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MS Notice No. 7 of 2012

Sub: Navigation off the Indian coast - transgressing of fishing nets – mistaking fishing boats with pirate skiffs

1. Shipping traffic closer to western Indian coast has been observed to be steadily increasing during recent times as merchant ships appear to prefer planning their passage closer to Indian coast as against the straight courses across the Arabian seas.

2. There are over 300,000 fishing boats in operations off the Indian coast. Fishing off the coast of state of Kerala and Karnataka is particularly intense during post South West monsoon and extends up to 50 NM from the coastline. Generally in these waters, FRP Fishing boats with 04-05 crew with outboard motors operate and engage in fishing activity with long lines and purseine gear.

3. Increasing shipping traffic closer to the Indian coast causes the merchant ships to, at times, transgress the fishing nets. On observing the approaching merchant vessel onto their fishing nets/gear, it is common for the fishing boats to raise alarm and to 'sail towards' the merchant ship to attract attention so as to avoid damage to their nets.

4. Reports are being received where merchant ships have mistaken the fishing boats to be 'pirate skiffs' In one such recent incident off the coast of West coast of India, Kerala, a merchant ship fired on the fishermen, killing two of the fishermen. The ship's security guards had assumed the innocent fishermen to be the pirates. In addition, there has been report of another report of firing of warning shots on Indian fishermen.

5. In another case, a merchant ship collided with a fishing boat. This resulted in sinking of the boat and loss of life of three fishermen while two of the fishermen are still missing. These unfortunate accidents have resulted in the detention of the suspected vessels and their crew members/security guards involved. In addition to these two instances, there have been numerous reporting of near miss collisions of fishing vessels with merchant ships off the west coat of India.

6. It has been reported that merchant ships are transiting very close to the coast to avoid the High Risk Area (HRA) which starts at 12 NM from the Indian coast. When the merchant ships navigate close to the coast, they do have close encounters with the fishermen. This interface may result in either a collision with the fishing vessels or at times merchant ships mistaking the fishermen to be pirates, fire upon the innocent fishermen. Such close encounters may result in the adverse consequences for the fishing vessels as well as the merchant ships.

7. While the ships are advised to maintain best management practices as per the advice of IMO, while navigating in the high risk area, it is clarified that continuing heightened vigil of Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard has ensured that no cases of incidents of piracy have occurred in the Indian EEZ (up-to 200 NM from the Indian coast) since June 2011.

8. Therefore, all merchant vessels are advised;

a) to take note of dense fishing traffic on Indian coast, the possibility that they may be approached by these boats for safeguarding their nets / lines and should not mistake these fishing boats for 'pirate skiffs' or PAGs and navigate with extreme caution when approaching up-to 50 NM from the Indian coast, and,

b) to take cognizance of IMO Circular MSC.1/1334 dated 23 Jun 2009 with regard to appreciating sufficient grounds for suspecting the fishing vessel to be a Pirate Action Group (PAG).

c) to report sightings of any suspicious craft within Indian EEZ to Indian Coast Guard on contact details mentioned under para 7 below.

9. All merchant ships are further advised to report the presence of armed Guards on board to Indian Navy (email: wncmocmb-navy@nic.in; fax: +91 22 22661702) / Indian Coast Guard (email: mrcc-west@indiancoastguard.nic.in or indsar@vsnl.net, or icgmrcc_mumbai@mtnl.net ; Telephone: + 91 22 24388065,

24316558, Fax: +91 22 24316558, +91 22 24333727) in compliance to para 3.8 of IMO circular MSC. 1/Circ 1405/Rev.1 dated 16 Sept. 2011 and para 7.6 of Ministry of Shipping, Govt. of India Circular F. No. SR-13020/6/2009-MG (pt) dated 29 Aug 2011.

10. This is issued with approval of Director General of Shipping.

(Capt. Harish Khatri)
(Dy. Director General of Shipping (Tech)