

IN REM AND PERSONAM ACTIONS

Admiralty law governs legal matters pertaining to maritime commerce and navigation within India's territorial waters and exclusive economic zone. It establishes a framework for resolving disputes arising from seafaring activities and ensures the smooth functioning of the maritime industry.

Key Concepts

High Court Admiralty Jurisdiction: The Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Act, 2017, empowers specific High Courts (those established under the Letters Patent, 1865, and others designated by the central government) to adjudicate maritime claims. These claims encompass a broad spectrum of maritime issues, including:

Carriage of goods and passengers by sea

Collisions between vessels

Salvage operations

Damage to maritime property

Maritime liens (privileged claims against a ship)

Marine insurance

Charterparty disputes

Marine pollution

Other maritime transactions

Actions in Rem and In Personam: Admiralty law recognizes two primary types of legal proceedings:

Action in Rem: A lawsuit filed against a vessel itself to recover a debt or enforce a maritime lien. The vessel becomes a defendant in the legal process, and its arrest may be ordered to secure the claim.

Action in Personam: A lawsuit brought directly against a person (owner, operator, etc.) involved in a maritime claim. This action seeks to hold the individual liable for damages or breach of contract.

Arrest of Vessels: Under Section 5 of the 2017 Act, a High Court may authorize the arrest of a vessel within its jurisdiction under specific circumstances. This typically occurs to secure a maritime claim or prevent the vessel from leaving Indian waters until the claim is resolved.

Maritime Liens: A maritime lien is a legal right that attaches to a vessel, granting the lienholder a privileged claim on the vessel's value to satisfy a maritime debt. Examples of maritime liens include:

Salvage claims

Wages of crew members

Collision damages caused by the vessel

Supplies and repairs provided to the vessel

Case Law

Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited vs. m.v. Kapitan Kud (1986): The Supreme Court upheld the admiralty action in rem against a foreign ship to secure a claim, highlighting the importance of arrest to prevent the vessel from leaving and potentially evading liability.

Section 5 of the Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Act, 2017 sets out action in rem

5. (1) The High Court may order arrest of any vessel which is within its jurisdiction for the purpose of providing security against a maritime claim which is the subject of an admiralty proceeding, where the court has reason to believe that:

(a) the person who owned the vessel at the time when the maritime claim arose is liable for the claim and is the owner of the vessel when the arrest is effected; or

(b) the demise charterer of the vessel at the time when the maritime claim arose is liable for the claim and is the demise charterer or the owner of the vessel when the arrest is effected; or

(c) the claim is based on a mortgage or a charge of the similar nature on the vessel; or

(d) the claim relates to the ownership or possession of the vessel; or

(e) the claim is against the owner, demise charterer, manager or operator of the vessel and is secured by a maritime lien as provided in section 9.

(2) The High Court may also order arrest of any other vessel for the purpose of providing security against a maritime claim, in lieu of the vessel against which a maritime

claim has been made under this Act, subject to the provisions of sub-section (1):

Provided that no vessel shall be arrested under this sub-section in respect of a maritime claim under clause (a) of sub-section (1) of section 4.

Section 6 of the Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Act, 2017 sets out action in personam

6. Subject to section 7, the High Court may exercise admiralty jurisdiction by action in personam in respect of any maritime claim referred to in clauses (a) to (w) of sub-section (1) of section 4.

Section 7 of the Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Act, 2017 sets out the restrictions on actions in personam in certain cases.

7. (1) Where any maritime claim arising in respect of a damage or loss of life or personal injury arising out of any.

(i) collision between vessels,

(ii) the carrying out of or omission to carry out, a manoeuvre in the case of one or more vessels,

(iii) non-compliance, on the part of one or more vessels, with the collision regulations made in pursuance of section 285 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, the High Court shall not entertain any action under this section against any defendant unless.

(a) the cause of action, wholly or in part, arises in India; or

(b) the defendant, at the time of commencement of the action by the High Court, actually and voluntarily resides or carries on business or personally works for gain in India:

Provided that an action may be entertained in a case, where there are more defendants than one and where one of the defendants who does not actually and voluntarily reside or carry on business or personally work for gain in India is made a party to such action either with the leave of the court, or each of the defendants acquiesces in such action.

(2) The High Court shall not entertain any action in personam to enforce a claim to which this section applies until any proceedings previously brought

by the plaintiff in any court outside India against the same defendant in respect of the same incident or series of incidents have been discontinued or have otherwise come to an end.

(3) The provisions of sub-section (2) shall apply to counter-claims as they apply to actions except counter-claims in proceedings arising out of the same incident or series of incidents.

(4) A reference to the plaintiff and the defendant for the purpose of sub-section (3) shall be construed as reference to the plaintiff in the counter-claim and the defendant in the counter-claim respectively.

(5) The provisions of sub-sections (2) and (3) shall not apply to any action or counterclaim if the defendant submits or agrees to submit to the jurisdiction of the High Court.

(6) Subject to the provisions of sub-section (2), the High Court shall have jurisdiction to entertain an action in personam to enforce a claim to which this section applies whenever any of the conditions specified, in clauses (a) and (b) of sub-section (1) is satisfied and any law for the time being in force relating to the service of process outside the jurisdiction shall apply.

An action in rem is directed towards a ship rather than against a person (which is an in personam or personal action).

A personal action may be brought against the defendant if he is either present in the country or submits to the jurisdiction. If the foreign owner of an arrested ship appears before the court and deposits security as bail for the release of his ship against which proceedings in rem have been instituted, he submits himself to jurisdiction.

An action in rem is directed against the ship itself to satisfy the claim of the plaintiff out of the res. The ship is for this purpose treated as a person. Such

an action may constitute an inducement to the owner to submit to the jurisdiction of the court, thereby making himself liable to be proceeded against by the plaintiff in personam. It is however, imperative in an action in rem that the ship should be within jurisdiction at the time the proceedings are started. A decree of the court in such an action binds not merely the parties to the writ but everybody in the world at large who might dispute the plaintiff's claim.

It is by means of an action in rem that the arrest of a particular ship is secured by the plaintiff. He does not sue the owner directly and by name; but the owner or any one interested in the proceedings may appear and defend. The writ is issued to the "owner and parties interested in the property proceeded against." A maritime lien is a privileged claim against the ship or a right to a part of the property in the ship, and it "travels" with the ship. Because the ship has to "pay for the wrong it has done", it can be compelled to do so by forced sale. In addition to maritime liens, a ship is liable to be arrested in enforcement of statutory rights in rem. If the owner does not submit to the jurisdiction and appear before the court to put in bail and release the ship, she is liable to be condemned and sold to satisfy the claims against her. If, however, the owner submits to jurisdiction and obtains the release of the ship by depositing security, he becomes personally liable to be proceeded against in personam in execution of the judgment if the amount decreed exceeds the amount of the bail. The arrest of the foreign ship by means of an action in rem is thus a means of assuming jurisdiction by the competent court.

The admiralty action in rem, is unknown to the civil law. In countries following the civil law, all proceedings are initiated by actions in personam. The Court having competence in the matter has the power to order an attachment of the ship if it is convinced that the plaintiff is likely to lose his security unless the ship is detained within the jurisdiction. Its hands are not fettered by the technicalities of an action in rem and the scopes of the proceedings are not limited to maritime liens or claims. According to the

French law, arrest of a ship is allowed even in respect of non-maritime claims and whether or not the claimant is a secured or unsecured creditor. A vessel may be arrested either for the purpose of immobilising the vessel as security (Saisie Conservatoire) or in execution of judgment (Saisie Execution) whether or not the claim has any relation to the vessel. Arrest of the vessel has the advantage of forcing the owner to furnish security to guarantee satisfaction of any decree that may be passed against him. On furnishing sufficient security with the Court, he is usually allowed to secure the release of the vessel.

The real purpose of arrest is to obtain security as a guarantee for satisfaction of the decree, although arrest is the basis of assumption of jurisdiction, unless the owner has submitted to jurisdiction. In any event, once the arrest is made and the owner has entered his appearance, the proceedings continue in personam. All actions in the civil law- whether maritime or not- are in personam, and arrest of a vessel is permitted under the provision of the act, and the vessel is treated as any other property of the owner, and its very presence within jurisdiction is sufficient to clothe a competent high court with admiralty jurisdiction over the owner in respect of any claim. Admiralty actions, whether in rem or in personam, are confined to well defined maritime liens or claims and directed against the res (ship, cargo and freight) which is the subject-matter of the dispute or any other ship in the same beneficial ownerships as the res in question.

Where statutes are silent and remedy has to be sought by recourse to basic principles, it is the duty of the court to devise procedural rules by analogy and expediency. Action in rem, as seen above, were resorted to by courts as a device to overcome the difficulty of personal service on the defendant by compelling him to enter appearance and accept service of summons with a view to furnish security for the release of the res; or, in his absence, proceed against the res itself, by attributing to it a personality for the purpose of entering a decree and executing the same by sale of the res. This is a practical procedural device developed by the courts with a view to rendering justice in

accordance with substantive law not only in cases of collision and salvage, but also in cases of other maritime liens and claims arising by reason of breach of contract for the hire of vessels or the carriage of goods or other maritime transactions, or tortious acts, such as conversion or negligence occurring in connection with the carriage of goods. Where substantive law demands justice for the party aggrieved, and the statute has not provided the remedy, it is the duty of the court to devise procedure by drawing analogy from other systems of law and practice. To the courts of the "civil law countries" in Europe and other places, like problems seldom arise, for all persons and things within their territories (including their waters) fall within their competence to deal with. They do not have to draw any distinction between an action in rem and an action in personam.

It is likewise within the competence of the appropriate Indian Courts to deal, in accordance with the general principles of maritime law and the applicability of provisions of statutory law, with all persons and things found within their jurisdiction. The power of the court is plenary and unlimited unless it is expressly or by necessary implication curtailed. In the absence of such curtailment of jurisdiction, all remedies, which are available to the courts to administer justice, are available to a claimant against a foreign ship and its owner found within the jurisdiction of the concerned High Court. This power of the court to render justice must necessarily include the power to make interlocutory orders for arrest and attachment before judgment.

The High Courts in India are superior courts of record. They have original and appellate jurisdiction. They have inherent and plenary powers. Unless expressly or impliedly barred, and subject to the appellate or discretionary jurisdiction of the Court, the High Courts have unlimited jurisdiction, including the jurisdiction to determine their own power.

A person who, maliciously and without reasonable and probable cause procures the arrest of a ship by Admiralty proceedings is liable to pay damages to the person aggrieved. A separate suit has to be filed for wrongful arrest proving malicious cause. Wrongful arrest may result in the condemnation of the claimant for damages only where the court is satisfied that the arrest was motivated by mala fides (bad faith) or crassa negligentia (gross negligence). Merely unjustified (i.e. erroneous) arrest would not normally entitle the defendant to claim damages, although he might then be able to recover costs.

The safeguarding of ownership/private property rights when ships are arrested in rem by the Admiralty Court are built into the rules of the High Court having admiralty jurisdiction for ship arrest. For example, a party wishing to prevent the arrest of property in an action in rem may, by filing a praecipe in the prescribed form, obtain the entry of a caveat against arrest in the caveat book kept in the Admiralty Registry/ Prothonotary & Senior Master of the High Court. Although the entry of the caveat does not prevent arrest of the res, the caveator, on a subsequent motion after arrest, may obtain the discharge of the arrest warrant and the condemnation of the arresting party in damages, if the latter is unable to show "good and sufficient reason" for having arrested.

Where a foreign ship registered in a port of a country having a consulate in jurisdiction of the High Court where arrest application is sought /is to be arrested in India in an action in rem for wages, prior notice of the arrest must be given to the consul concerned.

In the decision of the Supreme Court in *Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited -vs- m.v. Kapitan Kud* (1986) the court observed that the admiralty action is an action in rem and that there is strong triable case. The ship is a foreign ship and if it leaves the shores of Indian territorial waters it is difficult to get hold of it and it may not return to the jurisdiction of Indian courts. The claim

thereby, even if successful, would remain unexecutable or land in trouble in private international law in its enforcement. Under these circumstances, we are of the firm opinion that the vessel may be released on the certain conditions..., viz., [i] the respondent shall deposit a sum of Rs.10 crores; [ii] the Ukrainian Government shall give an undertaking through its accredited authority, more particularly may be its Ambassador attached to its Embassy in India in writing duly undertaking that in the event of the suit being decreed they would comply with the decree without reference to the execution; [iv] the undertaking should be for balance amount of Rs.18 crores and towards costs and other expenses roughly put at Rs.25 crores. It would be open to them to comply with these directions at any time. We are not fixing any time limit because it would be open to them to comply with it at any time and until then the ship shall remain arrested and shall not leave the shores of the Indian territorial waters. On deposit of Rs.10 crores and on furnishing of undertakings to the satisfaction of the Division Bench of the High Court, as stated above, the High Court would give appropriate direction for releasing the vessel in accordance with law.

In *m.v. Kapitan Kud* the Supreme court also observed that whether the appellant (VSNL) has made out *prima facie* case. Rules on Admiralty Jurisdiction in Part III were framed by Bombay High Court to regulate the procedure and practice thereof on the original side of the Bombay High Court. Equally, Original Side Rule 941 is relevant in this regard which provides that party applying under this rule in a suit *in rem* for arrest of the property shall give an undertaking in writing or through advocate to pay such sum by way of damages as the court may award as compensation in the event of a party affected sustaining prejudice by such order. In *Mahadeo Savlaram Shelke & Ors. v. Pune Municipal Corporation & Anr.* [(1995) 3 SCC 33], even in case of civil court, exercising its power under order 39 Rule 1, this Court held that while granting interim injunction, the Civil Court or Appellate Court is enjoined to impose as a condition that in the event of the plaintiff failing to prove the case set up and if damages are caused to the defendant

due to the injunction granted by the court, the court would first ascertain whether the plaintiff would adequately be compensated by damages if injunction is not granted. Equally the court should also impose condition for payment of damages caused to the defendant in the same proceeding without relegating the parties for a separate suit. The plaintiff should give such an undertaking as a part of the order itself. Rule 954 of Admiralty Rules provides that subject to the provisions of Rule 952 [caveat property not to be released unless notice is given to the caveator], property arrested under a warrant may be ordered to be released - [i] at the request of the plaintiff, before an appearance in person or a vakalatnama is filed by the defendant; or [ii] on the defendant paying into Court the amount claimed in the suit; or [iii] on the defendant giving such security for the amount claimed in the suit as the Court may direct; or [iv] on any other ground that the Court may deem just. Thus a ship arrested under warrant maybe released on fulfillment of any of the conditions mentioned hereinbefore. This could be done on the plaintiff showing prima facie best case.

Action in rem is an action against a thing, good or against certain property (ship or cargo) rather than a person. By proceeding against a res a plaintiff obtains security for his claim, the res may be arrested by the court and sold to satisfy a judgment in rem against it. An action may be brought in rem provided the property proceeded against (the res) is within the jurisdiction.

The jurisdiction conferred by this Act on the High Court of Admiralty may be exercised either by proceedings in rem or by proceedings in personam.

An action in personam is an ordinary action as in common law courts.

In Halsbury's Laws of England, the nature of action in rem and the nature of action in personam at para 310 is stated to be as -Nature of actions in rem and actions in personam. - An action in rem is an action against the ship itself but the view that if the owners of the vessel do not enter an appearance in the suit in order to defend their property no personal liability can be established

against them has recently been questioned. It has been stated that, if the defendant enters an appearance, an action in rem becomes, or continues also as, an action in personam; but the Admiralty jurisdiction of the High Court may now in all cases be invoked by an action in personam, although this is subject to certain restrictions in the case of collision and similar cases, except where the defendant submits or agrees to submit to the jurisdiction of the Court.

The foundation of an action in rem is the lien resulting from the personal liability of the owner of the res. Thus an action in rem cannot be brought to recover damages for injury caused to a ship by the malicious act of the master of the defendant's ship, or for damage done at a time when the ship was in the control of third parties by reason of compulsory requisition. On the other hand, in several cases, ships allowed by their owners to be in the possession and control of charterers have been successfully proceeded against to enforce liens which arose whilst the ships were in control of such third parties.

The defendant in an Admiralty action in personam is liable, as in other actions in the High Court, for the full amount of the plaintiff's proved claim. Equally in an action in rem a defendant who appears is now liable for the full amount of the judgment even though it exceeds the value of the res or of the bail provided. The right to recover damages may however be affected by the right of the defendant to the benefit of statutory provisions relating to limitation of liability."

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Section 35 of the Admiralty Courts Act, 1861, 24 Vict. c.10 reads "The jurisdiction conferred by this Act on the High Court of Admiralty may be exercised either by proceedings in rem or by proceedings in personam. [Jurisdiction of the Court]".

Summary of Actions in Rem and In Personam

Action in Rem: This is a proceeding directly against the vessel (or other maritime property), where the vessel itself is treated as the defendant. The aim is to secure a maritime claim by arresting the vessel to prevent its departure or disposal. Such actions often involve maritime liens or claims related to the ownership, operation, or damages caused by the vessel. The primary purpose of an action in rem is to satisfy the plaintiff's claim from the value of the vessel. Arrest of the vessel induces the owner to submit to the court's jurisdiction, offering security for the claim, often leading to a negotiated settlement.

Action in Personam: In contrast, an action in personam is brought directly against a person (e.g., the vessel's owner, operator, or charterer) to hold them liable for damages or breach of maritime obligations. The proceedings are similar to other civil actions, where the claimant seeks relief from a specific individual or entity. However, the High Court's admiralty jurisdiction to entertain such actions is limited by various conditions, including the presence of the defendant in the country or their submission to the jurisdiction.

Jurisdiction and Procedure

The Admiralty (Jurisdiction and Settlement of Maritime Claims) Act, 2017, empowers the High Courts to exercise admiralty jurisdiction for maritime claims through both actions in rem and actions in personam. Sections 5 and 6 of the Act provide clear guidelines on when and how these actions may be instituted, with Section 5 focusing on arresting vessels as a security measure and Section 6 addressing claims brought against individuals.

The process of an admiralty action, particularly in rem, plays a crucial role in ensuring that maritime claimants have a secure means of pursuing their claims, especially against foreign vessels that might otherwise escape jurisdiction. Arresting a vessel is not only a means to assume jurisdiction but also serves as a powerful tool to compel foreign owners to provide security for claims, ensuring that the claimant's interests are protected during litigation.

Through admiralty actions, courts ensure that maritime disputes are resolved effectively, balancing the rights of the claimants with the protection of maritime commerce and ownership rights.