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63rd National Maritime Day 2026 — India's Maritime Ambitions and the Blue Economy

5 April 2026 · **GS3**

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5 April 2026 · 4 min read · 1 tag

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WHY IN NEWS

India observed the **63rd National Maritime Day** on **April 5, 2026**, with the theme “**Maritime India – Empowering Progress**”. President **Droupadi Murmu** inaugurated the national celebrations in New Delhi. The occasion highlighted India's maritime trade heritage, ongoing port modernisation under the **Sagarmala Programme**, and the government's push for a **Blue Economy** worth \$1 trillion by 2030.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

National Maritime Day is observed every year on **April 5** — the date in **1919** when the steamship **SS Loyalty**, owned by the Scindia Steam Navigation Company, set sail from Mumbai to the United Kingdom, becoming **India's first ocean-going vessel** under an Indian company. This marked the beginning of India's independent maritime history, breaking the British monopoly on ocean trade.

The day is celebrated by the **Directorate General of Shipping (DGS)** under the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways**.

INDIA'S MARITIME PROFILE

INDICATOR	DATA
Coastline length	7,516 km
Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)	2.02 million sq. km
Major ports	13
Non-major ports	~200 operational
Share of international trade (by volume)	~95%
Share of international trade (by value)	~70%
Registered Indian seafarers	~2.4 lakh (5th largest globally)

India handles over **1,400 million tonnes** of cargo annually across its ports. The country is strategically positioned on major global shipping routes — between the Gulf/West Asia and East/Southeast Asia — giving it significant leverage in maritime trade.

SAGARMALA PROGRAMME

Launched in **2015**, Sagarmala is the Government of India's flagship port-led development initiative under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways. It has four pillars:

PILLAR	FOCUS
Port Modernisation	Capacity expansion, mechanisation, digitisation
Port Connectivity	Rail, road, inland waterways linking ports to hinterland
Port-Led Industrialisation	Coastal Economic Zones (CEZs), Special Economic Zones
Coastal Community Development	Skill development for fisherfolk and coastal communities



Key achievement: Sagarmala has helped reduce India's logistics cost (currently ~13-14% of GDP vs. 8% in developed countries) by promoting coastal shipping and inland waterways as cheaper alternatives to road freight.

BLUE ECONOMY

The **Blue Economy** refers to the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and ocean ecosystem health. India's Blue Economy includes:

- Deep-sea fishing and aquaculture
- Offshore oil and gas production
- Seabed mining (polymetallic nodules in Indian Ocean)
- Marine biotechnology
- Coastal tourism
- Shipping and port services
- Ocean renewable energy (tidal, wave, offshore wind)

The **National Deep Sea Mission (NDSM)**, launched in 2021 with a budget of Rs 4,077 crore, is India's flagship initiative to explore the deep ocean for mineral resources, biodiversity, and climate data.

INDIAN SEAFARERS — A GLOBAL WORKFORCE

India has approximately **2.4 lakh registered seafarers**, making it the **5th largest supplier of seafarers globally**. Indian seafarers work on ships worldwide, contributing significantly to remittances. The **Training of Seafarers** policy under IMO's STCW (Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping) Convention governs their certification.

Key institutions:

- **T.S. Chanakya** (Navi Mumbai) — India's premier merchant navy training institute
- **Indian Maritime University (IMU)** — established 2008, HQ Chennai
- **Directorate General of Shipping (DGS)** — regulatory authority

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3 — Economy & Infrastructure

- Blue Economy: concept, components, India's policy



- Sagarmala Programme: objectives, achievements, significance
- Port-led development and logistics competitiveness
- National Deep Sea Mission

GS Paper 2 — International Relations

- India's maritime security: IOR (Indian Ocean Region) strategy
- SAGAR doctrine (Security and Growth for All in the Region)
- India's EEZ and UNCLOS obligations

Prelims Fast Facts:

- National Maritime Day: **April 5** every year
- 2026 edition: **63rd**; theme: “**Maritime India – Empowering Progress**”
- SS Loyalty's voyage: **April 5, 1919** (Mumbai to UK)
- Company: **Scindia Steam Navigation Company**
- India's EEZ: **2.02 million sq. km**
- Sagarmala launched: **2015**
- IMU established: **2008**, HQ: **Chennai**

FACTS CORNER

- **SAGAR** — India's maritime doctrine — stands for **Security and Growth for All in the Region**, articulated by PM Modi in Mauritius in 2015
- India's **continental shelf** extends up to 350 nautical miles in some areas under UNCLOS Article 76, giving India sovereign rights over seabed resources beyond the standard 200 nm EEZ
- The **Indian Ocean** accounts for ~50% of global container traffic and ~70% of global petroleum trade — making India's central position strategically crucial
- **INS Aridhaman**, commissioned this week, adds to India's maritime power beyond trade — underscoring the dual-use nature of India's maritime ambitions (economic + security)
- India's **Coastal Shipping** carries only ~7% of domestic freight (vs. 40%+ in China/EU) — a key efficiency gap that Sagarmala's coastal shipping corridor aims to bridge

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