

## India-Sri Lanka Ferry Service

### Why in news?

India-Sri Lanka ferry service has been restarted after 40 years from Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu to Kankesanthurai in Jaffna, Northern Sri Lanka.

### What about the ferry routes between India and Sri Lanka?

- **Previous route-** *The Indo-Ceylon Express or Boat Mail* ran between Chennai and Colombo via the Thoothukudi port from the early 1900s up until 1982. However, the civil war in Sri Lanka resulted in the halting of these services.
- The *1964 cyclone*, which devastated Dhanushkodi, and the civil war ended the multiple transport links, forcing peoples in both countries to rely *only on air services*.
- **Restart service-** The resumption of ferry services has been mooted especially after the war ended in 2009.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) concerning passenger transportation by sea was signed in 2011 and a similar service was launched. However, it did not last for more than 6 months.
- Attempts were also made to establish services from Rameswaram to Talaimannar and Karaikal to Kankesanthurai. Various challenges kept these proposals from materialising.
- **Revival of sea link-** An age-old sea route between India and Sri Lanka has been rejuvenated with the inauguration of a passenger ferry service from Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu to Kankesanthurai in Jaffna, Northern Sri Lanka.



## What is the current ferry service about?

- **Aim-** Bolster bilateral ties, boosts tourism, and increasing people-to-people relations.
- **Cheriyapani-** It is a High Speed Craft vessel which is designated for the ferry service.
- **Established by-** Tamil Nadu Maritime Board and Shipping Corporation of India
- **Capacity** - 150 passengers
- **Distance covered** - 110 km in 3.5 hours
- **Cost-** A one-way ticket costs approximately Rs 7,670, with a baggage allowance of up to 40 kg per passenger

To know about India-Sri Lanka ties, click [here](#)

## What is the potential impact of the new ferry service?

- **Strengthen connectivity-** It will provide efficient and cost effective means of travel for both countries.
- It will improve people to people relations and will improve the bilateral relationship between both countries.
- This is the 1<sup>st</sup> such service between the two countries and 2 more are on the horizon,
  - Between Rameswaram and Talaimannar, and
  - Karaikal, near Pondicherry, to Kankesanthurai.
- **Revives ancient sea route-** Sangam age literature like *Pattinappalai* and *Manimekalai* speaks about boats and ships moving between India (**Poompuhar**- a historical port in Tamil Nadu) and Sri Lanka.
- The initiative renews historical sea ties that existed between the two countries since the early 1900s.

*The great poet Subramania Bharti's song 'Sindhu Nadhiyin Misai', mentions a bridge connecting India and Sri Lanka.*

- **Foster diplomatic relation-** It is a generous and far-sighted approach by India to its neighbouring country, focusing on connectivity, cooperation and contacts.
- India's '*Neighbourhood First policy*' is once again reassured with this ferry service initiative.
- **Religious tourism-** Transportation linkage can amplify religious tourism in the coastal regions of both countries.
  - **From India-** Travellers can access significant religious sites in Colombo and the southern parts of Sri Lanka.
  - **From Sri Lanka-** They can access Indian pilgrim centres such as Nagapattinam, Nagore, Velankanni, Thirunallar.
  - Temple towns such as Thanjavur, Madurai, and Tiruchi in Tamil Nadu are expected to see an influx of Lankan tourists.
- **Trade-** The ferry will directly facilitate cargo services which would be a boost to regional commerce and trade and it is expected to benefit local traders on both shores.
- **Infrastructure development-** The *Nagapattinam port*, under the Tamil Nadu Maritime Board, was upgraded recently to ensure smooth experience for passengers.

- **Smart economics**- As Sri Lanka emerges from the [economic crisis](#), the ferry is another example of India promoting greater regional connectivity with the neighbourhood.
  - India gave \$3.9 billion in aid before and during the crisis, both in cash and kind.
- **Improve security**- India's policy of *SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)* has again been active in ensuring maritime security and safety, as well as in disaster response and environment security.
- **Repatriation of refugees**- In some stage, it may enable seamless voluntary repatriation of thousands of refugees from Sri Lanka, living in Tamil Nadu.

### What lies ahead?

- The difference between the ferry rate and air fares is not competitive enough for the passengers to opt for ferry service.
- Baggage allowance should be increased to 50 kg to help the passengers.
- The provision of amenities at Nagapattinam port such as a dormitory and improving rail connectivity require attention, as passengers from Sri Lanka are sure to want to visit Chennai.
- As Nagapattinam is predominantly agrarian and one of the economically backward spots of Tamil Nadu, it needs proper infrastructural facilities to make the ferry service a successful one.
- The economists, policymakers and activists should consider promoting economic ties including exports from the Northern Province, given the inherent asymmetrical bilateral relationship.
- Sustained policy attention is critical to making this service a success.

### References

1. [Indian Express- India Sri Lanka ferry service restarted](#)
2. [The Hindu- Sea service between Kankesanthurai and Nagapattinam](#)