

AMETIAP in India 2004: Coping with Change

“Training The Asian Seafarer for Future Employment” – A summary of events at the Conference held on 21st February 2004 at “The Renaissance”, Mumbai.

Awareness of the need to pay far more attention to the human resource in international shipping quickly developed as the underlying theme for the AMETIAP in India “Training the Asian Seafarer for Future Employment” 2004 conference, held in Mumbai on 21 February. Over 100 participants from India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom expressed deep concern about the inadequate attention given to the ‘liveware’ aspects of the industry and the need for this to be quickly addressed.

After the very welcoming formal opening by the Chief Guest Captain P S Barve, formerly Nautical Adviser to the Government of India, the stage was set by Mr Ajoy Chatterjee, Chief Surveyor of Shipping, with his presentation on the project to grade maritime education and training (MET) institutions in India, introduced at the beginning of the year. This project is in response to the rapid growth resulting in close to 130 MET institutions in India, nearly all of which are privately run.

This was followed by Captain Darrel J Silva, Director of Marine Operations at the Colombo International Navigation and Engineering College (CINEC), who described the work of his institution in preparing the Sri Lankan seafarer for the next 10 years; training which emphasises doing the right thing, the right way at the right time. The recruitment video shown by Captain Silva is an excellent example of how maritime training can be publicized.

Dr P Misra, Deputy Chief Surveyor of Shipping, then built on Mr Chatterjee’s presentation by focusing on the aim to benchmark seafarers using competency ratings and optimizing those ratings, to readily lead to further academic or professional careers, a development desired by many Indian seafarers. The need to counter the serious attrition rate was stressed. With the impending establishment of a National Maritime University, a new perception of the careers seafaring can lead to will be generated.

Mr Karl Lumbers, a Director of the UK P&I Club, gave an underwriter’s view of human factors, claims for which, if extrapolated across the industry, approximate US\$1.5 million per day. The need to raise awareness and to focus on latent failures, on situations instead of people, on seeing errors as consequences instead of causes and on aiming at preventing the next error rather than the last, were stressed and illustrated by many pictures which captured the very human ‘human factors’ with humour and realism.

Dr Helen Sampson, Director of the Seafarers International Research Centre, Cardiff University, described research on MET in the Asia Pacific which looked at employer and MET staff perceptions and the question of standards alongside issues of inequality. It was found that employers regarded standards as highly variable and a major part of the differences relates to resource levels. In addition, STCW has not achieved the needed level of standardization, the best companies having to resort to ‘topping up’ training.

Captain Pradeep Chawla, Director, QA & Training, Anglo Eastern Ship Management, continued the human element theme with his presentation on 'Alert', the International Maritime Human Element Bulletin, which is a Nautical Institute project sponsored by Lloyd's Register EMEA. Captain Chawla delivered a strong call for all to assist in raising awareness of the human element in the maritime industry. On behalf of the Nautical Institute, AMETIAP distributed copies of the latest issue of 'Alert' to conference participants.

Captain S C Sood, Managing Director, IMS Ship Management and former Chairman of FOSMA, in expressing the view of the foreign shipowners, emphasised the strong focus on Asian seafarers and the need for their training to be oriented toward future employment. He called for more training that prepares students to work with modern technology and for training subsidies to enable affordable delivery so as to attract talented deserving trainees.

Mr Swapan Das Sarma, Director, Singapore Maritime Academy, looked into the future in describing the SMA's leadership in the application of technology to MET. The work already done clearly showed that 'E-enabled MET' could improve the quality of management and services, reduce costs, improve pass rates and allow much greater creativity. The need for all staff in a MET institution to be able to use IT was stressed.

With the annual Sailor Today awards ceremony to follow, this AMETIAP conference was shorter than past conferences, but, again, the quality of presentation and level of participation was high. There was insufficient time to do justice to the many questions asked and points made. Many commented on the increasing activity associated with MET in India and the greater vibrancy that marked this particular conference. As with so much activity in India, considerable development is taking place and one left convinced that much was being done to ensure the future employment of Asian seafarers and of Indian seafarers in particular.

One of the most encouraging aspects of AMETIAP's involvement in India is the growing collaboration between members, especially where competitors in the student market place work together for the common purpose of increasing maritime safety and efficiency by teasing out issues and determining how they can be best addressed. The Mumbai based organizing committee, led by the Anglo Eastern Maritime Training Centre, is to be thanked for their hard work in bringing such a successful conference to fruition. It augers well for the future of maritime training in India. The Organizing committee comprised of premier maritime training institutions in Mumbai namely, O.E.R.C., FOSMA MIRO, M.M.A, M.T.I., L.B.S, Chanakya, T.S.Rahaman and AEMTC.

The Next Steps

Expressions of considerable satisfaction with the events organised by AMETIAP member institutions in India, were balanced by requests for more to be done. It was generally agreed that, rather than wait another 12 months, the next AMETIAP activity in India should be a two or three-day workshop focusing on MET e-learning for the web, to be held in Mumbai in a few months time. An organizing committee is to be formed.

It was also proposed that, early next year, the AMETIAP member institutions in India should organise another annual conference, with a strong emphasis on education that will provide seafarers with greater academic recognition and more prospects for work in other spheres of maritime activity. The maritime sector as a whole is growing rapidly. Educated, well trained people, with seafaring experience, have the potential to play a major role in the utilisation of the wealth of the oceans in a responsible manner. All involved in maritime education and training have a responsibility to ensure that those entering the shipping industry and working at sea are well prepared for employment in other sectors of maritime activity.

----- X -----

Capt. Rod Short
Executive Secretary
AMETIAP