

**Today's Paper » NATIONAL » KERALA**

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**Row over waste treatment plant**

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*NIIST denies involvement in project**Corporation had approved proposal by NIIST on Friday**Project envisages pilot plant for solid waste disposal*

Thiruvananthapuram: Three days after the City Corporation adopted a resolution approving a tie-up with the National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology (NIIST) for the establishment of a pilot plant utilising new technology for solid waste disposal, the institute has denied any involvement in the project.

A press note issued by NIIST director T.K. Chandrashekar here on Monday said he was "surprised" to see media reports on the project. "As of today, we have not entered into an agreement or any project with the Corporation in this regard."

Mr. Chandrashekar, however, said the NIIST had independently submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Non-Conventional and Renewable Energy Sources for funding. "The outcome of the proposal is not known," he added.

On Friday, the Corporation Council had adopted a resolution approving a proposal submitted by the NIIST for a pilot project of five tonnes capacity. According to the resolution, the Corporation would provide land, electricity and water required for the plant, while the NIIST would bear the capital cost and operation and maintenance cost for three years. The project would be transferred to the Corporation on completion of the three-year term, it adds.

Corporation functionaries have taken strong exception to the director's statement. Chairman of the standing committee on Health G.R. Anil said the resolution adopted by the council was based on a concrete proposal from the NIIST. "If the director has denied any involvement in the project, he is clearly not completely aware about the activities in his institution. He cannot wash his hands off at this stage. A socially-relevant project such as this should not be allowed to become a casualty of an ego clash in the institute," he said.

When contacted, R.V.G. Menon, a member of the technical committee constituted by the Corporation for improving the solid waste management system in the city, said the project had been discussed in detail before it was presented before the council for approval. "A formal agreement is yet to be signed. The resolution adopted by the council was a mandatory requirement to formalise the project and secure funding from the Union Ministry," he explained.

The pilot plant is designed to address the limitations of the existing garbage treatment plant at Vilappilsala and to develop appropriate technology for integrated management of solid waste. Researchers at the NIIST had developed the scale model of a zero-discharge anaerobic digester that constitutes the primary stage of treatment in the demonstration plant. Based on the technology developed by the pilot project, the Corporation is planning to establish a network of garbage treatment plants at different places.