

Finnish oil major eyes Indian jatropha

Jatropha, a wonder plant grown in India, might soon fuel cars in [Europe](#) with Finnish oil and refining major Neste Oil considering importing it for its upcoming bio-diesel plants.

'We are continuously looking for ways to expand our raw material base for NExBTL (the second generation bio-diesel developed by Neste), and in this search the non-edible jatropha is very interesting,' said Neste Oil president and CEO Risto Rinne here.

'Currently, Neste Oil has no ongoing projects in India but with its vast population and proactive bio-fuel targets, India is an attractive future market opportunity for Neste Oil's NexBTL renewable diesel,' he told visiting Indian journalists.

Neste Oil, the third largest company in Finland with a 50.1 percent government stake, is coming up with its first bio-diesel plant in May this year and aims to emerge as the world's leading bio-diesel company besides running its traditional oil refining business.

'India is a rather new thing for us but we can buy Jetropha Curcas from India to begin with,' said Osmo Kammonen, senior vice-president, communications, Neste Oil.

Jatropha Curcas is the wonder plant that produces seeds with an oil content of 37 percent. The oil can be combusted as fuel without being refined. It burns with a clear smoke-free flame and has been tested successfully as a fuel for the simple diesel engine.

'More than 50 percent of new European Union (EU) cars are diesel cars and so we want to gear up to produce more diesel,' said Kammonen.

'India has potential to be a market and for sourcing our raw material. I am sure that our people are looking at the Indian market. We need to find a good supplier.

'New diesel vehicles are better than gasoline ones. For producing bio-diesel we use animal fat and vegetable oil as feedstock and jatropha is a good option,' he said.

Neste Oil's NExBTL renewable diesel is a second generation bio-diesel which is pure hydrocarbon and according to its properties and quality is similar to fossil diesel.

Wider feedstock - raw materials like jatropha - base can be utilised in the production process for Neste Oil. The higher the NExBTL content, the lesser the emissions. The first NExBTL production at a Neste Oil unit will be on-stream in Porvoo, Finland, this year.

Neste Oil's Porvoo and Naantali refineries have a combined refining capacity of about 14 million tonnes a year.

'Neste Oil is involved in developing third generation bio-diesel technology. Though it does not significantly differ from NExBTL, the technology enables one to exploit the whole plant (biomass) and thereby widens the feedstock base since Finland is the most extensively forested country in Europe with 86 percent of its land area falling under forests,' said a Neste Oil official.

In 2006, the company supplied 8.1 million tonnes of petroleum products to Finland and exported 6 million tonnes. It imports crude oil mainly from Russia (48 percent in 2006).

Neste Oil has some 900 Neste service stations, diesel fuel outlets and other sales points in Finland, and some 240 Neste stations and outlets and diesel fuel outlets in the Baltic states, Russia and Poland.

Jatropha is a valuable multi-purpose crop to alleviate soil degradation, desertification and deforestation and can be used for bio-energy to replace petro-diesel besides for soap production and climatic protection.

According to Abhishek Maharishi, CEO, Centre for Jatropha Promotion and Bio-diesel, Rajasthan, if the Indian government implements its policy on jatropha cultivation in right earnest the country could be a leading exporter.

'Since 2003, the policy has been adopted to promote the cultivation, yet there are hurdles. A bio-diesel board formed in Rajasthan is yet to function. We think that if at least 10 percent of the 33 million hectares of wastelands in India is made available for jatropha, it could turn the fortunes of the rural poor and work wonders,' Maharishi told IANS.

Sujoy Dhar (© IANS / India eNews)