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**Special Report  
on  
Fishing Activities  
off Southwest Coast of India**

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**ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre**  
456, Alexandra Road, #11-02  
Singapore 119962  
Tel : (65) 6376 3091  
Fax : (65) 6376 3066  
Web : <http://www.recaap.org>

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## Fishing Activities off Southwest Coast of India

### Background

1. The southwest coast of India has been a popular fishing zone where fishing seasons are subjected to two monsoons, namely the southwest monsoon and the northeast monsoon. The southwest monsoon coincides with the period of upwelling and phytoplankton bloom which results in large number of fishes and crustaceans in the area. The two largest fishing states located off the southwest coast of India are Kerala and Karnataka (see map below). **Annex A** provides the geographical description of the two fishing states.



Map showing Kerala and Karnataka

2. With the increase in incidents of piracy and attempted piracy reported in the Arabian Sea, merchant vessels are operating closer to the coast of western India. The vessels preferred to plan their passage closer to the coast of India rather than the straight course across the Arabian Sea. This had resulted in situation where fishing boats would raise the alarm and sail towards the merchant vessels to warn them from transgressing over their fishing nets/gears. Unfortunately, these fishermen and their boats were mistaken as pirates in skiffs, and resulted in unfortunate incidents where innocent fishermen were fired upon by the armed guards onboard the merchant vessels.



## Objectives of report

3. The objectives of this report are as follows:
  - a. To update the shipping community of the fishing activities off the southwest coast of India;
  - b. To enable seafarers to differentiate between innocent fishermen carrying out fishing activities in their fishing boats from Somalian pirates operating from their skiffs; and
  - c. To provide recommendations to ship masters, fishing communities and authorities when operating in the vicinity.

## Highlights of report

4. This report highlights the modus operandi of fishermen operating off the southwest coast of India, and reiterates the reporting procedures to be adopted by merchant vessels when in the area. Through the sharing of four incidents reported during January-March 2012 involving ships transiting close to the southwest coast of India, the ReCAAP ISC shares the lessons learned and provides recommendations to the shipping communities and authorities in addressing the concern of fishing boats mistook as pirates' skiffs.

## Type of fishing activities off the southwest coast of India

5. There are over 300,000 fishing boats operating off the coast of India. Fishing off the coast of Kerala and Karnataka is most intense during the post southwest monsoon and extends up to 50 nm from the coastline. Fishing activities in the area are undertaken by motorised and mechanized fishing boats. Refer to **Annex B** on the type of fishing and fishing boats used by fishermen.

6. Motorised fishing vessels with outboard motors (OBM) generally operate up to about 50-60 nm away from the coast using long line and spreading their nets for a few hours throughout the day. They would remain unlit, and do a east-west course coming to or going back from fishing grounds and criss-cross the track of the merchant ships who had in several occasions mistook them as 'threatened approach' and the fishing boats as skiffs. Upon sighting the merchant vessels approaching their fishing nets/gears, the fishermen would raise alarm and sailed towards the merchant vessels to attract their attention so as to prevent the vessels from damaging their nets/gears. There are usually about 4-5 crew onboard the fishing boats who put on some headgears which appeared to look like turbans, to protect them from the heat at sea.



7. Fishing by mechanised fishing vessels is either by trawling, or ring seiners off the Kerala coast and pre-dominantly purseining off the Karnataka coast. The purseine boats which had been confused as 'chase boats' by merchant vessels, usually towed a small boat used to lay nets. The ringseiners are mechanised boats which lay large nets up to nearly 2 km for an extended duration, would remain stationery and take several hours to recover manually. These boats operate up to 30-40 nm off the coast of Kerala. See photograph below.



Photograph of 'chase boat' towed by a fishing vessel

## Piracy incidents involving Somalia pirates (as extracted from MSCHoA)

8. Somalian pirate groups usually loiter in shipping lanes waiting for potential targets. Once they see a merchant vessel, they will approach her to establish whether the design, speed and direction of the vessel will allow them to board. If the vessel is 'unsuitable' they will continue to loiter in the area waiting for another target. Actual tactics adopted differs as it depends on where they operate. The modus operandi of the pirates operating in the Gulf of Aden, Somali Basin, and the Indian Ocean are shown in **Annex C**.

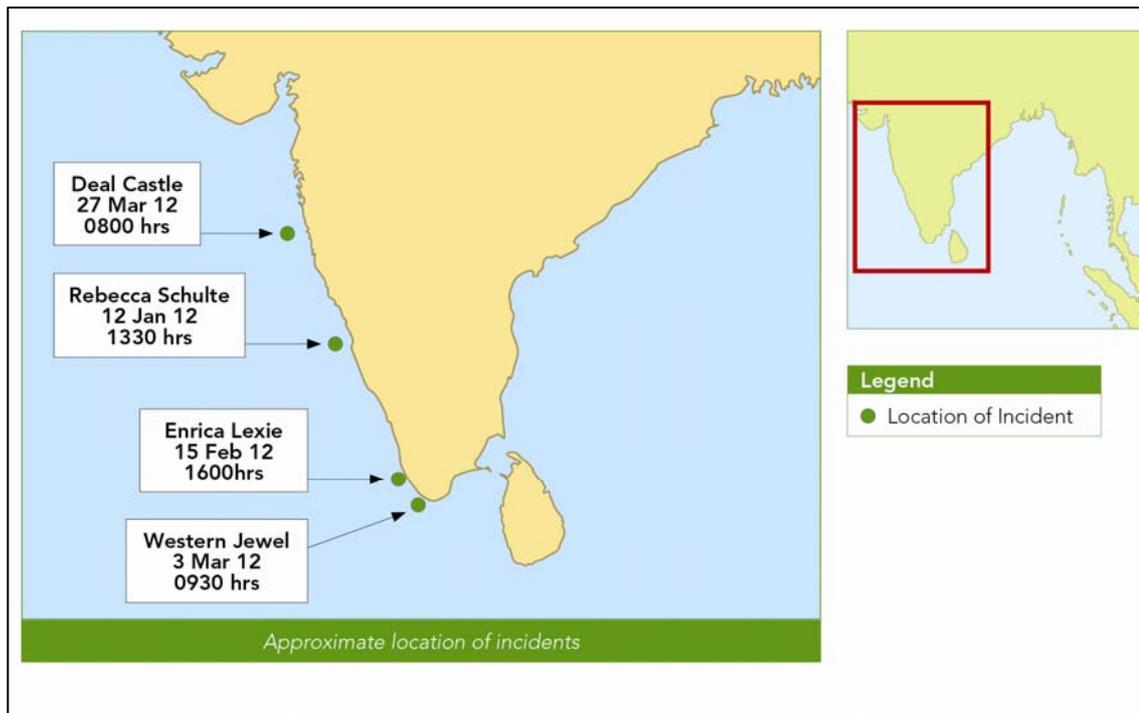
## Activities by merchant vessels

9. To avoid the High Risk Area (HRA) which starts at 12 nm from the coast, merchant vessels are transiting very close to coast. When vessels navigate close to coast, there had been occasions of vessels in close encounter with fishing boats, collision with fishing boats; and merchant vessels mistook fishermen as pirates by firing at them. Increasingly, more vessels while transiting the HRA are hiring the services of Private Maritime Security Companies (PMSCs) and Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP) onboard their vessels.



## Incidents of mistaken of identity

10. There have been reports of merchant vessels mistook fishing boats as pirates' skiffs. Between January and March 2012, a total of four such incidents were reported. Refer to location of incidents below.



Location of incidents off the southwest coast of India

11. In the incident involving tanker, *Enrica Lexie* on 15 Feb 12 which occurred off the west coast of India, Kerala; the security armed guards onboard the tanker assumed the innocent fishermen onboard the suspicious Indian mechanised fishing boat, *St Antony* to be pirates. Without verifying with the Indian authorities, the security guards fired at the fishing boat which resulted in the death of two fishermen. In another incident involving oil tanker, *Western Jewel* on 3 Mar 12 which occurred approximately 28 nm west of Kolachel Island, India; the security team onboard the merchant vessel fired warning shots at three fishing boats which they suspected to be pirates' skiffs. Fortunately, nobody was injured and the fishing boats drifted away. The fishermen lodged a complaint with the local police. The master took photograph of the skiffs which the Indian authorities had later verified that they were fishing boats. See photographs below.





Photographs courtesy of owner of *Western Jewel*

**Photographs of “suspected skiffs” taken by the master of *Western Jewel***

12. There were two other incidents of mistaken identity, and they involved chemical tanker, *Rebecca Schulte* on 12 Jan 12 at approximately 50 nm west of Mangalore, India; and the most recent incident involved general cargo ship, *Deal Castle* on 27 Mar 12 at approximately 37 nm west of Ratnagiri Lt, India. The map below shows the approximate location of the four incidents. Detailed descriptions of the incidents are in **Annex C**.

**Comparison between activities carried out by fishermen and pirates**

13. The table below shows some of the differences between fishing vessels operating in Western Indian Ocean and pirates skiffs in Somali Basin.

	Fishing Vessel in Western Indian Ocean	Pirate Skiff in Somali Basin
<b>Type of Boats</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motorised boats with OBM</li> <li>• Mechanized fishing boats</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fibre glass or wooden boat with high powered OBMs</li> <li>• Dhows</li> </ul>
<b>Appearance</b>	Generally well maintained and brightly painted	Poorly maintained
<b>Number of Crew</b>	10 to 15	4 to 6



<b>Speed</b>	8-10 knots	15-20 knots
<b>Gears on boat</b>	Fishing Gears (usually orange coloured fishing nets)	Ladders, fuel drums, hooks & weapons
<b>Modus of Operandi</b>	Carried out normal fishing and approached merchant vessel when they transgressed their fishing gears/nets	Disguise as fishing boats, and loiter in the area waiting for potential target.

## Actions carried out by the Indian authorities

14. In view of the situation off the southwest coast of India, the Directorate General of Shipping has issued a Merchant Shipping Notice 7 of 2012 dated 7 Mar 12 advising all merchant vessels to exercise caution while navigating off the Indian coast. Refer to:

[http://www.dgshipping.com/dgship/final/notices/note7\\_2012.pdf](http://www.dgshipping.com/dgship/final/notices/note7_2012.pdf)

15. All merchant vessels when transiting within the Indian EEZ are advised to abide by the revised IMO guidelines vide MSC circular 1/1405/Rev 2 dated 25 May 12 on 'Revised interim guidance to ship owners, ship operators, and ship masters on the use of privately contracted armed security personnel onboard ships in the HRA'. The MSC Circular can be found at the following:

<http://www.imo.org/OurWork/Security/SecDocs/Documents/Piracy/MSC.1-Circ.1405-Rev2.pdf>

16. All merchant vessels are advised to report sightings of suspicious craft to the nearest coastal states in accordance with MSC circular MSC.1/Circ.1334 dated 23 Jun 09 on "Guidance to ship owners, ship operators, ship masters and crew on preventing and suppressing acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships". The MSC Circular can be found at <http://www.imo.org/OurWork/Security/SecDocs/Documents/Piracy/MSC.1-Circ.1334.pdf>. The contact details of the relevant Indian authorities comprising the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) or the Indian Navy are as follows:

Organisation	Contact details
Indian Coast Guard	<a href="mailto:mrcc-west@indiancoastguard.nic.in">mrcc-west@indiancoastguard.nic.in</a> <a href="mailto:icgmrcc_mumbai@mtnl.net">icgmrcc_mumbai@mtnl.net</a> Telephone: +91-22-24388065
Indian Navy	<a href="mailto:wncmocmb-navy@nic.in">wncmocmb-navy@nic.in</a> Telefax: +91-22-22661702



17. The Indian authorities are considering the promulgation of fishing zones in the western seaboard of the Indian EEZ; and demarcation of a dedicated Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) for merchant vessels transiting close to the west coast of India.

## Recommendations

18. Based on the fishing activities off the southwest coast of India, the modus operandi of the pirates and the lessons learned from the four incidents as mentioned in paragraphs 11 and 12, the ReCAAP ISC and the ICG which is also the ReCAAP Focal Point (India) proposes the following recommendations:

(i) To ship masters

- Maintain enhanced vigilance and watch keeping while transiting close to coast.
- Apprise of the dense fishing traffic off the southwest coast of India, and the possibility that they may be approached by fishing boats for safeguarding their nets/lines
- Navigate with extreme caution when approaching up to 50 nm from the Indian coast.
- Take cognizance of IMO circular MSC 1/1334 dated 23 Jun 09 with regard to appreciating sufficient grounds for suspecting the fishing vessel to be a Pirate Action Group (PAG).
- Should not presume fishing boats are pirate skiffs or PAGs without verification.
- Report sighting of any suspicious craft within Indian EEZ to Indian Coast Guard on contact details as mentioned in paragraph 16.
- Report presence of Armed Guards onboard to Indian Navy or Indian Coast Guard in accordance with the IMO guidelines vide MSC circular 1/1405/Rev 1 dated 16 Sep 11.
- Differentiate between normal fishing activity and suspicious piracy activity by considering the following factors:
  - The number of crew onboard the vessel relative to its size



- The existence of unusual and non-fishing equipment, for example presence of ladders (*fishermen don't use ladders*), climbing hooks or large amounts of fuel/fuel drums
- Sighting of arms/weapons onboard and if weapons are discharged
- Observe fishing boat to determine if she has pursued for a longer duration, and not keeping with normal fishing or other circumstances prevailing in the area.

(ii) To fishing communities

- Don't close in to merchant vessels or make aggressive approach.
- Adequate lighting onboard boat to identify during the period of darkness.
- Identify themselves upon request and clearly display registration number of boats, name of boats and consider flying the national flag.
- Maintain an alert watch while engaging in fishing operations and approaching merchant vessel.
- Report suspicious vessels that use traditional fishing areas as cover to intercept merchant vessels.

(iii) To authorities

- Carry out enhanced patrolling and maritime enforcement presence in areas of reported activities to deter the pirates/robbers and deny usage of navigable waters for piracy and sea robbery.
- Engage the shipping/fishing community extensively, more so to enhance awareness and build mutual confidence. This would further facilitate better information sharing between ReCAAP Focal Points and the shipping community.
- Be prompt in reacting to reports by ship owners, ship operators and ship masters. This aids in confidence building and better exchange of information between the authorities and shipping community.



- Conduct outreach programmes to the coastal community to enhance awareness of the ill effects of piracy and sea robbery, and encourage them to report any suspicious activity in the community to the authorities.

## Conclusion

19. The ReCAAP ISC and the ReCAAP Focal Point (India) will provide updates on the fishing activities off the southwest of India, and highlight the differences between fishing boats and pirates skiffs operating in the area. These inputs together with the proposed recommendations to ship masters, crew, fishing communities and the authorities, are aimed at addressing the concerns of fishing boats mistook as pirates' skiffs.

Prepared by the ReCAAP ISC  
In consultation with the Indian Coast Guard

29 May 2012



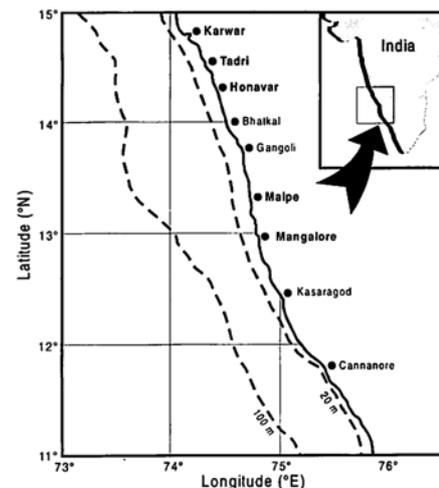
## Annex A

### Geographical description of Kerala and Karnataka

Located off the southwest coast of India, the State of Kerala and Karnataka are key fishing areas with a total of 220 and 28 fishing landing centres respectively. The detailed descriptions of the two States are as follows:

a. **Kerala**. The state of Kerala has a coastline of 590 km with an EEZ of about 218,536 km and a continental shelf of 39,139 sq km. The profile of the shelf is with uniform gradient up to 80 metres in depth. There are nearly 275 fishing villages and 220 landing centres for fish landing. It constitutes nearly 26% of the west coast coastline of India. The state ranks first in marine fish production of India forming nearly 25% (average 575,000 tonnes) of the total annual production. There are about 20,000 motorised craft and 2,600 mechanised fishing vessels operating in the Kerala state.

b. **Karnataka**. The state of Karnataka has a coastline 320 km and constitutes nearly 15 % of the coastline with numerous river mouths, lagoons, bays, creeks and a few islands. The continental shelf extends up to 50 nm and breaks between 90-120 m in depth. There are 28 fish landing centres in the state. Mangalore and Malpe in South Karnataka and Karwar in the north are main landing centres, primarily catered for 3,316 mechanised fleet. The mechanised fishing vessels operate up to seven days in a multi-day fishing of up to 100 m deep. The main types of fishing are by purseine, trawling and gillnetting. There are 5,300 motorised vessels and about 5,500 traditional boats in the State.



### Types of Fishing and Fishing Boats Used by Fishermen

1. Motorised. Due to rapid motorisation of the indigenous crafts with OBMs made the traditional sector more efficient, and extension of their fishing activity into deeper waters up to nearly 60 nm from the coastline in Kerala coast. The type of boats with a huge size of net to exploit the



pelagic resources have net of size up to 450-1000 m and a large number of crew of about 10-15 onboard with multiple OBMs and OBM of up to 120 HP fitted. Due to growing demand, this resulted in the mechanised fishing fleet extending their hours of fishing and enhanced fishing operations are carried out by the motorised sector especially the ring seiners. The mechanised fishing vessels are engaged in trawling and gillnetting and very few are purseiners.

2. Mechanised fishing boats. The mechanised fishing vessels pre-dominantly carry out fishing by trawling and gillnetting off the Kerala and Karnataka coasts. However, purseine fishing is predominantly carried out off the coast of Karnataka.





Type of fishing boats



## Annex C

### Piracy incidents involving the Somalia pirates

Gulf of Aden. Pirates use small skiffs to launch their attacks. They often use fibre glass or wooden skiffs powered by two OBM (40-80bhp, one in reserve) which are capable of carrying enough pirates and their equipment to launch an attack on a merchant vessel. The skiffs are not capable of carrying a lot of fuel or stores, although it is common to see many fuel cans on the floor of the skiff or for them to work in pairs where one skiff carries the pirates and another skiff carries the fuel and equipment. However, their small size and lack of cover make the skiffs more vulnerable to poor weather conditions.

Somali Basin and Indian Ocean. Due to the greater distances between shore and the Indian Ocean, the pirates use larger ships and fishing dhows which serve as mother ships. These mother ships (which may themselves had previously been hijacked) are used to re-supply the skiffs and to transport them and the pirates out to the target areas. They will try to disguise themselves as normal fishing boats or other vessels normally found in the area.

Boarding and Seizing. The pirates will manoeuvre their skiffs to a point where they can gain access to the deck. About 3-6 pirates will board the ship whilst others remain in the skiff covering them with their weapons and ready to pick up any who should fall overboard. Upon boarding, the pirates will make their way quickly to the bridge to capture the crew and take control of the ship. In the Gulf of Aden, a hijacking incident can be over within minutes compared to hours for the incident to take place in the Somali Basin and the Indian Ocean. The urgency of the attack is linked to the pirates' perception of the proximity of the anti-piracy naval forces in the area. Pirates may also employ distraction tactics by deploying a number of skiffs from different directions or approach, or making use of reduced visibility. In some cases, lack of vigilance by crew lead to pirates gaining access to the bridge without being noticed by the crew.

Weapons and Equipment. The pirate team is usually armed with small arms such as AK-47s and RPG rocket launchers. They will 'threaten' the ship by firing their weapons into the air. They may also fire some rounds at the bridge. Pirate hijack teams are commonly equipped with a long ladder with hooks at the end to be attached to the deck of a vessel for boarding. Grappling hooks are also used to board the vessel.



## Incidents of Merchant Vessels Mistook Fishing Boats as Pirates' Skiffs

S/N	Ship Name Type of Ship Flag Gross Tonnage IMO Number	Date, Time Location	Description of Incident	Remarks
1.	<i>Rebecca Schulte</i> Chemical tanker Singapore 19793 9576753	12 Jan 12 1330 hrs(LT)  13° 19.10' N, 074° 08.30' E  Approximately 50 nm west of Mangalore, India	While <i>Rebecca Schulte</i> was underway from Galle to Salalah, the master spotted a skiff with five persons and a mother ship towing a grey skiff at approximately 2 nm on her starboard side.  The master reported that the skiff did not execute any boarding attempts upon seeing the armed guards onboard and subsequently drifted away. There were no exchanges of gunfire.	Inputs from the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) revealed that on 12 Jan 12, an ICG aircraft was on patrol from 1120 hrs to 1612 hrs and had established contact with six merchant vessels in area, but no piracy activity was reported. An ICG aircraft was also launched on 13 Jan 12 between 1212 hrs and 1557 hrs and vessels transiting through the area also reported no piracy threat or any suspicious activity.



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S/N	Ship Name Type of Ship Flag Gross Tonnage IMO Number	Date, Time Location	Description of Incident	Remarks
2.	<i>Enrica Lexie</i> Tanker Italy 58418 9489297	15 Feb 12 1600hrs (LT)  09° 16.00' N, 076° 02.00' E  Approximately 20 nm southwest of Allepey Light, India	While <i>Enrica Lexie</i> was underway from Singapore to Egypt, she was approached by a suspected fishing boat named <i>St. Antony</i> .  Suspected it to be a pirate skiff, the boarding team onboard fired warning shots resulting in two casualties.	The security team onboard <i>Enrica Lexie</i> fired at suspicious Indian mechanized fishing boat, <i>St Antony</i> , which resulted in two casualties. The vessel failed to inform the MRCC (Mumbai)/MRSC (Kochi), but continued her voyage without informing the coastal State about the incident. MRCC Mumbai located the vessel by AIS-SB plot and established communication with the master when the vessel had transited 38 nm from the position of the incident. <i>Enrica Lexie</i> was asked to proceed to Kochi anchorage for further investigation. The vessel had reportedly resorted to direct firing on the fishing boat rather than using other tactics to evade purported piracy attack which included evasive manoeuvres, or making a water wall as prescribed in BMP 4, but instead adopt the use of force for defensive purposes.
3.	<i>Western Jewel</i> Crude Oil Tanker Singapore 164251 9045467	3 Mar 12 0930hrs(LT)  07° 57.00' N, 076° 47.00' E  Approximately 28 nm west of Kolachel Island, India	While underway, the tanker sighted three suspected 'skiffs'. The master initiated evasive manoeuvres and all crew proceeded to the citadel.  When the suspected 'skiffs' closed to 200 m, the security teams onboard fired warning shots and the 'skiffs' drifted away. The master reported the incident	The vessel did not report the incident to the coastal State. Upon close examination of the photographs provided by the master, the 'skiffs' were indeed normal Indian fishing boats.  The two fishing boats returned to harbour and filed a FIR with the Marine Police Station Colachel, Kanyakumari Tamilnadu, regarding the firing of warning shots by the vessel.



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S/N	Ship Name Type of Ship Flag Gross Tonnage IMO Number	Date, Time Location	Description of Incident	Remarks
			<p>to the Port Operation Control Centre, Singapore.</p> <p>The master reported that no weapon was sighted onboard the 'skiffs' and believed that the 'skiffs' were not Indian-registered. He also added that the people onboard the 'skiffs' worn red/white overalls with yellow turbans.</p>	
4.	<i>Deal Castle</i> General Cargo St Vincent and Grenadines 17098 8220230	27 Mar 12 0800hrs(LT)  17° 03.00' N, 072° 39.00' E  Approximately 37 nm west of Ratnagiri Lt, India	The master of the vessel reported that a suspicious looking mother vessel lowered some persons into a 'skiff' and the 'skiff' followed the <i>Deal Castle</i> . The master altered course, increased speed and enforced anti-piracy measures and escaped.	Communication was established with the vessel when she was within the Indian EEZ. It was later confirmed that the suspicious craft was a fishing vessel engaged in purseining fishing which generally has a small boat towed for laying nets. The same was been explained to the master and assured that the ICG ship and aircraft were in area and there were no suspicious activities.

