

## New water trade route beckons India, Bangladesh

The Brahmaputra river is expected to once again come alive with vessels carrying fuel sailing to Bangladesh.

India's decision to export 120,000 tonnes of diesel to Bangladesh annually using the waterways could be the beginning of a new trade route for greater economic ties between the two neighbours.

'The deal would also boost economic activities and help in generating employment to locals of the two countries,' Das said.

The Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPC) and the Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd, the marketing arm of the Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL) of Assam in northeast India, have signed an export-import agreement to meet Bangladesh's vehicular fuel demand.

'The business deal is definitely a win-win situation for both the countries. Apart from earning revenue, the most important aspect of this agreement is that the waterways could be a new trade route for the two countries,' Bhupati Das, chairman-cum-managing director of NRL, told IANS on telephone from Dhaka.

The first lot would be on its way to Bangladesh next month with diesel loaded into barges from the Silghat port in Assam and delivered at Bagabari in northern Bangladesh. It would take about seven days to complete the journey.

Bangladesh's total demand for petroleum products is 2.2 million tonnes per annum.

The 2,906-km Brahmaputra river, one of the longest in Asia, traverses Tibet, India and Bangladesh before emptying into the Bay of Bengal. The 1,530 km long Brahmaputra waterways connecting Assam to [Kolkata](#) via Bangladesh - about 600 km passes through Bangladesh - has remained literally idle despite the two countries having a protocol agreement to allow using the river system for cargo movement.

'The volume of traffic at present is almost negligible and it would be idle to transport items like bitumen, coal, LPG and kerosene between Assam and Kolkata using the waterways,' said M.K. Saha, director of the Inland Water Authority of India.

'The deal for export of diesel to Bangladesh could go a long way in proper utilisation of the vast river system we have.'

'The development of infrastructure linkages is very important for improving economic ties and the decision to export diesel to Bangladesh using the waterways could be a boon for many people residing on the riverbanks,' said Montu Doley, a water tourism entrepreneur in Guwahati.

With the waterways until recently not fully developed, nearly 70 to 80 percent of India's total exports to Bangladesh was transported through land routes.

'If the volume of traffic in the waterways increases then there would be several anchoring points that would come up in the route and that way the local economy is bound to grow,' Doley said.

'It is much cheaper for both countries to use the waterways for transportation of cargo instead of using the land routes. It also saves a lot of time.'

*Syed Zarir Hussain* ( © IANS / India eNews)