

India's Regulatory Response to the Strait of Hormuz Crisis: All Hands-On Deck

Overview

- The Directorate General of Shipping (“DGS”) issued a series of circulars and press release containing advisory for Indian Flag Vessels and Indian Seafarers regarding escalation of security situation in Iran, Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf and adjacent waters.
- Ministry of Ports, Shipping and waterways (“MoPSW”) assures of close monitoring and coordination with all players involved such as the Indian Navy, Ministry of External Affairs (“MEA”), Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (“MRCC”) etc.
- MoPSW has issued a Standard Operating Procedure (“SOP”) for all Major Ports to mitigate disruptions affecting Maritime trade.

Introduction

The escalating geopolitical tension due to the US-Iran-Israel war beginning in late February 2026 has triggered regulatory responses mainly from the DGS operating through MoPSW. The West Asia unrest has manifested itself in unrest marked with uncertainty, especially on account of closure of one of the world’s most important chokepoint, i.e. the Strait of Hormuz (“Hormuz”). Currently, 778 Indian seafarers are on board 28 Indian-flagged vessels in the Persian Gulf region.¹ Additionally, there are 35 Indian-flagged vessels currently in and around Hormuz and adjoining waters.² In light of these figures it is important to assess India’s regulatory responses and efforts balancing maritime security, trade, movement and economic continuity.

On March 1, 2026, the Cabinet Committee of Security (“CCS”) convened under Prime Minister’s chairmanship to assess the security implications for the estimated one crore Indian citizens in the Gulf region and the country's energy security interests.³ The CCS meeting established strategic framework for coordinating responses across multiple ministries, including the MoPSW, MEA, and the Indian Navy.

The MoPSW has assumed the lead role in maritime response coordination. The DGS operating through the MoPSW has issued a series of circulars so far in response to the escalation.

Circulars issued by the Directorate General of Shipping

The DGS emerged as the operational nerve center for India's maritime regulatory response beginning with an early advisory regarding travel to Iran on 14 January 2026,⁴ well before the crisis escalated demonstrating proactive monitoring of security developments. As tensions intensified, the DGS issued a cascade of circulars establishing comprehensive security protocols.

¹ [West Asia crisis: 2 Indians dead, 778 seafarers aboard 28 Indian ships stuck in Persian Gulf, says govt - The Tribune](#)

² [MoPSW Press Release dated 6 March 2026; India weighs options to escort stuck ships out of choked Strait of Hormuz | India News](#)

³ [Press Release CCS Meeting dated 1 March 2026](#)

⁴ [DGS Circular 01 of 2026 dated 14 Jan 2026](#)

On 28 February 2026, DGS issued Circular No. 08 of 2026 mandating enhanced security measures for all Indian-flagged vessels operating in Hormuz, Persian Gulf, and adjacent waters. The circular required vessels to conduct comprehensive security drills covering scenarios including drone attacks, missile threats, and asymmetric warfare systems. Ship Security Alert Systems (“SSAS”) testing became mandatory before entering high-risk areas (“HRA”), and ship owners were directed to undertake voyage-specific risk assessments before planning any transit through the region.⁵

A critical regulatory requirement was the implementation of mandatory daily reporting protocols. All vessels transiting the region were required to submit details through an online Ship Reporting Form established under DGS Circular No. 08 of 2024, streamlining the reporting process and creating a robust database for real-time monitoring.⁶ This digital infrastructure enabled the DGCOMM Centre to maintain 24×7 monitoring of vessel movements with hourly updates.⁷

On 28 February 2026, DGS issued another Circular No. 09 of 2026, specifically addressed to Indian seafarers in Iran following pre-emptive strikes in Tehran.⁸ The circular urged seafarers to remain vigilant, register with the Embassy of India in Tehran, adhere to local safety protocols, and coordinate departure through official channels. Recruitment and Placement Service Licensees (“RPSLs”) companies and shipping companies were prohibited from deploying Indian seafarers to Iran until further notice in reference to the advisory issued on 14 January 2026.⁹

The DGS formalized its crisis management structure and released an update on the situation. Through DGS Order No. 01 of 2026, released on 2 March 2026 a dedicated Quick Response Team (“QRT”) was constituted to ensure a timely and coordinated response to safeguard Indian seafarers. The order details the composition of the team, including a 24x7 response team and officials with specific responsibilities for different time shifts. A 24x7 DGCOMM Centre was established as the first point of contact for seafarers in crisis, with dedicated contact numbers and email. The team coordinated closely with RPSLs, shipping companies, trade unions, Indian Missions abroad, and port authorities to ensure timely communication and assistance.¹⁰

On 2 March 2026, the DGS reported that while no Indian-flagged vessels had been involved in incidents, there had been four incidents involving Indian seafarers on foreign-flagged vessels, resulting in three casualties and one injury. It confirmed through the press release that enhanced monitoring, mandatory reporting protocols, and close coordination with the Indian Navy and other agencies were in place.¹¹

On 6 March 2026 a subsequent safety advisory was issued via DGS Circular No. 10 of 2026 highlighting specific attack patterns threatening merchant vessels, including boat-mounted drones,

⁵ [DGS Circular No. 08 of 2026 dated 28 Feb 2026](#)

⁶ [DGS Order No. 08 of 2024 dated 10 April 2024](#)

⁷ [Press Release: MoPSW Reviews Maritime Situation in Persian Gulf dated 3 March 2026](#)

⁸ [DGS Circular No. 09 of 2026 dated 28 Feb 2026](#)

⁹ [DGS Circular 01 of 2026 dated 14 Jan 2026](#)

¹⁰ [DGS Order No. 01 of 2026 dated 2 March 2026](#)

¹¹ [DGS Press Release dated 2 March 2026](#)

missile strikes, and structural damage to ballast and cargo tanks. The circular mandated round-the-clock watches in accordance with the International Ship and Port Facility Security (“ISPS”) Code and required RPSL companies to establish 24×7 emergency contact mechanisms accessible to seafarers' families. Shipping companies were advised to make arrangements for psychological counselling support for seafarers and their families who may experience anxiety or panic.¹²

Other Safety Measures, Port Operations and Trade Continuity Measures

MoPSW in its press release emphasized coordination among multiple agencies over the regulatory framework. For instance, the DGS maintained close liaison with the Indian Navy, Ministry of External Affairs, Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (“IFC-IOR”), and Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (“MRCC”).¹³ This multi-agency coordination enabled comprehensive situational awareness and swift response capabilities.¹⁴

Beyond vessel and crew safety, India's regulatory response addressed the disruption to maritime trade. The MoPSW issued an SOP dated 9 March 2026 directing all major ports to implement measures mitigating trade disruptions.¹⁵ In compliance with the SOP, Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA), India's largest container port, constituted a dedicated task force comprising representatives from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (“DGFT”), Customs, DG Shipping, and JNPA's Traffic department. The task force implemented several facilitation measures including temporary storage arrangements for Middle East-bound cargo; allocation of additional storage areas at terminals; facilitation of ad-hoc vessel calls to alternate ports east of Hormuz (Fujairah, Khor Fakkan, Sohar, Muscat, Salalah); priority handling for perishable and returning export cargo; expedited “Back to Town” (“BTT”) movement procedures. Customs authorities at Jawaharlal Nehru Customs House introduced unprecedented facilitation measures, waiving BTT-related fees and penalties and permitting cargo movement even when Export General Manifests had not been filed.¹⁶

While the DGS handles major chunk of the regulatory response, the operational security is supported by the Indian Navy and high-level government strategy. The Indian Navy has in place Operation Sankalp active since 2019 to ensure the safe passage of Indian-flagged vessels. This involves the deployment of stealth frigates e.g., INS Talwar and destroyers in Hormuz and Persian Gulf to provide a “security blanket” against asymmetric threats.¹⁷ The Government of India is currently evaluating high-level options to physically escort Indian-flagged

¹² [DGS Circular No. 10 of 2026 dated 6 March 2026](#)

¹³ [Press Release MoSPW dated 3 March 2026](#)

¹⁴ [DGS Press Release dated 2 March 2026](#)

¹⁵ [Press Release MoPSW issues SOP dated 9 March 2026](#)

¹⁶ [Press Release MoPSW issues SOP dated 9 March 2026](#)

¹⁷ [Op SANKALP : 3RD YEAR OF INDIAN NAVY'S MARITIME SECURITY OPERATIONS; India weighs options to escort stuck ships out of choked Strait of Hormuz | India News](#)

vessels stranded in the region out of the danger zone. As of 10 March 2026, discussions are ongoing, but no final order for convoy escorts has been issued.¹⁸

Conclusion

India's regulatory response to the Hormuz crisis represents a comprehensive framework addressing maritime security, seafarer welfare, and trade continuity simultaneously. The coordinated action across ministries, establishment of dedicated response teams, implementation of robust monitoring systems, and facilitation of trade operations demonstrate institutional capacity to manage complex maritime crises. The latest development has been India's direct communication with Iran by the External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar to restart shipping through Hormuz. At present, 2 Indian ships have been allowed safe passage through Hormuz, in light of the current LPG crisis in India.¹⁹

Authors:

Mustafa Motiwala, Senior Partner

Nihal Shaikh, Associate Partner

Sanskriti Sharma, Associate

Disclaimer: The content of this article is intended to provide a general guide to the subject matter. Specialist advice should be sought about your specific circumstances.

¹⁸ [India weighs options to escort stuck ships out of choked Strait of Hormuz | India News](#)

¹⁹ [Two Indian ships cross Strait of Hormuz as Iran says it allowed passage | US-Israel war on Iran News | Al Jazeera;](#)
[We have allowed some ships: Iranian envoy Fathali on passage of vessels via Strait of Hormuz - The Hindu.](#)