

A 'Boat Lab' to study Brahmaputra

Harsh Vardhan

Soon, it will be possible to cruise along the Brahmaputra along while doing some serious science.

The Department of Biotechnology will commission a two-tiered barge that will roughly be the size of two large conference rooms and host scientists and a full-fledged lab that will allow those on board to collect samples from various stretches of the river, perform tests on water quality and biodiversity of the wider ecosystem. The proposed vessel, now only known as the Brahmaputra Biodiversity Biology Boat (B4), would also be linked to smaller boats and research labs, said Union Science Minister Harsh Vardhan at a press conference.

The first experiments will likely begin this December and will have the boat — a re-purposed one — trawl Pasighat, Dibrugarh, Neemati, Tejpur and Guwahati in Assam and managed by the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati. The "B4" will also have a teaching laboratory for school and college children.

Specifying that this wouldn't be just a show boat, officials said there would also be 'mobile labs' that would run along the tributaries of the Brahmaputra to feed in data to the B4.

"For a river of the size and diversity of the Brahmaputra, there is very little research done to understand its hydrology, water quality and biodiversity," said K. Vijay Raghavan, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology. "The idea for it came from a scientist who's of Chinese and Indian-origin and based in Shillong."

'A few precedents'

He added that a boat of this nature would be one of its kind in the world though there were a few precedents in China and mobile laboratories that studied the Amazon river.

He didn't specify a budget for the boat but said the government aimed to spend Rs. 200 crore across a range of programmes.

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