World Bank approves USD 105M project to improve waterways in West Bengal

By TIOL News Service

WASHINGTON, DEC 2, 2020: WORLD Bank approved a USD 105 million project to improve the inland water transport infrastructure for passengers and freight across the Hooghly river in Kolkata, West Bengal.

The West Bengal Inland Water Transport, Logistics and Spatial Development Project will facilitate passenger and freight movement across the Hooghly river while undertaking spatial planning to improve accessibility in the Kolkata Metropolitan Area and contributing to the growth of the state's logistics sector.

More than 80% of freight and passenger traffic crosses the Hooghly river via Kolkata's three bridges. To curtail congestion, the city has restricted the movement of trucks to the port to certain bridges and only during limited hours, reducing access to the port and increasing the cost of logistics. The ferries plying across the river cater to less than 2% of the passenger traffic and a small portion of the freight movement.

Developing the river transport infrastructure will enable a large population of the state to utilize its waterways, have alternative, multi-modal options for transportation for both freight and passengers, connect the hinterland with Kolkata Metropolitan Area's markets and job centres and emerge as a logistics hub, the bank said.

The project will cover the five most populous districts of southern West Bengal, including its urban agglomeration - the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA) where around 30 million people or one-third of West Bengal's population live

â€œThis operation will allow the state to invest in Kolkata's economic productivity by making its waterways and ferry services part of an efficient and safe urban mobility strategy,â€• said Mr Junaid Ahmad, World Bank Country Director in India.

In the first phase, the project will enhance the capacity and improve the safety of the Inland Water Transport system; including rehabilitating existing jetties, buying new ferries with enhanced design; and installing electronic gates in 40 locations.

In the second phase, it will support long-term investments for passenger movements, including in terminals and jetties; improve the design of the inland water transport vessels; ensure night navigation on the most hazardous and trafficked routes and crossing points; and encourage the private sector to invest in Ro-Ro vessels that will allow easier movement of trucks across the Hooghly river.

To better cope with increased precipitation and flooding, climate-smart engineering solutions will be applied, including modular floating designs for ferry access points at the passenger terminals. In addition, the project will facilitate disable-friendly amenities, ensure women's safety and encourage women's employment in the IWT Department as well as with the ferry operators.

The USD 105 million loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), has a maturity of 17 years, including a grace period of 7 years.