

BANGLADESH-BHUTAN-INDIA-NEPAL MULTI-MODAL CONNECTIVITY IN THE SUB-REGION (M-CONNECT)



Joining Dots • Connecting People • Shared Prosperity

Field Diary Narayanganj River Port: Prospects as a Multi-Modal Hub

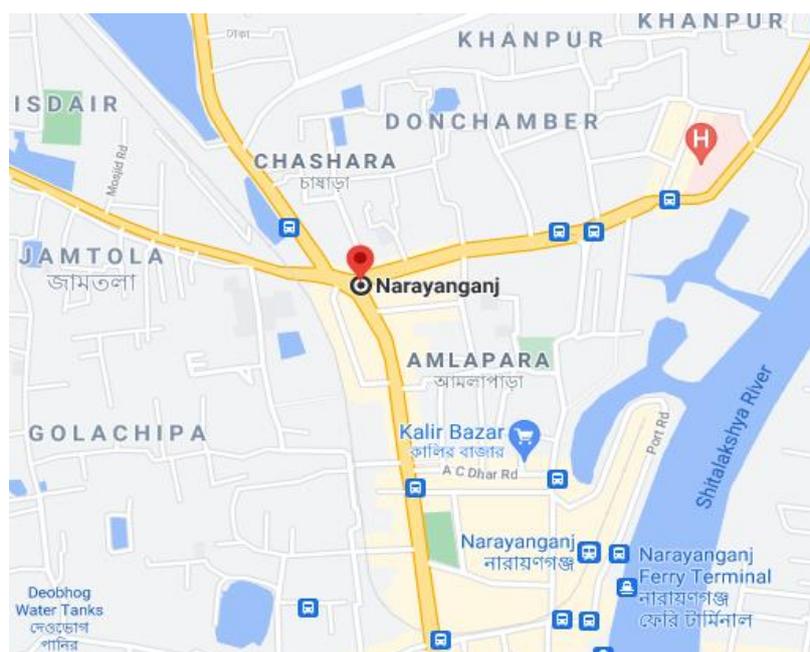
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About the Field Visit

Unnayan Shamannay, in collaboration with CUTS International, is conducting a study entitled 'Enabling a Political Economy Discourse for Multimodal Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region (M-Connect)'. Under the project, a field study was conducted at Narayanganj River Port situated on the river Shitalakshya in the Dhaka division in June 2021.

The purpose of the field visit was to analyse and investigate the policy and protocols associated with the Inland Water Transport (IWT) utilising the river Shitalakshya and assess the potential opportunities of using this route in the multi-modal connectivity initiatives of the sub-region. Infrastructure and



Map of Narayanganj

trade logistics were studied, while stakeholder consultations were conducted to encourage and facilitate multi-modal connectivity between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal, (BBIN) countries.

A Journey towards the Dandy of East

It takes less than two hours on average to commute to Narayanganj from Dhaka. Narayanganj is also quite easily accessible by both roadways and railways. As soon as the team reached Narayanganj, it was evident that it is almost as busy as Dhaka, the



Busy streets of Narayanganj

capital of Bangladesh. The streets were crowded and the whole city was bustling with activity. The city is teeming with activity because Narayanganj is one of the biggest hubs of export from Bangladesh. The jute industry of Bangladesh was previously

centered in Narayanganj. But as the export of jute declined over the years, the jute industry was gradually replaced by the readymade garments industry.

It is known that the water of the Shitalakshya river is alkaline which plays a vital role in the manufacturing process of jamdani saree, a renowned textile product of Bangladesh. The livelihood of lots of people is associated with the garment industry in this ancient historical city.

Taking a Stroll in the Launch Terminals

The team visited the launch terminals of Narayanganj, which also acts as a river port in parts, to assess the feasibility of Narayanganj as a multi-modal hub. Like the entire city, it was crowded with people coming from various corners of the country.



River view from Launch Terminal

A notable fact about the terminal is that it is surrounded by many cement factories that use this river port, mainly to trade with India. A quite surprising scenario near the terminals was a huge fish market adjacent to the terminals.



Fish market in launch terminal

It was surprising because the team had previously known that no more fish are left in the Shitalakshya river due to the constant liquid waste dumping from the adjacent dyeing factories. But it was later found that the fish are coming from the local fisheries, which has become a popular trend

amongst locals to use their spare lands for farming for extra income generation.

Other than that, the launch terminal was like any other launch terminal in the country.

Roaming the Streets of the Historical City

When we talk about Narayanganj, the thing that almost simultaneously crosses our mind is the history of Baro Bhuiyans (confederacies of soldier-landowners of Bengal) and Mughal emperors from the Mughal period. On the way to the city corporation office, the team found that period traces remain.

After the city corporation office consultations, the team headed towards the Dhaka-Chattogram highway to learn what the Roads and Highways Department was planning regarding Narayanganj. On the way, a brief stop in front of Adamjee Export Processing



Entrance of Adamjee Export Processing Zone

Zone (EPZ) was taken. It is situated in Siddhirganj, Narayanganj, with 245 acres of land and 229 industrial establishments. It was established back in 2006 and is the 6th largest Special Economic Zone in Bangladesh.

Stakeholder Consultations

The team consulted relevant stakeholders concerning the river port to determine the viability of Narayanganj River Port in terms of regional connectivity and transboundary trade. Knowing the concerns of stakeholders was also on the agenda. These stakeholders included Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) officials, Customs officials, City Planners, BIWTA pilots, Naval Vessel Employees Association General Secretary, local businessmen, local journalists, labourers and residents.



Consultation with General Secretary, Local Labourer Association

It was clear from the consultations that the river port in Narayanganj still faces considerable challenges in its quest to become a regional connectivity hub. Infrastructure is primarily underdeveloped and obsolete. As seen in many investigations, there are some communication and coordination issues with different policymaking and implementation authorities. But, the concerned authority is mostly well-aware of the potential opportunities and shortcomings regarding new and sustainable development initiatives appropriate for the area.

Some of the major issues in the area, such as liquid waste disposal in the river and the removal of illegal infrastructures from the riverbank, are being dealt with.

A common platform is required for the grassroots people to voice their concerns and needs associated with the new development projects to the relevant authorities. BIWTA pilots claimed that they do not get enough training facilities for navigation in adverse stormy weather conditions.



Biggest market of clothes in Narayanganj

Some of them complained that they had encountered pirates in their journeys. But these occurrences have reduced to a certain extent due to the joint efforts of the Bangladesh Coast Guard and the Naval Police.

Media coverage regarding development initiatives is not satisfactory. Therefore, most people are currently unaware of the nature and consequences of these development and connectivity-related projects. Most public-private stakeholder meetings are conducted at higher levels without any representation of the locals in those meetings.

Without the inclusion and cooperation of the locals, future development initiatives may face many difficulties in implementation. A more inclusive and collaborative approach from the higher-ups can resolve this predicament and pave the way for a sustainable developmental atmosphere.

The team left this place with a strong belief that the M-Connect project will assist in addressing the issues both at the ground and technical levels and bring inclusive and sustainable development in the BBIN sub-region.

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