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At first glance, Vishwannath Associates looks just like another architectural firm from the city. Tucked away in a quiet corner of Vasanthnagar, the building, with its glassy facade, appears just what it is - an office like any other.

But climb onto the second floor terrace of this 60x40 office block and the cat is out of the bag. The terrace is completely covered by solar panels that generate electricity. This office runs almost entirely on power harnessed from the sun!

"It's true," says V Vishwanath, the principal architect at the firm and a staunch believer in going green. "We have a 5kw power generation unit which runs our lighting requirement, most of our systems and canteen. Except for the air conditioning, everything that needs power to work is run on solar energy. Sustainable energy is the order of the day, because our conventional power sources will be depleted. What happens then? We need to the plan for the future."

About three months ago, the firm got another Bangalore-based company, U-Solar, to install this system in his office out of which 22 employees work. This has meant that Vishwannath Associates has reduced its energy consumption from nearly 75 units to about 30 units every month.

"My electricity bill has gone down from close to Rs 11,000 to less than Rs 5,000 every month and whatever extra energy is produced is fed back into the grid," Vishwanath said.

The process itself is quite simple says Hariharan of U-Solar. Solar panels



Sunrise on a rooftop

Vishwannath Associates, an architectural firm in the city, has cut its power bill from ₹11,000 a month to ₹5,000 after installing a solar energy system

on top of the roof generate DC current which is converted into AC power. This is routed via wiring (which can be modified in existing buildings) to an integrated inverter and battery unit that is also hooked up to a UPS and the main grid that supplies the power. The power output can also be monitored and stored as well for the evenings.

But what is so special about an office that runs on solar energy? Narendra Modi proved that it could be done on a large scale at Charanka, Gujarat when he opened a solar power park that can generate up to 600 Kws of power. He was even aided by experts from Bangalore to realise his dream at that!

"The idea of putting this system in

place was to demonstrate that it is a system that can work even in small firms. You do not need large tracts of land to generate solar electricity. Your rooftop on your home can also be used for this," says Vishwanath, who also adds that this is where policy needs to get more beneficial.

"The initial cost of installing this system needs to be made more attrac-



V Vishwanath, principal architect at Vishwannath Associates says the idea behind the system is to show that it is viable for even small firms

tive. Alternative energy needs to be brought into homes and not just limited to commercial establishments. But the Ministry of Renewable Energy offers a substantial 30 per cent subsidy to commercial establishments and just Rs 10,000 for residences. To produce a one KW of power, the initial costs are about Rs 1.6 lakh including the solar panels (the wiring would be about two per cent more than your average systems for conventional power). The payback period for a commercial establishment like mine would be about eight years. But for a residential block the pay back would be close to 15 years, which makes it a tough choice for home owners," says Vishwanath who even incorporated solar energy panels for Chennai and Delhi Metro.

"The point is that we have the technology to help our planet, we just need a little help making it more pocket friendly," says the man who has been promoting the benefits of alternative energy to his clients as well.