

India and Bangladesh Sign Agreements for Enhancing Inland and Coastal Waterways Connectivity

India and Bangladesh signed several milestone agreements today, for enhancing inland and coastal waterways connectivity between the two countries for trade and cruise movements. Briefing media persons in New Delhi this evening, Shipping Secretary Shri Gopal Krishna, and his Bangladesh counterpart Shri Md. AbdusSamadinformed that the two countries have signed an agreement to use Chattogram and Mongla Ports in Bangladesh for movement of goods to and from India. A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has also been signed for movement of passenger and cruise services. In addition to this, an addendum to 'Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade' (PIWTT) between India and Bangladesh has been signed for inclusion of Dhubri in India and Pangaon in Bangladesh as new Ports of Call. These agreements will facilitate easier movement of goods and passengers between the two countries, giving an impetus to trade and tourism.

The two sides agreed to consider inclusion of Rupnarayanriver (National Waterway-86) from Geonkhali to Kolaghat in the protocol route and to declare Kolaghat in West Bengal as new Port of Call. Chilmari was agreed to as a port of call in Bangladesh. The new arrangement will facilitate movement of flyash, cement, construction materials etc from India to Bangladesh through IWT on Rupnarayanriver. Further, both sides agreed to declare Badarpur on river Barak (NW 16) as an Extended Port of Call of Karimganj in Assam and Ghorasal of Ashuganj in Bangladesh on reciprocal basis. The Indian side proposed for extension of the protocol routes from Kolkata upto Silchar in Assam. Currently 3.5 MMT cargo is transported on protocol routes through inland waterways which is expected to increase substantially after the declaration of additional Ports of Call and extension of protocol routes. The North Eastern states would get connected directly to the ports of Kolkata and Haldia in India and Mongla in Bangladesh through waterways which would facilitate movement EXIM cargo and would also reduce the logistic costs.

In another important understanding reached at between the two countries, the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for movement of passengers and cruise vessels on Inland Protocol route and coastal shipping routes have been finalised. These river cruise services are likely to commence between Kolkata – Dhaka - Guwahati – Jorhat and back.

It was also agreed that a Joint Technical Committee will explore the technical feasibility of operationalisation of Dhulian-Rajshahi protocol route upto Aricha. and the reconstruction and opening up of Jangipur navigational lock on river Bhagirathi subject to the provisions of the Treaty between India and Bangladesh on Sharing of Ganga Waters at Farakka, 1996. This move has the potential to reduce the distance to Assam by more than 450 kms on the protocol routes.

It was also decided that a Project Management Consultant for supervision and monitoring of dredging of Ashuganj-Zakiganj and Sirajganj-Daikhowa stretches of Indo-Bangladesh Protocol

Route in Bangladesh will be engaged with 80 % financial contribution from India and rest by Bangladesh. A Joint Monitoring Committee has also been constituted for overall monitoring of the dredging works.

To bring about significant reduction in logistics cost and faster delivery of Bangladesh export cargo, Indian side raised the point regarding permitting 'Third country' EXIM Trade under Coastal Shipping Agreement and PIWTT by allowing transshipment through ports on the East Cost of India. Bangladesh agreed to hold stakeholder consultations and revert on the matter.

Both sides have also agreed for development of Jogighopa as a hub/trans-shipment terminal for movement of cargo to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Bhutan and notifying Munsiganj River terminal by Bangladesh Customs for routing third party Exim cargo through Kolkata Port.

Discussions were also held to make Nakugaon Land Port in Bangladesh and Dalu ICP (India) operational and to connect Gelephu (Bhutan) as tripartite cross-border route.

Permission for the transportation of third country cargo on protocol routes and coastal shipping routes were also discussed. Inclusion of Dhamra Port, V.O. Chidambaranar Port (formerly Tuticorin Port) and Kamarajar Port under Coastal Shipping Agreement was also deliberated upon. These will be further discussed in Joint Shipping Committee meeting scheduled in December, 2018.

Prior to the Secretary Shipping level talks held today, the 19th edition of the Standing Committee meeting under 'Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade' (PIWTT) between high level delegations of the two countries were held yesterday. The daylong meeting was attended by representatives of Ministries of Shipping, External Affairs, Home, Finance, DONER and Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) and officials from Bangladesh belonging to Ministry of Shipping, Board of Revenue, DG (Shipping) and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA).

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(Release ID: 1550795)