

## Coastal Shipping Bill Clears Parliament Amid Opposition Protest



The Coastal Shipping Bill, 2025, aimed at streamlining and modernizing India's coastal trade, has been passed by Parliament, with the Rajya Sabha giving its nod through a voice vote. The legislation, which had previously been approved by the Lok Sabha on April 3, was passed amidst a vocal and sustained protest by opposition members demanding a discussion on the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar.

Union Minister of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal, presented the bill for passage, stating that its goal is to reduce the compliance burden for Indian ships and enhance the nation's supply chain security. He emphasized that the new law will "unlock the full potential of India's coastline" and help meet the goal of increasing the country's coastal cargo share to 230 million metric tons by 2030. The bill replaces the outdated provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, with a modern framework aligned with global best practices.

The core of the new legislation is to promote coastal trade and encourage domestic participation, ensuring that India has a strong coastal fleet owned and operated by its citizens for national security and commercial needs. It introduces a simplified licensing system for Indian vessels while still requiring foreign vessels to obtain a license from the Director General of Shipping to engage in coastal trade. The bill also mandates the creation of a National Coastal and Inland Shipping Strategic Plan to better integrate coastal shipping with inland waterways.

However, the passage of the bill was overshadowed by a stormy session in the Rajya Sabha. Opposition MPs, carrying placards, trooped into the well of the House, shouting slogans to demand an immediate discussion on the SIR exercise in Bihar. The opposition has claimed that the revision process is flawed and could lead to the deletion of millions of genuine voters, a charge the government has denied. Despite the protest and the subsequent din, the government proceeded with the legislative agenda. The chair repeatedly urged the protesting members to return to their seats, but their demands for a debate on the Bihar issue remained unaddressed, highlighting the deep political friction that has marked the current parliamentary session.