30 Dec 2019

IFC SPOT COMMENTARY 3/19 – Observations of Sea Robbery, Sea Theft and Attempted Actions Incidents in Singapore Strait and Approaches

OVERVIEW

1. IFC observed a spike of sea robbery and sea theft incidents in Singapore Strait and approaches from end of Nov to Dec 2019. This included four sea robberies, three sea thefts and six attempted actions incidents. These incidents occurred in the east-bound lane of the Traffic Separation Scheme in the Singapore Strait. This spot commentary aims to provide awareness of the emerging area of concern including the analytical insights into the incidents and the observed modus operandi of the perpetrators.

SUMMARY OF FACTS

2. Area of Concern. The spate of incidents occurred in Singapore Strait to the north of Batam (See **Diagram 1)**. A majority of the incidents involved east-bound bulk carriers (46.1%) and tankers (23.2%) with low freeboards (between 4.5 to 6.5 m) and slow speeds (between 9 to 10 knots). The above-mentioned incidents occurred during the night where there was no/minimal illumination from the moon (See **Diagram 2)**. The remaining 30.7% of incidents occurred on tug-boats and barges. Most of the incidents occurred within the hours of darkness between 2300H to 0600H (84.6%). No attacks have been observed in the mornings – 0700H to 1100H or early afternoons/evenings – 1500H to 2300H (See **Diagram 3**).

Diagram 1: Locations of observed incidents in end of Nov-Dec 19

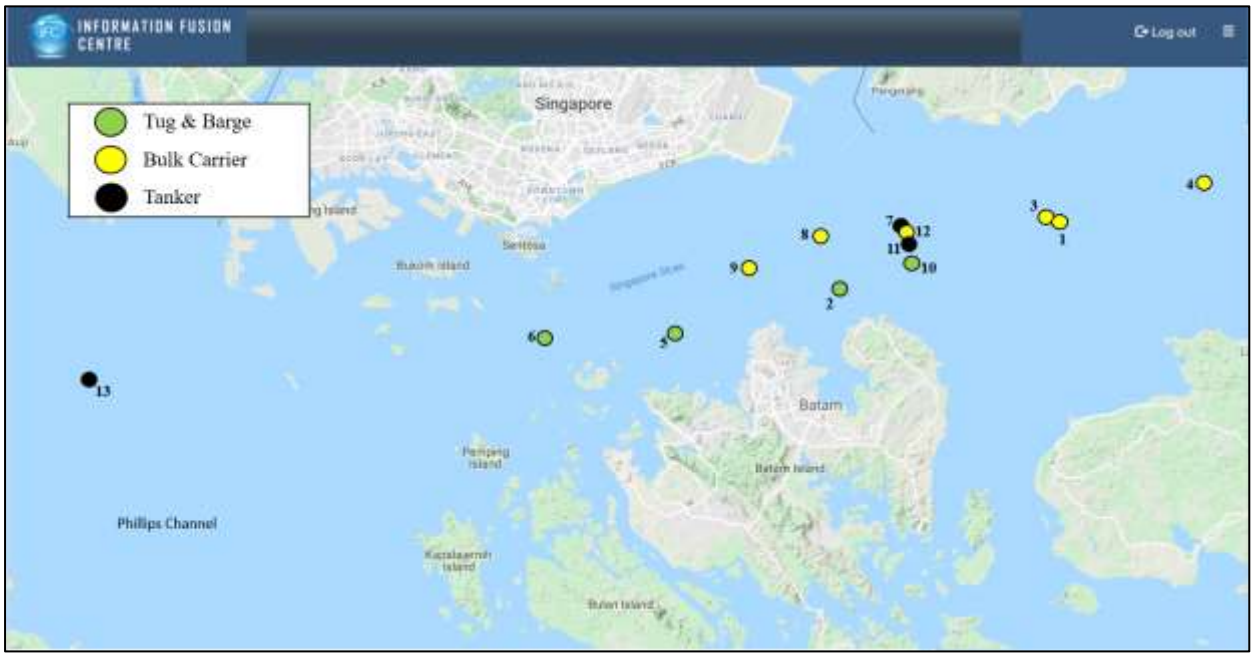


Diagram 2: Moonphase for end of Nov-Dec 19 – Incident nights highlighted by Red Borders

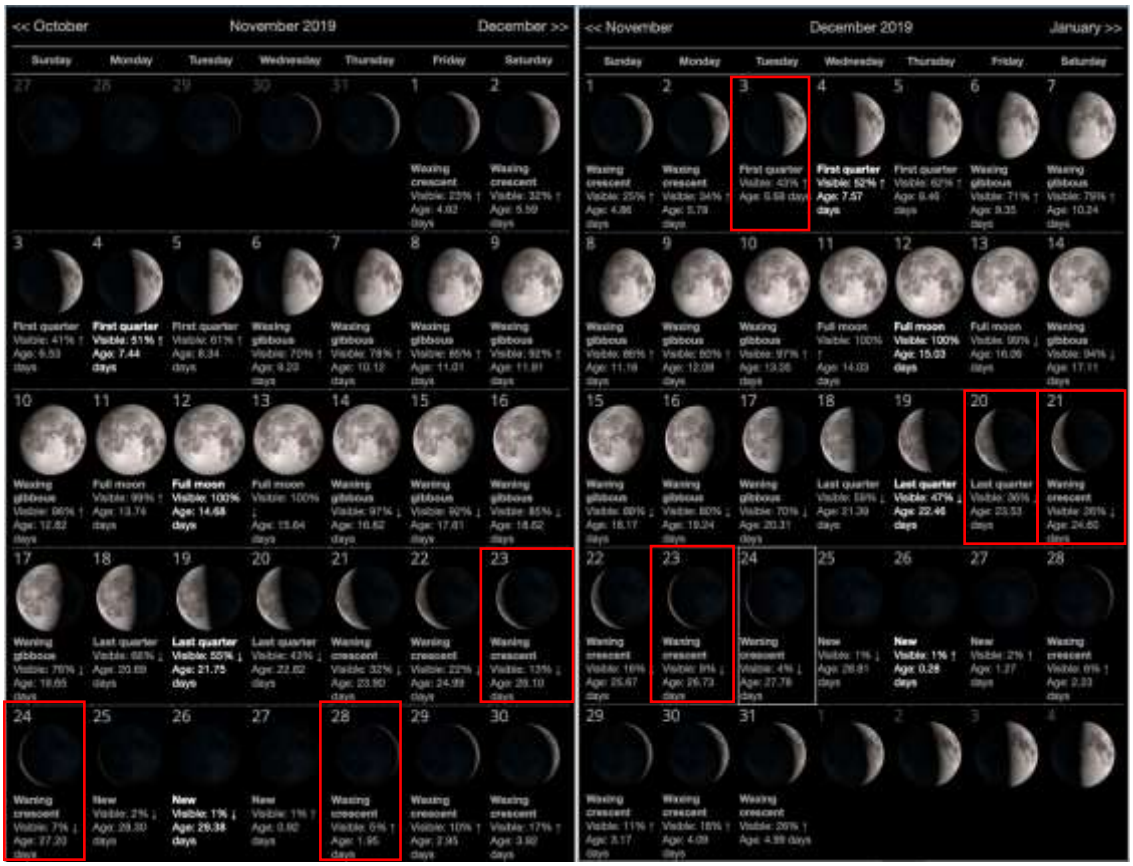
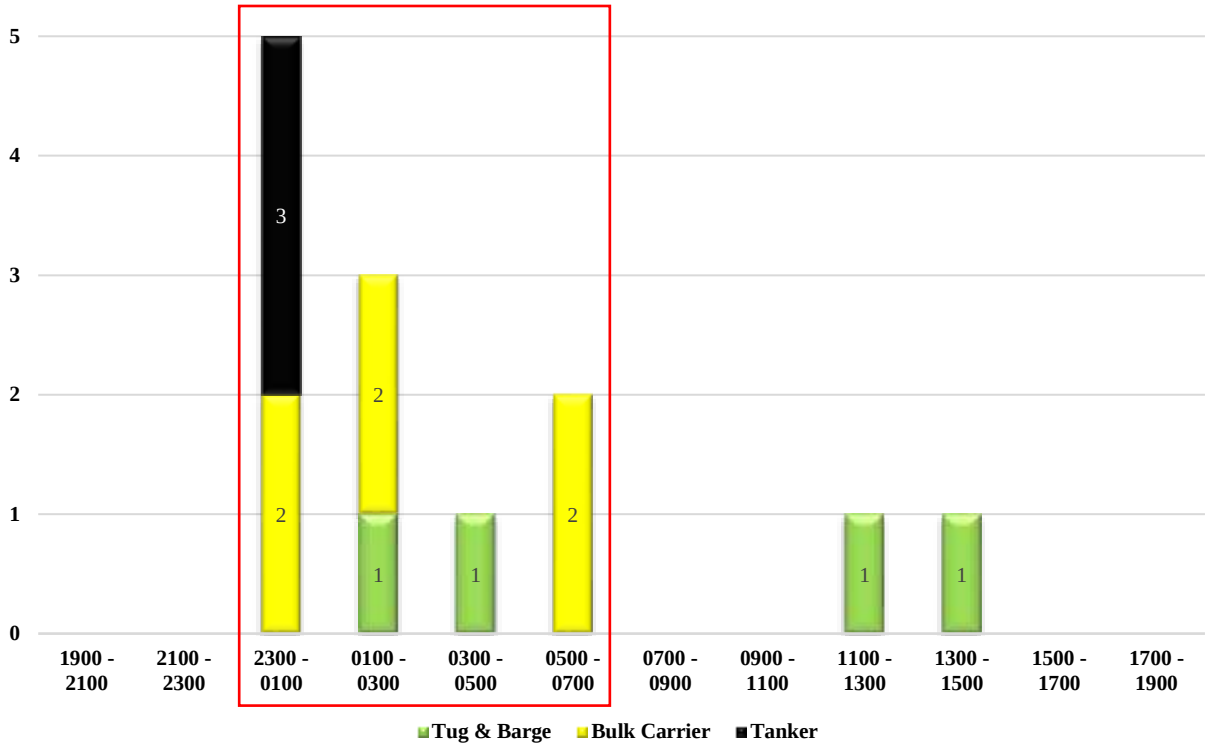
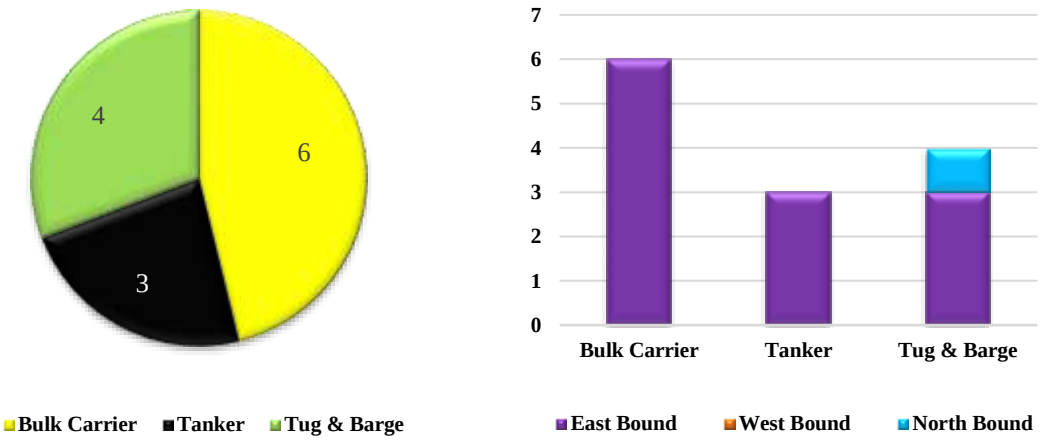


Diagram 3: Analysis on Timing of Attacks – Majority of Incidents occurred between 2300H to 0700H



3. Breakdown of Vessel Type and Direction. A total of six bulk carriers (46.1%), two tankers (23.2%) and four tugs and barges (30.7%) were involved in the 12 incidents (See **diagram 4**). This is assessed to be generally consistent with two factors, namely vessel type which constitute a larger percentage of the overall traffic volume (i.e. numerically more in absolute numbers); and vessels which operate at slower speed (10 knots and below) and with lower freeboards (below 10 metres), were primarily targeted. A majority of targeted vessels (92.3%) were east bound.

Diagram 4: Breakdown of Vessels type and Direction



4. Assessed Modus Operandi. An analysis of the perpetrators' actions revealed two distinctly differently modus operandi targeting two different groups of ships, as follows (The details of all incidents are at **Annex A)**:

a. Incidents involving Bulk Carriers and Tankers. Eight out of 12 incidents occurred on bulk carriers and tankers that were **eastbound** and travelling at **9~10 knots** in the previously highlighted location. All incidents occurred between 2300hrs to 0530hrs **during hours of darkness/ minimal illumination** as previously highlighted.

Modus Operandi: Perpetrators are assessed to **target east-bound bulk carriers and tankers during hours of darkness**. Incidents typically involve **five to six perpetrators** that **may be armed with long knives**. In most cases, the perpetrators **were discovered in the engine rooms**, and have been observed to **target ship's engine parts** and personal belongings. However, it was observed in six of the nine cases, that nothing had been stolen. Perpetrators were **observed to be confrontational**, with instances of tying up and even punching ship crew that they encountered. Trending of incidents suggest the same group of perpetrators may target a few vessels in the same night to maximise their gains.

b. Incidents involving Tugs and Barges. Four out of 13 incidents involving slow moving tugs and barges were observed in the highlighted location. Two out of four incidents occurred in daylight hours between 1100hrs to 1500hrs (see **Diagram 5**). The remaining two incidents occurred between the hours of darkness at 0200hrs to 0400hrs.

Diagram 5: Sampans approach and come alongside barge; Perpetrators steal scrap metal from barge – Photos shared by Company Security Officer via IFC Voluntary Community Reporting system

Modus Operandi: The perpetrator's modus operandi **remains consistent with previous trends**, which involved the **use of small wooden boats** or "sampans" to target slow moving tugs and barges. **Perpetrators are unarmed**, will **avoid any confrontation** with the crew, and have **targeted ship stores and scrap metal**.

IFC ACTIONS

5. IFC will continue to info-share the details of the incidents as soon as practicable with relevant regional OPCENS. IFC will also continue to engage the shipping community to underscore the importance of maintaining a proper and vigilant lookout, adhering to ship security standard operating procedures, and the timely reporting of incidents to local authorities. IFC will remind ships' masters to contact the local authorities and the IFC immediately, when they sight suspicious activities (including suspicious small boats approaching) and not confront the perpetrator when boarding had occurred.

IFC RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Ship masters are reminded to contact the local authorities and the IFC immediately, when they sight suspicious activities (including suspicious small boats approaching) and not confront the perpetrator when boarding had occurred. Details of IFC recommendations are found in **Annex B**. The contact details of local authorities are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Contact Details of Local Authorities

Country	Contact Details	
Malaysia	MMS Radio Channel	16
	Phone Number	+60 7 219 9401/9407
Indonesia	MMS Radio Channel	16
	Phone Number	+62 812 7754 8766
Singapore (VTIS)	MMS Radio Channels	10, 14, 73
	Phone Number	+65 6325 2493
IFC	Phone Numbers	+65 9626 8965
		+65 6594 5728
	Email	IFC_DO@defence.gov.sg

7. Masters and operators are encouraged to participate in the IFC's Voluntary Community Reporting (VCR) program as this allow vessels to receive timely information from the IFC on reports of incidents in the IFC's Area of Interest (AOI).

Annex A to
Spot Commentary 3/19
Dated 30 Dec 19

Incidents in Singapore Strait and Approaches

#	Incident Classification	DTG	Location of incident / vessel movement	Flag/ Vessel Type	Vessel Freeboard/ size	No of Perpetrators/ Position of initial sighting/ Arms carried	Items Stolen	Remarks
1	Attempted Actions	230528H (UTC+8) Nov 19	Lat 01º 19.38'N Long 104º 22.41'E / Underway – East bound	Bulk Carrier/ Marshall Islands Flagged	Freeboard – 5.36m / Vessel size – 182.5m x 30.5m	Five perpetrators/ engine room/ two perpetrators armed with knives	Nothing stolen.	Perpetrators fled once ship alarm raised, no one injured
2	Sea Theft	240343H (UTC+8) Nov 19	Lat 1° 14.25' N Long 104° 4.01' E / Underway – East bound	Barge/ Malaysia Flagged	-	Two perpetrators/ on-board barge/ not reported	'Twist locks' and ropes missing	No one injured
3	Attempted Actions	282320H (UTC+8) Nov 19	Lat 01° 16.2' N Long 104° 13.4' E/ Underway – East bound	Bulk Carrier/ China Flagged	Freeboard – 6.5m / Vessel size – 299m x 50m	Four perpetrators/ engine room/ not reported	Nothing stolen.	Perpetrators fled once ship alarm raised, no one injured
4	Attempted Actions	280445H (UTC+8) Nov 19	Lat 01º 19.38'N Long 104º 22.41'E/ Underway – East bound	Bulk Carrier/ Marshall Islands Flagged	Freeboard – 5.5m / Vessel size – 225m x 32.4m	Five perpetrators/ engine room/ not reported	Nothing stolen.	No one injured.

#	Incident Classification	DTG	Location of incident / vessel movement	Flag/ Vessel Type	Vessel Freeboard/ size	No of Perpetrators/ Position of initial sighting/ Arms carried	Items Stolen	Remarks
5	Attempted Actions	030210H (UTC+7) Dec 19	Lat 01° 10.95' N, Long 103° 56.63' E Underway – North bound	Singapore Flagged/ Tug/	-	Five to seven perpetrators/ on approaching sampan/ not reported	Metal scrap	No one injured.
6	Sea Theft	061132H (UTC+8) Dec 19	Lat 01° 10.59' N Long 103° 50.6' E/ Underway – East bound	Tug and Barge/ Singapore Flagged	-	Unknown numbers of personnel/ from multiple sampans going alongside barge/ unarmed	Metal scraps	No one injured.
7	Sea Robbery	202325H (UTC+8) Dec 19	Lat 1°15'47.4"N Long 104°06'43.2"E/ Underway – East bound	Tanker/ Indian Flagged	Freeboard – 6.05m / Vessel size – 274m x 48m	Six perpetrators/ steering gear room/ armed with knives	A gold chain	One ship crew was punched in the face, another sustained bruising on neck from strangulation. Assaulted crew informed assailant is either Indonesian or Filipino
8	Sea Robbery	202338H (UTC+8) Dec 19	Lat 1°15'20.4"N Long 104°03'10.2"E/ Underway – East bound	Bulk Carrier/ Bangladesh Flagged	Freeboard – 5.03m / Vessel size – 189.9m x 32.2m	Five perpetrators/ poop deck and engine room/ armed with knives	Main engine and generator spares	The five perpetrators escaped via a white small boat. No one injured.

#	Incident Classification	DTG	Location of incident / vessel movement	Flag/ Vessel Type	Vessel Freeboard/ size	No of Perpetrators/ Position of initial sighting/ Arms carried	Items Stolen	Remarks
9	Attempted Actions	210532H (UTC+8) Dec 19	Lat 01° 13.9' N, Long 103° 59.98' E/ Underway – East bound	Bulk Carrier/ Panama Flagged	Freeboard – 4.524 metres/ Vessel size – 182.5m x 30.5m	Three perpetrators/ not reported/ not reported	Nothing stolen.	Perpetrators fled back to their small craft and headed towards Batam. No one injured.
10	Sea Theft	221429H (UTC+8) Dec 19	Lat 01° 14.9'N Long 104° 07.18'E/ Underway – East bound	Tug & Barge/ Singapore Flagged	-	Four perpetrators embarked onto the barge/ two sampans approaching barge/ unarmed	Metal scraps	No one injured.
11	Sea Robbery	230012H (UTC+8) Dec 19	Lat 01° 15.51' N, Long 104° 07.80' E/ Underway – East bound	Oil Tanker/ Panama Flagged	Freeboard – 6.52m / Vessel size – 243.5m x 42m	Three perpetrators/ Engine room/ One perpetrator armed with long knife	Nothing stolen.	Two of the crew were confronted in the engine room and were tied up.
12	Sea Robbery	230120H (UTC+8) Dec 19	Lat 01° 15.57' N, Long 104° 07.01' E/ Underway – East bound	Bulk Carrier/ Panama Flagged	Freeboard – 4.482m / Vessel size – 176.5m x 28.8m	Six perpetrators carrying gunnysacks/ engine room/ armed with knives	Spare parts stolen.	Two of the crew were confronted in the engine room and were tied up. Perpetrators believed to be Indonesian as they were heard speaking the language.
13	Attempted Actions	250028H (UTC+8) Dec 19	Lat 1°08'57.0"N Long 103°29'00.0"E / Underway – East bound	Tanker/ United Kingdom Flagged	Freeboard – 5.3m / Vessel size – 183m x 32m	Six perpetrators/ Engine room	Nothing stolen.	Perpetrators fled once ship alarm raised, no one injured.

Annex B to
Spot Commentary 3/19
Dated 30 Dec 19

IFC Recommendations

1. The IFC recommends the following measures to be implemented while transiting or anchored:

a. Activate the ship's Automatic Identification System (AIS) at all times.

b. Timely reporting to the local authorities.

c. Increase vigilance in watch-keeping and deploy additional lookouts. Be wary of suspicious small boats approaching. Take photo of the suspicious boat and send to IFC.

d. Participate in the IFC Voluntary Community Reporting (VCR) System and provide status update, while in transit, as much as possible.

e. Use CCTV cameras for coverage of vulnerable areas (if available)

f. Keep ship's whistle, search lights and fog horn ready for immediate use.

g. Secure or lift external ladders to prevent their use and to restrict external access to the bridge.

h. Deploy Self-Protection Measures (SPM) eg. Rig the water spray hoses and foam monitors in a fixed position. Evasive manoeuvres have also been proven to deter perpetrators in the areas of concern.

i. Secure all doors and hatches providing access to the accommodation and machinery spaces.

j. Rig safety precautionary measures on the anchor cable hawse pipe while anchored.