

India's first methanol cooking fuel debuts in Assam



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NITI Aayog member V.K. Saraswat hands over the first methanol stove to Ritu Bordoloi of Namrup. Photo: Special Arrangement

It's a cheaper clean energy substitute for LPG.

Ritu Bordoloi of Namrup never thought she would create history. On Tuesday, she became India's first owner and user of a cooking stove fuelled by methanol.

The homemaker, 50, was aware that she had added a chapter to an area that has had many industrial firsts in India as well as Asia. Namrup, in eastern Assam's Dibrugarh district, is not far from where the commercial journey of the team began, the first oil well was struck, and the first refinery was set up.

Ms. Bordoloi was one of 500 people who were handed over a stove with two 1.2-litre canisters of methanol on Friday, as part of a pilot project by the Namrup-based [Assam](#) Petrochemicals Limited (APL), India's first public sector producer of methanol and formalin from natural gas as feedstock.

The project has been promoted by NITI Aayog.

“APL has taken a huge step towards reducing India’s oil imports and tap into pollution-free methanol as fuel for cooking and transportation. It is apt that the project has begun with cooking fuel that mostly impacts women in India,” V.K. Saraswat, Member, NITI Aayog, said before handing over the first few methanol stoves.

Can replace LPG

Dr. Saraswat said methanol is the future of fuel in India, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi keen on reducing oil imports that set the country back by \$86 billion every year. “We are looking at conversion of coal, petroleum and natural gas to methanol so that LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) consumption is reduced,” he said.

About 80% of LPG consumed in India is imported, Dr. Saraswat said.

According to alternative fuel expert Prashanth Guru Srinivas, APL’s experience in producing methanol for 30 years gave NITI Ayog the confidence to go ahead with the cooking fuel project.

“There are 5.5 lakh people in Africa and 8 million in China who use methanol as cooking fuel. But India is the first country where the focus is on replacing LPG. This is why much of the world is looking at how our cooking fuel project is working out,” he said.

About 5% of 70 million metric tonnes of methanol used in China is for cooking, and the resultant market turnover there is \$2 billion now, Mr. Srinivas said. “Methanol can be a major market in India, besides helping us reduce oil imports by 20%,” he added.

In terms of heat value, a 14 kg LPG cylinder is equivalent to about 20 kg of methanol. But methanol works out 30% cheaper, and the saving on an equivalent quantity of LPG is expected to be up to ₹350.

Target Northeast

APL Chairman Jagadish Bhuyan said the company would become the largest producer of methanol in the country by 2019-end after it expands its capacity from 100 MMT to 600 MMT. The expansion project is worth ₹1,337 crore.

“After expansion, our target is to feed methanol to the Northeast and then to the rest of India,” Mr. Bhuyan said.

APL Managing Director Ratul Bordoloi said the company is now planning to produce methanol from biomass, municipal waste and flare gas from refineries and oil wells.

“Methanol is not only a clean fuel, it is light and can be easily carried to hilly areas,” he said.