

Monday
Oct 18 2004

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NEW ENERGY SOURCE?n

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By Shawn Cumberbatch

GOVERNMENT is about to be asked to consider a \$120 million project that promises to slash several million dollars off Barbados' growing energy import bill, while not costing taxpayers one cent.

Last year alone, \$260 million in foreign exchange was spent buying gasoline, diesel, liquid petroleum gas, kerosene and other energy products for the country.

Now, amid signals the price of these products here are likely to increase again due to the spiralling price of oil on the world market, an American company last week proposed construction of a ten megawatt power plant utilising Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC).

Additionally, if it receives the green light, Baltimore-based Sea Solar Power International's initiative would see the production of three million gallons of fresh water daily, and a lift for fish and vegetable production.

Business Monday was made aware of the ambitious project by Robert Nicholson, president of Sea Solar Power International, who said his company not only had the expertise, and financial backing, but the desire to partner with public and private sector entities on the island. Nicholson said he was keen to contact the Ministry of Energy and Public Utilities, Barbados Light and Power Company Limited (BL&P), Barbados Water Authority (BWA) and any other relevant agency as soon as possible so he and other officials could present a detailed proposal.

Although invented back in 1881 by French scientist Jacque Arsene D'Arsonval, OTEC has remained a largely untapped but environmentally sound method of converting into useful energy the temperature difference between surface water of tropical oceans, and water at a depth of at least 1 000 metres.

The company head said even though he did not know much about the Barbados market and its requirements for electrical power and water, he visited the island before and was keen to add it to the list of countries where his company was spreading OTEC. "What we are using is solar energy. We have a ten megawatt plant that generates ten mega-watts of power and it produces three million gallons of fresh water per day and we use only solar energy and the solar energy is tapped from the ocean. So this technology works day and night, he said.

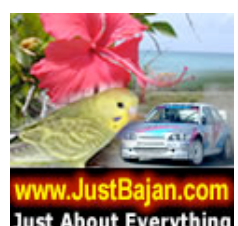
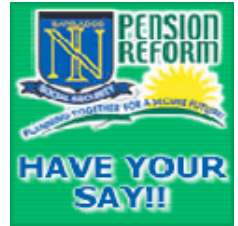
Nicholson said like so many other small island states, Barbados was vulnerable to the price of oil because it had no major supply of its own and therefore could not determine how much it wanted to pay for the precious commodity.



With Barbados' rising energy import bill because of the increasing oil prices, an American company will soon ask the Barbados Government to consider new alternative in the form of a ten megawatt power plant utilising Ocean Thermal Energy Conversion (OTEC).1

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According to the company official, Sea Solar Power was preparing to build its first OTEC plant but had several proposals for others it was planning internationally. He said having signed an agreement for one such plant in the Cayman Islands, he and officials there would have to revisit the initiative following the destructive path of Hurricane Ivan there.

When the company submits its proposal to Government, one set of good news authorities would hear was the Baltimore company intended to build, own and operate the plant, which he estimated could cost around \$120 million. "We will build and own and operate. We will invest. We will build the plant and own it so Barbados doesn't have to put up any money. We have the funding in each case, for each proposal. And in the case of Barbados there could be more than one plant or one large plant, he suggested.

"I don't know what your load is or what you generate but we have a ten megawatt plant and a 100 megawatt plant. And here is a tremendous opportunity and no risk. There is absolutely no risk because we put up all of the money, the president added. Nicholson said it was important in the existing environment to attain some level of self sufficiency where energy was concerned because "you've got tourist dollars coming in but you've got a drain on your treasury because you've got oil dollars going out.

He hoped to work an arrangement with Government whereby after operating the plant for about four years profitably, Sea Solar Power would train Barbadians to run it and sell it to the country. Another plus of the project he referred to was that each of the ten megawatt power plants would support hundreds of acres of mariculture.

"We would be bringing up nutrient rich cold water from the bottom of the ocean that would cause fish and vegetables to grow three times faster. So we can have several acres adjacent to our plant and add a mariculture park where we grow and raise fish and vegetables, according to him.

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