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## ♦ Chief Editor's Voice

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**Chief Editor's Voice****VIZHINJAM PORT: VIKASIT BHARAT THROUGH VIKASIT KERALA**

India's maritime history is rich and extensive dating back to the Indus Valley civilization around 3000 BC. The Indus Valley people engaged in maritime trade with Mesopotamia. Later the Vedas and Jataka Tales provide further insights into Indian seafaring activities including silk routes and spice routes. Today India's maritime sector plays a vital role in trade with 12 major ports and over 200 minor ones handling a significant portion of the country's trade by volume and value. Similarly, Kerala has a rich and long maritime history dating back to ancient times. The State's coastal location and abundant resources, particularly spices, attracted maritime trade from various regions including the Arabs, China and later European traders. They were influencing Kerala's trade and traditions. Robert Bristow once said "the history of civilization is written largely in the history of its ports". Bristow was responsible for creating a new man-made island off Cochin, Willington Island, between 1920-1941.

Presently, the maritime business is carried out in India predominantly by private entrepreneurs and traders. Among them Adani Group shares a significant portion. This Indian multinational conglomerate, headquartered in Ahmedabad, was founded by Gautam Adani, in 1998 as a commodity trading business. Their business diversified into ports, airports, metals, minerals, natural gas, food and weapons. It is the largest private port operator with a network of 12 ports and terminals. Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone at Mundra was the first

port-based SEZ. It was founded 26 years back and grown into heights when Narendra Modi was the Chief Minister of Gujarat for 3 consecutive terms during 2001 to 2014. Incidentally, Adani's first International Deepwater Transshipment Port at Vizhinjam, Thiruvananthapuram, was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in May 2, 2025.

For the Kerala state government it is a dream come true. After decades of delay and political uncertainty as to whether to have a port like this in private sector, it came into being. It is true that at present the State government spent about Rs 5350 crores as against Adani's Rs 2497 crore and the viability fund of Rs 875 crores of Central government. But without sufficient infrastructures like railways, highways, airways and waterways a port cannot exist. A port is just one component of a larger vision. Infrastructure development alone can bring economic growth. International trade grows based on the international relations and foreign policies.

The Rs 8800 crore Vizhinjam International Deep water Multi-purpose seaport is developed by Adani Ports and SEZ Limited on DBFOT Model (Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Transfer). The Adani is a multinational company operating in Gujarat for about 30 years in port development. Their Public Private Partnership has the power and potential to change the mindset of the political parties, who once opposed the private entry in the port business, and such a compromise was necessary for Kerala's development. Pragmatism is the only key to succeed with regard to development.

We cannot forget the contribution of Tata, Birla Ambani and Adani in nation building, employment and economic growth.

After decades of delay and political controversies, apprehensions of certain religious groups, Vizhinjam International Deepwater Multi-purpose seaport has materialized and finally inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the presence of all interested parties. This port is India's first dedicated transshipment facility and is expected to reduce the country's dependence on foreign ports, especially for container handling. Developed under a Public Private Partnership (PPP) with Adani Ports and SEZ Limited the port boasts a cutting edge infrastructure at a strategic location close to international shipping route.

With its commissioning Vizhinjam positions India as a new maritime gateway in south Asia that is expected to rival the major ports like Colombo and Dubai. Its natural depth of nearly 20 meters and proximity to global shipping routes made it ideally suited for large container vessels. The port has already demonstrated its operational capabilities with trial runs beginning in July 2024 and over 285 vessels docking before its formal inauguration. It is also the first automated port in the country and is equipped with the AI powered vessel traffic management system developed in collaboration with IIT Madras. The strategic location makes this port very significant in the south. It is situated just 10 nautical miles away from the key international shipping routes. It is ideally located connecting East and West international trade. Advanced infrastructure is another advantage. The port includes a container berth of 1800 meters and a container handling capacity of 1.5 million TEUs (Twenty-Foot Equivalent Units) annually in phase I. This modernized high tech port has a distinctive technological edge.

It features semi automation remote controlled quay cranes and first AI powered vessel traffic management system of India. Vizhinjam port is now part of the Mediterranean Shipping companies (MSCs) Jade service routes connecting Singapore to Europe, marking a key milestone in India's maritime ambitions.

The jubilant inauguration is over. . Now we have to expand the port operation. It needs rail road connectivity. It has to be connected with National Highway and new railway link. Kerala's first cloverleaf interchange needs to be developed to handle the future logistic traffic. All these developments come under the master plan of the central government. It represents the transformative advancements being made in India's maritime sector as a part of the unified vision of Vikasit Bharat. Vizhinjam port having strategic importance has been identified as a key priority project which will contribute in strengthening India's position in global trade, enhance logistic efficiency, and reduce reliance on foreign ports for cargo transshipment.

Its location near one of the world's busiest trade routes further strengthens India's position in global trade. It is a significant advancement in India's maritime infrastructure. Over the past 10 years it has been the blue print of Government of India's port and waterways policy. It can create a tremendous impact on Kerala's economy and trade. It is for the government to take initiative to tap the potential of this privileged port for the benefit of the state. Kerala has to reform, perform and transform itself into a vikasit Kerala as a part of the vision of Vikasit Bharat.