



TAKING WING PM Narendra Modi will inaugurate the newly upgraded airport in Thoothukudi on Saturday

PHOTO: AAI

Historic port to future hub: Thoothukudi's giant leap

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Thoothukudi — a port city that once powered the trade ambitions of the Pandyas and Cholas, and later the Portuguese, Dutch, and British — is now firmly back on the economic map. With a legacy of maritime commerce dating back to the 6th century BCE, it is now riding a fresh wave of

industrial momentum. This Saturday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate a newly upgraded airport in Thoothukudi, making it only the second city in Tamil Nadu — after Chennai — to boast full connectivity by air, road, rail, and sea. The move is set to accelerate the region's transformation into a modern export and manufacturing hub with global reach. Turn to Page 6 ►

Thoothukudi's giant leap

From electric vehicles (EVs) to green hydrogen, and even rocket launches, Thoothukudi, 610 kilometres from the state's capital, is rapidly evolving into a high-stakes destination for future-facing industries. At the heart of this surge is a pipeline of over ₹1 trillion in investment commitments, positioning the region as a magnet for global and domestic players alike.

A key milestone in this transformative journey is VinFast's ₹16,000 crore EV manufacturing unit, set to be inaugurated by Chief Minister M K Stalin on July 31. The Vietnamese major isn't just building cars, it's setting up an entire EV ecosystem, with supplier industries expected to emerge around the plant and across southern Tamil Nadu. This industrial revival isn't isolated. The southern districts, including Madurai, Tirunelveli, Sivaganga, Theni, and Kanyakumari, have attracted ₹2.2 trillion in investments out of the ₹7.5 trillion that Tamil Nadu has drawn statewide since May 2021, when the M K Stalin-led government was sworn in. That's over 1 million jobs created in four years, underscoring the region's return to relevance.

Thoothukudi is also preparing to power India's green future. The VOChidambaranar (VOC) Port is set to host a ₹41,860 crore green hydrogen hub, backed by a global coalition, including

Petronas-backed Amplus Ganges Solar, Singapore's state-run Sembcorp Industries, Acme Green Hydrogen, and ReNew E-Fuels. The first phase is expected to go live by 2028.

Leap Green Energy is also joining the race with a proposed ₹17,400 crore integrated hydrogen and power storage plant, while the Centre has tagged Thoothukudi as one of three national hydrogen hubs, alongside Gujarat's Deendayal Port and Odisha's Paradip, marking it as a key node in India's clean energy grid.

"The region is seeing all-round development with global majors lining up. It is going to help micro, small, and medium enterprises too. One major advantage with Thoothukudi is availability of land, besides an all-weather seaport and now a full-fledged airport," said K Ponvenkatesh, secretary of the Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry-Tuticorin.

The VOC Port is undergoing a transformation of its own, with a ₹7,056 crore Outer Harbour Project set to elevate it into India's first East Coast transshipment hub. "The project is designed to develop two deepwater container terminals, each one-kilometre long, with a draft of 16 metres and a capacity to handle 2 million twenty-foot equivalent units each. The project includes installing state-of-the-art container-

handling and advanced logistics infrastructure," Susanta Kumar Purohit, chairperson, VOC Port Authority, told Business Standard in a recent interview. "This project will enable VOC Port to compete effectively with the major container-handling ports in the region."

For Thoothukudi, sky is not the limit — quite literally. The Indian Space Research Organisation is setting up its second spaceport at nearby Kulasekaraipattinam, targeting the small satellite launch sector. Paired with a new furniture park inside the State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu Limited's industrial estate, the economic footprint of the region is growing wider by the month.

The airport upgrade — with a modern terminal and runway expansion — will support 2 million passengers annually, acting as a key enabler for all this activity. "Thoothukudi is the second city in Tamil Nadu which has air, road, rail and sea connectivity. Chennai is the first one," posted Chennai-based financial planner D Muthukrishnan on X.

This industrial momentum in the region comes years after the controversial 2018 closure of the Sterlite copper plant. A source involved in the Sembcorp deal said the company chose Thoothukudi over rival East Coast ports due to its strategic location, availability of land, and the aggressive facilitation by Guidance Tamil Nadu.