

Public Private Dialogue Promoting Cross-border Tourism in India and Bangladesh through Trans-boundary Waterways



Report

Welcome Remarks

Saurabh Kumar, Fellow, CUTS International

Opening Remarks

Biswajit Chakraborty, Director, North-East Advisory Council, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry

Special Address

Dipankar Barua, Chairman, FICCI Assam State Council and MD, Landmark Hotels

Key Speakers

- **Anuradha Goswami**, Deputy Director-NE Initiative, Indian Chamber of Commerce
- **Mohammad Saiful Hassan**, Deputy Director (Research & Planning), (Deputy Secretary), Bangladesh Tourism Board, Bangladesh
- **Kaushik Kumar Borah**, Managing Partner, B & R Riverbourne Cruise
- **Sanjay Thakur**, Promoter, East India Travel Co.
- **Sabyasachi Dutta**, Executive Director, Asian Confluence
- **Chanmiki Lamin**, Shnongpdeng Tourism Development Society, Dawki, Meghalaya

- **Akshay Jyoti Sarma**, Assistant Professor, OKD Institute of Social Change and Development
- **Kamesh Salam**, Founder and CEO, South Asia Bamboo Foundation

Closing Remarks and Wrap-up

Vinuthana Patibandla, Programme Officer, Oxfam; **Saurabh Kumar**, Fellow, CUTS International

1. Background and Objectives

- 1.1. Transboundary-rivers-based trade, tourism, and cruise operations between India and Bangladesh have an immense scope of the region's economic, social, and cultural prospects. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the movement of small boats and cruise vessels on the routes of Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT) have made some traction in these regions.
- 1.2. Cross-border trade and river tourism on smaller stretches can lead to inclusive and sustainable development in both countries. Networking links rely heavily on local agriculture products, natural resources, culture, cuisine, art, and history.
- 1.3. This can enhance economic opportunities for local communities, including employment generation in the form of cruise crew, jetty operators, local tourist guides, and small boat operators and benefit the local markets to some extent.
- 1.4. A significant way to improve local transportation is by using local country boats that can carry goods through smaller stretches. At present, the number of rivers and their tributaries are on the route of PIWTT. There is a strong need to connect and acknowledge the inland waterway routes and rivers for small-scale trade.
- 1.5. The dialogue was organised to bring together the voices of the local communities from India and Bangladesh to adopt an inclusive and sustainable approach to cross-border tourism and cruise operations.
- 1.6. The discussion aimed to increase awareness and create consensus among relevant stakeholders about the potential benefits and challenges of cross-border tourism and cruise operations between India and Bangladesh.

2. Key Takeaways

2.1 Session 1: Cross border tourism and regulations

- 2.1.1 North-East region is immensely engaged in agriculture and tourism activities, yet they are not capitalised. It offers larger opportunities in Assam river tourism, including cruises and others, and enhances local communities' livelihood.

- 2.1.2 River tourism can be used to bring people from Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries to India. It could make tourism from these countries possible even without heavy documentation such as a visa.
- 2.1.3 Till now, many of these rivers have not been utilised for transport and tourism activities. Therefore, it is vital to start these activities even on a small scale. Investments, infrastructure, healthcare, and particularly, a systematic approach are required. For example, cabins on the boat are considered a reasonable accommodation option as it requires fewer investments and further attracts many investors.
- 2.1.4 The signing of MoUs and SOPs for the movement of vessels has made some developments in the region. Tourism through rivers can generate employment opportunities and further enable the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 2.1.5 Travel restrictions and regulations are the primary concern and should be simplified. E-visa's and technology up-gradation are required in river tourism. India can take the lead bilaterally with Bangladesh to promote regional connectivity and tourism.
- 2.1.6 Furthermore, it is crucial to initially work on one or two routes as a pilot and then its experiences should be applied to other routes. Also, the procedures involved should be simplified.
- 2.1.7 Data management is important as each website should consist of authentic and reliable information to provide valued information to tourists about the places.

2.2 Session 2: Cross-border tourism and community concerns

- 2.2.1 Tourism is an enabler to boost other sectors. Therefore, the role of people is important to augment cross-border tourism. It is necessary to build a constructive narrative by the people at the borders.
- 2.2.2 Innovative thinking and digitisation are necessary to connect the tour guides and other stakeholders through borders.
- 2.2.3 Border-haats jointly organised by Bangladesh and Indian government should be focused on developing local connectivity and border areas. It could further enhance women's participation.
- 2.2.4 Tour operators from both sides of borders should meet and organise a meeting to share their innovative ideas to promote effective and efficient tourism.
- 2.2.5 Memories of people before partition should be capitalised to promote and improve tourism. It is important to enhance the environment of security prevailing at borders to foster tourism. People to people contact is an essential form of traditional security.

2.2.6 Sustainable tourism and bamboo are both complementary to each other. Bamboo tourism can be cultivated in India and Bangladesh as people prefer to stay in home-like places. Bamboo eco-tourism could attract many tourists and create ample opportunities and benefits to communities as it is locally available.

3. Conclusion and the Way Forward

- 3.1 Tourism should be considered in integration rather than in isolation. Community plays an important role in promoting cross-border tourism, especially river tourism. Therefore, efforts should be made to encourage people to visit local destinations.
- 3.2 River tourism opens various platforms for other types of tourism. Therefore, a proper mechanism should be adopted to address the issues of river tourism. Additionally, e-visas would be beneficial to promote cross-border tourism.
- 3.3 It is vital to develop traffic routes to prevent unforeseen circumstances and travel restrictions and regulations should be liberal to encourage tourism. These procedures should be simplified. Day pass for India-Bangladesh would play an important role in promoting river tourism.
- 3.4 Furthermore, innovation and skill development are necessary to promote cross-border river tourism. Market analysis and research should be established to identify and analyse the loopholes.
- 3.5 It is crucial to develop accommodation facilities and Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMSEs) should be involved to increase and promote the culture of a particular region.
- 3.6 Collaboration between craftsmen of India and Bangladesh could lead to better promotion of tourism and entrepreneurship.
- 3.7 The governments of India and Bangladesh should work jointly on river routes to promote river trade and tourism. The private sector has also become proactive in promoting and investing in tourism.

Public-Private Dialogue
on
Promoting Cross-border Tourism in India and Bangladesh through Trans-boundary Waterways

Friday, October 29th, 2021 | Time: 10:00 to 14:30 (IST)

The Lily Hotel, Guwahati, India

AGENDA

09:30 – 10:00	Registration and Welcome Tea
10:00 – 11:00	<p><i>Opening Session</i></p> <p>Welcome Remarks Saurabh Kumar, Fellow, CUTS International</p> <p>Opening Remarks Biswajit Chakraborty, Director, North-East Advisory Council, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry</p> <p>Special Address Dipankar Barua, Chairman, FICCI Assam State Council and MD, Landmark Hotels</p>
11:00 – 11:15	Tea/Coffee Break
11:15 – 12:15	<p><i>Session – I - Panel Discussion</i></p> <p>Theme: Cross-border tourism and regulations</p> <p><i>This session aims to build consensus among relevant stakeholders to have an inclusive approach for cross-border tourism, cruise operations via transboundary waterways, and compatible and mutually agreed regulations.</i></p> <p>Chair Anuradha Goswami, Deputy Director-NE Initiative, Indian Chamber of Commerce</p> <p>Panelists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mohammad Saiful Hassan, Deputy Director (Research & Planning), (Deputy Secretary), Bangladesh Tourism Board, Bangladesh • Kaushik Kumar Borah, Managing Partner, B & R Riverbourne Cruise • Sanjay Thakur, Promoter, East India Travel Co.
12:15 – 12:30	Break
12:30– 13:45	<i>Session – II - Panel Discussion</i>

	<p>Theme: Cross-border tourism and community concerns</p> <p><i>The session's focus is to bring together the voices of local communities and women from India and Bangladesh to the front about cross-border tourism and cruise operations.</i></p> <p>Chair Sabyasachi Dutta, Executive Director, Asian Confluence</p> <p>Panelists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chanmiki Lamin, Shnongpdeng Tourism Development Society, Dawki, Meghalaya • Akshay Jyoti Sarma, Assistant Professor, OKD Institute of Social Change and Development • Kamesh Salam, Founder and CEO, South Asia Bamboo Foundation <p>Wrap-up Vinuthna Patibandla, Programme Officer, Oxfam</p> <p>Vote of Thanks Saurabh Kumar, Fellow, CUTS International</p>
13:45 – 14:30	Networking Lunch