

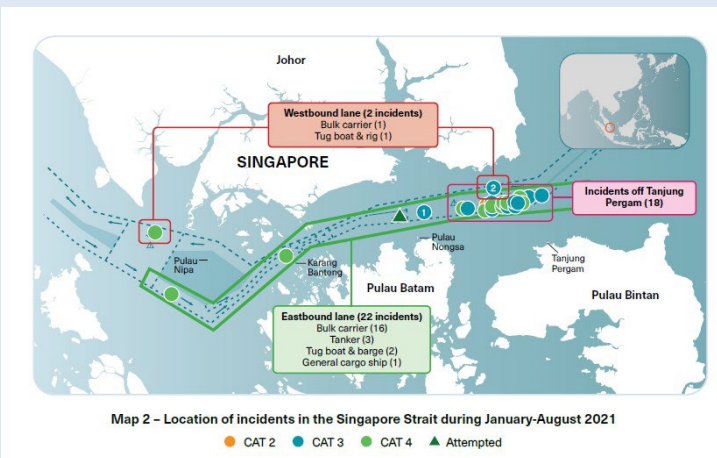


## Rise of Singapore Strait sea robberies

Reported incidents of sea robberies occurring in the Singapore Strait continue to rise, even as similar incidents have decreased in number across Asia. This is a concerning development for shipowners, charterers, operators and insurers, writes [Benjamin Lim](#), Associate in CJC's Singapore office.

According to reports published by the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia Information Sharing Centre ("ReCAAP ISC"<sup>1</sup>), from January to September this year, a total of 27 sea robbery incidents took place within the Singapore Strait. This is up by 22% from the 22 sea robberies reported in the same period in 2020.

Conversely, across other parts of Asia, piracy and sea robberies decreased by 27% during the same period. The first eight months of this year saw 51 sea robbery incidents in Asia, down from 70 in the same period last year. Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, the South China Sea and the Sulu-Celebes Seas all reported a drop in sea robbery reports. No piracy incident was reported during this period.



Within the Singapore Strait, the vast majority of sea robbery incidents reported thus far this year have been concentrated in the eastbound lane of the Traffic Separation Scheme, on the Indonesian side of the Strait, with the waters off Tanjung Pergam in Bintan Island, Indonesia being a particular hotspot. This has been the site of 22 out of the 27 sea robberies reported occurring in the Singapore Strait this year.

Source: ReCAAP ISC August 2021 Report

Of these 22 sea robberies, 19 were carried out on bulk carriers, the rest being carried out on tankers (2 incidents) and a general cargo ship (1 incident). Bulk carriers are frequent targets of sea robbers and pirates worldwide.

All 22 incidents were carried out in hours of darkness. In a sign of the perpetrators' increasing brazenness, 12 of the 22 incidents off Tanjung Pergam involved robbers armed with knives and machetes. Worryingly, the latest sea robbery reported in the same area on 18 September 2021, on the Cyprus-flagged bulk carrier *Asia Graeca*, involved robbers armed with firearms, in addition to knives and machetes.

According to experts quoted in the Singapore media, the waters off Tanjung Pergam are close to ports from which the criminals operate and where law enforcement capacity is generally less.

The rising number of incidents of sea robberies in the Singapore Strait is all the more notable considering that ReCAAP ISC numbers reported from 2016 to 2018 showed that sea robbery was “almost stamped out” in the area.



The navies and the coast guards of the littoral states to the Straits of Malacca and the Singapore Strait (namely, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore) are responsible for the security of ships traversing these waterways, which are long-time hotspots for piracy and sea robberies. The ReCAAP ISC strongly urges the littoral states to continue to increase patrols and enforcement in their respective waters, respond promptly to incidents reported by ships, strengthen coordination among themselves and promote information sharing on incidents and criminal groups involved in order to arrest the perpetrators.

To this end, from 20 to 27 September 2021, the Royal Malaysian Navy (“**RMN**”) and the Republic of Singapore Navy (“**RSN**”) jointly participated in “Exercise Malapura”,<sup>2</sup> a bilateral maritime exercise hosted by RMN and held in the northern part of the Malacca Strait, another piracy and sea robbery hotspot. This exercise was notable for being the first “contactless” naval exercise between the two navies, conducted without physical contact between service personnel from both countries due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Exercise Malapura saw the RMN and the RSN execute air defence exercises, gunnery firings, maritime security drills, as well as manoeuvring and communications drills.

It remains to be seen if the situation in the Singapore Strait will improve. Until then, vessels (especially bulk carriers) traversing the waters off Tanjung Pergam are particularly vulnerable to attacks and intrusions from sea robbers. To the best of our knowledge, marine insurers are yet to levy any security premium for vessels sailing in or through the Singapore Strait, but this might change if the numbers remain high.

Our Singapore office has considerable experience of handling piracy and sea robbery matters in Asia and Africa. We also offer a 24-hour emergency response service on +44 (0)203 301 8888 from which we provide immediate response, protection and management around the clock and across the globe.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.recaap.org/reports>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/news-and-events/latest-releases/article-detail/2021/September/27sep21\\_nr](https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/news-and-events/latest-releases/article-detail/2021/September/27sep21_nr)

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