

Draft Speech for RPSL Symposium – 18 December 2025, Delhi

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege to address this gathering at the RPSL Symposium today on a subject that lies at the very foundation of India's maritime strength – the integrity of seafarer recruitment, placement, and welfare.

Indian seafarers are the true ambassadors of our nation across global waters. They remain an indispensable workforce sustaining international trade, often under demanding and high-risk conditions. Recent years have reinforced not only their critical importance but also the vulnerabilities they face, particularly during recruitment and placement. Ensuring their welfare is not merely a social obligation; it is a strategic national priority.

India's Maritime Aspirations

India currently contributes approximately 12% of the global maritime workforce. Under the Maritime India Vision 2030, we have set a clear objective to enhance this share to 20% by the end of the decade. Achieving this target depends squarely on the credibility, transparency, and ethical functioning of our recruitment and placement ecosystem.

For every young aspirant entering the maritime profession, the system must provide assurance – that recruitment is free, lawful, and secure; that contracts are genuine; and that institutional safeguards will protect their rights.

Role of the Crew Branch and RPSL Framework

The Crew Branch of the Directorate General of Shipping plays a central role in regulating the entire lifecycle of a seafarer – from recruitment and placement to grievance redressal. Within this framework, RPSL companies are entrusted with a position of responsibility that directly impacts livelihoods, national reputation, and international compliance.

However, we must acknowledge that challenges persist in the RPSL space. Documentation gaps, misuse of digital systems, forged contracts, misleading submissions, and the involvement of unlicensed intermediaries continue to pose risks. These practices not only cause financial and emotional distress to seafarers but also expose India to serious reputational and regulatory scrutiny.

Fraud Risks in Recruitment and Placement

The Directorate General of Shipping has observed a steady rise in fraud cases affecting Indian seafarers, particularly in recruitment and placement. These frauds manifest through fake job offers, illegal charging of placement fees, forged employment contracts, fake CDC endorsements, and illegal deployment on vessels.

Increasingly, such frauds are executed through social media platforms and online communications, where agents often disappear after collecting money.

It must be clearly reiterated that recruitment through unregistered or unlicensed agents is illegal. As per Rule 4(2) of the Recruitment and Placement of Seafarers Rules, 2016, no RPSL-licensed company is permitted to charge any recruitment or placement fee from seafarers under any circumstances.

Preventive and Digital Safeguards

To prevent fraud at the outset, DG Shipping has strengthened regulatory and digital controls. Instant online verification of RPSL companies is available on the DG Shipping website, enabling seafarers and their families to confirm whether a company is valid, invalid, or temporarily blocked before engagement. This transparency is a critical safeguard and must be actively promoted by all stakeholders present here.

Every seafarer has clearly defined rights – including the right to free recruitment, engagement only through DG Shipping-approved RPSL companies, and a valid employment contract specifying wages, duration, insurance, and repatriation, in alignment with DG Shipping guidelines and the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006.

Enforcement, Legal Action, and Zero Tolerance

Where fraud occurs, DG Shipping adopts a strict zero-tolerance approach. Grievances can be lodged through the DG Shipping e-Governance Portal, and the DG Com Welfare helpline serves as a single point of contact for seafarer assistance.

Serious violations are examined under applicable legal provisions, including the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, the Recruitment and Placement of Seafarers Rules, 2016, relevant DG Shipping Circulars, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita relating to cheating, criminal breach of trust, and human trafficking, as well as provisions of the Information Technology Act, 2000 in cases of digital fraud.

Based on the severity of violations, Show Cause Notices are issued, RPSL licences are suspended, cancelled, or temporarily blocked, and defaulting entities are listed in Fraud Alerts and Blacklists published on the DG Shipping website. In serious cases, FIRs are lodged, and DG Shipping coordinates closely with State Police and enforcement agencies to ensure accountability.

Strengthening Governance and Systemic Reform

Beyond enforcement, DG Shipping continues to focus on systemic corrective measures. Through symposiums and stakeholder consultations, including those held in Delhi and Mumbai, compliance expectations are reinforced, grievances are addressed, and corrective actions are implemented. These efforts have already resulted in action against multiple RPSL companies and illegal agents.

Looking ahead, the transition of the Directorate General of Shipping into the Directorate General of Maritime Administration under the new Merchant Shipping Act will provide an expanded mandate to close regulatory gaps and realign practices with international conventions. Work is also progressing towards a Seafarers' Rights Charter and Code of Conduct to establish clear standards of accountability across the ecosystem.

Closing

Colleagues,

Every seafarer who places their trust in the Indian maritime system must feel protected, respected, and confident. The integrity of the RPSL framework is central to this trust.

Let us collectively reaffirm our commitment to ethical recruitment, transparent processes, strict compliance, and zero tolerance for fraud. By doing so, we safeguard not only individual livelihoods but also India's standing as a reliable and responsible supplier of maritime manpower to the world.

Together, we will strengthen recruitment and placement governance, protect our seafarers from exploitation, and ensure a safer and more credible future for Indian shipping.

Thank you. Jai Hind.

RPSL Symposium – 18 December 2025

Speech Pointers

1. Opening and Context

- Privilege to address the RPSL Symposium in Delhi
- Importance of integrity in seafarer recruitment, placement, and welfare
- Indian seafarers as global ambassadors and backbone of international trade
- Welfare of seafarers as a strategic national priority, not merely a social obligation

2. India's Maritime Aspirations

- India's current contribution of ~12% to global maritime manpower
- Maritime India Vision 2030 target of increasing share to 20%
- Critical dependence of this goal on ethical, transparent, and compliant recruitment systems
- Need for aspirants to feel safe, assured, and fairly treated

3. Role of DG Shipping and Crew Branch

- Crew Branch regulating the full lifecycle of a seafarer
- Central role of RPSL companies in recruitment and placement
- Direct impact of RPSL functioning on livelihoods, compliance, and India's reputation

4. Persistent Challenges in RPSL Ecosystem

- Documentation and compliance gaps
- Misuse of digital systems and processes
- Forged contracts and misleading submissions
- Role of unlicensed intermediaries
- Operational issues leading to grievances and international scrutiny

5. Fraud in Recruitment and Placement

- Rising cases of fraud affecting Indian seafarers
- Financial loss, emotional distress, abandonment, and rights violations
- Common fraud modes:

- Fake job offers
- Illegal charging of placement fees
- Forged employment contracts and CDC endorsements
- Illegal deployment on vessels
- Fraud via social media and online platforms

6. Legal Position and Seafarer Rights

- Recruitment through unregistered or unlicensed agents is illegal
- Rule 4(2) of RPS Rules, 2016: no recruitment or placement fees permitted
- Seafarers' rights to:
 - Free recruitment
 - DG Shipping-approved RPSL engagement only
 - Valid employment contracts with clear terms
- Alignment with DG Shipping guidelines and MLC, 2006

7. Preventive and Digital Safeguards

- Online RPSL verification facility on DG Shipping website
- Ability to check valid, invalid, or blocked RPSL status
- Importance of verification by seafarers and families before engagement
- Transparency as a core preventive tool

8. Grievance Redressal and Enforcement

- DG Shipping e-Governance Portal for grievance lodging
- DG Com Welfare helpline as a single-point contact
- Legal action under:
 - Merchant Shipping Act, 1958
 - RPS Rules, 2016
 - Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (cheating, breach of trust, trafficking)
 - IT Act, 2000 for digital fraud

9. Zero-Tolerance Policy Against Fraud

- Show Cause Notices to defaulting RPSL companies

- Suspension, cancellation, or temporary blocking of licences
- Publication of Fraud Alerts and Blacklists
- FIRs in serious cases
- Coordination with State Police and enforcement agencies

10. Systemic Reforms and Future Direction

- Stakeholder consultations and symposiums in Delhi and Mumbai
- Reinforcement of compliance expectations
- Corrective actions against RPSL companies and illegal agents
- Transition to Directorate General of Maritime Administration under new Merchant Shipping Act
- Progress towards Seafarers' Rights Charter and Code of Conduct

11. Closing Message

- Trust of seafarers as the foundation of the maritime system
- Integrity of RPSL framework as non-negotiable
- Collective responsibility of regulators, RPSLs, and stakeholders
- Commitment to ethical recruitment, transparency, and compliance
- Safeguarding livelihoods and India's global maritime reputation