

## India and Northern Sea Route

### Why in news?

Murmansk, the beginning point of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), is witnessing the rising trend of Indian involvement in cargo traffic.

### What is Northern Sea Route?

- It is the shortest shipping route for freight transportation between Europe and countries of the Asia-Pacific region, straddles four seas of the Arctic Ocean.
- **Coverage**- It runs around 5,600 km, the Route begins at the boundary between the Barents and the Kara seas (Kara Strait) and ends in the Bering Strait (Provideniya Bay).
- **Save distance**- Distance savings along the NSR can be as high as 50% compared to the currently used shipping lanes via Suez or Panama.
- The traditional Suez Canal route is 8000 km longer than Northern Sea passage.
- **2021 blockage**- The 2021 blockage of the Suez Canal, which forms part of the widely-used maritime route involving Europe and Asia, has led to greater attention on the NSR.
- **Navigability**- Arctic Ocean remain icebound during most of the year, the icebreaking assistance is organised to ensure safe navigation along the NSR.



### What are the advantages of Northern Sea Route?

- **Profitable**-It is a strategically important *transport artery*; it is economically profitable when compared with Suez Canal.
- **Save fuel**- It will save fuel due to reduced distance.
- **Cost effective**- The shorter distance reduces the cost of staff labor and chartering vessels.
- The route does not charge payments for the passage unlike Suez Canal.
- **Time saving**-There are no queues (unlike, for example, the Suez Canal);
- **Safety**- There is no risk of a pirate attack.

### Why Arctic region is so significant for India?

- **Impact on India**-The vulnerability of the Arctic region leads to unprecedented changes in the climate.
- This may have an impact on India in terms of economic security, water security and sustainability.

*Arctic region is the region, which is above the Arctic Circle and includes the Arctic Ocean with the North Pole at its centre.*

- **Svalbard Treaty**- India's engagement with the Arctic can be traced to the signing of the Svalbard Treaty in 1920.
- **Conduct studies**: Indian conducts studies regarding atmospheric, biological, marine,

hydrological, glaciological events.

- **Arctic Council-** Arctic Council addresses the issues faced by governments in the region and the indigenous people of the Arctic.
- India is an *observer state* in Arctic Council including China.
- **Himadri research station-** India's first permanent Arctic research station located at Spitsbergen, Svalbard, Norway.
- It is located at the International Arctic Research base, Ny-Alesund.
- **Infrastructural base-**
  1. Multi-sensor moored observatory was inaugurated in 2014
  2. Northernmost atmospheric lab was launched in 2016
- **Successful expeditions-** India conducted around 13 successful expeditions to Arctic till 2022.
- **Arctic Policy of 2022-** It mentions that the country's approach to economic development of the region is guided by UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Potential for minerals-** The region constitutes the largest unexplored prospective area for hydrocarbons remaining on the earth.
- There may be significant reserves of coal, zinc, and silver.
- **Institutional support-** In 2018 India renamed National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research to National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research.
- It shows India's refocusing priorities in Arctic region.

### **What are the driving factors for India to participate in the NSR development?**

- **Growth in cargo traffic-** India engagement in NSR is on the constant rise and during 2018-2022, the growth rate was around 73%.
- Last year, the volume of cargo traffic was 34.117 million tonnes.
- **India-Russia trade-** India increasingly imports crude oil and coal from Russia in recent years.
- The record supplies of energy resources for the Indian economy are possible due to such a reliable and safe transport artery as the NSR.
- **Transit route-** NSR assumes importance, given India's geographical position and the major share of its trade associated with sea transportation.
- **East meets East-** In 2019 India and Russia signed Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor (CVMC) project.
- It is signed as one linking with another organise international container transit through the NSR.
- **Reduce travel time-** The 10,500 km-long CVMC, passing through the Sea of Japan, the South China Sea and Malacca Strait, will bring down transport time to 12 days.
- This is almost a third of what is taken under the existing St. Petersburg-Mumbai route of 16,000 km.
- **Chennai Port Trust study-** Fuel and fertilisers are some of the cargo that can be imported from Russia to India through CVMC.

### **What lies ahead?**

- **NSR development plan-** It is approved until 2035 by Russia, this sets the cargo traffic target as 80 million tonnes and 150 million tonnes for 2024 and 2030.

- The plan approval took place amid economic sanctions imposed by the West against Russia following the latter's war with Ukraine.
- **Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor project-** Workshop featuring stakeholders from the two countries, is expected to be held in the second half of October.

## References

1. [The Hindu- Explained Indian and Northern Sea Route](#)
2. [Observer Research Foundation- Northern Sea Route is a game changer](#)
3. [NCPOR- About NCPOR](#)

