



IWDC 3.0 Approves Over ₹1,500 Crore Projects to Drive Green Mobility, Cargo Movement & River Tourism on India's Inland Waterways

“IWDC Platform Reinforces Centre-State Push for Inland Water Transport Development:” Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal

IWDC Clears ₹900-Crore New Inland Waterway Projects

₹465-Crore Asset Procurement Approved to Enhance Inland Water Transport Capacity

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New Delhi, 23 January 2026: The third meeting of the Inland Waterways Development Council (IWDC 3.0) concluded in Kochi, Kerala, with a comprehensive roadmap to expand India's inland water transport network, approve major infrastructure investments, and strengthen Centre-State coordination to unlock the full economic potential of the country's rivers.

Chaired by Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal, the day-long meeting was also attended by Mukesh Agnihotri, Deputy Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh; Sharwan Kumar, Minister of Transport, Government of Bihar; K. G. Kenye, Minister of Power and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of Nagaland; Ojing Tasing, Minister of Rural Development, Government of Arunachal Pradesh; Daya Shankar Singh, Minister of Transport, Government of Uttar Pradesh and Barinder Kumar Goyal, Minister of Water Resources, Government of Punjab. The meeting marked a significant milestone in India's journey towards strengthening inland water transport as a key pillar of sustainable and efficient logistics.

IWDC 3.0 identified projects worth more than ₹1,500 crore, aimed at accelerating green mobility, strengthening multimodal logistics and promoting river-led economic development. Foundation stones were laid for projects exceeding ₹150 crore, including river cruise jetties in Kerala, Gujarat, Karnataka, Odisha and Telangana, supporting the expansion of cruise tourism circuits across the country.

The council was apprised about the development of Ro-Ro and cargo terminals at Muktyala and Harishchandrapuram on the Krishna River (NW4) in Andhra Pradesh, which will strengthen cargo movement. Onshore facilities on the Jhelum River (NW49) in Jammu and Kashmir were also approved to support passenger movement and tourism infrastructure. A total of 10 hybrid electric vessels will be deployed on NW 49 in Jammu & Kashmir.

Asset procurement worth over ₹465 crore was also announced to enhance navigability, safety and year-round operations. These include survey vessels in Kerala; Ro-Pax berthing jetties in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal; floating pontoons and quick-opening mechanisms in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal; hybrid survey vessels; amphibian and cutter suction dredgers; and tug-barge units.

The council was appraised about the major new projects worth over ₹900 crore, including development of a slipway facility at Kochi, construction of 110 jetties across Odisha (25) and the Northeast (85), and implementation of the National River Traffic and Navigation System (NRTNS) in Maharashtra, development of a ₹70-crore cruise terminal at Uzan Bazar Ghat in Guwahati and a ₹144-crore approach road connectivity project to the Bogibeel River Port in Dibrugarh on Brahmaputra (NW-2).

Addressing the council, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said that inland waterways have emerged as a strategic pillar of India's transport and logistics transformation under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Our dynamic Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji has given special impetus to inland waterways, which has eased congestion on roads, reduced logistics costs and strengthened ease of doing business. Today, under the visionary leadership of Modi ji, inland waterways have become a strategic pillar of India's multimodal logistics framework. Guided by this vision, rivers are no longer viewed merely as natural resources but as economic lifelines driving growth, sustainability and connectivity," he said.

Kerala's vast backwater and canal network was highlighted as a major opportunity for inland waterways. The council also noted about the initiative of IWAI for conducting feasibility study for urban water transport in 18 cities including Guwahati, Varanasi, Patna, Tezpur, Dibrugarh and beyond.

Kerala emerged as a key focus area at IWDC 3.0 with a series of major announcements aimed at strengthening inland water transport and logistics in the state. The Jal Vahak cargo promotion scheme is being explored to be expanded to other National Waterways including Kerala, offering reimbursement of up to 35% of the total operating expenditure incurred on cargo movement through inland waterways. The scheme is expected to encourage private participation by enabling cargo owners to hire vessels operated by entities other than IWAI or ICSL, making it particularly attractive for major shipping companies, freight forwarders, trade bodies and operators handling bulk and containerised cargo. Valid initially for three years, the initiative will help optimise supply chain networks and enhance the commercial viability of water-based logistics. At IWDC, it was also announced the commencement of Fixed Day Scheduled Sailing Services on commercially viable stretches to demonstrate the readiness of waterways as an efficient, cost-effective and environmentally sustainable mode of cargo transport. The Kerala package also includes the development of river cruise jetties and the induction of one survey vessel, further strengthening the state's capacity for passenger movement, tourism and safe navigation.

The meeting reiterated that inland waterways remain the most fuel-efficient, cost-effective and environment-friendly mode of transport, helping reduce carbon emissions, decongest roads and railways, and lower overall logistics costs. River cruise tourism was identified as one of the fastest-growing segments of the maritime economy, with the government developing modern cruise terminals, improved navigation systems and dedicated cruise circuits.

"Under the dynamic leadership of our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, India's inland waterways are emerging as a powerful multiplier of green growth, digital transformation and tourism-led development. With rapid expansion in cargo movement, passenger services and cruise tourism, our rivers are becoming engines of sustainable mobility and economic opportunity. By integrating clean energy vessels, smart navigation systems and world-class passenger infrastructure, we are unlocking the full potential of waterways to reduce logistics costs, cut emissions and create new livelihoods. The success of initiatives

such as the Kochi Water Metro shows how rivers can transform urban mobility, and we are committed to replicating this model across cities including Guwahati, Varanasi, Patna, Tezpur and Dibrugarh, ensuring that India's waterways drive inclusive growth on the path to Viksit Bharat," Sonowal added.

Special emphasis was placed on the Northeast region, where waterways projects are expected to significantly boost connectivity, trade, tourism and livelihoods of riverine communities. The government plans to develop 85 jetties across the Northeast with an investment exceeding ₹500 crore, strengthening regional logistics integration.

"The Northeast holds a central place in India's inland waterways vision. With its vast river network, the region has the potential to emerge as a major hub for sustainable transport, trade and tourism. The development of 85 jetties with an investment of over ₹500 crore will significantly strengthen connectivity, integrate regional logistics and create new livelihood opportunities for riverine communities. Inland waterways will not only bring the Northeast closer to national markets but also unlock its role as a gateway for growth, prosperity and regional integration," said Sarbananda Sonowal.

The meeting reviewed the sector's rapid expansion over the past decade. Cargo movement on national waterways has increased from 18 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 145.84 million tonnes in 2024-25, while the number of operational national waterways has grown tenfold from 3 to 32. The number of luxury river cruise vessels has increased from 5 to 25, highlighting the growing confidence of industry, investors and state governments. The number of operational terminals has gone from 15 to 25, and floating jetties from 30 to 100.

The council reaffirmed the government's forward-looking priorities, including the deployment of green and hybrid vessels, expansion of digital navigation and traffic management systems, development of modern inland terminals, strengthening of shipbuilding and ship-repair facilities, and promotion of maritime skill development. The meeting also featured detailed deliberations on building resilient urban water transport systems, improving cargo transport efficiency, promoting green and hybrid vessels for passenger movement, expanding river cruise tourism and strengthening digital and sustainable practices. Regulatory issues and concerns raised by states regarding ongoing and proposed inland water transport projects were reviewed, with an emphasis on expediting execution through coordinated efforts. IWDC 3.0 builds on the foundations laid during IWDC 1.0 in 2024 and IWDC 2.0 in 2025, with a strong focus on sustainability, technology-driven solutions and accelerated project execution.

The meeting was also attended by Vijay Kumar, Secretary, MoPSW; Sunil Paliwal, Chairperson, IWAI; Sunil Kumar Singh, Vice Chairman, IWAI among other senior officials of the central and state governments, industry representatives and experts to review progress made since IWDC 1.0 and 2.0 and chart the next phase of growth for inland waterways. The day-long meeting reviewed sectoral achievements, announced major investments and projects and laid out a forward-looking roadmap for the development of inland waterways across the country.

IWDC 3.0 concluded with a shared commitment by the Centre and states to scale up inland water transport, strengthen regional connectivity, promote cleaner transport solutions and position rivers as engines of economic growth. The meeting reaffirmed inland waterways as a preferred, future-ready mode of transport for both cargo and passengers, contributing to cleaner transport, smarter logistics and a stronger India.

India's inland waterways continue to play a crucial role in decongesting road and rail networks by offering a fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly mode of transport. With 111 national waterways spread across 23 states and four union territories, inland waterways are increasingly supporting initiatives such as Ro-Ro vehicle movement and cruise tourism. IWAI, under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, remains the nodal agency responsible for the development, maintenance and regulation of national waterways.



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