

INDIAN SEAFARERS KEPT SUPPLY CHAINS RUNNING DURING COVID: SONOWAL

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The role played by Indian seafarers in keeping the global supply chain operational can be gauged from the fact that even during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 2.1 lakh of them served on Indian and foreign ships in 2021, Sarbananda Sonowal, Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, said on Tuesday. This ensured Indian and global trade and commerce activities continued unhindered, he said.

“The recently appointed National Maritime Security Coordinator (NMSC) can set up framework with the coordination of the Navy, the Coast Guard and the Ministry of Shipping with the State maritime boards and ports within their respective State jurisdiction to enhance coastal surveillance to streamline the maritime activities in India,” he told *The Hindu* on the sidelines of an event to mark the 59th National Maritime Day.

Former Vice-Chief of Navy Vice Admiral Ashok Kumar was recently appointed the country's first NMSC reporting directly to National Security Adviser Ajit Doval.

National Maritime Day commemorates the first ship under Indian Flag, *SS Loyalty*, which set sail from Mumbai to London on April 5, 1919.

To mark this, a walkathon was organised at the Safdarjung Tomb, led by Minister of State Shantanu Thakur along with the Ministry and port officials and around 600 trainee cadets, faculty from maritime institutes, as well as merchant navy officers located in the national capital.

Stating that the share of Indian seafarers in the world shipping has increased by 25% between 2016 and 2019, the Minister said 1,17,090 seafarers were employed in India in 2014 which increased to 2,05,789 registering a massive growth of almost 76% in seven years. The aim is to increase India's seafaring share from 12% of world market to 20% by 2030.

The government aims to start a dedicated training centre preparing Indians to take over jobs on cruise ships by providing hospitality training and the Indian cruise industry is growing rapidly due to multiple government interventions in the last three years, Mr. Sonowal said.

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