall prey to miscreants. If commuters come across suspicious characters, they should call up the police control room and give the cab's registration number" he said.

Travel agency owners shall be held responsible for their drivers' conduct. "It's the cab owner's duty to keep a watch on movements of their drivers," the officer added.

FAKE NUMBER PLATES

A senior police officer expressed concern over cabs with fake number plates: "Most of the culprits involved in mugging cases use fake number plates."

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