

In Varanasi, clean Ganga plan rides on CNG boats

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Varanasi: A boat ride on Ganga for experiencing the mystical tranquility of sunrise or to enjoy the divine view of the majestic evening 'aarti' tops the must-do list of believers thronging the holy city. But the visuals were marred by high decibel noise of the diesel engines powering the boats and itchy eyes caused by black exhaust fumes containing unburnt fuel that impacted aquatic life. Not any longer.

Today 90% of these boats are powered by engines running on clean-burning CNG, thanks to a retrofitting scheme launched by the oil ministry and being funded by state-run gas utility GAIL.

The company has retrofitted 585 of the 647 registered diesel-powered boats since the conversion began in December 2021. It is expected that with time the 1,153 registered rowing boats will also convert to CNG. GAIL has also set up a first-of-its-kind floating CNG station and a second is being planned at Ravidas Ghat.

"In July last year, the PM had desired that boats on Gan-

CLEARING THE AIR

1,800 | Number of registered boats | **647** | Number of diesel-power boats

585 | Number of boats retrofitted with CNG engines



₹ 75 lakh | Cumulative savings of Rs 75 lakh for boatmen with CNG vessels since retrofitting began in December 2021

₹ 25,000 | Each boatman's annual estimated

savings

₹ 2 lakh | Levelised average cost of retrofitting borne by GAIL

₹ 29 crore | Outlay set by GAIL for retrofitting 18,000 boats



ga should be run on CNG... Varanasi is among the oldest cities in the world (and it is) where tradition mixes with modernity," petroleum and natural gas minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Sunday before flagging off a CNG boat rally to spread awareness about energy transition, one of the themes of next month's India Energy Week conference that coincides with India's presidency of G20 grouping.

"More people are opting for boat rides now as CNG engines are quieter and does not cause eye irritation. Sometimes it means more trips," bo-

atman Rajkumar Sahni said.

"Our calculations show switching to CNG leads to annual savings of Rs 25,000 for each boatman," Puri said, adding work on the second CNG station will begin once the state provides land.

There are collateral benefits of the floating CNG station, which has become a major tourist attraction. Passengers can take the river route in CNG boats to the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor. The project also includes two passenger jetties and a floating bridge at Varanasi Khidkiya Ghat river access point.

No. of CNG-powered Boats in Varanasi to Rise to 2,000: Puri

Our Bureau

Varanasi: About 580 boats now run on compressed natural gas (CNG) in the Ganga river in Varanasi as Gail has laid city gas infrastructure in the city. The number of CNG-powered boats in Varanasi will rise to 2,000, oil minister Hardeep Puri said, without giving a timeline.

Boats driven by CNG will help cut air pollution in the city while also increasing the income of boatmen, he added.

Boatmen in Varanasi are also experimenting with battery-powe-



red boats.

India is working on increasing the consumption of natural gas in transport. It aims to raise the share of gas in the primary energy mix from 6.3% now to 15% by 2030.



More boats in Varanasi turn eco-friendly, switch to gas

Shishir Sinha

Varanasi

Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Sunday said as many as 583 boats plying on the river Ganga are being operated on environment-friendly CNG as against diesel. The plan is to take this number to 2,000. These boats are being supplied CNG from India's first floating CNG

station built by GAIL at Namohat. There are also plans to add another filling station at Ravidas Ghat.

Acknowledging that there could be some initial problems in operating CNG-driven boats, Puri said a boatman could save ₹20,000-25,000 annually this way, besides it being environment-friendly. To promote the fuel, a race of CNG-run boats, too, was or-

ganised. In comparison to diesel, CNG is less flammable, so it is likely to reduce the risk of boat disasters. "For us, it is an extremely important step," Puri said.

The conversion of boats to CNG was carried out under GAIL's corporate social responsibility initiative in association with Varanasi Nagar Nigam (VNN). The floating filling station doubles as a tourist attraction, from

where passengers can take the river route in eco-friendly boats to the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor. The project also includes two passenger jetties made from robust high-density polyethylene (HDPE) and a floating bridge at the Varanasi Khidkiya Ghat river access point.

(The correspondent is in Varanasi at the invitation of GAIL)

Cut down fuel prices if crude has stabilised: Oil Minister to OMCs

Shishir Sinha

Varanasi

Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Sunday asked oil marketing companies (OMCs) to cut retail prices of petrol and diesel, but only after fulfilment of two conditions — once international prices have stabilised and the companies have managed to reduce under-recoveries.

Speaking on the sidelines of flagging off a CNG-driven boat race on the River Ganga here, Puri claimed that fuel cost has been under check, despite volatile prices of the Indian crude basket. The event was organised by GAIL as a run up to the India Energy Week to take place next month in Bengaluru.

OMCs have incurred a loss of ₹21,200 crore on account of



Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas

selling petrol and diesel below the cost price.

UNDER CHECK

Puri said one of the reasons for keeping fuel prices under check is the reduction in taxes. The Centre had revised taxes twice between November 2021 and May 2022. Prices of petrol and diesel have not

PRICE RECOVERY

The Minister also mandated narrowing down of under-recoveries. OMCs have incurred a loss of ₹21,200 crore on account of selling petrol and diesel below the cost price

been revised since May 22, 2022.

However, during this period, while the Brent crude came down to \$88/barrel from the highs of \$139 in March, India has been increasing its import from Russia. Both these have a combined impact on the overall fuel import bill, but losses are still there which

seems to be why OMCs are not able to cut the prices.

“We are earning gross profit on petrol and it is in single digit. However, during the last 15 days, due to cracks, petrol profitability has been effected. Diesel sale is still on gross loss and it is in double-digits,” said a senior official from an OMC.

In a recent report, Moody’s Investor Services said as international prices of gasoline (petrol) and gasoil (diesel) cool on slowdown concerns, marketing losses will ease for the three OMCs.

“Still, overall earnings for FY23 will be weak because of marketing losses in the first half. The rupee’s depreciation against the US dollar further hit profits,” it added.

(The correspondent is in Varanasi at the invitation of GAIL)