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**Three years after 26/11, govt to Kick-start coastal radar chain**

Rajat Pandit, TNN. September 12, 2011 0438am IST

**NEW DELHI:** A decade after it was first mooted and three years after the 26/11 terror strikes in Mumbai, the government is now finally scrambling to kick-start the static coastal radar chain and the national AIS (automatic identification system) network to dynamically detect and track suspicious vessels entering Indian waters.

The long-delayed contract for coastal radars, which will be manufactured by defence PSU Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) in collaboration with a foreign firm, was inked last week. "The contract is worth Rs 601.77 crore. Under it, 36 coastal radars will be installed in the mainland, six in Lakshadweep and Minicoy Islands and four in Andaman and Nicobar Islands," said an official.

Even though it sounds pretty ambitious, the plan is to have the radar chain for the mainland up and running in a year, with the island ones scheduled to become operational six months after that.

"Apart from existing lighthouses on which the radars with electro-optic sensors will be installed, 13 towers are being constructed on the mainland for them. Phase-II of the project, with 37 additional radars, will follow thereafter," the official said.

"The overall Phase-II of the coastal security plan, with additional force-levels for Navy and Coast Guard, in fact, has also been finalized. It will soon be sent to the Cabinet Committee on Security for the final nod," he added.

The AIS network, under a Rs 132 crore contract inked with ELCOME Marine India in collaboration with Swedish SAAB Transponder Tech Ltd, in turn, will see a pilot project being established in Gujarat by October-November. "In all, 84 AIS stations will be progressively set up under this," said another official.

The critical radar chain and the 84 networked AIS stations, backed by adequate manpower and

infrastructure, will provide "gapless surveillance cover" along the coast, say officials.

All such long-range identification and tracking systems will mesh together under the upcoming National C3I (command, control, communication and intelligence) Network. Linking 51 nodes of Navy and Coast Guard to achieve a "common operational picture", this comprehensive maritime intelligence grid is slated for completion by 2012-2013.

Absence of coastal radars in "its drift path", incidentally, was one of the main reasons cited by an embarrassed government to explain how the abandoned merchant vessel MT Pavit slipped through the three-tier coastal security ring to run aground on Mumbai's shore on July 31.

There has certainly been a huge jump in physical surveillance by naval and Coast Guard aircraft and warships but it has flopped in backing them with electronic snooping measures as well as capacity-building in terms of "assets and manpower".



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