Maritime Flag Rules 2026

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | Defence*

Why in news?

India has introduced a new set of rules governing the flags flown by Indian ships at sea, replacing a notification that had remained in force for more than six decades.

- **Nodal Ministry** – The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways.
- The Ministry has issued a fresh notification under the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025.
- **Key changes** – The Centre has replaced the *maritime flag framework* that had governed Indian vessels since 1961, laying down separate flag requirements for merchant ships, government-owned vessels and merchant ships operating exclusively for the Defence Ministry.
- **Revised rules** – Under the revised rules, Indian merchant vessels registered under the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025, will fly the Red Ensign.
- The flag will be red, with the Indian National Flag placed in the upper canton, the area closest to the flagstaff.
- Its length will be one and a half times its width, in accordance with the Flag Code of India, 2002.
- **Government-owned vessels** – They will fly the Blue Ensign, irrespective of whether they are registered under the Merchant Shipping Act.
- These ships will carry the official badge of the department, authority or organisation that owns them.
- **Exemption** – The exemption applies to ships belonging to the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard, which are operating exclusively for the Defence Ministry.
- **Use of badges** – The government has also laid down rules for the use of official badges on the Blue Ensign.
- Any new badge will require prior approval from the Centre, with applications routed through the Director General of Maritime Administration.
- Organisations already using an approved badge will be allowed to continue with it.
- **Separate provision for Indian merchant vessels** – The merchant vessels which are receiving financial subvention from the Ministry of Defence and operating exclusively for it have separate provisions.
- These vessels will also fly the Blue Ensign; however, their badges will need to be authorised through a Warrant issued by the Chief of the Naval Staff, with applications submitted directly to the Naval Chief.
- **Specification of the Blue Ensign** – It will be royal blue, with the Indian National Flag in the upper canton. The badge, in light golden colour, will be placed at the centre of the fly half of the flag.

- Its size will be restricted to a circle with a diameter not exceeding 13/30th of the flag's width.



Reference

NDTV | Centre Revises Maritime Flag Rules For Merchant Ships, Government Vessels

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