



IWDC 3.0 to Chart the Next Phase of Growth for India's Inland Waterways

Brahmaputra Drives Green Transport Shift as IWDC 3.0 Eyes Next Phase for Assam

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The third meeting of the Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC) will be held on January 23, 2026, at Kochi, Kerala, with the objective of highlighting the achievements of the Inland Water Transport (IWT) sector and outlining its future vision.

The day-long session will be chaired by **Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Shri Sarbananda Sonowal** and will be attended by Minister of State for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Shri Shantanu Thakur along with ministers from various state governments.

During the meeting, the Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways will launch new initiatives to further develop inland water transport in various states. Several State Support Agreements are also expected to be signed, strengthening Centre-State collaboration for IWT projects.

The IWDC 3.0 agenda includes sessions on building a resilient urban water transport system, enhancing the efficiency of cargo transport, promoting green vessels for passenger transport, advancing river cruise tourism and implementing digital and sustainable practices. The meeting will also review the regulatory framework for inland waterways and address concerns raised by states related to ongoing and proposed inland water transport projects.

India boasts an extensive network of inland waterways, with over 145 million tonnes of cargo moved annually, offering a fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly mode of transport. Inland waterways complement the overburdened rail and road networks and facilitate initiatives such as Roll-on-Roll-off (Ro-Ro) vehicle transport and river cruise tourism. Of the total 111 National Waterways across 23 states and four union territories, 32 are currently operational for cargo and passenger movement. Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways is primarily responsible for development, maintenance and regulation of these waterways.

Cargo movement on national waterways has increased from 18 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 145.84 million tonnes in 2024-25, while passenger traffic has grown to 7.64 crore in 2024-25. This momentum has been further accelerated through transformative initiatives such as the 'Jalvahak' Cargo Promotion Scheme, incentivising shippers to shift cargo from road and rail to waterways, and 'Jal Samridhi', which promotes strong private sector participation in terminal development and operations.

“Under the visionary leadership of Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, the IWDC has become a truly collaborative national platform, bringing together policymakers and representatives of various state governments and concerned departments to shape the future of inland waterways. Hon’ble Union Minister Shri Sarbananda Sonowal has transformed IWDC into a catalyst for aligning Centre-State priorities,

translating policy intent into actionable outcomes, and advancing a greener, more efficient transport ecosystem. By combining infrastructure development with sustainability and community participation, the Council is reviving India's riverine heritage and repositioning inland waterways as a preferred mode of transport for cargo and passengers. In Kochi, we aim to consolidate the progress made since IWDC 1.0 in 2024 and IWDC 2.0 in 2025, accelerate project execution and scale green, technology-driven inland waterways in close partnership with states," said Sunil Paliwal, Chairman of IWAI.

Assam at IWDC 3.0

Steady growth in inland waterways traffic in Assam underscores how the IWDC has successfully translated policy decisions into tangible outcomes over the past two years. Fully operational NW2 (Brahmaputra with multimodal terminals at Pandu and Jogighopa, permanent terminals at Dhubri and Bogibeel, multiple floating terminals and assured depth maintenance from the Bangladesh border to Sadiya is redefining sustainable transport in the North Eastern Region. NW2 handles over 98% of Assam's inland waterways cargo, including vehicles, over-dimensional cargo and construction materials.

Building on IWDC-led coordination, the government has planned investments of ₹5,000 crore for inland waterways development in the Northeast between 2025 and 2030. Projects worth around ₹1152 crore are already under implementation, with detailed project reports underway for the remainder. The upcoming IWDC 3.0 meeting will focus on operationalising Dibrugarh's Regional Centre of Excellence (RCoE), completing the ship-repair facility at Pandu and scaling green vessel operations, reinforcing IWDC's role as a national platform for coordinated and sustainable inland waterways development. The approach road to Bogibeel River Port and a tourist jetty at Uzan Bazaar Ghat are likely to be announced during the meeting alongside plans to develop 85 jetties across the region's waterways.

The upcoming IWDC 3.0 meeting in Kochi is expected to serve as a dynamic forum to evaluate the potential and advantages of the inland water transport sector and to chart a clear roadmap for its future growth and expansion.

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(रिलीज़ आईडी: 2216510) आगंतुक पटल : 226
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