

JSW to set up solar project in West Bengal to meet captive needs

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Partha Jindal, MD, JSW Cement, at a press briefing in Kolkata on Wednesday. -- Debasish Bhaduri

Group in advanced talks to rope in foreign major

Kolkata, July 19:

Sajjan Jindal's \$11 billion JSW Group plans to set up 200-250 MW land-based solar project at Salboni in West Bengal to meet captive requirements.

The group is in advanced level of discussions to rope in a foreign solar major for the project.

JSW has 4,300 acres at Salboni, approximately 160 km from Kolkata. The land was acquired for a steel project that did not take off.

However, JSW recently invested ₹600 crore in a 2.4-million-tonne (mt) cement grinding unit. Plans are afoot to double the cement capacity and to set up paint manufacturing unit and finishing steel mill facilities at Salboni.

According to Parth Jindal, MD, JSW Cement, the group's Salboni operations will require 45 MW of captive power. Considering the current tariff of grid-based power at ₹6.7 a unit, JSW wants to go for cheaper alternatives.

As per plans, JSW will offer land for solar generation and enter long term power purchase agreement with the producer.

"We are in advanced stages of discussion. We should have an answer in the next three months," Jindal said at a media conference here. The expectation is that solar power will be available at less than ₹3 per unit.

Interestingly, Jindal says even if all the investments, including solar farm, comes on stream, the group will still have 2,500 acres of excess land. Jindal said they are trying to attract other investors at Salboni.

"We still don't have a concrete plan for utilisation of the entire land. The West Bengal government asked us to come up with a proposal and we are working on it. We can make it an industrial park," he said.

JSW Steel's loss-making steel pipe and plate making mill in Texas, US, is likely to rebound soon.

According to Jindal, after nearly a decade since acquisition in 2008, the US operations are now EBITDA positive.

With manufacturing outlook improving in the US, plans are afoot to modernise the unit by setting up an electric arc furnace and slab caster at an estimated investment of \$350 million subject to environmental clearance.

Sports ventures

An avid sports enthusiast, Jindal is keen to buy an IPL cricket team. JSW currently invests ₹50 crore a year in sports and owns ISL football team Bengaluru FC and pro wrestling team Bengaluru Yodhas.

Jindal, however, reminded that the group does not make any money from the prevailing sports ventures. The group invested ₹150 crore in four years in training 300 junior athletes, he said.

"Buying IPL is business.. But I am much into investing in Olympic sports which will help elevate India's rankings in sports," he said.

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