

LP 25/2026 Heightened Vigilance Against Armed Robbery in the Singapore Strait and the Strait of Malacca

On 14 July 2026, the ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre (ISC) released its *Half-Yearly Report on Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia* (January–June 2026). The report records 35 incidents of armed robbery against ships in Asian waters during the period — a 64% decrease from the 96 incidents reported in H1 2025, and the lowest H1 figure since 2019.

Although the overall risk picture has eased markedly, the Singapore Strait and the Strait of Malacca remain designated “areas of concern” by ReCAAP, accounting for 60% of all incidents in Asia and with most attacks targeting low-freeboard, slow-moving vessels underway at night. Members are recommended to maintain heightened vigilance when transiting these waters and to apply robust preventive measures.

I. Summary of Maritime Security Incidents in Asian Waters (H1 2026)

To help members calibrate their watchkeeping and loss-prevention arrangements, the following is a summary of incidents in the Singapore Strait, the Strait of Malacca and other Asian waters during H1 2026.

- **Total incidents:** 35 across Asian waters, all classified as armed robbery. Of these, 21 occurred in the Singapore Strait and the Strait of Malacca, accounting for 60% of the regional total.
- **Year-on-year change:** Asian waters saw a 64% decrease overall. The two straits fell by 74% yet remain the most concentrated area for security incidents in Asia.
- **Vessel types (two straits):** 62% bulk carriers, 29% tugs/barges and 9% tankers. The common feature is low freeboard and slow speed.
- **Vessel status:** Region-wide, 21 incidents (60%) occurred while ships were underway and 14 (40%) at anchor/berth. All 21 incidents in the two straits occurred while the vessels were underway.
- **Time of day:** Around 75% of incidents took place at night between 2100 and 0559 hrs — the high-risk window.
- **Location:** Of the 21 incidents in the two straits, 20 occurred in the eastbound lane of the Singapore Strait and one within the precautionary area.
- **Severity (ReCAAP classification):** Across Asian waters — 0 CAT 1 (most severe), 4 CAT 2 (moderately significant), 13 CAT 3 (less significant) and 18 CAT 4 (least significant).

- **Crew outcome:** 85% of incidents left crew uninjured; in 10% crew were threatened or injured.
- **Items stolen:** Mainly engine spares, scrap metal, paint, fire-fighting equipment, cables and copper fittings.

II. Situation in the Singapore Strait and the Strait of Malacca

The two straits are key international shipping lanes linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans, with one of the highest densities of transiting vessels in the world. According to the ReCAAP H1 2026 report, 21 incidents were reported in the straits — 60% of the Asian total (21/35) — confirming their status as the principal area of concern in the region.

Although this represents a 74% drop from 80 incidents in H1 2025, the ReCAAP ISC Executive Director attributes the improvement to effective preventive measures by the shipping industry and firm action by the littoral States' enforcement agencies. Petty theft remains concentrated in the eastbound lane of the Singapore Strait around the Phillip Channel, and vessels should not lower their guard when transiting this area. On 19 March 2026, ReCAAP ISC issued a dedicated Incident Alert calling on crew to maintain extra vigilance and a sharp lookout while transiting the straits, and urging enforcement agencies to step up surveillance and patrols.

The dominant modus operandi remains opportunistic, “hit-and-run” attacks aimed at avoiding direct contact with crew. However, in several cases perpetrators have been reported carrying knives, machetes or items resembling firearms — a real and immediate threat to crew safety.

III. Impact on Vessels and Crew

A reduction in incident numbers does not mean the underlying risk has gone away. Even with the downward trend, a single incident can still cause serious consequences:

- **Direct threat to crew safety:** In the 21 incidents in the two straits, perpetrators armed with knives or gun-like objects have boarded vessels. In one recent ReCAAP ISC Incident Report (No. 34), perpetrators carrying a gun-like object boarded the vessel and entered the engine room; in another CAT 2 incident, five perpetrators boarded the vessel, one of them armed with a knife. In a CAT 3 incident, a crew member suffered a head laceration and required medical treatment.
- **Psychological damage on crew:** Even without physical confrontation, the sudden appearance of unknown persons in work areas such as the engine room or storeroom can cause lasting fear and anxiety, affecting subsequent safe operations.

- **Disruption to vessel operations:** Theft of stores and spares not only affects normal operations but may also trigger additional port-State inspections and delays. Cooperation with coastal State investigations can further extend the impact on schedules.

IV. Loss-Prevention Recommendations

Based on industry best practice, the Club recommends the following measures for members planning to transit the Singapore Strait and the Strait of Malacca.

1. Pre-Voyage Preparation and Risk Assessment

- 1) Before entering the two straits, the Master should conduct a targeted threat and risk assessment, taking into account the vessel's type, freeboard, route and current intelligence, and prepare a specific ship-protection plan.
- 2) Ensure the Ship Security Plan and the muster list are up to date, and conduct security drills so that every crew member is familiar with his/her role in anti-piracy/anti-robbery response.
- 3) Check that anti-piracy equipment — fire hoses, razor wire, security grilles, searchlights, whistles/horns, etc. — is on board and in good order.
- 4) Verify that the VDR, CCTV, Radar, AIS and communication equipment are in normal working order.
- 5) Secure all doors, hatches and external stairways leading to the bridge, accommodation and engine room; consider fitting metal grilles to external stairways.

2. Strengthen Lookout and Watchkeeping

- 1) While transiting the two straits — particularly during the high-risk night window of 2100 to 0559 hrs — maintain enhanced lookout, shorten the rotation cycle for deck patrols and ensure watchkeepers remain fully alert at all times.
- 2) The bridge should be equipped with sufficient binoculars (anti-glare type recommended). Members may also consider fitting thermal-imaging or night-vision equipment where practicable.
- 3) Maintain continuous radar surveillance, paying particular attention to small craft approaching from astern. The eastbound lane of the Singapore Strait is currently the most concentrated incident area and warrants extra vigilance.

3. Alarms, Mustering and Communication

- 1) On detecting a suspicious approach or a confirmed boarding, sound the general alarm and continuously sound the ship's whistle/horn. This both alerts the crew and signals to the perpetrators that the vessel is aware and responding.

- 2) Pre-designate a safe muster point or citadel equipped with independent external communication (portable VHF, satellite phone) and key emergency contact numbers.
- 3) Subject to safe navigation, apply small, continuous helm alterations while maintaining speed to create a stern wash that discourages approaching boats. Avoid large course changes that would significantly reduce speed or affect other traffic.
- 4) Report immediately via VHF Channel 16 or by telephone to the nearest coastal-State Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) and notify the Company Security Officer.

4. Incident Response and Evidence Preservation

- 1) If armed personnel have boarded, crew should avoid direct confrontation and remain calm. Where necessary, the Master should organise the orderly evacuation of crew to the citadel.
- 2) Keep the VDR and CCTV recording continuously; where safe to do so, take photos of the scene, the affected areas and the direction in which the perpetrators fled (do not photograph them in their presence).
- 3) After the incident, avoid touching or moving any items that may be related to the offence, so as not to compromise evidence.
- 4) The Master should record the incident timeline without delay, collect statements from relevant crew, prepare a list of stolen items, and cooperate fully with the relevant authorities when they board for investigation.

This article is for Members' reference only. For specific advice, please contact Managers of the Association.