

Exporters, vessel operators at sea over stranded ships, Indian seafarers

DGFT, DGS officials have met stakeholders over past two days to discuss issues they are facing

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With the Strait of Hormuz turning into a zone of active conflict amid severe maritime disruptions, vessel operators and exporters are feeling the heat of continued cargo build up at Indian ports and Indian seafarers stuck at sea in the middle of the war in West Asia.

Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) and Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) officials met stakeholders over the past two days to discuss issues they are facing.

A war room has been set up to help with cargo congestion, rerouting, and ensuring non-West Asia bound supplies reach destinations timely, a freight forwarder said.

The Indian National Ship-



owners Association (INSA) has asked the government to arrange safe transit for Indian-flagged vessels.

"There are 27 vessels in the affected region, with many Indian seafarers aboard. Our primary concern right now is the

In troubled waters

- The government has set up a war room after consultations by DGFT to manage congestion and rerouting
- The INSA said 27 Indian-flagged vessels with Indian crew were stuck in the conflict zone
- It has urged Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal to seek diplomatic assurances from Iran and Israel for safe passage

safety of the seafarers. We have requested the government for the same," Anil Devli, chief executive officer (CEO) of the association, told *Business Standard*.

In a letter to Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Monday, INSA said these ships are caught

in the midst of the unfolding conflict and the safest option for them is to hold their positions.

"Collectively, these ships would be worth over ₹10,000 crore and these valuable assets, and their even more-valuable people on board need to be protected," the letter said.

The body has asked the ministry to use diplomatic channels to press upon the decision-making authorities in Iran and Israel to allow the safe movement of Indian flag ships in the Strait of Hormuz. This would allow an uninterrupted supply of India's energy needs.

The association cited news reports where Chinese and Iranian ships via the strait were seen passing in both directions.

"This will ensure the safety of Indian ships and Indian citizens who are on board these vessels. It

will also create a safe supply chain for crude oil and LPG imports. Importantly, if Indians are assured safe passage, it will work as a safeguard against unprecedented high freight and insurance charges against Indian ships," INSA's letter added.

One Indian mariner onboard a Marshall Islands-flagged crude tanker was reportedly killed in an attack by a bomb-carrying drone in the Gulf of Oman on Monday.

Sources also said this bombing caught the industry off guard as the Gulf was considered a safe haven for vessels.

Meanwhile, port players are experiencing a cargo build-up.

A shipping executive said container ships are not accepting more containers now. And, stuck containers at ports may have to be routed back to their source locations if the situation continues.