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Work on restoring Kankasanthurai port gets under way

R.K. RADHAKRISHNAN

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Sri Lankan Economic Development Minister, [The Hindu](#) Basil Rajapaksa waves a flag at the Kankasanthurai port to mark the inauguration of the \$20 million wreck removal operations in the port on Tuesday. Next to him is the Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Ashok K. Kantha. Photo: R.K. Radhakrishnan

In the first phase, six wrecks obstructing safe access to harbour will be removed

A mere five days after India and Sri Lanka signed a memorandum of understanding, work started on a port project that will boost economic activities in Jaffna and its neighbourhood.

The Kankasanthurai port was the lifeline of the Northern Province. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) sank six ships in the harbour and in its channel between 1994 and 1996, as the outfit tightened its grip on the Tamil-dominated north. After the LTTE lost out in the war, the Sri Lankan government has been rebuilding infrastructure in the north.

In the first phase of the project, the wrecks will be removed before the monsoon sets in, by mid-November. Simultaneously, the Indian public sector engineering consultant, RITES, is working on a detailed project report, having completed the hydro-graphic and geotechnical studies. This report will be ready in the next few weeks.

“Once the detailed project report is accepted by the government of Sri Lanka, we will commence work on the deepening of the port,” Indian High Commissioner Ashok K. Kantha said.

Mr. Kantha and Sri Lankan Economic Development Minister Basil Rajapaksa

inaugurated the work at the port on Tuesday. As they waved a flag, a boat-mounted crane at the mouth of the port lifted a piece of wreckage of a half-submerged ship, signalling the beginning of the work. About half-an-hour later, a tug hauled a few pieces of the wreckage ashore, as an exhibit.

Mr. Rajapaksa said later that the port would ease the congestion at the Colombo port, through which are now routed all goods from and to Jaffna. The transport of goods also choked the A-9 highway that links Colombo to Jaffna. “Initially, the port will help the movement of agricultural produce from here [Jaffna] to Colombo and other materials from Colombo to Jaffna,” he said.

Once fully functional, Kankasanthurai will be the nearest port for all eastern ports in India, as well as for Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Mr. Rajapaksa said many of the goods from Indian destinations, such as Chennai, could be unloaded at Kankasanthurai, instead of the whole cargo being

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transported to Colombo and then back again.

Resolve Marine Group, which is handling the wreck removal work, was awarded the \$20-million contract through a global tender floated by the Shipping Corporation of India. The six wrecks range from 17 m to 99.5 m and are either fully or partially submerged, obstructing safe access to the harbour.

The operation involves not only the removal of the wrecks but also the use of the state-of-the-art 3-D image scanning equipment that will identify all obstructions within a 500-metre radius of each wreck to ensure that the transit to the port is safe.

Keywords: [Kankasanthurai port restoration](#), [India-Sri Lanka ties](#)