

Shore power for greener cruises

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GEORGE TOWN: A cruise ship with all its lights on and engine thrumming while berthed at the port here is always a sight to behold. However, it is also a huge addition to the state's carbon footprint.

Keeping a berthed cruise ship's engine running just to supply electricity to the cabins also means high fuel consumption.

Due to these facts, Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal (SPCT) has decided to provide power from the shore for the cruise ships.

A total of RM50mil will be spent on this, only the second such project in the Asean region. Singapore was the first port to provide ships with shore power.

The process, called "cold-ironing," allows berthed ships' auxiliary engines to be turned off, thus cutting air pollution by 95%.

Penang Port Sdn Bhd (PPSB) chief executive officer Datuk Sasedharan Vasudevan told The Star in an exclusive interview that PPSB would spend RM50mil to set up a power substation on land belonging to the Penang Port Commission (PPC) to supply power to the ships by mid-2025.



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“The world is moving towards environmental, social and corporate governance, and shore power will be the requirement of countries as a condition to allow cruise liners to berth,” he said.

According to a study, within the transportation sector, shipping claims third position in carbon dioxide emissions or 11% of the total, trailing closely behind passenger vehicles at 39% and medium to heavy trucks at 23%.

With the increase in global trade and demand for the maritime carriage of goods, he said the sector’s carbon footprint could surge by between 50% and 250% by 2050 if proactive measures are not taken.

Sasedharan said a private company would be given the task of producing electricity for cruise liners.

“Europe is moving away from the cruise tourism business to reduce the carbon footprint. Huge cruise liners are not exactly environment-friendly.

“Imagine around 4,000 passengers landing on shore – it creates a huge carbon footprint. That is why the world’s cruise liners are moving to Asian markets.

“Of course, it’s a boon when cruise liners call on us, but the question is, are we ready for them?”

Sasedharan said many facilities must be ready for cruise ships to come a-calling.

“There are many processes involved in homeporting. Passengers fly in to board the cruise ship and even with a minimum capacity of 4,000, you need 15 chartered flights. Even if they land at KLIA (Kuala Lumpur International Airport), they need to board domestic flights to Penang,” he added.

He said currently, Penang was the secondary homeport for Costa cruises, which is homeported in Port Klang.

Sasedharan also said competition in Asia was getting fierce.

“China has opened up and the big liners are going there, which will slice off a percentage of the business in this region. While passengers who board from the Asean region pay RM4,000 per person, liners can ply between China-Japan-South Korea and charge US\$4,000 (RM19,000).

“As such, the real spin-off will only be seen if we have liners doing homeporting, and Penang is trying to bring the Swiss-based MSC Group of cruise liners with a 5,000-passenger capacity,” he added.

On the cruise business this year, he said 1.5 million passengers was the target, despite the stiff competition from China.

Sasedharan said the burgeoning Indian market, with 400 million middle-income earners, accounted for about 25% of the 1.7 million passengers last year and this was expected to grow this year.

“We did our RM155mil expansion of SPCT during the Covid-19 pandemic and the berthing area can now even accommodate the world’s biggest cruise ship, ‘Icon of the Seas’.

“Work will begin on a further expansion at the end of this year.

“Disney Cruise will also be here, with its ships having a capacity of 3,000 to 4,000 passengers,” he added.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2024/02/29/shore-power-for-greener-cruises>