

## **ARMED ROBBERY AT SEA IN INDIA: TRENDS AND IMPERATIVES**

*Captain Himadri Das*  
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### **Introduction**

‘Armed robbery against ships’ [hereinafter referred to as ‘armed robbery’] has been defined by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) as “*any illegal act of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, or threat thereof, other than an act of “piracy”, committed for private ends and directed against a ship, or against persons or property on board such ship, within a State’s internal waters, archipelagic waters and Territorial Sea.*”<sup>1</sup> Armed robbery also includes inciting or facilitating an act of armed robbery. Unlike piracy, only coastal States have jurisdiction over acts of armed robbery.<sup>2</sup>

On 15 January 2020, ReCAAP ISC [Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia — Information Sharing Centre] released its annual report for 2020.<sup>3</sup> The report highlighted an increase in incidents of armed robbery and piracy in Asia from 83 in 2019 to 97 in 2020. Incidents of armed robbery in India rose from five in 2019 to nine in 2020. The report also highlighted the arrest of the perpetrators, including by Indian agencies. At the release ceremony of the report, the Executive Director, ReCAAP ISC urged littoral States “to take seriously petty theft and sea robbery because leaving criminals to continue their crime with impunity will only embolden them to escalate their acts.”<sup>4</sup>

ReCAAP is a regional government-to-government agreement to promote and enhance cooperation against piracy and armed robbery.<sup>5</sup> The ReCAAP agreement was launched in November 2006 with 14 contracting parties. India is a contracting party to ReCAAP and the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Mumbai is the designated Indian Focal Point. The IMO guidance of 2009 for the shipping industry on measures for reporting incidents of

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<sup>1</sup> “Piracy and armed robbery against ships,” International Maritime Organisation, <https://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Security/Pages/PiracyArmedRobberydefault.aspx>, accessed 27 January 2021.

<sup>2</sup> In accordance with Articles 101 (Definition of Piracy) and Article 58 (Rights and duties of other States in the exclusive economic zone) of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), universal jurisdiction can be exercised only outside the limits of the territorial seas of a coastal state.

<sup>3</sup> “Ninety-seven Incidents Reported to ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre in Asia in 2020, Marking 17% Year-on-Year Increase in Total Incidents and 32% Increase in Actual Incidents,” ReCAAP, [https://www.recaap.org/resources/ck/files/news/2021/News\\_Release\\_on\\_ReCAAP-ISC\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2020\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.recaap.org/resources/ck/files/news/2021/News_Release_on_ReCAAP-ISC_Annual_Report_2020_FINAL.pdf), accessed 26 January 2021.

<sup>4</sup> “Ninety-seven Incidents Reported to ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre in Asia in 2020, Marking 17% Year-on-Year Increase in Total Incidents and 32% Increase in Actual Incidents,” ReCAAP.

<sup>5</sup> “About ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre | combating maritime robbery, sea piracy,” ReCAAP, [https://www.recaap.org/about\\_ReCAAP-ISC](https://www.recaap.org/about_ReCAAP-ISC), accessed 26 January 2021.

piracy and armed robbery included ReCAAP Focal Points in the reporting chain for incidents in Asia.<sup>6</sup>

This paper investigates the trends in armed robbery in India, primarily based on the analytical work done by the ReCAAP ISC, and will attempt to suggest measures to address armed robbery.

### **Armed Robbery in India: Trends**

In 2018, ReCAAP ISC started using data analytical tools to analyse incidents, and in 2019, ReCAAP ISC published the results for the period 2007-2019 for the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, India, and Philippines.<sup>7</sup> The analysis focuses on the number of perpetrators, weapons carried by perpetrators, treatment of crew, items stolen, type of ships boarded, and on the time of incidents.

The report on India revealed that the trends were broadly consistent, albeit with some variations in the time of incidents.<sup>8</sup> The 13-year data on India revealed that on an average about six cases were reported annually; the highest was reported in 2014 (14 incidents) and the lowest in 2017 and 2018 (four incidents). To put things in perspective, in 2019, when five incidents of armed robbery were reported, a total 8,54,618 cases crimes related to property (including theft and burglaries) were registered in India.<sup>9</sup> Generally, these armed robberies were committed by a small unarmed (or lightly armed) group during dark hours on board tankers.<sup>10</sup> In majority of the cases only loss of stores was reported, and the crew was unharmed.

The broad trends of 2007-2019 continued in 2020. As per the French Navy's Maritime Information Cooperation & Awareness Center (MICA), the increase in incidents in 2020 is attributed to "the increase in the number of vessels in anchorage areas, which encourages robbers to take action."<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding the similarity in the broad trends, unlike previous years when most attacks were directed at tankers, about half the attacks in 2020 were directed at offshore supply vessels, and unlike in 2019, when 60 per cent of the incidents were reported

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<sup>6</sup> "Guidance to shipowners and ship operators, shipmasters and crews on preventing and suppressing acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships," International Maritime Organisation, <https://www.wcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/OurWork/Security/Documents/MSC.1-Circ.1334.pdf>, accessed 12 February 2021.

<sup>7</sup> ReCAAP Information Fusion Centre, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia: Annual Report 2019*, 41-45. <https://www.recaap.org/resources/ck/files/reports/annual/ReCAAP%20ISC%20Annual%20Report%202019.pdf>, accessed 25 January 2021; ReCAAP Information Fusion Centre, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia: Annual Report 2020*, 9-10 and 46-87, <https://www.recaap.org/resources/ck/files/reports/annual/ReCAAP%20ISC%20Annual%20Report%202020.pdf>, accessed 25 January 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Unlike in previous years, in 2019, five of the seven incidents were reported during daylight hours.

<sup>9</sup> "Crime in India – 2019," National Crimes Record Bureau, <https://ncrb.gov.in/sites/default/files/CII%202019%20SNAPSHOT%20STATES.pdf>, accessed 27 January 2021.

<sup>10</sup> In most cases there was no information available on the arms carried by the perpetrators, and 'small' refers to group of six persons or less.

<sup>11</sup> Maritime Information Cooperation & Awareness Center Centre (French Navy), *Annual Report 2020*, 48, [https://www.mica-center.org/download/Bilan\\_annuel\\_MICA\\_CENTER\\_2020.pdf](https://www.mica-center.org/download/Bilan_annuel_MICA_CENTER_2020.pdf), accessed 26 January 2021.

during daylight hours, majority of the incidents in 2020 were under the cover of darkness. Two of the incidents related to vessels which were under tow.

During the period 2007-2020, the highest incidents of armed robbery were reported from Kandla (38), followed by Kakinada (21), Kochi (18), Visakhapatnam (15), Haldia/ Sagar (14), and Alang (4).<sup>12</sup> The reported incidents are, therefore, spread across only four of the 13 coastal states/ union territories: Gujarat (Kandla and Alang), Kerala (Kochi), Andhra Pradesh (Kakinada and Visakhapatnam), and West Bengal (Sagar/ Haldia). In 2020, nine cases were reported from only two Indian states: five were from Andhra Pradesh (Kakinada) and the balance four from Gujarat (including three at Alang). However, towards the end of the period, the number of incidents at/ off major ports witnessed a decline. Between 2019-20, only one incident was reported from Kandla, and none from the other 'hotspots' viz. Kochi, Haldia, and Visakhapatnam. The decline continued onto 2020 when no case was reported from any major port. However, in 2020, Alang emerged as a new hotspot.

Out of the four cases reported off Gujarat, in three cases (including two off Alang), a total of 17 perpetrators were arrested, and in one case stolen property was also recovered.<sup>13</sup> While the Coast Guard apprehended the perpetrators at sea in one incident, in the other two incidents, investigations by the State Marine Police (SMP) led to the arrests. In one of the incidents off Gujarat, the perpetrators boarded a tanker under tow from an Indian fishing vessel. In its report ReCAAP ISC commended the action by concerned agencies, and also highlighted the fact that in the period April to December 2020 there were no reports of armed robbery from Gujarat.<sup>14</sup>

It is clear that armed robbery has a correlation with the monsoons, possibly due to the effect on boat operations. There was just one incident reported in the monsoon months in Kakinada. The maximum incidents were reported in February 2020 (five), and one incident each was reported in the months of March, April, June, and October, respectively. The COVID-related lockdown in India, including seaward enforcement, which continued from March till May 2020 could have also contributed to the reduction of incidents.

While the report by ReCAAP is considered an authoritative report, it is possible that some incidents, particularly petty theft, remained unreported to preclude time and financial penalties associated with longer stay in ports for investigations.

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<sup>12</sup> ReCAAP Information Fusion Centre, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia: Annual Report 2018*, 32, <https://www.recaap.org/resources/ck/files/reports/annual/ReCAAP%20ISC%20Annual%20Report%202018.pdf>, accessed 25 January 2021; ReCAAP Information Fusion Centre, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia: Annual Report 2019*, 41-45; ReCAAP Information Fusion Centre, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia: Annual Report 2020*, 46-87.

<sup>13</sup> ReCAAP Information Fusion Centre, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia: Annual Report 2020*, 39.

<sup>14</sup> ReCAAP Information Fusion Centre, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia: Annual Report 2020*, 41.

## Port Security in India: An Overview

India has a coastline of over 7,500 km with 12 major ports and over 200 non-major ports. While the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) is responsible for major ports, non-major ports are governed by respective state governments, and are administrated through State Maritime Boards (SMB). To cater for the projected increase in traffic and cargo-handling requirements, port-modernisation, and development of new ports is being progressed as part of the SAGARMALA port-led development project.<sup>15</sup> This includes initiatives to improve efficiency and expand capacity in existing ports, and development of six new ports.

In 2001, a Group of Ministers (GoM) report on national security had recommended setting up of State Marine Police (SMP) for coastal policing. Specifically, for port security, the report had recommended installation of Vessel Traffic Management System (VTMS)<sup>16</sup> in major ports, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and in the Gulf of Kutch, and also, representation of security agencies in port-related bodies.<sup>17</sup> With the assistance of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), SMP were raised in coastal states between 2005 and 2011 under the Coastal Security Scheme (CSS). As evidenced in the cases in Gujarat, the SMP has emerged as a key stakeholder in the response to incidents of armed robbery. Progressively, VTMS have also been installed at all major ports, and in the Gulf of Kutch; a radar chain has also been established along the Indian coast, including the island territories. Cases of armed robbery are being also reported through the VTMS.

The International Ship and Port Security Code (ISPS) entered into force on 01 July 1994 and is applicable to certain classes of ships engaged in international voyages, and also to all ports servicing such ships. The code, developed after the September 2001 attacks on the US ('9/11'), is a mandatory security-focused regime for international shipping and for ports engaged in international trade. In 2007, the provisions of the code were statutorily implemented in India through amendments to the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 and the Indian Ports Act, 1908.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequent to the terror attacks on Mumbai on 26 November 2008 ('26/11') the overall construct for coastal and maritime security in India was revamped. Key focus areas of the revamp were designation of responsibilities; institutionalisation of interagency coordination mechanisms; and, a focus on electronic surveillance and development of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). The mandate of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) was also expanded to include security in private sector. This enables the CISF to provide security to privately-owned ports which are growing in India.

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<sup>15</sup> "Port Modernization & New Port Development," Sagarmala, <http://sagarmala.gov.in/project/port-modernization-new-port-development>, accessed 26 January 2021.

<sup>16</sup> VTMS systems comprise sensors (radar, Automatic Identification System (AIS), cameras, etc) and communication equipment and are used by port authorities to control traffic to and from a port.

<sup>17</sup> Group of Ministers, *Report of the Group of Ministers on National Security*, 71-75, Vivekananda International Foundation, <https://www.vifindia.org/sites/default/files/GoM%20Report%20on%20National%20Security.pdf>, accessed 13 February 2021.

<sup>18</sup> The Merchant Shipping (Amendment) Bill, 2004 was introduced in the Lok Sabha in December 2004 and was enacted as the Merchant Shipping (Amendment) Act, 2007 by insertion of Part IXB (Security of Ships and Port Facilities) in the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958. See: Merchant Shipping Act, 1958: <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/1562/5/A1958-44.pdf#search=Merchant%20Shipping>

In 2014, the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs examined coastal security in India, and recommended the need for effective utilisation for VTMS to meet coastal security requirements, and for strengthening port security in non-major ports.<sup>19</sup> In 2015, the committee, after reviewing an audit report on the security of non-major ports, took serious note of the deficiencies in port security, and recommended the implementation of the audit recommendations.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, in 2016, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) circulated a ‘Compendium of Guidelines’ on security of non-major ports to all stakeholders.<sup>21</sup> Separately, guidelines have been promulgated for security 26 Single Point Moorings (SPM) some of which are located within port areas.<sup>22</sup>

In the last two decades the security of ports and port facilities has progressively been augmented. Presently, security in Indian ports is based on either the ISPS Code or MHA Guidelines on security for non-major ports. The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) is responsible for security in all major ports and in select non-major ports, such as Port Blair.<sup>23</sup> In Indian Custom Ports, port security is also augmented by the Customs which has a marine wing for patrolling and other equipment, such as X-Ray machines and scanners, for inspection of goods and containers transiting ports.

### Security in the Ship-Recycling Industry

The Indian ship-recycling industry accounts for over a quarter of the global industry. India’s ship-recycling industry is centred along a 10 km coastline at Alang, Gujarat which is considered amongst the world’s largest ship-recycling facility.<sup>24</sup> Alang, which accounts for 98 per cent of ships recycled in India has 153 plots for ship-breaking with plans for further expansion.<sup>25</sup> One

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<sup>19</sup> Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs, *177<sup>th</sup> Report on Coastal Security Scheme*, 36-41, <http://164.100.47.5/newcommittee/reports/EnglishCommittees/Committee%20on%20Home%20Affairs/177.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs, *187<sup>th</sup> Report on Action Taken by Government on the Recommendations/Observations Contained in the 177<sup>th</sup> Report on Coastal Security Scheme*, 44, Vivekananda International Foundation, <https://vifdatabase.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/report-no-187.pdf>, accessed 27 January 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report 2018-19*, [https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/AnnualReport\\_18\\_19.pdf](https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/AnnualReport_18_19.pdf), accessed 12 February 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, *Annual Report 2018-19*, 47.

<sup>23</sup> “Security of the Ports of the Country,” Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 2171, 30 July 2014, Ministry of Home Affairs, <https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2014-pdfs/rs-300714/2171.pdf>, accessed 12 February 2021.

<sup>24</sup> G Seetharaman and Prerna Katiyar, “Can a new ship-recycling law help India regain its status as the world’s top dismantler of vessels?,” *The Economic Times*, 22 December 2019. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/shipping/-transport/can-a-new-ship-recycling-law-help-india-regain-its-status-as-the-worlds-top-dismantler-of-vessels/articleshow/72918468.cms?from=mdr>; In 2019, Gross Tonnage of 3,32,6552 was recycled in India (27 per cent of all ships recycled), with Bangladesh being the leading nation having recycled Gross Tonnage of 6, 83,7100 (56 per cent of all ships recycled) [Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development]

<sup>25</sup> Avinash Nair, “Ship recycling in Alang: What is its capacity, and can it attract more ageing ships from Europe & Japan?,” *The Indian Express*, 05 February 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/ship-recycling-alang-capacity-ageing-ships-europe-japan-7174436/>; G Seetharaman and Prerna Katiyar, “Can a new ship-recycling law help India regain its status as the world’s top dismantler of vessels?”

of the highlights of Budget 2021 is the proposal to double the ship-recycling capacity of around 4.5 Million Light Displacement Tonne (LDT) by 2024, and to generate an additional 1.5 lakh jobs.<sup>26</sup>

In November 2019, India deposited its instrument of accession to the Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound **Recycling of Ships**, 2009. The Ship Recycling of Ships Act, 2019 and the Shipbreaking Code (Revised), 2013, governs ship-recycling in India. In October 2020, the Directorate General of Shipping was notified as the National Authority for Recycling of Ships.<sup>27</sup> As an apex national authority for ship-recycling, DG Shipping is authorised to administer, supervise, and monitor all activities relating to ship-recycling.

Security aspects related to ship-recycling yards are covered in Shipbreaking Code (Revised), 2013.<sup>28</sup> These relate to consultation with security agencies; record-keeping, including photographic; information-sharing of vessel movements and crew details with security agencies; regular meetings amongst stakeholders; and, measures for physical security, including audits. The Recycling of Ships Act, 2019 provides a statutory requirement for the owner of ship planned for recycling to report the date of arrival of the ship for recycling to MRCC.<sup>29</sup>

## Imperatives

In the context of coastal security, coastal waters include the waters seaward of the Indian coast up to the limit of India's contiguous zone (24 nm), or the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL), in case the latter is nearer.<sup>30</sup> While spatial scope of armed robbery includes the internal waters and territorial seas, a zone within the coastal waters, an analysis of the ReCAAP ISC report clearly indicates that an overwhelming majority of incidents in India were localised around ports and at Alang. Suppression of localised armed robbery therefore is an enabler for wider coastal security.

In 2015, the IMO in its recommendations for prevention and suppression of piracy and armed robbery, on the issue of interagency coordination and swift operational response, had emphasised the need for developing institutional measures for incident response; integration of existing mechanisms dealing with other maritime security threats to allow for the most efficient

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<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Finance, "Key Highlights of Union Budget 2021-22," Press Information Bureau, 01 February 2021, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1693907>

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, "Directorate General of Shipping as National Authority for Recycling of Ships," Press Information Bureau, 15 October 2020. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1664703>

<sup>28</sup> "Shipbreaking Code (Revised), 2013," Ministry of Shipping, [http://shipmin.gov.in/sites/default/files/1157392371CBCODErevised201310022017\\_0.pdf](http://shipmin.gov.in/sites/default/files/1157392371CBCODErevised201310022017_0.pdf), accessed 12 February 2021.

<sup>29</sup> "The Recycling of Ships Act, 2019," Gazette of India, <http://egazette.nic.in/WriteReadData/2019/214694.pdf>, accessed 27 January 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Integrated Headquarters Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas: India's Maritime Security Strategy* (Integrated Headquarters Ministry of Defence (Navy): New Delhi, 2015), 108.

utilisation of limited resources; and, development of procedures for rapid information-sharing.<sup>31</sup> More recently, ReCAAP ISC has highlighted the importance of enhanced surveillance and patrol, quick responses, and the need for a legal finish through arrest and prosecution to curb armed robbery and piracy.<sup>32</sup>

The coastal security construct in India, developed after the Mumbai attacks in 2008, is premised on the fundamentals espoused by the IMO and the ReCAAP, albeit in a different context. An analysis indicates that response to reports of armed robbery have been coordinated amongst the Coast Guard, SMP, Customs, Port Authorities, and other agencies, with successful apprehensions in a third of the nine reported cases in 2020. The success in apprehending the criminals is a possible indicator of the effectiveness of the overall security construct. With increasing focus on the port-development, continued efforts at capacity-building and capacity enhancement of the forces and agencies responsible for security in ports and adjoining areas, such as the CISF, SMP, Customs, are essential. A dedicated marine wing of the CISF, on the lines of the Border Security Force (BSF) water wing and the marine wing of the Customs, could also bolster port security.

While in the past decade a major share of incidents were reported from major ports, the absence of any incident in major ports in 2020 is a notable development. Strengthening patrolling of port areas and implementation of port security measures (ISPS Code and MHA guidelines for non-major ports and SPMs) are fundamental prerequisites for port security. Stringent implementation of Port State Control (PSC) measures in Indian ports can also contribute to strengthening security in ports.

Installation and effective use of electronic sensors can effectively complement surveillance and patrol efforts by ships, craft, and aircraft. Such systems also contribute to developing MDA in a wider area. For example, the VTMS in the Gulf of Kutch and Gulf of Khambhat (where Alang is located), are planned to be integrated into the Phase II of the Coastal Surveillance Network (CSN) which is a chain of coastal radars. In addition to sensors, port-related information from the Indian Port Authority (IPA) is also available with the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC), Gurugram.<sup>33</sup> Fused and correlated information, such as from the proposed National Maritime Domain Awareness (NMDA) project, can contribute towards developing a Common Operational Picture (COP) of a wider geographical area amongst all stakeholders, including in adjoining areas which are not covered by local sensors.

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<sup>31</sup> “Recommendations to Governments for preventing and suppressing piracy and armed robbery against ships,” International Maritime Organisation, <https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/OurWork/Security/Documents/MSC.1-Circ.1333-Rev.1.pdf>, accessed 12 February 2021.

<sup>32</sup> ReCAAP Information Fusion Centre, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia: Annual Report 2020*, 44.

<sup>33</sup> Krishn Kaushik, “Explained: The state of coastal security, after the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks,” *The Indian Express*, 03 December 2020. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/coastal-security-imac-26-11-mumbai-terror-attack-7071100/>

Periodic drills and exercises are mandated in all ISPS-compliant ports.<sup>34</sup> These exercises and drills are also complemented by periodic exercises at the state- and national-level. As armed robbery in India are largely localised, streamlining of local measures through regular exercises and drills are necessary. Likewise, such drills could also be exercised in state-level exercises to cater for the rare contingencies which may be beyond local capacities to handle. Periodic drills and exercises also need to be carried out in non-ISPS compliant ports.

ReCAAP ISC has advised the shipping industry viz. masters and crew to maintain vigil, report incidents to the nearest coastal state, and also to implement recommended preventive measures.<sup>35</sup> The experience of addressing piracy off the coast of Somalia, and elsewhere, highlights the need for a multi-pronged approach to prevent incidents of piracy (or armed robbery), including by adoption of best practices by the shipping industry (including self-protection measures). Position and incident reporting by ships, in accordance with established procedures, are key for monitoring and swift response by security agencies. Such information also needs to be shared mutually amongst all domestic stakeholders for developing a COP.

The Shipbreaking Code (Revised), 2013 caters for formulation of local security orders in consultation with security agencies.<sup>36</sup> In the light of incidents at Alang, there may be a need to revisit local security orders, including in the approaches and anchorage area. These could also be reviewed during the periodic audits. Further, there is also need for compliance of the provisions of the Recycling of Ships Act, 2019 regarding information-sharing with MRCC regarding the ship's movement. This information also needs to be widely shared amongst the security community, and also with other information gateways/ hubs such as the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) and the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC).

There are no indicators so far to indicate the involvement of any organised criminal syndicate in India, and the perpetrators are likely to be petty criminals associated with the maritime sector. Addressing armed robbery will therefore need greater engagement with the maritime community, such as through community programmes. Greater oversight of activities in maritime hubs, such as ports, recycling yards, fish landing centres, etc is also an imperative.

## Conclusion

In the past decade, incidents of armed robbery have largely been limited to a small number of ports. In 2020, incidents of armed robbery were reported from just one port, with the balance being reported from Alang. While overall there has been an uptick in the past three years, it has not exceeded the 14-year average. However, as highlighted by the RecAAP ISC, incidents of

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<sup>34</sup> Port of Antwerp, *European Handbook of Maritime Security Exercises and Drills*, 6, <https://www.portofrotterdam.com/sites/default/files/European-Handbook-of-Maritime-Security-Exercises-and-Drills.pdf?token=1PCul7VO>, accessed 21 January 2021.

<sup>35</sup> ReCAAP Information Fusion Centre, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia: Annual Report 2020*, 2; preventive measures have been recommended in the *Regional Guide to Counter Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia*.

<sup>36</sup> "Shipbreaking Code (Revised), 2013," Ministry of Shipping.



armed robbery, no matter how petty, have significant connotations from the maritime security perspective.

The successful apprehension of criminals, as also the subsequent suppression in Gujarat, has rightfully drawn the praise of the ReCAAP ISC. The suppression of armed robbery in other major ports across India is also noteworthy. However, incidence of armed robbery are indicative of the presence of local criminal elements, and there always remains the possibility of such criminals colluding with anti-national elements. The 1993 Mumbai attack is a grim reminder of this possibility.

Preventing, and responding to, armed robbery necessitates a multi-pronged approach by all stakeholders such as those involved in port security, police, shipping industry, ports, and now, also the ship-recycling industry. Therefore, consolidating on the gains, and strengthening of security measures across ports and ship-recycling yards is an imperative, not only for suppressing armed robbery, but also for strengthening overall coastal security.

### ***About the Author***

*Captain Himadri Das is a serving Indian Naval Officer and is presently a Research Fellow at the National Maritime Foundation (NMF). The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official position of the Government of India or the Indian Navy. He can be reached at [csmda.nmf@gmail.com](mailto:csmda.nmf@gmail.com).*