

DRAFT CIRCULAR

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F. No.:23-18/71/2026-CREW – DGS (C. No 39444)

Date: xx.xx.2026

(Draft)

DGS Circular No. XX of 2026

Subject: Implementation of Digitally Executed / Smart Seafarers' Employment Agreements (SEA) under the Merchant Shipping Act 2025, the Merchant Shipping (Maritime Labour) Rules, 2016 and the Merchant Shipping (Recruitment and Placement of Seafarers) Rules, 2016-reg.

1. Whereas, the Directorate General of Shipping (Directorate) has received representations from various entities seeking permission for the execution of seafarers' employment agreements (SEA) in digital form, including the use of Aadhaar-based e-Sign and Digital Signature Certificates (DSC) for the execution of contracts and related documentation.
2. Whereas, the objectives of these requests are to promote the digitisation of maritime labour documentation; enhance authenticity, traceability and auditability; prevent fraudulent employment contracts; and facilitate the transition towards smart contracts in maritime labour governance.
3. Whereas, the matter has been examined and it has been decided to grant approval for the digital signing of seafarers' employment agreements, subject to the following safeguards:
 - 3.1. The requirements of the Information Technology Act, 2000 shall be complied with. Where personal data is processed, compliance with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 shall also be ensured, and no specific prohibition shall apply.
 - 3.2. The digital execution of the agreement shall be acceptable to both parties.
 - 3.3. No cost shall be charged to seafarers for the use of digital signatures or e-Sign authentication.
 - 3.4. Records of all digital signatures and e-Signs executed by seafarers shall be maintained and made available for verification at the entity's office during audits or any inspection carried out by this Directorate in accordance with the applicable rules and regulations.
4. Whereas, the scope of this circular shall apply to all recruitment and placement licence holders, manning agencies, shipowners and ship managers engaging Indian seafarers, and digital service providers facilitating the execution of seafarers' employment agreements.
5. Whereas, the following terms have been defined for ease of reference:
 - 5.1. Digital seafarers' employment agreement (Digital SEA): A seafarers' employment agreement executed using legally valid digital signatures.
 - 5.2. Smart seafarers' employment agreement (Smart SEA): A digitally executed contract embedded with automated compliance verification, immutable audit logs and condition-triggered obligations. It shall initially function as a "digitised enforceable contract" and not as an autonomous blockchain-only system.

6. Whereas, Digital SEA and Smart SEA shall comply with the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025, to the extent applicable and as brought into force, the Merchant Shipping (Maritime Labour) Rules, 2026, the Merchant Shipping (Recruitment and Placement of Seafarers) Rules,

2026, the Information Technology Act, 2000 and rules made thereunder, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, to the extent applicable and as brought into force, the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam, 2023, the Aadhaar Act, 2016 and applicable UIDAI/CCA requirements, and any rules, notifications, orders, circulars or instructions issued thereunder.

7. Whereas, this Directorate permits the execution of SEA in electronic or digital format, subject to the following conditions:

7.1. There shall be no deviation from the requirements under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006.

7.2. Seafarers shall be informed of their rights and shall provide consent prior to signing.

7.3. A copy of the contract shall be made available to seafarers before onboarding.

7.4. No cost shall be imposed on seafarers for digital signing.

7.5. Digital records shall be made available for inspection during audits.

8. Whereas, the mandatory technical requirements shall be as follows:

8.1. The standard modes of signature shall be Aadhaar-based e-Sign or equivalent approved electronic authentication for seafarers, and Class III Digital Signature Certificates issued by licensed Certifying Authorities for manning agencies and authorised representatives, as applicable.

8.2. The system shall include tamper-proof document storage, end-to-end encryption, timestamped audit-trail logs, IP and device tracking where permissible, and real-time verification capability.

9. Whereas, the mandatory protection safeguards shall include the following:

9.1. A pre-signing contract briefing, including by video or audio, where permissible.

9.2. Availability of the contract in multiple languages, where required.

9.3. The ability for seafarers to download and retain a copy of the SEA.

9.4. A cooling-off period or grievance redressal mechanism, as applicable.

9.5. Employers shall ensure that there is no coercion or automated acceptance, and that all terms are displayed transparently before signing.

10. Whereas, for record keeping and audit purposes, all Digital SEA shall be preserved for a minimum period of five years, and a complete audit trail shall be maintained, including signing logs, authentication records and document versions. Such records shall be produced during audits and any inspections carried out by the Directorate in accordance with the applicable rules and regulations.

11. Whereas, non-compliance may result in suspension or cancellation of the RPSL licence, rejection of the SEA and penal action under the applicable rules.

12. This Circular shall come into effect from xx.xx.2026.

This issues with the approval of the competent authority.

(Capt Bipin Kumar)
Deputy Director General of Shipping (Crew)

To,
All Stakeholders through DGS Website.