

Inland waterways underutilised

In a bid to ease the burden on rail and road infrastructure, the Union Government has taken steps to fast-track the development and use of inland waterways by involving public and private sectors.

The National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) has agreed to use the inland waterways to transport three million metric tonnes of coal for Barh power project in Bihar. A tripartite agreement has been signed between the NTPC, the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) and a private developer, which has led to competitive transportation rates for the NTPC, a govt statement said.

It said a private sector investment of about Rs 650 crore has been committed with regard to the Farakka Power Project in West Bengal. The waterways will be used to transport coal imported by NTPC for its power plants.

At a meeting chaired by Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Pulok Chatterjee it was decided that the execution of coal handling facility at Jogighopa and rail connectivity will be taken up under the Non Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR) scheme.

A slew of decisions taken at the inter-ministerial coordination committee meeting include a commitment by the Food Corporation of India to provide cargo commitment for three years for transportation of foodgrains to Tripura and Assam from Kolkata and within Assam.

The Shipping Ministry has also been asked to consider providing additional money to ensure night navigation facilities on India-Bangladesh Protocol route. The Ministry of External Affairs will try to extend the period of Trade and Transit Protocol beyond March 2012 when it comes for renewal to provide longer certainty to vessel operators, the statement said.

Further, efforts shall be made for early completion of Ashuganj multi-modal port by Bangladesh and its regular use as a transit port. Oil and Natural Gas Corporation and Oil India Limited will also convey a firm commitment of cargo through Inland Waterways Transport in two weeks to the Authority. It was also decided that CONCOR will provide firm commitment for transportation of part of their container cargo from Pandu through IWT.

India has nearly 16,000 km of inland waterways of which about 5,000 km are navigable by large barges. In practice only 2000 km are utilised and managed by IWAI which was established in 1986 (The Hindu 28-1-12).