

Published on [Taipei Times](http://www.taipeitimes.com)

<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/biz/archives/2008/10/08/2003425306>

Solar cell expo opens in Taipei

BRIGHTENING UP: Taiwan is the fourth-largest solar cell manufacturing country in the world and the industry is expected to grow as solar energy becomes cheaper

By Jerry Lin

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The 2008 Taiwan International Photovoltaic Forum and Exhibition, aimed at promoting the solar industry, opened in Taipei yesterday.

This year's exhibition is bigger than ever, with 155 exhibitors and 299 booths — up 109 percent and 172 percent respectively from last year — the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA) said.

In his opening remarks yesterday, Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs Shih Yen-shiang (施顏祥) said that solar energy was a hot market, with statistics showing that the industry has been growing at a compound annual growth rate of 35 percent since 1998.

“Taiwan's solar industry is well established, except for polysilicon at the very top of the stream ... Based on our successful experiences developing the semiconductor and thin-film-transistor liquid-crystal-display (TFT-LCD) industries, I believe Taiwan will become the most important solar manufacturing base in the world,” Shih said.

The total production value of Taiwan's photovoltaic industry reached NT\$53.5 billion (US\$1.65 billion) last year and is projected to exceed NT\$100 billion this year, Shih said, adding that the value should exceed NT\$400 billion by 2015.

Taiwan has become the fourth-largest solar cell manufacturing country in the world, with a solar cell output of 545 megawatts-peak (MWp) last year, accounting for almost 13 percent of global production.



A truck equipped with solar panels attracts visitors at the Taiwan International Photovoltaic Forum and Exhibition at the Taipei World Trade Center yesterday. The truck, made by Taiwanese company Everphoton, can provide electric power in emergency situations when no mains supply is available. The exhibition closes today.

PHOTO: CHEN YUNG-CHI,

"I believe Taiwan will become the most important solar manufacturing base in the world."

Taiwan Photovoltaic Industry Association chairman Lan Chung-wen (藍崇文) said that grid parity, the point at which photovoltaic electricity is the same price as grid electricity, might be achieved in 2012 or 2015, adding that this would boost industry growth.

In addition, Lan said the industry stood to benefit from the fact that one-fourth of the world's population does not have access to electrical grids. It is estimated that the use of solar energy will grow sharply in less developed countries after 2012, Lan said, citing a European Photovoltaic Industry Association report.

— Shih Yen-shiang, administrative deputy minister of economic affairs

The leading international companies participating in the two-day expo include Q-Cells AG, the world's second-largest manufacturer of solar cells, based in Germany, E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Co from the US, and Nisshinbo Industries Inc from Japan.

Leading Taiwanese companies participating in the fair include E-Ton Solar Tech Co (益通光能), Gintech Energy Corp (昱晶能源) Green Energy Technology Inc (GET, 綠能科技) and many others.