

SOLAR LIGHTS ILLUMINATE REMOTE VILLAGES IN GUREZ TEHSIL OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR

All the households in 27 remote villages of Gurez Tehsil of Bandipora district of Jammu and Kashmir are now being illuminated by solar lights. Dr Farooq Abdullah, Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy, recently dedicated the solar home-lighting systems installed in 3900 households in 27 villages of Gurez to the people of the area. The project has been implemented by the Science and Technology Department of Jammu and Kashmir and JAKEDA (Jammu and Kashmir Energy Development Agency), with 90% financial assistance under the Remote Village Electrification Programme of the MNRE (Ministry of New and Renewable Energy). The solar lights will enable 30 000 people living in these villages to enjoy the comfort of modern lights through pollution-free technology. The systems do not require any major maintenance, except for periodic topping up of batteries. A five-year Annual Maintenance Contract with the suppliers is a mandatory part of the financial support. Representatives from each of the beneficiary villages have also been trained under a special training programme on minor maintenance and upkeep practices for these systems.

The Gurez Valley of North Kashmir, which manifests the natural beauty of Kashmir in its full glory, has been deprived of conventional electrification due to its remote location. The pass leading to the valley is way above the conifer line, and the valley is cut



off for almost five months in a year from the rest of the country because of heavy snowfall. The eco-sensitivity of the whole region also cannot be overlooked while planning a solution for providing electricity. On the other hand, the central government is committed to provide the convenience of modern lights to all households in the country as early as possible. It was in the light of this that a decision was taken to provide solar lights to all the households in the remote villages of Gurez, till the time conventional grid could reach there. The project costed about Rs 5 crore, of which the central government contributed about Rs 4.5 crore. The balance has been contributed by the state government

and a very nominal amount has been contributed by the beneficiaries.

The MNRE and the Government of Jammu and Kashmir had previously provided similar lighting systems to more than 8200 homes in Doda and Kupwara districts. The enthusiastic acceptance of these systems by the beneficiaries further motivated the state to take up many more villages for similar benefits. Another project – for covering 68 villages in Anantnag, Kulgam, Budhgam, Pulwama, and Shopian districts – was approved by the Centre, with a financial assistance of around Rs 15 crore. It is currently under implementation. More projects are being planned for the remote villages in other districts of the state.