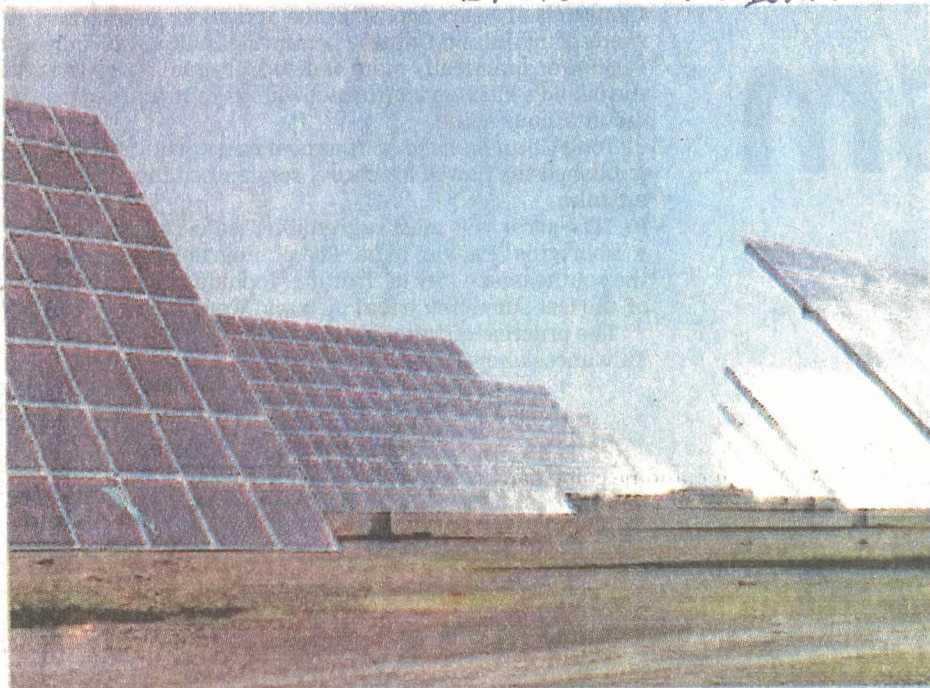




Solar panel: The sun in the Sahara is twice as strong as it is in Spain and is a constant resource, rarely being blocked by clouds even in the winter

Europe's energy needs could be met by the Sahara

By Richard Alleyne,
Science Correspondent in
Copenhagen

Technological advances combined with falling costs have made it realistic to consider North Africa as Europe's main source of imported energy.

By harnessing the power of the sun in an area around the size of Ireland, Europe could easily meet its 2020 target of getting at least 20 per cent of its energy from renewable sources.

Dr Patt told the conference that calculations show a £50 billion investment by governments over the next ten years would be enough to make Saharan thermal solar power an attractive and viable prospect for private investors.

The technology, which involves turning water to steam by focusing the sun's rays with mirrors, is also becoming cheaper and compares favourably with other forms of solar power, he said.

The cost of moving electricity long distances has come down by

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“It could supply Europe all the energy it needs,” Dr Anthony Patt, of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, in Austria, told scientists at a climate change conference in Copenhagen.

“The sun is very strong there and it's very reliable.”

around three-quarters, he added.

He said only a fraction of the Sahara, probably the size of a small country, needed to be covered to extract enough energy to supply the whole of Europe.

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