

Parliament passes two maritime Bills to modernise India's shipping laws

Bill passed in Rajya Sabha amidst the din of Opposition protests against the Bihar SIR; new shipping laws replace outdated legislation and align India's maritime legal framework with global standards

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THE HINDU BUREAU



A brief debate was held on the Bill amid protests. Several Opposition MPs who stood up to participate in the debate on the Bill, demanded a discussion on SIR. | Photo Credit: Sansad TV via ANI

The Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025 was passed by the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday (August 6, 2025) even as the Opposition continued loud protests against the **Special Intensive Revision** of electoral rolls in Bihar. The Lok Sabha passed another maritime legislation, the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024.

Amid the din in the Upper House, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also tabled the Demands for Grants for Manipur for 2025-26. Manipur has been under President's Rule since February 13.

The Rajya Sabha was earlier adjourned, soon after the tabling of papers and obituary references at 11 a.m. When the House reassembled at 2 p.m., Bhubaneswar Kalita, who was in the Chair, called for taking up The Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025, even as Opposition members continued to protest and trooped into the well of the House. The Bill was approved by voice vote amid the din. It had been passed by the Lok Sabha earlier.

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Replacing outdated laws

Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal said, "Today, with the passage of the Bills, the Modi government's push for India's modern shipping gets double endorsement from the Parliament."

The Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024 is meant to be a progressive, future-ready legislation that replaces the outdated Merchant Shipping Act of 1958. The Bill marks a significant step towards aligning India's maritime legal framework with global standards and strengthening the country's position as a trusted maritime trade hub.

Introducing the Bill in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Sonowal said, "This Bill represents a decisive step towards positioning India as a global leader in maritime trade and governance. It is a progressive and advanced legislation, up to date with international maritime conventions and informed by the best practices of leading maritime nations."

Modernising maritime legal framework

The Minister noted that the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958 had become bulky, fragmented, and outdated, with its 561 Sections failing to address contemporary maritime challenges or fully implement India's obligations under several key International Maritime Organization (IMO) conventions.

"The Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024, with 16 Parts and 325 clauses, modernises India's maritime legal framework by aligning with international conventions, enhancing safety at sea, improving emergency response, and ensuring environmental protection. It

reduces compliance burdens, promotes Indian tonnage, and prioritises seafarer welfare and ship safety. The Bill aims to make India a globally respected maritime jurisdiction and unlock sustainable growth, investment, and innovation in the sector,” Mr. Sonowal added.

Adopting global standards

The Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, 2025, repealed the century-old Indian Carriage of Goods by Sea Act, 1925.

The Bill adopts the Hague-Visby Rules, a globally accepted maritime standard also followed by countries like the United Kingdom. The legislation is expected to simplify maritime trade laws, reduce litigation risks, and enhance transparency and commercial efficiency in cargo movement by sea. The Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha by Shantanu Thakur, the Union Minister of State for Shipping in the Rajya Sabha.

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