

Crime Wave Continues Near Singapore with More Vessels Boarded



Seven vessels were boarded in the area around the Singapore Strait so far in January (file photo)

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Security consultants and the monitoring operation ReCAAP are warning of increased activity in the region around the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. It continues the trend which saw 62 vessels boarded and robbed while underway in the region in 2024.

Since the start of the year, ReCAAP has received reports of seven incidents with all but one in the region west of Pulau Cula, Indonesia. All but one of the cases also involved bulkers underway while one was a general cargo ship. An additional concern is that in all but one of the reports, the crew said the pirates were armed with guns or knives or in one case were carrying steel bars.

Historically most of the cases were non-violent with the boarders fleeing when they were discovered. However, more recent cases show a greater likelihood that they are carrying weapons, and many of the cases involve five or six people. So far, there have been no reports of injuries among the crews, but spare parts and other unsecured items have been reported stolen.

Beyond the area around the straits, there were two other incidents in anchorages in Indonesia and Bangladesh during January. The boarders were also armed and stole unsecured equipment.

ReCAAP in its end-of-year 2024 report highlighted that there had been a six percent increase in reports across Asia to a total of 107 incidents. That was the highest level in the past five years and also the first time since 2020 that hostages were taken and a FAME fuel oil cargo siphoned. Specifically, in the straits, there were 62 incidents in 2024.

Most of the incidents in the straits are happening in the eastbound lane south of Singapore. The most frequent target is bulkers, which made up three-quarters of the reports, and 84 percent of the incidents happened at night. The most dangerous time is between 0200 and 0300.

ReCAAP cautioned that there were more incidents involving perpetrators carrying knives and guns. On occasion, they have been used to threaten crews but not to harm individuals.

It continues to warn crews to exercise extra vigilance. At the same time, it calls on the local authorities to increase their patrols and enforcement to discourage the current crime wave.

The rise of incidents in Asia comes as many other parts of the world have reported a decline in crimes against ships. The Gulf of Guinea off West Africa had been one of the highest concerns but is again stable. The other area of concern was with Somali pirates who reemerged in 2024 with many reports linking it to the instability in the Red Sea and threats by the Houthi militants.