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Kochi may soon have solar boats

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KOCHI: Even as transport development agencies discuss the need to integrate various modes of transport, the state water transport department (SWTD) has come up with a plan to revamp its fleet and utilize solar energy to bring down the fuel cost. The department plans to introduce solar boats and set up chemical toilets in existing boats.

Speaking on the project, SWTD director Shaji V Nair said that the decision to introduce solar boats on a trial basis would be taken after scrutinizing a report submitted by the ship technology department of Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT). The state government took the initiative to authorise the university to conduct the study. "After analysing the report, we will look into the project cost and feasibility," he said.

Researchers with the ship technology department said that a ferry boat fitted with solar panels can carry 75 people. "It is designed in such a way that excess energy can be stored in standby batteries and used during night. During the monsoon season when there is less sunlight, the boat can use a stand-by diesel engine," said associate professor Dileep K Krishnan, who is involved in the project. The use of solar boats will eliminate emission of greenhouse and noxious gases. Meanwhile, the department will set up chemical toilets in all their boats as soon as the project is cleared by the state government. "We expect the order to be issued within a week. In the initial phase, chemical toilets will be set up in 49 boats owned by the department," said Shaji. A detailed project for setting up chemical toilets at a total cost of Rs 70 lakh was submitted to the state government. SWTD operates more than 80 boats across 14 operating stations in Kerala. The plan is to install special tanks to collect the waste in boats and treat it using chemicals.

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Reader's opinions

s venkataraman (Hyderabad)

The novel idea of Transport integration initiated by SWTD is good. Though the Government may be needed to earmark huge investment in the beginning, the same may be recovered in future. Picnic spots/tourist spots always lure general public. Moreover, ferrying through Solar boat will be of good interest. If feasible, hydrogen fuel cell technology may be integrated with solar power for a better mileage though diesel remains as an ultimate resort.

Malcolm Moss (Udaipur and UK) replies to [s venkataraman](#)

The first commercial Solar Boat was built for India and after 19 years operates daily in Rajasthan. Since then Solar powered ferries and boats operate all over the world and recently there has been a round the world voyage by Solar Planet. Solar boats are ideal for Kerala and if interested we can help with paddle wheel designs that get over the weed problem on some of your backwaters. Once tried Electric Boats powered by solar - you never return to smelly, noisy, polluting diesel. Malcolm Moss President Electric Boat Association

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