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

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering