

INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION (IMO) COUNCIL

NEWS: India has reiterated its commitment to maritime safety and gender equality during the **134th session** of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Council, held in London.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

India's Concerns Raised at the 134th IMO Session

- **Call for IMO-led Maritime Investigations:**
India highlighted serious maritime accidents that involved loss of containers and hazardous cargo, urging IMO to conduct in-depth investigations.
- **Recent Maritime Incidents Highlighted by India:**
 - *Sinking of MSC ELSA 3* (May 2025): A container ship carrying hazardous cargo sank off the coast of **Kochi, Kerala**, raising environmental and safety concerns.
 - *Fire and Explosion on WAN HAI 503* (June 2025): This vessel experienced a dangerous fire and explosion off the **Kerala coast**, likely involving hazardous materials.
- **India's Demands from IMO:**
 - Comprehensive investigations into such maritime incidents.
 - A review and possible revision of **international safety standards** for the transportation of dangerous goods—especially *lithium-ion batteries* and other substances covered under the **IMDG (International Maritime Dangerous Goods) Code**.
 - Stricter protocols on **packaging, declaration, stowage, and monitoring** of dangerous cargo.

Proposal for Global Standardisation and Safety Protocols

- India suggested that the IMO should:
 - **Standardise incident response protocols globally**, to ensure quick and effective responses during maritime accidents.
 - Promote **global best practices** to improve **operational safety on container ships**, particularly with regard to hazardous cargo handling.

3. India's "Sagar Mein Samman" Initiative (2024)

- **Objective:** The initiative, launched by India's **Directorate General of Shipping**, promotes a **safe, inclusive, and respectful maritime work environment**.
- **Focus on Gender Inclusion:**
 - Encourages **women's participation** at all levels—from **deck jobs to leadership roles** in the maritime industry.

- India recorded a **650% increase** in the number of **Indian women seafarers**, signaling a major shift towards gender equity in maritime employment.

Key Laws and Conventions Referenced

- **MARPOL (1973):**
 - *Full name: International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships.*
 - It was introduced by IMO to prevent marine pollution by oil and other harmful substances.
 - India is a **signatory**, committed to enforcing pollution control and marine environment protection standards.
- **Maritime Labour Convention, 2006:**
 - Sets **minimum standards** for working and living conditions of seafarers worldwide.
 - Covers aspects like **equal opportunity, safety, fair treatment, and gender inclusion** onboard ships.
- **Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 (India):**
 - Empowers the Central Government to **issue notices** if a vessel violates safety or compliance norms.
 - Failure to comply can lead to **legal prosecution** of the ship owner/operator.

Way Forward: India's Suggestions for Global Maritime Reform

- **Structural Reforms at the IMO Level:**
 - Establish a dedicated **international body to investigate maritime incidents**.
 - Strengthen **compliance mechanisms** related to cargo safety and hazardous goods.
- **Technological Innovations:**
 - Promote the integration of **blockchain** for secure cargo tracking and **AI tools** to ensure real-time cargo safety assessments and documentation transparency.
- **Support for Developing Countries:**
 - Provide **training and technical assistance** to help developing countries adopt and enforce **IMDG Code** standards and protocols.
- **Global Gender Inclusion Models:**
 - Replicate India's "Sagar Mein Samman" globally to **increase women's participation** in the maritime workforce and leadership roles.

About the International Maritime Organization (IMO)

- **Nature:** A specialised agency of the United Nations that is responsible for **regulating international shipping**.
- **Establishment:**
 - Agreed upon in **1948** at a UN conference in Geneva.
 - Came into force in **1958** with its first session that year.
- **Headquarters:** Located in **London, United Kingdom**.
- **Membership:**
 - Currently has **176 Member States** and **3 Associate Members**.
 - Works to ensure **safe, secure, and environmentally sound shipping practices** worldwide.

Source: <https://ddnews.gov.in/en/india-advocates-maritime-safety-and-gender-inclusivity-at-134th-imo-council-session-in-london/>