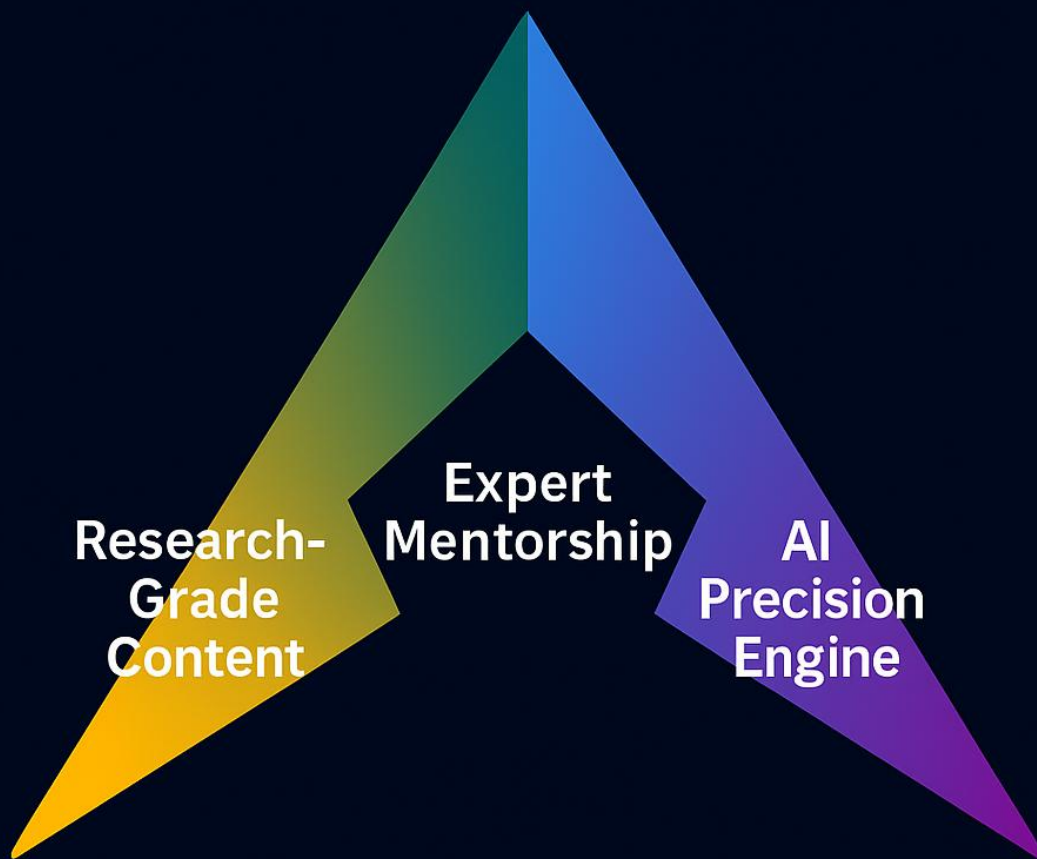


# PrepAlpine

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# DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS DATED 14.06.2026

## GS Paper III: Security

### 1. Safety of Indian Seafarers in War-Risk Zones

#### a. Introduction

The safety of Indian seafarers has become an important foreign policy and governance concern because commercial shipping is increasingly exposed to geopolitical conflict. Recent deaths of Indian seafarers aboard merchant vessels near the Strait of Hormuz have brought attention to the risks faced by civilian maritime workers in conflict-prone waters. Reports in June 2026 stated that three Indian seafarers were killed aboard the oil tanker MT Settebello near the Strait of Hormuz, while other crew members were rescued.

The issue is not merely about shipping routes or energy security. It concerns the lives, rights and dignity of Indian citizens working in the global maritime economy. India is among the world's top three suppliers of trained seafarers, with its seafarer workforce crossing three lakh. This makes maritime labour protection a significant part of India's diaspora welfare and citizen-centric diplomacy.

The central policy question is whether Indian seafarers should be prevented from working on vessels transiting high-risk routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, or whether India should adopt a more calibrated framework based on risk disclosure, informed consent, insurance, compensation, naval preparedness and diplomatic coordination.

Thus, seafarer safety must be seen not only as a maritime issue, but also as a test of India's ability to protect its citizens in a conflict-prone global economy.

#### b. Background Context

This issue is connected with Indian diaspora welfare, maritime security, international law, freedom of navigation, global supply chains, labour rights and crisis diplomacy. It also links with India's broader maritime strategy because the safety of seafarers cannot be separated from the security of sea lanes, energy chokepoints and global trade routes.

For India, the subject has three major dimensions.

##### Human Security Dimension

- Indian citizens working at sea are directly exposed to missile strikes, drone attacks, piracy, hostage-taking and regional conflict.
- Their safety is therefore part of India's obligation to protect citizens abroad.

##### Economic Dimension

- Indian seafarers form a major part of the global maritime labour force.
- Their employment supports household incomes, remittances, professional mobility and India's reputation as a maritime manpower power.

##### Strategic Dimension

- Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz and similar chokepoints affect India's energy security, inflation management, trade flows and diplomatic engagement with West Asia.
- Therefore, seafarer safety must be integrated with India's wider maritime security and foreign policy framework.

This makes the issue relevant for both welfare governance and strategic studies.



### **c. Nature of the Problem**

Indian seafarers often work on foreign-flagged vessels that operate across international routes. Many of these ships pass through geopolitically sensitive maritime corridors such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman, the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb region.

These are not ordinary trade routes. They are energy chokepoints and conflict-adjacent maritime zones where commercial vessels may be exposed to state action, non-state attacks, piracy, naval blockades, sanctions enforcement and mistaken targeting.

#### **Exposure to Conflict-Prone Sea Lanes**

- Indian seafarers may be deployed on vessels moving through areas affected by regional war, missile attacks, drone strikes or naval tensions.
- As civilian workers, they may have limited control over vessel routing, cargo decisions or security arrangements.
- Their exposure to danger often depends on shipowners, flag states, charterers and crewing agencies.

#### **Importance of the Strait of Hormuz**

- The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most critical energy chokepoints.
- Any disruption in this narrow passage affects global oil and gas flows, shipping insurance, freight rates and energy-importing economies such as India.
- Maritime crises in this region also create large-scale stranded seafarer concerns, showing the human cost behind shipping disruption.

#### **Indian Regulatory Response**

- India's Directorate General of Shipping issued security advisories in 2026 asking Indian seafarers and maritime stakeholders to maintain high vigilance in the Gulf region, particularly around the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman.
- Maritime recruitment and placement agencies were advised to restrict deployment of Indian seafarers to conflict areas until further orders.
- These advisories indicate that the State recognises the growing risks faced by Indian maritime workers.

Thus, the issue is not only whether a particular voyage is lawful. The larger concern is whether Indian seafarers are being deployed with full knowledge of the risks, proper contractual protection, adequate insurance and the freedom to refuse dangerous assignments without fear of professional penalty.

### **d. Human Security Dimension of Maritime Trade**

Global shipping debates usually focus on oil prices, freight costs, naval deployments and freedom of navigation. However, the immediate human cost of maritime insecurity is borne by merchant mariners. They are civilian workers, not combatants. They keep global supply chains running, but in war-risk zones they may face threats similar to those found in military theatres.

#### **Seafarers as Civilian Workers**

- Merchant seafarers are not military personnel.
- They do not choose geopolitical conflicts, sanctions disputes or naval escalations.
- Yet, they may become victims of attacks, detentions, hostage-taking, mistaken targeting or abandonment.

#### **Citizen-Centric Foreign Policy**

- For India, the death or injury of seafarers abroad is a direct test of citizen-centric foreign policy.
- A State that protects its citizens during evacuations from conflict zones must also protect workers at sea.

- The safety of Indian seafarers should therefore be treated as part of India's diaspora welfare framework, similar to the protection of migrant workers in the Gulf, students abroad and Indians living in conflict-affected regions.

#### **Broader Meaning of Maritime Security**

- Maritime security is not only about naval power, ports, trade and energy flows.
- It is also about ensuring that the human beings who operate ships are not treated as expendable collateral in geopolitical conflict.
- Seafarer welfare must therefore be placed at the centre of maritime governance.

This human security lens broadens India's approach from protecting only sea lanes and cargo to protecting citizens who sustain the maritime economy.

#### **e. India as a Maritime Manpower Power**

India's position as a major supplier of trained seafarers creates both opportunity and responsibility. The growth of India's seafarer workforce from around 1.25 lakh a decade ago to more than three lakh today has strengthened India's role in the global maritime economy.

Indian seafarers are employed on both Indian and foreign vessels and are valued for their skills in navigation, engineering, ship operations and logistics.

#### **Opportunities for India**

- Seafaring provides employment, income mobility and global professional exposure to Indian workers.
- It strengthens India's maritime profile beyond naval power and port infrastructure.
- It also supports India's soft power as a reliable supplier of trained maritime professionals.

#### **Risks of a Blanket Prohibition**

- A blanket prohibition on Indian seafarers joining vessels that may transit high-risk routes could protect some workers in the short term.
- However, it may also damage livelihoods, reduce employment opportunities, create uncertainty for shipowners and weaken India's standing as a reliable maritime manpower supplier.
- Many seafarers depend on such employment to support families, repay loans and build professional careers.

#### **Need for a Balanced Approach**

- The policy response should not be reduced to a simple ban.
- India must protect seafarers from forced or uninformed exposure to conflict.
- At the same time, it must preserve their right to work under fair, transparent and safe conditions.

Therefore, the challenge is to balance livelihood protection with life protection through a calibrated governance framework.

#### **f. The Sanctioned Vessel Question**

A vessel may be sanctioned for several reasons, including ownership links, cargo, suspected sanctions evasion, terrorism-related connections, unauthorised ship-to-ship transfers or association with a targeted state or entity.

Sanctions may be imposed by the United Nations Security Council, the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom or other authorities. However, the legal and operational consequences may differ depending on the source of the sanction.

### **Legal Distinction Between Sanctions**

- A vessel sanctioned by one country does not automatically become illegal under Indian law or international law.
- The legal effect depends on the source of the sanction.
- United Nations Security Council sanctions have binding force for member states.
- Unilateral sanctions by individual countries may not automatically bind India unless Indian law or policy recognises them.

### **Practical Risks of Sanctioned Vessels**

- Even when a sanctioned vessel continues to operate, it may face serious practical difficulties.
- These may include problems with insurance, banking, port entry, classification, cargo documentation, crew welfare and emergency assistance.
- For seafarers, the operational risk environment may matter more than the formal legal label attached to the vessel.

### **Core Worker-Protection Concern**

- The central concern is not only whether a vessel is sanctioned.
- The more important issue is whether Indian workers are being sent into a foreseeable danger zone without adequate disclosure, protection, compensation and exit rights.
- Therefore, vessel sanction status should form part of the mandatory risk disclosure given to seafarers before deployment.

This issue shows how maritime labour protection now intersects with sanctions regimes, geopolitical conflict and international law.

### **g. Labour Rights and Informed Consent**

The most important principle should be informed consent. Seafarers should not be compelled, misled or economically pressured into sailing through officially identified war-risk areas.

Before deployment, they must be clearly informed about the route, the risk level, the nature of the conflict, the vessel's sanction status if relevant, insurance coverage, war-risk allowance, evacuation arrangements and their right to decline.

### **Meaningful Informed Consent**

- Informed consent must be meaningful, not a mere signature on a contract.
- Many workers may feel compelled to accept dangerous assignments because of debt, fear of blacklisting, career insecurity or pressure from crewing agencies.
- Therefore, consent must be backed by enforceable labour protections.

### **Right to Refuse Dangerous Assignments**

- India must ensure that refusal to sail through officially declared war-risk zones does not lead to professional penalties.
- Seafarers should not be blacklisted, denied future contracts or financially punished for refusing avoidable exposure to conflict.
- Recruitment and placement agencies must be held accountable for coercive or misleading practices.

### **Preventive Governance**

- Diplomatic engagement may secure the release of detained seafarers or compensation after an incident.
- However, preventive governance must ensure that workers are not pushed into avoidable danger in the first place.
- Labour protection and foreign policy must therefore operate together.

This makes informed consent the ethical and legal foundation of any policy on Indian seafarers in war-risk zones.

## **h. Concerns and Challenges**

The safety of Indian seafarers in war-risk zones involves multiple challenges. These include the impracticality of blanket bans, fragmented regulation, weak risk communication, uneven insurance and the changing character of maritime conflict.

### **Impracticality of a Blanket Ban**

- High-risk maritime zones are often also essential trade routes.
- The Strait of Hormuz, for example, is central to global energy flows.
- A total prohibition on Indian seafarers serving on vessels transiting such routes may harm livelihoods, disrupt shipping operations and push employers towards workers from other countries without necessarily reducing global maritime risk.

### **Fragmented Regulatory Authority**

- The Directorate General of Shipping regulates seafarer certification, maritime training, recruitment and placement systems and Indian shipping-related compliance.
- The Ministry of External Affairs handles the welfare of Indian citizens abroad and diplomatic engagement with foreign governments.
- Defence, intelligence, labour authorities, insurance regulators, shipowners and seafarer unions may also be involved.
- Without a unified framework, responsibility becomes diffused during crises.

### **Weak Risk Communication**

- Families of seafarers often receive information through informal channels, media reports or rumours during maritime crises.
- This creates anxiety, confusion and distrust.
- A transparent family communication system is essential because seafarer welfare includes not only the worker at sea, but also the family waiting for verified updates.

### **Uneven Insurance and Compensation**

- War-risk allowances, contractual safeguards, death compensation, disability benefits and insurance cover may vary depending on the flag state, shipowner, contract terms, crewing agency and insurer.
- This unevenness can leave families vulnerable after casualties.
- Minimum compensation and insurance standards are therefore necessary.

### **Changing Nature of Maritime Risk**

- Commercial vessels are now increasingly caught in sanctions enforcement, naval rivalry, drone warfare, missile attacks, piracy, cyber threats and regional wars.
- Traditional shipping governance frameworks may not be sufficient for this new environment.
- The line between commercial shipping and geopolitical conflict is becoming increasingly blurred.

These challenges show that India needs a modern maritime labour protection framework suited to the realities of twenty-first century conflict.

## **i. Maritime Security Posture and Foreign Policy Linkage**

India's response must combine diplomacy, naval preparedness and maritime governance. Diplomatic engagement is necessary to secure information, coordinate with flag states, press for accountability and support affected families. However, diplomacy alone is not enough.

### **Role of Diplomacy**

- India must coordinate with flag states, port states, shipowners and international maritime bodies during crises.
- Diplomatic channels are essential for rescue, repatriation, compensation, accountability and family communication.
- India's missions abroad must treat seafarer welfare as a priority within citizen-centric diplomacy.

### **Role of Naval Preparedness**

- India must strengthen maritime domain awareness, intelligence sharing, naval presence and rapid response capacity.
- The Indian Navy's role in evacuation, anti-piracy operations, escort support and crisis response is likely to become increasingly important.
- Coordination with friendly navies will also be necessary in high-risk maritime corridors.

### **Role of International Maritime Governance**

- India must work through international maritime law and multilateral institutions.
- Freedom of navigation should not mean freedom to expose civilian crews to unreasonable danger.
- International Maritime Organization mechanisms, flag-state responsibility, port-state control, shipowner liability and insurance standards must all be strengthened to protect seafarers.

This linkage between foreign policy and maritime governance is essential because seafarer safety lies at the intersection of labour rights, diplomacy and strategic security.

## **j. Way Forward**

India should adopt a calibrated and evidence-based policy instead of relying only on blanket bans. The objective should be to protect both livelihood and life through risk classification, informed consent, insurance, compensation, crisis response and international cooperation.

### **Dynamic Classification of High-Risk Routes**

- High-risk routes should be classified according to dynamic threat assessments.
- These assessments should take into account missile activity, drone attacks, piracy, naval advisories, sanctions exposure, port risks and evacuation feasibility.
- Route-specific and vessel-specific advisories would be more useful than general warnings.

### **Mandatory Risk Disclosure and Informed Consent**

- Full risk disclosure and informed consent should be made mandatory before deployment in officially identified war-risk zones.
- Seafarers must be informed about the route, the vessel, the cargo, the threat environment, the insurance cover and their right to refuse without professional retaliation.
- Consent should be recorded in a transparent and verifiable manner.

### **Standardised Insurance and Compensation**

- War-risk compensation, adequate insurance cover and contractual safeguards must be standardised.
- Shipowners, protection and indemnity clubs, insurers, recruitment agencies and flag states should be made accountable for the welfare of Indian seafarers.
- Families should not be forced into prolonged struggles for compensation after casualties.

### **Inter-Ministerial Maritime Crisis Framework**

- India should create an inter-ministerial maritime crisis framework involving the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, intelligence agencies, labour authorities, shipowners, insurers and seafarer unions.
- This framework should operate before, during and after maritime crises.
- It should define responsibility, communication channels, compensation procedures and evacuation protocols.

#### **Periodic Threat Assessments and Simple Advisories**

- Periodic threat assessments and advisories should be issued for specific routes, ports, conflict zones and vessel categories.
- These advisories should be accessible to seafarers and their families in simple language.
- Digital alerts, multilingual advisories and verified updates can reduce confusion during crises.

#### **Seafarer Family Support Cell**

- A dedicated seafarer family support cell should be established.
- It should provide verified updates, psychological support, documentation assistance, compensation tracking and repatriation coordination.
- This would reduce panic and improve trust during maritime crises.

#### **Stronger Naval and Maritime Domain Preparedness**

- India should strengthen naval deployment, Coast Guard surveillance, maritime domain awareness, evacuation preparedness and coordination with friendly navies.
- Seafarer safety must become part of India's wider Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region strategy.
- Maritime crisis response should include both vessel security and crew welfare.

#### **International Legal Standards**

- India should work internationally to strengthen legal standards on merchant crew safety in conflict zones.
- The rights of civilian seafarers should be placed at the centre of maritime governance.
- They should not be treated as a secondary concern after cargo and vessel protection.

The way forward must therefore combine worker protection, maritime security and diplomatic readiness into a single national framework.

#### **Conclusion**

The safety of Indian seafarers in conflict-prone waters is not only a labour issue. It is a matter of human security, diaspora welfare, maritime governance and foreign policy responsibility. Indian seafarers sustain global trade and energy flows, but they must not be treated as expendable workers in geopolitical conflict.

A blanket ban on high-risk voyages may be impractical and could harm livelihoods. However, unrestricted deployment without informed consent, insurance, compensation and protection is equally unacceptable. India needs a calibrated framework that protects both livelihood and life.

As a major maritime nation and one of the world's leading suppliers of seafarers, India must ensure that no Indian maritime worker is pushed into war-risk zones without full knowledge, adequate safeguards and the right to refuse. Seafarer safety should become an integral part of India's citizen-centric diplomacy, maritime security posture and vision of responsible global engagement.

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