

Indian Seafarer Safety - Government Steps and Challenges

June 14, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



Indian Seafarer Safety Latest News

- The recent deaths of Indian seafarers Aditya Sharma, Shivanand Chaurashiya, and Patnala Suresh aboard the merchant vessel **Settebello** have brought urgent attention to the safety of Indian mariners operating in conflict-affected maritime corridors.

About Indian Seafarers

- Seafarers are professional sailors who serve aboard merchant ships engaged in international and domestic trade.
- **With over 2.5 lakh seafarers**, India ranks among the top three countries supplying skilled maritime workforce globally.

Regulatory Framework

- The **Directorate General of Shipping (DGS)** under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways is the principal authority responsible for:
 - Certification and training of Indian seafarers.
 - Implementation of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958.
 - Oversight of seafarer welfare measures.
 - Compliance with international conventions like the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention and the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), 2006.

Government Steps for Safety and Welfare of Indian Seafarers

• Regulatory and Institutional Measures

- **Merchant Shipping Act, 1958**
 - The principal legislation governing Indian seafarers and merchant shipping.
 - Provides for certification, employment conditions, welfare, and safety standards.
 - Currently undergoing modernisation through the proposed Merchant Shipping Bill to align with international conventions.
- **Directorate General of Shipping (DGS)**
 - The regulatory authority for seafarer training, certification, and welfare.
 - Issues Continuous Discharge Certificates (CDCs) to Indian seafarers.
 - Implements the **Maritime Labour Convention, 2006** provisions.
 - Maintains a central database of registered seafarers.
- **National Shipping Board**
 - Advisory body on matters relating to Indian shipping and merchant marine.
 - Recommends policies for maritime development and seafarer welfare.
- **Skill India Initiative**
 - Specialised maritime skill development programmes.
 - Apprenticeship and pre-sea training for aspiring seafarers.
 - Recognition of prior learning (RPL) for experienced mariners.

Safety and Security Measures

• Maritime Security Coordination

- Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) at Gurugram for maritime domain awareness.
- Coordination among the Indian Navy, Coast Guard, and DGS.
- Real-time threat assessment and dissemination to shipowners.

• Anti-Piracy Measures

- Indian Navy escorts in the Gulf of Aden and Western Indian Ocean.
- Best Management Practices (BMP) for ships transiting high-risk areas.
- Armed guards on Indian-flagged vessels in piracy-prone regions.

• Search and Rescue Operations

- Indian Coast Guard maintains 24/7 search and rescue capabilities.

- Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCC) at strategic locations.
- Rapid response for distress situations involving Indian seafarers.

News Summary

- The deaths of three Indian seafarers, Aditya Sharma, Shivanand Chaurashiya, and Patnala Suresh, aboard the merchant vessel Settebello have sparked widespread concern within the maritime community.
- This incident underscores the human cost of geopolitical conflicts borne by civilian mariners navigating dangerous corridors.
- The debate following recent attacks on merchant vessels has highlighted misunderstandings about sanctioned vessels.
- **A sanctioned vessel is one designated under an economic, trade, or security sanctions regime imposed by a government or international organisation.**

Limited Universal Applicability

- A vessel sanctioned by one country is not automatically sanctioned everywhere.
- Unilateral sanctions generally apply only within the jurisdiction of the imposing country.
- UN Security Council resolutions are binding globally.
- A vessel sanctioned by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) does not automatically become illegal under Indian law.

Core Issue: Seafarer Safety in Conflict Zones

- The larger concern is not the legal status of individual ships, but the safety of seafarers operating in regions where commercial shipping is entangled in geopolitical conflict.
- **Expected Indian Response**
 - The maritime community expects India to adopt a stronger, more proactive posture:
 - Unequivocal condemnation of attacks on merchant shipping and civilian seafarers, regardless of nationality.
 - Continued advocacy for adherence to international maritime law and freedom of navigation.
 - Raising concerns at multilateral forums, including the UN, IMO, and regional maritime security platforms.
- **Beyond Diplomatic Engagement**
 - Diplomatic engagement alone may not suffice. India must:
 - Work closely with flag states, shipowners, and operators.
 - Ensure appropriate security measures for vessels transiting high-risk areas.
 - Prevent Indian seafarers from being compelled to sail through war risk zones without full disclosure of risks and their informed consent.
- **Strengthening Maritime Security**
 - There is a growing expectation that India will strengthen its maritime security posture:
 - Enhanced naval deployments in critical regions.
 - Expanded Coast Guard surveillance.

- Rapid response capabilities.
- Preparedness for hostage rescue and evacuation operations.
- Timely dissemination of actionable intelligence to shipowners.
- Regular threat assessments for operators.

The Strait of Hormuz Question

- A recurring debate centres on whether Indian seafarers should be prohibited from serving on vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz:
- **Why Blanket Bans Are Not the Solution**
 - The Strait of Hormuz remains one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints.
 - Handles a substantial share of global energy trade.
 - Thousands of Indian seafarers earn livelihoods aboard vessels transiting the region.
 - Comprehensive prohibition could affect:
 - Employment opportunities for Indian mariners.
 - Global supply chains.
 - India's standing as a leading supplier of maritime manpower.
- **Preferred Approach**
 - The industry seeks a calibrated, evidence-based approach:
 - Periodic risk assessments.
 - Clear advisories to shipowners and seafarers.
 - Mandatory informed consent for deployment in high-risk areas.
 - Enhanced security protocols rather than outright restrictions.
 - Temporary advisories if the threat environment deteriorates significantly.

Proposed Framework

- India would benefit from an inter-ministerial maritime security framework capable of:
 - Escalating measures in proportion to the threat environment.
 - Bringing together maritime regulators, foreign policy officials, defence agencies, intelligence organisations, shipowners' associations, and seafarers' unions.
 - Facilitating real-time decision-making.
- This integrated approach would ensure:
 - Comprehensive threat assessment.
 - Unified response to maritime emergencies.
 - Better coordination between stakeholders.
 - Faster decision-making in crises.

Source : TH

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/indian-seafarer-safety/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.