**Is Merchant Navy Attracting the Best and the Brightest?**

Global Maritime Education and Training Association (GlobalMET) examines what it takes to have well-trained and adjusted seafarers.
- Sheila Anand.

Capt. Rod Short, in his opening address at the conference held at Textile Committee Auditorium, Mumbai, recently questioned whether shipping is really as attractive a profession as we Shippers would like to believe. The relevance of this question could sound quite ironic at a time when a leading Economic tabloid had categorically stated that the Shipping Industry contributes revenue of 8 trillion US$ to the global economy.

I personally can’t even imagine what a huge figure that is. If shipping were to stop- Would half the world starve and the other Half ...Freeze? In his defense, Capt. Short, questioned the validity of an article posted on the net with the heading: "Shipping becomes an attractive career", followed by text praising the prosperous shipping industry and it becoming a career for the brightest and the best. Capt. Rod Short speculated, "I look at this more as a question. Is this really so?" He went on to quote Capt. C.C. Tong, the former President of BIMCO who recently stated that in the Asian region and elsewhere, it is vital to tackle Sea Blindness, restore the demographic balance of the industry, improve public awareness and public perception.

Capt. Short went on to read, what he deemed ‘ alarming’ highlights of a data collected by a serving shipmaster, which claimed that levels of competency have been in a state of decline for many years and no amount of new technology will replace basic seamanship and common sense.

The data further alleged that Workers at sea will be just for the job and with little liking for it as a career and that never ending paperwork was responsible for keeping exhausted shipboard personnel from getting their rest. “Accidents are largely put down to human error. Wouldn’t you agree that these humans include the shore authorities and ship owners who place enough burden on ships crews to warrant being blamed as well. There should be training for all whether at sea or ashore.” The Captain opined.

Driving home the point he stressed that it is not wrong to feel that the industry is living in a fools paradise and should be willing to invest more in Manning, Amenities, Welfare and Education.”
Taking the debate further, Capt. K.N. Deboo, Director & Principal, Anglo Eastern Maritime Training Centre opined that as the world fleet grows at an alarming pace, Shipowners and Managers have begun to understand the importance of Human Capital.

"The Association of Maritime and Training Institutions in Asia Pacific, AMETIAP has over 100 institutions members all over the world and deserves a consultative status in IMO. STCW is up for a comprehensive review and there are many revisions which will continue till 2010. Thus it is apt to have the theme as improving MET through Reviewing STCW and Training policies." He said.

Another speaker, Capt. P. Pinto was keen that the grey area courses be given importance as well. He said that shipping has existed ever since our forefathers walked on the surface of this blue planet, father passed on information to son and so on but formal training has come very late in 1964.

"In this connection there are some bright young people who miss the career by a few marks but they are still very intelligent. The cut off points are so high in India. What can be done to train them and will the shipping companies agree? Conferences like yours must address this question." He suggested.

He further questioned if the shipping fraternity can give more mobility to ratings who are bright, earnest people with plenty of initiative?

"What about a certification process where ratings can come up to the top." Asked Pinto.

The conference was well-attended

A ‘Short’ Conversation

ATETE-A-TETE WITH CAPT. SHORT - WHO SHOT FROM THE LIP.... FASTER THAN THE FASTEST.

ON CONVERSATIONAL ICEBREAKERS

At a meeting of fairly senior bureaucrats, I sat next to a stranger who was quite a character and difficult to forget. I introduced myself with “My name is Short” and held out my hand. He replied with “Two letters, three letters, how short?”

FASCINATING INDIA

I would like to say a heartfelt thank you for bringing me back to Mumbai, Mumbai seems to be generating interesting experiences... Three years ago after travelling all the way from Australia I lost my wallet, my baggage and Capt. Deboo came to my rescue and this time there was an armed robbery in my hotel on my way to India from Sydney!!

ROAD VS. SHIPPING AS A METHOD OF TRANSPORT

We have the Roadway, we have the Highway, the Railway, the Airway and the SEAWAY.

The seaway is a freeway and it does not require maintenance.

New Zealand with its very small economic base and 4 million people cannot afford to maintain its road infrastructure as it should be able to. I put it to you that more people are saying, "Lets go back to shipping. Lets get these huge trucks off our roads. Lets invest in our ports."

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SHIPPING INDUSTRY

That is what should guide us through our discussions. We are in a Very Very Important Industry.