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VIZ-A-VIZ

SAMIR SHARAN,

CEO – ACME Cleantech Solutions Pvt. Ltd.

The ACME Group is one of the top player in the field of clean energy with operations in solar power generation, lithium-ion based energy storage solutions and energy management of telecom towers in India.
It pins itself as a pioneer in the development of green technology solutions that are environment friendly, energy efficient, frugal and also capable of delivering a quick return on investment. In a vivid viz-a-viz with Santanu Mukherjee, Samir Sharan, CEO – ACME Cleantech Solutions Pvt. Ltd shares on company's cutting-edge portfolio, futuristic plans to mitigate carbon emission and also confabs on much hyped issue EDF Energies Nouvelles and EREN Renewable Energy. Edited Excerpts.

• How ACME is consolidating its position in the solar Energy Storage Sector, globally?

ACME is today one of the largest Solar Power Developer in the country with a portfolio of about 1529 MW within a short time. We are planning to be at about 7500 MW by 2020.

We are primarily focusing on Indian market as the asking rate is almost of about 1500 MW per year henceforth if we have to achieve 7500 MW by 2020. We are also exploring other geographies to evaluate business potentials.

In Energy Storage Sector, we are the pioneering company in the country. Energy Storage is one of the key focus areas of ACME and we are developing various customized solutions to meet application specific requirements. However, the technology is still in nascent stage.

• Tell us how ACME aims to replace the polluting Diesel generators and Lead Acid batteries?

ACME's ECO GRID is direct replacement of DG Sets and Lead Acid Batteries. We have two standard models of ECO GRID – 5KVA and 10KVA. Multiple of these units can be connected in parallel to meet energy / power demand.

We do have further bigger Energy Storage solutions for commercial/ industrial applications and one of the live example is ACME's HO in Gurgaon. Here we have replaced our DG set with 270KWH of ESS (LIB) to provide backup power to whole office building.

• LIB storage solution can lasts for 4000 cycles or 10 years which give them a cost advantage over lead acid batteries but they are relatively expensive ..... how do you plan to bring it to masses

Yes, the present upfront cost of LIB is 3 -4 times higher than conventional lead acid batteries, this is really the show stopper. Now in a lithium battery system, lithium cell contributes 50 – 60 – 70 % of total cost and rest 30 - 40% includes Electronics, Electrical and Mechanical components. Now, one can really offer cost benefit by mfg it in India however present demand doesn't make it viable option to invest in mfg setup. So it is very important to create the demand first. We have been promoting LIB continuously and focus is to educate more and more probable segments (Users). In fact, despite higher cost, there are few customers who see value preposition in LIB considering it's advantages over conventional Lead Acid Batteries such as green technology, longer life, fast charging, maintenance free, less space, less weight etc. and we do get repetitive orders from them as well. We are also exploring finance/ lease options for consumer.

• What new technology you are coming

up with or integrating in your Energy Storage solutions

Energy storage is the key focus currently.

• How LIB systems can make rooftop installations more attractive for consumers

Due to its advantages over conventional batteries, LIB is the best fit for roof top solar application where consumer wants to have backup during night time/ absence of solar power. The main attraction is its fast charging time, longer life, lesser space & weight and no maintenance.
You know, the life of solar panel is 25 Yrs and LIB can also offer 10 – 15 Years life so consumer doesn't have to worry about frequent replacement of battery.

• How the Ecogrid Ess is helping to solve many energy Issues of Homeowners & Business Owners today and how is it different from Tesla's Powerwall?

Indeed, ECO GRID is one of the excellent product for energy storage application. It is an integrated solution i.e. one box solution (unlike Power wall) and installation is very easy.
We take regular feedback from our customers and we can confidently say that each one of our customers is very happy with the performance. That's how, we do get repetitive orders from some of them especially at remote locations where there is challenge to provide periodic maintenance for conventional battery.

• What are the solar based power generation projects in-line for the company and how are you stepping to protract the storage business in India?

ACME currently has portfolio of more than 1529 MW Solar PV Projects. Grid scale storage is definitely going to be the key application for LIB and we are expecting some tenders (PV Plant) with grid scale storage in coming years. We look forward to actively participate in these tenders.

• What kind of market share in storage segment do you enjoy right now and what percentage of growth do you reckon in the coming years?

We are one of the leading companies in India who have been offering LIB based commercial products for various applications (stationary) starting from residential, commercial, industrial, Defense & telecom etc and have experience in each of these applications. It would be quite early to talk about market share as the overall market size is very small.
Looking at present scenario, grid scale storage and EV application are going to be key driver to bring in the demand, however, it seems it may take another couple of years to see big volumes.

• What are the key market strategies of the company for energy storage system?

We are actively pushing LIB energy Storage for various applications and intent to deploy more and more by educating (about it's advantages) consumers in various segments.
Moreover, we are getting our self ready for the big volumes as well.

• Manufacturing has been given a thrust under the Make in India initiative, what type of help you are getting from the government so far?

Govt of India offers capital subsidy for setting up manufacturing facility for battery (LIB) and also there is exemption of Custom duty and Excise duty on mfg machines however as mentioned above the current volumes are not justified to make investment in mfg setup. Therefore, demand creation is very important at this stage.

• Your manufacturing plant in Pant Nagar Plant, Uttarakhad is the largest of its kind in Asia and incorporates state-of-the-art equipment and a high level of automation. Is there any plan to open more manufacturing unit in India?

No.

• There are reports that EDF Energies Nouvelles and EREN Renewable Energy may exit Acme Solar as they have issues with the company's aggressive bidding, and project execution. Would you like to shed some light on the same?

No, this is not true. The partnership is very much in place and not breaking up. However we can manage even without foreign partners. There is no plan or attempt on EDF's or EREN's part to get out of the Indian market or anything like that.

This partnership has surely helped ACME. They are strategic investors and not just financial investors. Strategic partners play a role in procurement, implementing best practices (and) maybe in getting ECB (external commercial borrowing) financing, apart from putting in funds.

It is important to mention here that we have a large pool of our own assets which is much bigger than the JV we have formed. Out of the 1500 MW, only about 260 MW in the operational or construction stage and another 360 MW of pipeline assets are part of the partnership. The rest is our own. In March this year we operationalized around 300 MW which are held entirely by us. Last month, we won 350 MW in NTPC auctions in which EDF and EREN had no participation. ■