

China's Polar Silk Road

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Why in News?

Chinese shipping line Sea Legend has officially launched a regular commercial container service connecting Ningbo-Zhoushan in eastern China to Europe via the Arctic's Northern Sea Route (NSR).

Key Highlights of the Route

- **Distance and Time Efficiency** - Saves up to **40% off transit times** compared to traditional shipping routes via the Suez Canal.
- It reduces voyages from East Asia to Western Europe from around 40 days down to **roughly 18-20 days**.
- **Bypassing Strategic Chokepoints** - Provides a maritime alternative that bypasses traditional chokepoints such as the
 - Red Sea,
 - The Suez Canal, and
 - The Strait of Malacca, mitigating China's strategic vulnerability known as the "Malacca Dilemma".
- **Polar Silk Road Initiative**- Serves as a primary operational deployment of China's 2018 **Polar Silk Road** policy framework, integrated within its broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Metric / Parameter	Northern Sea Route (NSR)	Suez Canal Route	Cape of Good Hope Route
Transit Time (China to Europe)	~18 - 20 Days	~35 - 40 Days	~45 - 50 Days
Primary Chokepoints	Bering Strait	Strait of Malacca, Red Sea, Suez Canal	None (bypasses Suez)
Operational Window	Seasonal (Late July - Sept)	Year-round	Year-round
Max Vessel Capacity	Small-Medium (20k-50k DWT)	Mega Container Ships (>200k DWT)	Ultra Large Vessels
Geopolitical Control	High (Russian permits & icebreakers)	Egypt / Middle East security	Open Ocean

About the Northern Sea Route (NSR)

- **Geographic Span**- Runs entirely within Russia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) along its Arctic coastline, stretching from the Barents Sea near Murmansk to the Bering Strait near Alaska.
- **Governance Framework**- Administered under Russian federal law via the Northern Sea

Route Administration, which oversees navigation permissions, vessel ice-class compliance, and mandatory icebreaker escorts.



Reference

[Down To Earth | China opens new Arctic trade route](#)

