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A smart idea to supply power

Special Correspondent

IIT team to set up shop in New York to commercialise product

'XEstor' uses algorithms to store parameters and interfaces with the grid

Power-starved countries like India to benefit from idea

CHENNAI: A fundamental idea taught to electrical engineering students is that energy may be stored, but not power. And this has been seen as a primary obstacle to ensuring sufficient peak power supply, even when the installed power capacity can easily handle non-peak conditions.

The solution could be installation of "smart grids," which will store excess energy whenever there is surplus and distribute it when required using information technology in power transmission and distribution networks.

A team of five, including the present and past students of the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras, on Thursday won a business plan competition in New York, with their idea for powering large networks using their software.

Midhun Saleem, a final B. Tech (electrical engineering) student, who worked on the software as part of his project, says the team's product 'XEstor' uses algorithms to store various battery parameters and interfaces with the grid to control the amount of energy supplied and stored in the network.

Saleem, Kaushik Anand, Ashish Dattani, Sriram Kalyanaraman and Vinay Shankar B.K. shared the \$20,000 prize. They will set up shop in New York next year with funding from venture capitalists to commercialise their product. "We got the idea from a White Paper published by Cisco. We thought we could use the interface I was developing for my B. Tech project as our entry to the competition," Saleem said.

The smart grid projects, for which U.S. President Obama has provided \$3.4 billion as part of a stimulus package for the U.S. economy, remains largely on paper, mainly because of the complexity involved in controlling flows across huge power

grids in the cities of the world. Many companies have started implementing ideas to save millions of dollars for consumers and to forestall blackouts.

So while the team will start working from its office in the Big Apple, in the long-term it is power-starved countries like India that will benefit from the “smart grid” idea.

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