

## **India & International Maritime Organization**

### **What is the issue?**

- The International Maritime Organization (IMO) lists India as among the 10 states with the largest interest in international seaborne trade.
- But India's participation in the IMO has been haphazard and inadequate.

### **What is IMO?**

- Shipping accounts for over 90% by volume and about 80% by value of global trade.
- The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is a body that regulates the shipping industry with a range of legislations.
- It currently has 174 member states and three associate members.
- There are also many non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations.

### **How does IMO work?**

- The IMO is primarily a secretariat that facilitates decision-making processes on all maritime matters through meetings of members.
- The binding instruments are brought in through the conventions.
- Maritime matters are dealt by the committees of the IMO like the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) etc.
- Each committee is designated a separate aspect of shipping and supported by sub-committees.
- The subcommittees are the main working organs, where the proposals from a member state are analysed and forwarded to a main committee.
- The main committees put the approved proposal for enactment through the Convention.

### **How do prominent maritime nations operate in IMO?**

- They have their permanent representatives at London (HQ, IMO).
- They are supported by a large contingent of domain experts from their maritime administration, seafarers and industry associations.
- They ensure that they have representation in every subcommittee, working group.

- European countries move their proposals in unison and voting or support are given en bloc.
- China, Japan, Singapore, Korea and a few others follow the same pattern ensuring that a large delegation intervenes in the meetings for their cause.
- This has resulted in these countries fiercely protecting their interests.

### How does India operate?

- India has followed the same pattern.
- India's permanent representative post at London has remained vacant for the last 25 years.
- Representation at meetings is often through a skeletal delegation.
- The number of submissions made by India in the recent past has been very few and not in proportion to India's stakes in global shipping.

### How does it affect India's interests?

- **High Risk Areas Demarcation** - IMO has demarcated "High Risk Areas" in Indian Ocean based on presence of pirates.
- This resulted in half the Arabian Sea and almost the entire south-west coast of India being seen as piracy-infested, despite the presence of the Indian Navy and Coast Guard.
- The High Risk Area formulation led to a ballooning of insurance costs. It affected goods coming into or out of India.
- So, it took great efforts to revoke the promulgation and negate the financial burden.
- **NavIC** - There was also great difficulty in introducing the indigenously designed NAVigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) in the worldwide maritime navigation system.
- **Environmental Regulations** - IMO had recently mandated that merchant ships should not burn fuel with sulphur content greater than 0.5% beginning January 1 from the previous level of 3.5%.
- Refineries in India struggle to meet the demand.
- Freight costs also have increased resulting in a cascading effect on retail prices.
- New legislative mandates of IMO, fitment of new equipment and changes to ship structural designs being brought on have been driven by developed countries.
- They are not entirely pragmatic from the point of view of India's interests.

### What should be done?

- So far, India's presence and participation in the IMO has been at the individual level.
- India should now make its presence felt so that its national interests are served.

**Source: The Hindu**

