



Dibrugarh Sends First International Cargo from Bogibeel to Bangladesh Since Independence

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal flags off 540 tonnes of APCL Methanol from Bogibeel to Dhaka, with Assam CM Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma joins virtually

Voyage on the Brahmaputra (NW-2) tests river as Freight Corridor Linking India's Northeast to Overseas Markets

The steamer whistle that fell silent in 1956 is heard again today: Sarbananda Sonowal

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A barge carrying 540 metric tons of methanol left Bogibeel Terminal in Dibrugarh for Dhaka, Bangladesh, here today. **Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW)**, flagged off the vessel DLB Patkai, pushed by the tug Kushal Konwar from Bogibeel. **Assam Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma** joined the ceremony virtually. It is the first cargo shipped from the upper Assam to a foreign port since India's independence in 1947, nearly 70 years after the town's river ghat closed.

The methanol, produced by state-owned Assam Petro-Chemicals Ltd. (APCL) at Namrup, is bound for Pangaon Port in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The vessel will travel about 768 kilometres down National Waterway-2 on the Brahmaputra River in India to the Indo-Bangladesh border, then continue along the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route (IBPR). The vessel will cover a total distance of 1,300 kms from Bogibeel, Dibrugarh to Narayanganj, Dhaka.

The voyage is being observed as a test of whether the Brahmaputra can serve as a commercially viable freight corridor linking the Northeast to overseas markets. Regular methanol shipments to Bangladesh are planned. The shipment became possible after customs and immigration complexes were set up at Bogibeel and Dhubri recently.

"Our grandparents grew up hearing the steamer whistle at Dibrugarh Ghat. For 70 years, that whistle fell silent and the ships stopped coming," Sonowal said. "Today, a ship leaves Dibrugarh for the world once again. The river never failed us. What it lacked for decades was the will to revive it."

Sarma called it a proud day for Assam. "Assam's own product, made in Namrup, is now traveling to an international market on Assam's own river, The Northeast is no longer a frontier. It is India's gateway to the East," he said.

Sonowal said the shipment was a beginning. "This is the first voyage, not the last," he said. "To the youth of Assam I say: Dream with this river. The world is no longer far away. It is downstream. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Dibrugarh, the Tea Capital of India, is reclaiming the glory it once had as a great river port. We are building it with world-class infrastructure while honouring its heritage. The steamer whistle that fell silent in 1956 is heard again," **Sonowal** exclaimed.

Dibrugarh was once among the busiest river ports in eastern India. Government steamers reached the town from Calcutta, now Kolkata, by 1856. In 1882, the Dibru-Sadiya Railway began operating from the Dibrugarh steamer ghat. By 1913, steamers sailed up the Brahmaputra to the town daily, carrying tea, timber and passengers.

The 1947 partition cut that route, forcing Assam's goods to pass through East Pakistan to reach Calcutta. A 1950 earthquake disturbed the riverbed at Dibrugarh. Regular bookings from Dibrugarh Ghat stopped in 1954, and the ghat closed on October 15, 1956, as tea shipments shifted to rail. The 1965 war between India and Pakistan suspended cross-border river trade. India and Bangladesh signed a river trade protocol in 1972. In 1988, the 891-kilometer stretch of river Brahmaputra from Sadiya to Dhubri was declared National Waterway-2. Regular cargo service on the waterway did not begin until December 2017, when cement moved from Pandu to Dhubri.

"For decades, that glory was allowed to fade. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we set out to give Dibrugarh back its rightful place. The Bogibeel terminal, the customs and immigration complex and fixed-schedule cargo services under 'Jalvahak' are giving this historic town modern amenities and world-class infrastructure. We are building for the future while reinstating the heritage that made Dibrugarh great. Today, as cargo leaves Dibrugarh for a foreign port once again, the town's proud past and its promising future meet on the same river," Sonowal added.

Activity on the route has grown since then. Tata Steel barges reached Pandu through Bangladesh in February 2022, and the river cruise ship MV Ganga Vilas sailed from Varanasi to Dibrugarh through Bangladesh in 2023. The Bogibeel passenger and cargo terminal, whose foundation stone was laid in July 2023, opened in February 2024. The 'Jalvahak' cargo incentive program launched in December 2024.

According to the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW), cargo on India's national waterways rose from 18 million metric tons in fiscal 2013-14 to 218 million metric tons in 2025-26. More than 68 billion rupees (about \$770 million) is being invested in waterways across the Northeast, including development of National Waterway-2, a ship repair facility at Pandu and last-mile connectivity to Pandu Port.

"Every ton we move on the river means less fuel burnt and fewer trucks on the highway," Sonowal said. He added that India is working with Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar on regional waterway links.

The voyage involved the Inland Waterways Authority of India, Assam Petro-Chemicals, Cochin Bunkers Pvt. Ltd. and partners in Bangladesh.

Assam state ministers **Charan Boro**, **Bimal Borah** and **Sushanta Borgohain** attended, along with **Terash Gowalla**, a member of the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of India's Parliament. Also present were state legislators from the region, including **Prasanta Phukan, MLA, Dibrugarh LAC** and **Chakradhar Gogoi, MLA, Khowang LAC**. **IWAI's Chief Engineer, AK Bansal** and **Assam Petro-Chemicals APCL's Chairman, Bikul Ch. Deka** was also present along with officials of APCL, IWAI and Govt of Assam attended the historic event.



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