

Merchant Shipping Bill - Modernising India's Maritime Law

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Maritime Law Latest News

- Parliament has passed the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024 and the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025, to modernise India's maritime laws and align them with global standards.

Introduction

- In a significant move to overhaul India's maritime legal infrastructure, Parliament has passed two landmark legislations: the **Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024** and the **Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025**.
- These Bills aim to modernise outdated maritime laws, bring India in line with international maritime conventions, and support the country's ambitions to become a leading player in global shipping and trade.

Modernisation of India's Maritime Legal Framework

- India's maritime sector had long been governed by the **Merchant Shipping Act of 1958** and the **Indian Carriage of Goods by Sea Act, 1925**, both of which had become outdated, fragmented, and inadequate for handling contemporary maritime challenges.
- The newly passed Bills represent a decisive departure from these colonial-era frameworks.
- According to the Union Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, the reforms signal a "double endorsement" of the Centre's push toward modern shipping infrastructure and legal clarity.

Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024

- This Bill replaces the old 1958 Act with a comprehensive and future-ready legal structure.
- With **16 Parts and 325 clauses**, it simplifies compliance, strengthens safety norms, and reflects India's commitments under key **International Maritime Organisation (IMO)** conventions.
- **Key Features:**
 - **Seafarer Welfare:** Prioritises working conditions, welfare, and protection of Indian and foreign seafarers operating under Indian jurisdiction.
 - **Safety and Emergency Response:** Strengthens frameworks for ship safety, emergency preparedness, and marine pollution control.
 - **Environmental Protection:** Integrates IMO protocols to safeguard marine ecosystems.
 - **Tonnage Promotion:** Encourages the registration of ships under the Indian flag to boost domestic tonnage.
 - **Compliance Simplification:** Consolidates fragmented provisions, thereby reducing red tape for maritime operators.
- The Government stressed that the legislation not only updates India's shipping law but also positions the country as a "globally respected maritime jurisdiction" ready for sustainable growth and investment.

The Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025

- This Bill **repeals the Indian Carriage of Goods by Sea Act, 1925** and brings in a modern legal structure to regulate cargo movement via sea.
- It is particularly **significant for exporters, importers, shipping companies, and insurers**.
- **Key Features:**
 - **Hague-Visby Rules Compliance:** Aligns India's cargo liability laws with globally accepted standards followed by countries like the UK, simplifying cross-border transactions.
 - **Commercial Efficiency:** The new rules enhance transparency in contracts and dispute resolution, helping to reduce litigation and boost investor confidence.
 - **Trade Facilitation:** It streamlines the legal process surrounding cargo shipping, making India more attractive to international shipping and logistics companies.

Strategic Significance for India's Maritime Sector

- Together, the two Bills lay the foundation for India's **blue economy** by:
 - Promoting **ease of doing business** in maritime logistics.
 - Unlocking investment potential in ports, shipbuilding, and maritime technology.

- Supporting **India's maritime security architecture** through better legal and regulatory frameworks.
- Creating opportunities for **green maritime initiatives** and sustainable coastal development.
- The reforms are also expected to generate employment, especially in coastal states, and enhance India's capability to compete with global maritime powers such as Singapore, China, and the UAE.

Source : TH

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