

Maritime Reform Bills Passed

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Maritime Reform Bills Passed: Strengthening India's Sea Laws for a Global Future

Context

India's maritime sector plays a crucial role in national trade and economic development, handling around **95% of India's trade by volume** and **70% by value**. However, its legal infrastructure was based on **colonial-era laws** that no longer reflected current realities or international standards. In this backdrop, Parliament has passed two significant legislations to **modernise maritime laws** and align India with **global shipping practices**.

Introduction

In a landmark move to reform India's maritime governance, **Parliament passed the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024**, and the **Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025**. These Bills aim to:

- Replace outdated laws such as the **Merchant Shipping Act, 1958**, and the **Carriage of Goods by Sea Act, 1925**
- Introduce a **comprehensive and internationally aligned legal framework**
- Strengthen India's position in **global maritime trade**
- Facilitate **sustainable growth**, investment, and employment in the shipping sector

Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024

This Bill replaces the **Merchant Shipping Act, 1958**, introducing a modern and consolidated legal structure with **16 Parts and 325 clauses**.

Key Features

- **Seafarer Welfare:** Emphasises working conditions, rights, and welfare of Indian and foreign seafarers under Indian jurisdiction
- **Ship Safety and Emergency Preparedness:** Enhances regulatory standards for ship safety, emergency response, and marine pollution control
- **Environmental Protection:** Integrates global protocols to protect marine ecosystems and promote sustainable maritime practices
- **Tonnage Promotion:** Encourages registration of ships under the Indian flag to increase **domestic tonnage capacity**
- **Compliance Simplification:** Merges fragmented provisions into a single legal document to **reduce bureaucratic hurdles**

The Bill positions India as a **globally credible maritime jurisdiction**, enabling growth, investment, and regulatory clarity.

Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025

This Bill repeals the **Carriage of Goods by Sea Act, 1925**, introducing a modern legal regime for the **transport of cargo by sea**.

Key Features

- **Global Alignment:** Complies with the **Hague-Visby Rules**, aligning India's cargo liability norms with international standards
- **Trade Facilitation:** Simplifies legal procedures, making India more attractive to **global shipping and logistics companies**
- **Commercial Efficiency:** Improves contract transparency and dispute resolution, reducing **litigation and business uncertainty**

The Bill is particularly beneficial to **exporters, importers, shipping companies**, and **marine insurers**, promoting confidence in India's maritime legal system.

Strategic Significance

The two legislations together represent a major step towards building a **modern and robust**

maritime legal framework.

- Boost **ease of doing business** in the maritime sector
 - Attract investments in **ports, shipbuilding, and maritime technology**
 - Enhance **India's maritime security architecture**
 - Facilitate **green maritime development** and **coastal economic growth**
 - Generate employment, especially in **coastal regions**
 - Strengthen India's global competitiveness against maritime powers like **Singapore, China, and UAE**
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Conclusion

The enactment of the **Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024** and the **Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025** marks a significant overhaul of India's maritime governance. These reforms reflect India's commitment to **global standards, sustainable practices**, and a **future-ready blue economy**, creating the legal and institutional framework required to emerge as a **leading maritime nation**.

