

Draft

File No.: 25-25/1/2022-NT-DGS (Comp. no.14925)

Date: xx.01.2026

Directorate General of Shipping Order No. xx of 2026

Subject:

Usage of Satellite Communication Equipment in Indian Waters by Ships and Seafarers – Reg.

For the Attention of:

Ship Owners, Ship Operators, Shipping Managers, Ship Agents, Ship Masters, Recognized Organizations, Manufacturers, Surveyors, Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard (ICG), Security Agencies, National Hydrographic Office (NHO), and other National and International Stakeholders.

Purpose:

The purpose of this Order is to ensure compliance with, and to promulgate, the regulatory requirements governing the use, declaration, authorization, and reporting of satellite communication equipment by ships and seafarers while operating in Indian waters, in the interest of maritime safety and national security.

A. Background

1. The Directorate General of Shipping (DGS), vide DGS Order No. 09 of 2023 dated 12.07.2023,
 - a) permitted the use of Iridium-based satellite communication equipment in Indian waters exclusively for Distress and Safety communications under the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS), subject to meeting stipulated conditions.
 - b) The usage of Thuraya Satellite Equipment is continued to be banned in the Indian waters.

2. The said DGS Order, inter alia, envisages that:

Iridium GMDSS terminals approved under Recognised Mobile Satellite Service (RMSS) can be fitted and used onboard ships while navigating at sea including Indian territorial waters;
and

- b) Usage shall be strictly limited to Distress and Safety communications only;
- c) However, **Portable Iridium satellite devices are prohibited from being carried into**

Indian land territory. Full details of any such portable satellite equipment, including IMEI/ESN numbers, must be mandatorily declared through the Pre-Arrival Notification of Security (PANS).”

d) Use of such portable equipment for GSM, personal, commercial, or non-GMDSS communications is expressly and strictly prohibited.”

3. Subsequently, clarifications were sought by international organizations regarding the applicability of the above Order to ships participating in the WMO Voluntary Observing Ship (VOS) Scheme. Accordingly, this Directorate clarified, vide official communications issued during November 2023 and March 2024, that:
 - a) Ships participating in the VOS Scheme are permitted to transmit required meteorological and safety-related information using Iridium GMDSS equipment; and
 - b) Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) installed onboard ships under SOLAS Chapter V, Regulation 5, operating through non-GMDSS Iridium equipment, are also permitted, as such systems are standalone, non-portable, transmit only binary meteorological data, and are incapable of voice or personal communications.
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B. Incident Reports

4. Notwithstanding the above regulatory framework and clarifications, violations continue to be reported by security agencies. These include instances of vessels and crew carrying unauthorized and/or undeclared portable satellite communication devices, such as satellite phones and satellite-enabled messaging equipment, without declaration in PANS and without requisite authorization.

Reports further indicate the use of Zoleo satellite devices, connected to smartphones compatible with Iridium satellite communication, for messaging in areas lacking cellular network coverage. Such actions constitute serious violations of existing Orders and pose potential national security threats.

5. In view of the absence of Iridium gateways or ground stations within the Indian region (both land and water), communications using Iridium-based portable devices by seafarers and ships cannot be effectively monitored, examined, or traced. This limitation is of particular concern in suspicious or sensitive cases and underscores the necessity for strict compliance and enforcement.
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C. Mandatory Provisions and Requirements

6. **Licensing and Authorization:**

- a) All mobile satellite communication equipment brought into Indian waters shall be duly licensed and authorized.
- b) For Indian-flag vessels, such equipment shall comply with all applicable Indian regulatory requirements and approvals issued by competent authorities.
- c) For foreign-flag vessels, such equipment shall be duly licensed by the respective Flag State/Administration, and its usage in Indian waters shall be restricted strictly to the permitted GMDSS functions under applicable regulations and DGS Orders.

7. **Declaration Requirements:**

- a) All types of portable satellite communication equipment carried on board by the vessel, or its crew shall be mandatorily declared in the Pre-Arrival Notification of Security (PANS), including full details such as make, model, and IMEI/ESN numbers.
- b) **Fixed satellite equipment that is approved and permitted under the RMSS shall not be required to be declared in the Pre-Arrival Notification of Security (PANS).**
- c) Satellite communication equipment that does not forming part of the ship's GMDSS station and that constitutes the personal belongings of crew members or other individuals shall not be permitted for use in Indian waters or within Indian land territory.
- d) Any such personal satellite equipment (portable or mobile satellite phones/devices) if available onboard ship shall be placed under the custody of the Master and shall be sealed by the Indian authorities upon arrival, as applicable.

8. **Dealers and Service Providers:**

Satellite communication equipment and related services shall be procured, installed, and operated exclusively through manufacturers, dealers, and service providers that are duly approved and licensed by the competent authorities.

D. Applicability

9. This Order shall be applicable to:

- a) All Indian-flag ships and vessels operating in Indian waters and in Indian ports;
- b) All foreign-flag ships and vessels operating, calling, or transiting through Indian waters and ports;
- c) All seafarers engaged onboard ships and vessels as part of the vessel's staff; and
- d) All shore-based personnel engaged onboard ships/vessels for installation, maintenance, operation, or related activities.

10. This Order shall not apply to ships equipped with satellite equipment used exclusively for Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) for ocean data acquisition under the WMO Voluntary Observing Ship (VOS) Scheme, subject to compliance with the conditions outlined in relevant clarifications.
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E. Reporting of Infringement and Penalties

11.

a) Any ship or vessel found in non-compliance and deviating from the above requirements, including failure to declare or unauthorized use of satellite communication equipment, shall be issued an infringement notice and shall be liable for penal action under applicable Indian laws.

b) Penalization and punishment shall be imposed in accordance with:

- i) Section 31 of the Indian Telecommunications Act, 2023 and
- ii) Entry no. 45 of Section- 281, Part-XIV of the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025.