

***“India to work with ASEAN to Develop Cruise Tourism Circuits in the Bay of Bengal & the Indian Ocean”*: Sarbananda Sonowal**

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal Inaugurates First Ever ASEAN-India Cruise Dialogue in Chennai

***“India to work with ASEAN Nations to Develop Cruise Tourism Hub of Global South”*: Sarbananda Sonowal**

*** Delegates from all 10 ASEAN nations+ India Join Inaugural Meet to Co-Create Cruise Circuits Linking Coastal Cities and Cultural Destinations in the region**

*** *“India plans to Professionalise 5,000 kms of Waterways, to boost Cruise Tourism with ASEAN:” Sarbananda Sonowal***

Chennai, 30 June, 2025: The **Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW), Sarbananda Sonowal** inaugurated First ever ASEAN-India Cruise Dialogue here today. The meet hosted by India is being attended by all the member nations of ASEAN; i.e. Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam along with Timor Leste. The Dialogue aims to strengthen maritime cooperation, enhance cruise connectivity, and promote sustainable tourism across the Indo-Pacific region.

The meet was held aboard the MV Empress (Cordelia Cruise ship) at Chennai Port, with more than 30 delegates from ASEAN countries. Along with the stakeholders and senior officials from the MoPSW, the event will continue in Mamallapuram, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Union Minister was accompanied by the **Union Minister of State for MoPSW, Shantanu Thakur** among others.

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said India plans to professionalize 5,000 km of navigable waterways to enhance cruise connectivity with ASEAN nations. Speaking at the inaugural ASEAN–India Cruise Dialogue in Chennai, Sonowal noted the Sagar Mala initiative aims for one million cruise passengers by 2029, with ship calls rising sharply from 102 in 2013–14 to over 14,000 today, driven by policy reforms, tax measures and improved port infrastructure.

Sarbananda Sonowal highlighted, *“Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji’s vision to boost coastal connectivity and modernise customs and immigration can be achieved with greater cooperation and collaboration among India and ASEAN nations. India plans to work with ASEAN countries to develop cruise tourism and tourism circuits in the Bay of Bengal as well as the Indian Ocean region. An integrated cruise network linking Indian ports with ASEAN destinations supported by real-time tracking and modern terminals is being envisaged which will be deliberated in this meet. Our efforts are to align with the Viksit Bharat 2047 and ASEAN Community Vision 2045, aiming to strengthen economic and cultural ties in the region. Together, we want to develop a*

sustainable Cruise Circuit among the culturally vibrant coastal cities and regions of India and ASEAN countries across the Indian Ocean to offer the best travel experience for any traveller and transforming it as the hub of Cruise Tourism of Global South.”

At the inauguration, the **Union Minister, Sarbananda Sonowal** said, *“India is committed to work closely with ASEAN member nations to co-operate and co-promote new cruise circuits connecting our vibrant coastal cities and cultural destinations. This dialogue is likely to explore the region to become the hub of cruise tourism of the Global South. Together, we can establish an integrated cruise network linking India with ASEAN countries, through modern ports, efficient tracking systems and robust support mechanisms.”*

The dialogue serves as a high-level platform for collaboration on cruise tourism, port infrastructure development, regulatory alignment, and the identification of cruise routes connecting cultural and commercial centres across the Bay of Bengal and beyond. It also envisions the establishment of an ASEAN–India Cruise Tourism Corridor, aligned with India’s larger maritime vision. Two thematic sessions are guiding the discussions on *“ASEAN–India Cooperation Fund: Trade & Investment”* and on *“ASEAN–India Cruise Tourist Circuits: Cruise Tourism.”*

Speaking further, **Sarbananda Sonowal** said, *“Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, the Cruise Bharat Mission, Maritime India Vision 2030, and Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 aim to position India as a global leader in cruise tourism, offering exceptional and affordable cruising experiences. With more collaboration and cooperation, both at private as well as regional level, this meet can power the cruise tourism to realise its transformative potential to act as a powerful catalyst for economic growth, cultural exchange and employment generation across the region. India and ASEAN nations can together become the hub of cruise tourism of the Global South.”*

The participants, which includes policy leaders as well as industry leaders from the region, are also deliberating on connectivity gaps, regulatory best practices, and pathways to promote inclusive and sustainable cruise growth in the region. The Government of India envisions the ASEAN–India Cruise Dialogue as a recurring multilateral forum that will serve as a strategic enabler for regional maritime growth and people-to-people connectivity. This edition marks a significant step in positioning India and ASEAN at the centre of cruise tourism in the Indo-Pacific.

Addressing the Dialogue, **Minister of State for Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW), Shantanu Thakur** said, *“ASEAN is a cornerstone of India’s Act East Policy and a vital partner in shaping a peaceful, prosperous Indo-Pacific. Our centuries-old maritime ties now stand ready to be revitalised through cruise tourism and blue economy cooperation. Under the guidance of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, India is advancing with a holistic maritime vision*

spanning coastlines, inland rivers, and international waters to establish itself as a global maritime power.”

During the two days meet, the dialogue will also visit Mamallapuram, with sessions on heritage-led cruise tourism and deeper ASEAN–India collaboration. Delegates will also tour the shore temples and rock-cut monuments, highlighting India’s cultural and coastal tourism appeal. The ASEAN–India Cruise Dialogue 2025 supports national goals under the ‘*Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047*’ and National Cruise Tourism Strategy, underscoring India’s commitment to stronger maritime partnerships and modern cruise infrastructure.

The maiden dialogue was also attended by Secretary MoPSW T.K. Ramachandran, Special Secretary MoPSW, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Joint Secretary MoPSW, Venkatesapathy, Chairman, Chennai Port Authority and IPA Sunil Paliwal, Advisor, Cruise Bharat Mission, Rajeev Jalota, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu, Dr. K. Manivasan, and Ambassador of India to ASEAN, Srinivas Gotru, along with other senior officials from the Central and State Governments.

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