Indian Coast Guard conducted the 18th National Maritime Search and Rescue Board (NMSARB) meeting at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi on 18 Dec 2019. The apex level Maritime Search and Rescue meeting was chaired by DG K Natarajan, PTM, TM, Director General Indian Coast Guard and Chairman, NMSARB. The Board comprising 48 members from various ministries, agencies, all Coastal States & Union Territories meets annually to discuss policy issues, formulate guidelines & procedures and assess the efficacy of National Search and Rescue Plan. The Chairman, NMSARB was pleased to announce participation of three strong components of the M-SAR - Secretary of Shipping, Civil Aviation and Fisheries, which is the first time in the history of NMSARB. He also welcomed three new members, the Ministry of Shipping, Dept of Animal Husbandry (DoAH&DF) and INCOIS as permanent members. The meeting was also attended by Fisheries Department officials from West Bengal, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka.

During the inaugural address, the Chairman highlighted various initiatives of Indian Coast Guard in coordination with other stakeholders for improving the Search and Rescue effectiveness within the 4.6 million sq km vast Indian Search & Rescue Region. He brought out the importance of three Maritime Rescue Coordination centers at Mumbai, Chennai and A&N established by ICG and also voluntary ship reporting system INDSAR, again developed by ICG to divert the ship nearest to the site of incident for immediate SAR assistance. The Prevention and Measured SAR mechanism adopted by ICG resulted in no loss of life at sea during passage of many cyclones in the recent past.
The Chairman advocated the need for collaborative approach with capacity building of stakeholders towards strengthening the maritime SAR architecture. He reiterated the need to focus on sustainable maritime safety in our AOR and address regulations governing mandatory carriage of life saving safety equipment, seaworthiness of fishing vessels by fisher-folk as preventive mechanism, proper training and accounting of the crew onboard.

Chairman NMSARB delivering the Inaugural Address

The Key note address was delivered by Shri Gopal Krishna, Secretary (Shipping). He complimented the Indian Coast Guard and the NMSAR board members for their exemplary coordination which resulted in incorporation of various ingenious measures to improve the SAR mechanism. He also stressed upon the need to harmonise the Maritime-Air SAR system.

In the special address by Shri Pradeep Singh Kharola, Secretary (Civil Aviation), he also stressed the need to reduce the divide between Aeronautical & Maritime SAR as about 60% of Indian airspace comprises of ocean areas. He assured the forum that his ministry would provide all assistance for enhancing the coordination further.

Smt Rajini Sekhri Sibal, Secretary (Fisheries) during her address said 2.5 lakhs fishing boats with about 38 lakhs fishermen are engaged in fishing which requires frequent SAR assistance and she complemented ICG for having a robust SAR mechanism in place. She also mentioned about National SAR Legislation under MS Act and National Marine Fisheries (Regulation & Management bill) 2019, which is
under preparation, will further enhance the existing SAR mechanism, once implemented.

Apart from deliberations on various maritime safety issues and identifying areas of improvement of Search and Rescue services, the NMSAR Board recognises the SAR efforts of merchant mariners, Govt. Owned Vessels and Fishermen every year. For the year 2018-19, MV Asia Emerald III was awarded the SAR Award for Merchant Vessel for saving 06 lives from a distressed fishing boat. SAR Award for Fisherman was awarded to Shri Anand A Ambhire from Maharashtra for saving 11 lives from a sinking fishing boat. SAR Award for Government Owned SAR Unit was awarded jointly to Indian Coast Guard Ships Sujay and Vikram for saving 46 lives from ROSV Sagar Sampada off New Mangalore.

3 Secretaries and DGICG with the Awardees

Indian Coast Guard being the nodal agency for Maritime Search and Rescue has rescued 9672 lives by co-ordinating 3180 search and rescue missions, which inter alia includes 2479 air sorties and 3540 ship deployments, since inception. ICG thus saves one precious life every second day. Further, ICG also escorted more than 6000 fishing boats to safe locations during the passage of three severe cyclonic storms this year. In this year alone, ICG took 300 SAR missions involving rescue of close to 1000 lives at sea which includes 27 MEDEVAC operations and some of the rescue operations were conducted at the fringes of Indian Search and Rescue Region.