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India's First International Cruise Vessel

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Why is in news? Shri Sarbananda Sonowal flags off India's First International Cruise Vessel from Chennai to Sri Lanka

- The Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways and Ayush, flagged off the maiden International Cruise Vessel - **MV Empress, India's first international cruise vessel - from Chennai to Sri Lanka.**
- This marks the beginning of the international cruise tourism terminal at Chennai, built at a cost of ₹17.21 crores, heralding a new age of cruise tourism & maritime trade in the country.
- The cruise service will sail to **three Sri Lankan ports; viz. Hanbantota, Trincomalee, and Kankasanturei**. The tour packages on board MV Empress will be offered for 2 nights, 3 nights, 4 nights and 5 nights. During its run at the sea, MV Empress will be touching 3 ports in Sri Lanka before returning to Chennai.
- The cruise service is the result of an **MoU signed during the first Incredible India International Cruise Conference in 2022 between Chennai Port and M/S Waterways Leisure Tourism Pvt Ltd** to start domestic and international cruise service.
- With an overwhelming response by 85,000 passengers availing the cruise service through 37 vessels for the domestic circuit, it is expected that the opening up of international circuit will further amp up the business of cruise tourism in the region.
- The **modern cruise terminal developed at Chennai Port** is spread over an area of 2,880 square meters with an ability to host 3,000 passengers at a time.
- As more and more people are likely to experience cruise tourism in the near future, the government remains deeply committed to develop world class infrastructure to support and enable growth of cruise tourism and maritime trade.
- In future, the three new international cruise terminals are likely to be completed and become operational by 2024. As expect that the volume of cruise ships will increase from 208 in 2023 to 500 in 2030 and upto 1100 by 2047.
- Consequently, the number of passengers availing cruise services is also likely to increase from 9.5 lakhs in 2030 to 45 lakhs in 2047.
- In order to boost demand for cruise services the western, southern and eastern coasts of India, we are working on **Gujarat Pilgrimage tours, Cultural and Scenic Tours, Ayurveda Wellness Tours & Heritage Tourism**. Plans are afoot to develop **new cruise tourism terminal in Andamans, Puducherry and Lakshadweep circuits**.
- Now we are also studying the feasibility of developing ferry circuits **across India, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar**.

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