

India set to have ballast water testing facility

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Soon the Indian waters will be out of bounds for invasive species, world's most unwanted stowaways, a major concern which has been haunting the country's maritime business and marine wealth.

India will soon join select club of nations like Singapore and Japan to have its own ballast water treatment and testing facility, a pre-requirement as per the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), to prevent attack of invasive species both in Indian and international waters.

Invasive species like microbes, bacteria, eggs, cysts,

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larvae of various species, algae and plants are being dumped into the country's waters by ships when they discharge the ballast water at their ports of call. This has become an international issue and the IMO has declared that ships which do not have inbuilt ballast water

management system will not be allowed in ports and has set a deadline as well.

Ballast water is the water which has to be stored in the bottom chamber of the ship to maintain its stability while sailing in high seas. When the ship is fully loaded with cargo, the

chamber needs only minimum quantity of water. But, when the ships leave the port after unloading the cargo, they fill the chamber to capacity with sea water drawn from the last port of call.

"The ballast water is discharged or de-ballasted in the port from where the ship is loaded with cargo. This has become a threat to marine life all over the world as the de-ballasted water contains species from far away ports which may not be ecologically and environmentally friendly to the sea water of another country," explained Dr MA Atmanand, director, ESSO-NIOT, (Earth System Science Organisation-National Institute

of Ocean Technology), Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India, Chennai which has taken up the responsibility of guarding Indian sea waters from invasive species.

The NIOT has spread its wings to the neighbouring State of Andhra Pradesh, where it will set up the ballast water testing facility on land abutting the Bay of Bengal. Nearly 200 acres of barren land has been acquired along the Nellore coast where works for an ever green campus was launched on Saturday. The significance of the campus could be understood from the fact that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu along with some of his Cabinet Ministers flew down

from Hyderabad to attend the function. Union Minister for Science and Technology Harsh Vardhan, his deputy YS Chowdury, secretary of the Ministry of Earth Sciences Sailesh Nayak were present for the launching of works.

"This is a major initiative since our ships are yet to install ballast water treatment systems. There were instances when our ships were turned away from their ports of call when it found that the ballast water carried by them has invasive species. Such ships traverse more than 30 nautical miles to discharge the ballast water in deep seas," said Captain Bhaskar Kunhi, senior pilot, Cochin Port Trust.