

Three Indian seafarers killed; Indian warships in the Gulf on standby for humanitarian operations

BY S VENKAT NARAYAN
OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI: At least three Indian seafarers on board foreign-flagged vessels were killed and one was injured in the ongoing conflict in West Asia, the Directorate General of Shipping said.

It issued an advisory for maritime operators to assess voyage-specific risks, amid escalated military actions involving the United States, Israel and Iran that threaten disruptions of major trade routes.

"There have been four reported incidents involving Indian seafarers in the region, resulting in three casualties and one injured seafarer, all of whom were serving on board foreign-flagged vessels," the Directorate General of Shipping said.

The Directorate said the remaining crew members on board are safe and secure, and the Directorate, as well as other authorities, are maintaining close coordination with all stakeholders to ensure their continued safety, well-being and timely support.

All necessary support, assistance and facilitation are being extended to the affected seafarers and their families, it added.

Meanwhile, two Indian Navy ships, deployed in the region under Operation Sankalp, have been placed on standby for possible humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations.

"Under Operation Sankalp, two Indian Navy ships (a frigate and a destroyer) are already deployed in the

Gulf of Aden and the Gulf of Oman. They have been deployed for anti-piracy operations and the safety of merchant vessels since 2019. If required, these ships could be utilised for HADR operations. The Navy has prior experience in such missions," the official said.

The deployment under Operation Sankalp was initiated to safeguard Indian-flagged vessels and ensure maritime security in the region amid rising threats to commercial shipping.

The official also stated that INS Surat is currently in Bahrain as part of a regional maritime security engagement.

The Directorate General of Shipping said it is closely monitoring the evolving maritime security situation in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, Gulf of Oman and adjoining sea areas.

Stakeholders have been advised to maintain heightened vigilance and undertake voyage-specific risk assessments, and vessels operating in the region have been advised to maintain an enhanced security posture and bridge watch, ensure continuous communication readiness, and report any suspicious activity immediately, with transit through high-risk areas to be reviewed by operators based on prevailing conditions, the shipping authority said.

India has historically leveraged its naval presence in the region for evacuation and relief missions during crises, and officials indicated that contingency planning remains in place should the situation warrant further action.

The directorate further said that it

has activated enhanced monitoring and security oversight, real-time tracking of Indian-flagged vessels with increased reporting frequency and 24X7 monitoring.

"Mandatory reporting protocols have been prescribed for vessels, owners and managers, and close coordination is being maintained with the Indian Navy, Ministry of External Affairs, IFC-IOR, MRCC and Indian Missions," it said.

Shipping companies have also been advised to exercise due caution in crew deployment and to maintain regular communication with seafarers and their families.

The Directorate said a dedicated 'quick response team' has also been formed to ensure timely coordination among all concerned authorities, enable immediate response to emerging situations, and facilitate prompt assistance and support to Indian seafarers and their families.

On Monday (01 March), Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), the country's highest decision-making body on security and strategic affairs. The meeting reviewed the conflict in West Asia and its implications for India.

The meeting was attended by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah, External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. Top officials briefed the Committee on the prevailing regional dynamics and assessed their impact on India's strategic, economic and diaspora interests.