

INLAND WATERWAYS TAKES A GIANT STEP WITH IWDC TOWARDS FULFILLING MARITIME INDIA VISION 2047

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Distribution of key natural resources - Water Resources incl. Rivers & related issues in world & India

The first meeting of Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC) concluded on January 8, 2024 in Kolkata to strengthen the inland water transport system in the country. The Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW), Shri Sarbananda Sonowal chaired the meeting onboard vessel MV Ganga Queen showcasing the interesting possibilities waterways sector holds.

The Meeting witnessed participation from the Minister of State for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Shri Shantanu Thakur and the Ministers from six States, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland and Manipur, Senior officials and dignitaries from 21 State Governments/Union Territories namely Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Puducherry. A total of 124 participants from Central Government, State Government and UT Governments attended the meeting. This massive participation truly depicted the spirit of IWDC which is envisaged to function as a dedicated institutional mechanism directed towards accelerating the holistic development of inland waterways and the associated IWT ecosystem for enhanced cargo, passenger movement and river cruise tourism by enabling active dialogue and deliberation between the States, Union Territories and the Center.

The agenda of the first IWDC meeting had sessions centered around fairway development, enhancing cargo and passenger transport in IWT, potential of river cruise tourism to boost economic activity, sustainability practices in terms of non-fossil fuel-based vessel operations among others.

One of the key highlights of the meeting was the launch of Harit Nauka- Guidelines for Green Transition of Inland Vessels and River Cruise Tourism Roadmap, 2047 by Shri Sonowal.

With the Harit Nauka Guidelines, the MoPSW has put forth a strong commitment towards furthering passenger transport through waterways in an environment friendly and sustainable manner by promoting the adoption of low-emission fuel (CNG/LNG/electric/hydrogen/methanol) as propulsion fuel for inland vessel operations (Green Vessels). Chairman, IWAI and Chairman & Managing Director, Cochin Shipyard Limited apprised meeting participants on our nation's elevated capacity in building such Green Vessels and highlighted that a new state of the art facility has been set up at the Hooghly Cochin Shipyard Limited for construction of electric powered inland vessels.

The River Cruise Tourism Roadmap 2047 focuses on four vital pillars, including Infrastructure, Integration, Accessibility, and Policy for promoting river cruise tourism. As a part of the roadmap, over 30 possible routes and tourist circuits along inland waterways have been identified for further development.

The meeting served as successful platform for communicating the concerns and suggestions of the State/UT representatives to the Center and vice versa. MoPSW stressed upon the importance of State-level institutional structure and rules in ensuring that the planning and

development of the state's inland waterway ecosystem accounts for its unique characteristics and requirements. The Ministry further recommended that IWT specific institutional structures put in place by Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh among others can be looked into and adopted by other states.

States such as Nagaland and Tamil Nadu, highlighted the rivers and waterbodies (NW-101, NW-4) of the respective States, that possess the potential for supporting passenger and/or cargo movement and emphasized upon prioritizing the development of these NWs. Many of the state's highlighted opportunities of channelizing IWT for cargo movement. For instance, Madhya Pradesh highlighted the potential of the waterways in their state towards facilitating mineral movement while Andhra Pradesh highlighted ability for finished goods movements of cement and steel using waterways in their state. Similarly, multiple states brought out the scope of IWT-based tourism. For instance, Madhya Pradesh mentioned stretches of Narmada River while Assam shared ideas on religious tourism circuit development along Brahmaputra River among others.

Most states also unanimously highlighted the need for technical guidance and support from the Central Government in expediting the development of their waterway system. Meeting participants also discussed regulatory aspects of the IWT sector especially contours of the Inland Vessel Act 2021 (which replaces a century old Act) and the role of State Government agencies in ensuring its compliance.

As the participants deliberated upon infrastructure and technology interventions in the IWT space, representatives from IIT Kharagpur presented a computerized simulation of the working of an Open Pontoon system developed by the institute for enabling faster pontoon operations. Works towards deployment of two such Open Pontoon systems in Uttar Pradesh are underway.

Union Minister Shri Sonowal in his concluding remarks, assured that the Central Government shall continue to support the States/UTs in their endeavours for untapping the waterway system of their State/UT. He also stressed upon the importance of undertaking the techno-economic feasibility studies to ensure that the planning, estimation, development, and execution of any project is done in a comprehensive and prudent manner.

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