

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 1st 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](#)