

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



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Field Dairy

Uttar Pradesh: Emerging as a Hub for Multimodal Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region

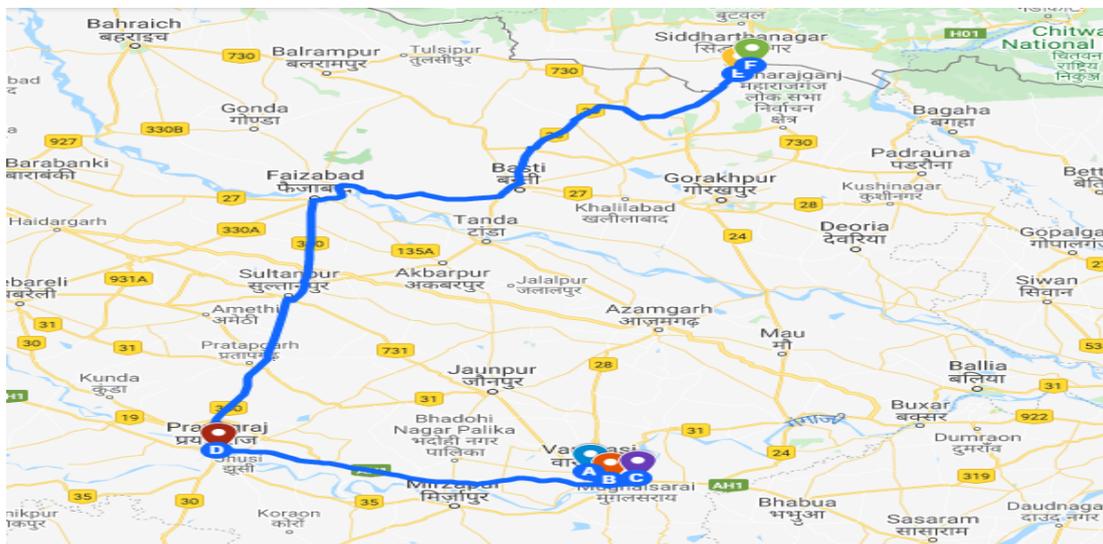
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About the Field Visit

Under the project titled '[Enabling a Political Economy Discourse over Multimodal Connectivity in the BBIN Sub-region \(M-Connect\)](#)', a team from [CUTS International](#), Jaipur, comprising Suresh Singh and Deepmala Ghosh visited seven important locations in Uttar Pradesh in India during February 21-March 01, 2021.

The purpose of the visit was to understand and gather information relating to connectivity, trade logistics, infrastructure and transport challenges and opportunities through stakeholder consultations focussing on understanding their views and perception on ways and means to promote multimodal connectivity within India and in the BBIN sub-region as a whole.



Locations Visited

All of these locations are hugely important with regard to ongoing national and regional multimodal transport connectivity initiatives. Two locations, namely Varanasi and Ramnagar, are linked to waterways and fall on National Waterways (NW) 1. Allahabad is linked to both waterways (NW-1) and the newly established control and monitoring centre for Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor.

Of the remaining four, three locations, namely Jeonathpur, Nautanwa and Deendayal Upadhyay Railway Station (old Mughal Sarai Railway Station) are related to railways freight and passenger transport. The last visited location, Sunauli, is a proposed Integrated Check Post (ICP) at the India-Nepal border and existing Land Customs Station (LCS). In view of logistical issues, the team planned to cover the first three locations staying at Varanasi and the other two from Gorakhpur.

Table 1: Project sites and destinations details			
Destination	Location	Approx. distance from the Central Point (Varanasi/Gorakhpur*)	Stakeholder
1. Varanasi	Varanasi	--	Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)/Other Stakeholders
2. Ramnagar (Varanasi) and Jeonathpur Railway Station	Varanasi	15 km	Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)/Multimodal Terminal/Other Stakeholders
3. Allahabad Railway Station/ Subedarganj Railway Station/Triveni River (Sangam)	Allahabad	124 km	Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor Officials/Other Stakeholders/Waterways
4. Mughal Sarai Railway Station	Mughal Sarai	18 km	Freight Corridor/Other Stakeholders
5. Nautanwa Railway Station	Nautanwa	88 km*	Intermodal Terminal
6. Sunauli LCS (site for proposed ICP)		95 km*	Customs/Land Port Authority of India (LPAI)/Other Stakeholders

Varanasi: A Holy Pilgrimage of the Hindus

The team reached Varanasi, popularly known as Kashi, on February 21, 2021 evening. The city is located on the river Ganges banks in Uttar Pradesh and 320 km south-east of the state capital, Lucknow. The city draws its name from the rivers Varuna and Assi, which flow into the river Ganges. It has significantly improved in terms of cleanliness compared to a few years back.

The team visited Kashi Ghat, considered one of the holiest places in Varanasi and India. In Hindu mythology, Kashi Ghat is believed to cleanse people physically, mentally and spiritually. There are more than 100 ghats alongside Ganga in Varanasi.



Assi Ghat, Varanasi

However, what is more important is that these ghats have also emerged as tourist destinations and become a source of livelihood for hundreds of boatmen who earn their livings by ferrying tourists. The water level in Varanasi was navigable at the time of the visit and the team saw a large number of ferrying boat people and a similar number in a queue for their turn. The boatmen's interactions revealed that they are aware of government initiatives towards making the river navigable and connecting the same to Patna in Bihar and further to Haldia in West Bengal. The respondent was very much happy with the initiatives.

Promoting Movement of People and Transport Vehicles

The IWAI office is located in the heart of city at Varanasi Trade Centre. The team had a fruitful meeting with IWAI officials. The main role of IWAI here is to set up the infrastructure and hand it over to a private party for operation and maintenance. The team was informed that for smooth operation and movement of vessels, the IWAI performs hydrographic services to measure the water depth for all active waterways every fortnight.

Presently, Ghazipur-Varanasi and Varanasi-Haldia stretch is under process. There are a few stretches in the waterways of Varanasi that have reduced water, causing difficulty in plying high-capacity drafts.



IWAI Office, Varanasi

The IWAI is also closely working with the state government of Uttar Pradesh to promote the movement of people and transport vehicles through the Ro-Ro vessels. The IWAI has procured two Ro-Ro vessels to be gifted to the state government. Besides the seating arrangement facilities, there is also a ramp in the front yard of the vessel for vehicle carriage.

Several significant developments have taken place over the last few years with regard to waterways management and navigation from Varanasi to Patna and further to Haldia ports. One such major development is the proposed two-phased construction of multimodal terminal (MMT) in Varanasi at Ramnagar.

The MMT project is being implemented under the Jal Marg Vikas Project and expected to be completed by 2023. In addition, under the Arth Ganga project, small jetties carrying small products will ply through NW-1. This project is based on a port-to-port and port-to-door approach.

Further, it was mentioned that Sahibganj and Varanasi are expected to be 'Port of Call' between India and Bangladesh soon. With regard to the navigability of waterways between Varanasi and Patna, presently, there is no serious issue of navigation at this point of time. This connectivity goes beyond Patna up to Sahibganj in Jharkhand.

Ramnagar MMT: Setting an Example of Public-Private Partnership

The IWAI MMT is being implemented in two phases under the Jal Marg Vikas Project and expected to be completed by 2023. Under Phase-1, construction and installation of an administrative building, night navigation facility, ship tracking building, two cranes and an electricity supply building have been undertaken. Railway connectivity, construction of freight village, warehouse, repairing centre and other infrastructure required for efficient connectivity will be implemented under Phase-2 of the project.

The Ramnagar MMT has the potential to provide a considerable boost to the transport network in the state, as it seeks to facilitate transport connectivity through road, rail and waterways. It is connected with NH-7 (700 m away from the terminal) and also to NH-2.

There is a proposal for extending the rail tracks from Jeonathpur Railway Station to the MMT. This station is only 4-5 km away from the terminal. Through this railway station, goods can reach Mughalsarai and beyond through railways. Once this terminal becomes operational, Varanasi has a scope of becoming a marketing hub of India.



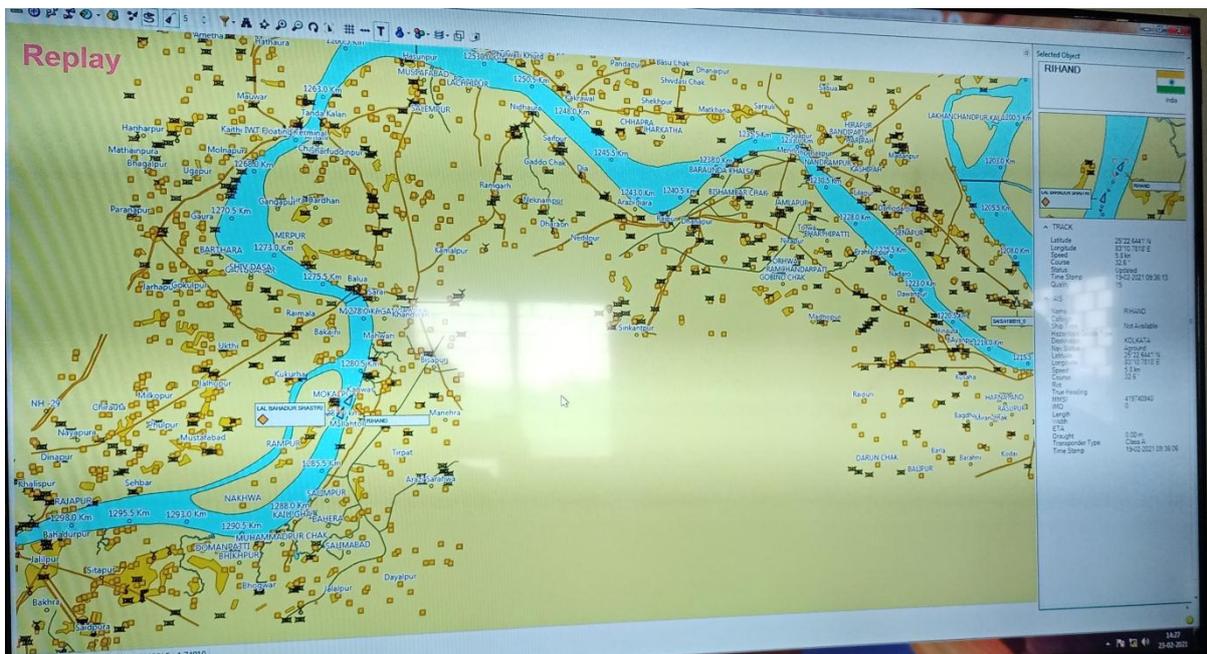
Jeonathpur Railway Station, near Varanasi

The MMT has a jetty of 200 metres in length wherein two 60 metre vessels can be parked at a time. There are two cranes of 50 tonnes each, for smooth loading and unloading of goods. The width of the jetty is 42 metres.



Site for MMT at Ramnagar, Varanasi

There are two electronic systems, RIS (River Information System) and DGPS (Differential Global Position System) that track the current and accurate position of vessels in the ship tracking and control building. There is an Automatic Information System installed that helps in tracking the vessel from the RIS room. The DGPS gives the vessel's exact location, the route it is taking, and the depth of the water in which it is plying. Also, there is three GPS for tracking the position of satellites. Every month two surveys are conducted by the IWAI.

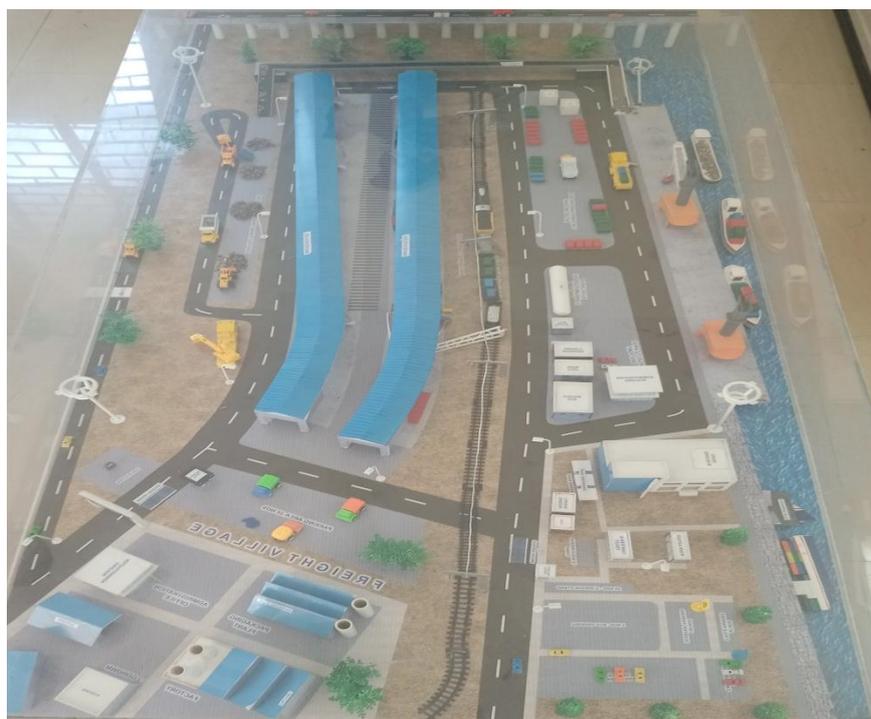


Differential Global Position System Screen Photo

This terminal is an example of the Public-Private Partnership mode. The water depth near the terminal is approximately 12-13 meters, enough for big vessels to ply. Also, this terminal is the most appropriate example of what a multimodal terminal should be.

Nevertheless, the full-fledged operation of this terminal faces a few hurdles in its developmental process. One such hurdle faced is the lack of timely payment of compensation for the acquisition of land done for the freight village. People who have given their lands are yet to get compensation, although IWAI has already provided the money to the district administration.

Such issues can create major hurdles in the future as people may not participate in the land acquisition process of the government for the extension of a rail line to the MMT. The proposed land acquisition may require the resettlement of people affected by this acquisition.



Map of the MMT, Varanasi

Allahabad: Connected to Varanasi through NH-19

Varanasi is connected to Allahabad through NH-19, a part of the Asian Highway 1 (AH-1). It is mentioned that the AH-1 is the longest route (20,557 km) of the Asian Highway Network that starts from Tokyo, passes through Korea, China, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and further goes to Iran's border with Turkey, where it joins European route E-80.

In India, it starts from NH-39, runs through NH-36, NH-37 and NH-40. This highway then goes into Bangladesh and rejoins India in Petrapole. Petrapole connects with NH-35, runs through NH-19, NH-1, and then goes into Pakistan via the Wagah border.

The Ring Road of Varanasi, which is part of NH-7 (connecting Kolkata-Kanyakumari), connects Varanasi with Gorakhpur. The team was informed that the construction of road is almost complete, except a few stretches along this road near Varanasi are under-construction.

Allahabad Railway Station: Freight Movement on the Anvil

The team visited the railway station on February 22, 2021. The journey towards the railway station was pleasant and smooth. Presently, the railway station lacks adequate infrastructure for dedicated freight movement. However, the planning for dedicated freight movement through this station is approved and the laying down of track is under process.

The team was advised to visit Subedarganj railway station (4.9 km away) to see the live display of the Train Management System (TMS) for dedicated freight movement, installed to oversee and monitor the movement of freight trains between Khurja and Kanpur.



Allahabad Railway Station

Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor: New Khurja-New Bhaupur Section

The team visited Subedarganj on the same day. At Subedarganj, there is an Operating Control Centre (OCC) of Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor (EDFC). Under the TMS, live tracking of freight trains is done. This is believed to be Asia's biggest and the first control room monitoring centre for dedicated freight movement.

The control room presently has two display screens, of which one is functional (New Khurj-New Bhaupur Section). One can see the full details of the freight train like its capacity, its current position, the place where it is coming from and the place it is destined to go, and such other

details. This partly operational Eastern Corridor starts from Ludhiana in Punjab and goes up Dankuni in West Bengal. The speed of freight trains on this corridor is 100 km.

Presently, only a section of the route Khurja-Bhaupur covering a distance of 350 km is functional. In addition to the TMS, the centre has display screens for voltage monitoring and control on the track. The whole control room has Automatic Electrified System. The team was informed that this system will be installed at places that have maximum freight movements.

Incidentally, at the time of visit to EDFC, a freight train had derailed on the Khurja-Kanpur section. The team noticed a red blinking at a particular point on the operational EDFC, which was indicative of the derailment of the train.

The team was informed that the Kanpur (Bhaupur)-Mughalsarai route would be functional soon. By 2022, the entire eastern corridor from Punjab to West Bengal is aimed to be functional. Currently, 60 per cent of the track-laying work is done.

This is considered to be an unprecedented development in India and a game-changer at regional and international levels.



Train Management System for Tracking Movement of Cargo Trains, Subedarganj, Allahabad

Triveni Sangam: Confluence of Three Rivers

After visiting Subedarganj EDFC, the team had opportunity to visit the Sangam, treated as one of the holiest places by people all over the country. There is a spot where three rivers, namely, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati meet. The water is almost 50-60 feet deep and has a navigation scope, but there is a lot of work to be done to make the river navigable for big vessels. Through this waterway, which is part of NW-1, the vessels can reach Varanasi.



Triveni Sangam, Allahabad

Deen Dayal Upadhyay Railway Station: A Large Railway Marshaling Yard in Asia

The team met the officials of Deen Dayal Upadhyay Railway station. The station is well maintained in terms of cleanliness. It could be because it is closer to Varanasi (about 15 km), identified as one of the smart cities. There were dustbins placed at every corner of the station. At the entrance, there is a scanner that scans every person entering the station. The station is equipped with CCTV cameras. Private players renovated this station.

At present, for freight movement, there is no dedicated track. However, being part of EDFC, laying down dedicated rail tracks is underway, which is expected to facilitate smooth movement of goods train only. The required electrical and earthing work has been done for the Kanpur-Deen Dayal Upadhyay Railway section. Currently, 120 goods trains run through this station. The goods transported include iron ore, coal, cement, onion, food grains and other items.



Rail Track Being laid down for EDFC at Deen Dayal Upadhyay Railway Station, Mughal Sarai

Journey from Varanasi to Gorakhpur: An Awful Experience

The team started its about 200 km journey from Varanasi for Gorakhpur on February 25, 2021. Gorakhpur is connected with Varanasi through NH-24, 27 and 28. Since NH-28 is under construction, the team had to take the Azamgarh-Dohrighat-Gorakhpur route through the NH-24.

Other than a few stretches along the route, the whole road is under construction, congested and dusty. The team was informed that the route to Gorakhpur from Varanasi (NH-28) had been in this condition for five years. There has been no improvement at all. It took almost seven hours for the team to reach Gorakhpur. The maximum time to reach Gorakhpur is ideally less than five hours.



A stretch on NH-28 – Road to Gorakhpur from Varanasi

Nautanwa Railway Station: Facilitates Third-Country Goods Movement to Nepal

The Nautanwa Railway Station has a pleasant surprise for all visitors who would undertake to visit this station to know its importance for the sub-regional connectivity. A poorly maintained station is a very important station as far as trade with Nepal is concerned. The team learnt that this is a significant link to Vishakhapatnam seaport and several industrial belts in India, including Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and several other states.

Freights reaching this railway station from any corner of India is only for export to Nepal. The team saw several cranes unloading freights from the train and loading the same on trucks for export to Nepal. The team was informed that on average, 25 trains per month reach this station

carrying iron ore, sponge iron, iron pellets, bitumen, salt, fertilisers and other items. Trains carrying iron items come from Durgapur and Bokhara mainly. Recently, the motor car also got exported to Nepal through this station.

Nautanwa also facilitates third-country goods movement to Nepal. Fertilisers from China are unloaded at Vishakapatnam Port and sent by rail to Nautanwa for exporting to Nepal. It was conveyed that in the pre-COVID period, around 1,000 trucks crossed over to Nepal through the two land ports of India, namely Raxaul and Sunauli. However, this was reduced during the pandemic period.



Unloading Activity at Nautanwa Station

This station has tracks for containerised cargos; but presently, only non-containerised cargos and closed cargos move from this station.

For transportation, food items, particularly grains, are given more priority than other products. A goods train can transport two or more products if the products are of small quantity. There is an allowance for two/more exporters to export their products on the same train together.

Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India: Developing Freight Corridors

The team had a discussion with officials of DFCCIL. Its field office is in Varanasi.

The DFCCIL is a special purpose vehicle created by the railways to develop freight corridors. The planning for Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) began in 2006. In the first phase, the Western Corridor will connect Jawaharlal Nehru Port to Delhi via Vadodara, Ahmedabad, Palanpur, Jaipur and Rewari and further on to Tughlakabad and Dadri.

There will be four logistic terminals at New Delhi, Jaipur, Ahmedabad and Vadodara. The Eastern Corridor will connect from Ludhiana to Sonnagar and then further on to Dankuni via Ambala, Saharanpur, Khurja, Shahjahanpur, Lucknow, Allahabad, Mughalsarai, Durgapur, Tatanagar and Barkakhana. The Eastern Corridor will be a single line on the Ludhiana-Khurja portion and a double line on the remaining portion. It is expected that trains running on the DFC lines will run up to 100 km per hour.

The project involves the construction of six corridors traversing the entire country. Presently, two corridors are under-construction. The other corridors will be North-South, East-West, East-South, and South-South. These four corridors are still in the planning phase. The Eastern Corridor and the Western Corridor are expected to be operational by 2022 and using the best available technology.

The DFCCIL is facing some funding issues, though the World Bank has agreed to extend its help.

Sunauli Land Customs Station

At present, there is no ICP at Sunauli, but there has been a proposition to construct one. For this purpose, land acquisition is in process. The construction of the ICP is expected to begin shortly, once the land compensation issue between the state government and farmers gets sorted out.

To overcome these land acquisition issues, the state government may need to plan some relief schemes for the farmers. A district-level meeting is held regularly, yet the construction process is going slow.

Currently, there is no plant quarantine facility at the LCS as plants and animals export/import from this border does not take place. At this border, all paper works are done online. Meetings between customs officers on either side are done as per the requirement and situation.

There is no restriction on the movement of cargo vehicles and people. The border working hours are from 6 am to 10 pm and can be extended according to the requirement. During this hour, trucks are allowed to cross the border.

The relationship between Nepal and India in this area is harmonious. Daily trucks of Nepal enter India through this border and require a shipping bill. Tourist buses of India used to cross this border. Post-COVID, buses and cars are not yet allowed to pass, but people can cross on either side by walking.

Dry ginger, wai-wai noodles, and bay leaves are imported from Nepal. The volume of trade depends on the demand and supply on either side. During the COVID period, the volume was comparatively low.



Indo-Nepal Border, Sunauli

The team had an informative discussion with stakeholders, such as Customs House Agent at the Sunauli border. On average, 350 trucks of India cross the border and almost 50-60 trucks of Nepal cross over to India. India imports less from Nepal. Almost all products are exported to Nepal and are duty-free.

This border during the COVID-19 period was not completely closed. The movement was there but with restrictions.

This border also facilitates the third-country movement of goods from China to reach Nepal through Vishakhapatnam and Kolkata ports. The clearance time at both borders is only two-three days.

Usually, there are no parking charges at Nepal Inland Clearance Depot (ICD). Still, if any truck goes into Nepal customs without prior information to the importer or does not receive goods in time, then parking charges are levied.



Land Customs Office, Sunauli, India



Customs Office, Sunauli, Nepal

Inland Clearance Depot, Nepal

The team crossed over to Nepal to interact with the officials and gain some insights on the available infrastructure at the ICD, Bhairahawa, Nepal. The officials believe that ICPs on both sides of the border need to be constructed at the earliest, as the present infrastructure is not sufficient to support increasing trade between the two countries.

They mentioned that the existing infrastructure is only meant for 200-250 trucks a day, whereas there is a crossover of more than 500 cargo trucks a day. As a proactive step, the Nepal government has acquired the required land of about 35 acres for the construction of ICP on their side.

On the Indian side, there is a plan to acquire 45 acres for the construction of ICP on the Indian side of the border.



Parking Area at ICD, Sunauli, Nepal

The ICD at the Nepal side has all facilities in place. The only infrastructure needed here is a parking area. The existing parking area has the capacity of accommodating only 200-250 trucks. Currently, the trucks are being parked in the land acquired for the construction of ICP. The ICP is required for removing the congestion inside the depot. This ICD has a dumping yard and a weighbridge too.



Dumping Yard at ICD, Sunauli, Nepal

Interactions and Engagement with Stakeholders

The team had interactions with various people directly or indirectly connected and affected activities related to transport connectivity. While some like fishermen and boatmen, earn their livelihood using waterways mode, others include people whose land has been acquired by the government for transport connectivity purposes.

For example, the boatmen of Varanasi are facing some issues. They expressed their grievance that the boatmen community does not have any power. Their voices are not heard and they do not have any representation in any governmental forums even though they have some genuine concerns and ideas to share with regard to cleanliness and disaster management.

The boatmen community is aware of the navigational developments, which the government is undertaking, and suggestions for their betterment. These people live near the ghats and have generations working in these ghats of Varanasi.

Tourism is the only source of income for them. They do not have any other source of income to sustain their livelihoods. They require some vocational training that would help them sustain their living in crises like the COVID-19. These people need support from the government.

The team met one boatman who informed them that three generations of his family are working in the waters. His grandfather was a boatman, father a marine officer and he and his brother are now connected with the waters as boatmen and life-savers. He has an association of

his own that is solely dedicated to saving the lives of people. The people of the association have saved more than 200 lives.

There are competent people in the community who can help in disaster management, particularly rescue operations during floods and play an essential role in cleanliness around ghats. They suggested that the government disaster management should effectively use their services. They can also play a good role in maintaining the Ganga River's cleanliness, especially at ghats.

Assi Ghat is one of the most important ghats in Varanasi. The team saw hundreds of boats at the Assi ghat with engines and lighting in them. But unfortunately, the decorations and engines are installed by the boatmen themselves for promoting tourism and attracting more tourists.

The team spoke to a few Indian truck drivers on the Nepal side. They were carrying empty glass bottles of various sizes of Virgin Brand of Nepal's whisky. The team was informed that the time allowed by the Nepalese authorities for clearance from the depot is maximum of 72 hours. If the importers do not clear the goods in the provided 72 hours, parking charges are levied on the vehicles.

Concluding the Tour – Visiting Dashashwamedh Ghat, Varanasi

The team returned to Varanasi on February 28, 2021, and headed straight to the famous Dashashwamedh Ghat, where Ganga Aarti is performed every day at about 6.30 pm. The visit to this Ghat was exciting and important because the team had a first-hand realisation and understanding of the economics of the Aarti at Dashashwamedh Ghat.

Thousands of people, including tourists, throng the place during this hour. The team viewed hundreds of stranded boats on the river with many people on each of these boats to just watch Ganga Aarti. Each of these people was charged ₹200 to have a seat on the stranded boats.

This is a usual thing to happen everyday evening. That implies that just by allowing people to be on the boat for an hour, boatmen have earnings of about ₹5,000 per day. Thus, for a total of 100 boats, Ganga Aarti generates an income of over ₹500,000 on a day and about a crore of rupees (₹1 crore) for supposedly 20 working days to the boatmen.

The team also witnessed some other activities like selling flowers for offering during the Aarti and diyas for floating in the river to fulfill wishes. Put together, the Ganga Aarti has become a good source of income, informal in nature, to boatmen.



Ganga Aarti at Dashashwamedh Ghat, Varanasi

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