

MONTHLY UPDATES ON NATIONAL INLAND WATERWAYS OF INDIA

UPDATE- 16
January 2021

This update covers the following:

- [After one year of lull, only 25 tonnes cargo movement starts from Varanasi multi-modal terminal; takes 24 days to reach Kolkata.](#)
- [World Bank, the Government of India and the Government of West Bengal sign loan agreement for Inland Waterways; This is World Bank's third project on inland waterways in India](#)
- [Fisherfolk object to Loktak Inland Waterways Improvement Project while tenders get published for dredgers](#)
- [Another luxury cruise to come up on Varanasi Ghats; Earlier boatmen had protested as their livelihood gets adversely affected.](#)
- [Soon dredging to start on Gazipur to Jamania stretch on Ganga Waterway](#)

1. After one year of lull, only 25 tonnes cargo movement starts from Varanasi multi-modal terminal; takes 24 days to reach Kolkata.

"The much-hyped Inland Water Transport (IWT) connecting Patna to Kolkata and Varanasi through the river Ganga is proving to be a big flop. The Inland Waterways Authority of India vessel MV RN Tagore which sailed from Varanasi on December 29 with a container of fertiliser reached Patna's Gaighat terminal on Saturday night. The vessel took nearly five days to reach Patna from Varanasi due to problems it encountered along the route." (Source: [Newslick](#))

According to another [news report](#), the vessel MV Rabindranath Tagore was transported empty from Kolkata to Varanasi in August 2020. Only on 29 December 2020, the vessel started its journey carrying only 25 tonnes cargo from IFFCO, although the capacity of the vessel was reported to be 300 tonnes. The fact that this is only the third movement which has started from the Varanasi Multi-modal terminal on National Waterway -1 in two years after its inauguration reflects the dearth of takers for transport on this terminal.

The [news report](#) for the movement of this vessel from Varanasi also alleged that pontoon bridges represent a significant obstruction to navigation which is causing delay in reaching Patna and then Sahibganj. The vessel took five days to reach Patna and then had to wait for 10 more days in Patna in the hope of more cargo. The vessel was late by 16 days in reaching Sahibganj. Approximately 100 tonnes of cargo dust were transported to Kolkata.



(Source: [Dainik Jagran](#))

The problem with the pontoon bridges in Bihar has been noted in the detailed feasibility study report prepared for the Ganga Waterway in 2017 (accessed by Manthan through the RTI Act). It is mentioned in this report that permanent bridge crossings are under construction at all of these locations except Narainpur Urf Harlharpur. Further as a short-term solution, it is mentioned that mechanical arrangement could be made for opening and closing a section of pontoon bridge to minimize impact on navigation along waterway.

This recent incident of delay being caused due to the Pontoon bridges in Bihar for the cargo movement through MV RN Tagore from Varanasi to Kolkata reflects on the pace of development and implementation of strategic planning being done for the Ganga Waterway. It is even more worrying to see such state of affairs as this waterway is being developed as Jal Marg Vikas Project which has received financial and technical aid from the World Bank.

2. World Bank, the Government of India and the Government of West Bengal sign loan agreement for Inland Waterways; This is World Bank's third project on inland waterways in India

On 05.01.2021, the Government of India, the Government of West Bengal and the World Bank signed a \$105 million project to improve the inland water transport infrastructure in Kolkata, West Bengal.

" Developing the river transport infrastructure will enable a large population of the state to utilize its waterways, have alternative, multi-modal options for transportation for both freight and passengers, connect the hinterland with Kolkata Metropolitan Area's markets and job centres and emerge as a logistics hub."

This is the third approved project funded by the World Bank for developing the inland water transport in India including the Jal Marg Vikas Project for National Waterway -1 (2018) which already includes the river Hooghly and Assam Inland Water Transport project (2019). In absence of strong legally binding environmental safeguards in India for the inland waterways sector, it is concerning to see the World Bank funding and supporting these inland water transport projects in India.

Read more on this - <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1686277>

3. Fisherfolk object to Loktak Inland Waterways Improvement Project while tenders get published for dredgers

The Loktak Development Authority has published in December 2020 the Notice Inviting tenders (NIT) for dredgers and other equipment for Loktak Inland Waterways Improvement Project. The High Court of Manipur in October 2020 had permitted NIT for this project subject to condition that all the necessary statutory clearance will be obtained from all departments concerned, more particularly, from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Among other statutory clearances, the MoEF&CC has to review and approve the Integrated Management Plan for Wise Use of the Loktak Lake prepared by the Government of Manipur.

The High Court order of 12th October 2020 states,

"On pragmatic assessment of the issue, necessary guidelines for Wise Use of Loktak Lake in relation to Loktak Inland Waterways Improvement Project as well as Eco Tourism project will have to be issued by the various Departments of the Union of India. It is a decision they have to take on the merits of the proposal keeping in mind the environment and ecology of the Ramsar site." This reflects that the necessary guidelines for these interventions in the Loktak Lake are yet to be issued although it has been established that earlier changes in the land use pattern affected the fragile ecosystem of the Loktak Lake and posed a serious threat to the aquatic ecosystem.

The NGAMEE LUP -a federation of small capture fishing unions and culture fisheries in Manipur has strongly objected to this project saying that Inland Waterways Project will not only destroy the lake ecosystem but also the traditional and sustainable mode of transport by canoe that fishermen depend on.

NGAMEE LUP's note can be accessed from

<https://www.facebook.com/ManthanAdhyayanKendra/posts/3694058643997369>

Support the global campaign to Protect for Posterity the Unique Loktak Wetland Region in Manipur, India. Know more at <https://esgindia.org/new/campaigns/lakes/global-campaign-to-protect-for-posterity-the-unique-loktak-wetland-region-in-manipur->

[india/?fbclid=IwAR3cvVWzuL9CIFSFPldUy1HPcOrc9ChH4epyLmFld89hItpzp611p6EwhEM](https://www.facebook.com/india/?fbclid=IwAR3cvVWzuL9CIFSFPldUy1HPcOrc9ChH4epyLmFld89hItpzp611p6EwhEM)

4. Another luxury cruise to come up on Varanasi Ghats; Earlier boatmen had protested as their livelihoods get adversely affected.

In 2019, boatmen from Varanasi had vehemently opposed the cruise services on the ghats of Ganga. They wanted their voices and demands be heard along with the complaint that luxury cruises on ganga ghats of Varanasi will adversely affect their livelihood.



(Source: [Dainik Jagran](#))

Yet, after introduction of Alaknanda cruise on the ghats of Varanasi, another cruise service is about to begin from Rajghat to Assighat in Varanasi. See more here - <https://m.jagran.com/lite/uttar-pradesh/varanasi-city-cruise-from-go-a-via-ghazipur-now-leaves-for-varanasi-seating-arrangement-of-100-people-21310883.html>

5. Soon dredging to start on Gazipur to Jamania stretch on Ganga Waterway

According to a news report, dredging operations are soon to commence on the Ghazipur to Jamania stretch of the National Waterway -1 on the river Ganga. This news report mentions that the 14 km stretch from Ghazipur to Jamania is full of stones. The news further says that, “once the channel is created, it would be easier to remove the accumulated sand and silt from the channel if it requires to be dredged again.”

“एक बार चैनल बनने पर उसमें दोबारा बालू भरने पर भी ड्रेजिंग करने में आसानी होगी। सबसे बड़ी समस्या गाजीपुर से जमनिया तक गंगा के रास्ते में पड़ने वाले पत्थर से है।”

If true, this news report essentially reflects that the dredging to be done here would be categorised as capital dredging which requires prior environmental clearance. The Ganga waterway has circumvented the environmental clearance process by calling dredging in the National Waterway-1 as maintenance dredging.

<https://www.jagran.com/uttar-pradesh/varanasi-city-ganga-waterway-14-km-stone-formed-in-ganga-en-route-to-ship-dredging-will-be-done-soon-21224016.html>