Retrospection at GlobalMet Conference

The falling quality in Maritime Education and Training came in for serious criticism at the Conference of the world body, GlobalMet held on 9th June 2007 at the Textile Committee Auditorium, Prabhadevi, Mumbai. The conference was attended by delegates from various countries especially from those of the Asia and Pacific region. Participants from both the administration and the shipping industry found every reason to point fingers at each other for the perceived malady that afflicted shipping in general and Maritime training in particular. Formerly known as AMETIAP; the name Global Maritime Education and Training Association (*GlobalMET*) was incorporated in Australia in 2002. This was to reflect the growing global role it played having registered more members from outside the Asia-Pacific region.

Mr Rod Short, the Executive Secretary in his address expressed concern about the declining levels of competence. He said that STCW had not achieved a universal standard which resulted in frequent cases of non-compliance. Furthermore, he felt that there was hardly any commitment to training from the industry and more often professionalism was seriously lacking in delivery of MET. GlobalMET, he affirmed, had embarked on various initiatives. "We have developed a registry of Maritime Education and Training Teachers," he said. "we have 55 already registered with us and another ten have sent in their registration."

The chief guest, Mr Michael Pinto, former Secretary of the Ministry of Shipping, Government of India, said, "It must be remembered that learning is a continuous process and this goes right through your sea career. We have not as yet come up with distance learning and this would be a big boon."  

Mr Pinto underscored the need for a training programme for ratings which would help them to rise up to the level of officers since there were many who had the initiative, drive and aspiration and would make good seafarers.

Mr N Srinivasan, Former Director of Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) highlighted the need for a clear cut division between training and certification. "Have a modular self-contained training system attached to your work place." And he added, "If you want people to join the maritime field catch them young."

It is criminalisation of seafarers which was serving as a deterrent to aspirants wanting to join the merchant navy according to Capt. Tim Wilson, Director of New Zealand Maritime School, Auckland. "GlobalMET must pursue for a consultative status on International bodies such as the IMO and others," he stated. "Besides, we must work with smaller bodies and associations to make ourselves heard. Remember we work in an industry that is quick to blame others for any fault."

Mr Ajoy Chatterjee, Chief Surveyor with the Government of India, felt that the MET did not address technical competency. "On a ship one would want a person who can actually handle the machinery of a ship and this is not possible to do only by attending a training institute. It is for this reason that I introduced the concept of Ship-in-Campus and today there are six institutes which have integrated this system in their training schemes."

According to Capt S. S. Chaudhari, lecturer from LBS College, the STCW convention and code needed to be projected in a more user-friendly manner. He declared that amendments, standards and guidance were often ambiguous and did not give specific directives. On the other hand Mr David Birwadkar, Vice President of Great Eastern Shipping Company, gave a ship-owner’s perspective on improving MET through a review of STCW and training policies. He felt the objective of training should be to improve the standards of health, safety and quality besides enhancing motivation. Training should all be geared to enhancing cargo outturn and improve quality so that ship-owners stood a better chance of obtaining higher returns on their investments.

Another ship owner’s perspective was offered by Capt Navin Passey, Managing Director of Wallem India and Wilco Ship Management Pvt Ltd. He was vocal about prevailing flaws in the examination system. "Why do people who fail in India go out and pass similar examinations conducted by overseas administrations?" he asked. "STCW does not address many issues such as leadership, working with multinational crew. There is no solution provided on manpower management, human resource aspects, etc."

On the seafarers’ part Rajendra Pradhan of Wallem Ship-Management presented his case wherein he emphasized that there were enough regulations and more stress should be laid on training than on certification. While Mr R Sunder, a researcher, cautioned that the control system always had a closed look. "In today’s technology there were plenty of tools that we should make the most of in our operations."

A different approach to MET was provided by Mr BK Saxena, Principal of Tolani Maritime Institute, Pune. He spoke at length on the key performance-indicators and now better result could be secured through self-assessment methods. On the other hand Mr PP Chugani gave his observations on a study that he conducted though a short survey.

Capt KJ Miranda, Dean of SCI ridiculed the idea of ship-in-campus as it was a costly venture and it was cheaper for cadets to get on-board experience. "Why should we not prefer our old system of on-board training?" he asked. Capt K Vivekanand, Director of Veil Goutam contended that over the past 10 years MET was locked in an impregno. "We had a glorious past and there was hope for the present but unfortunately there is no future," he informed. "There is a proliferation of institutes. There is also ISO 9000. But if you produce garbage then you will continue to produce garbage but under controlled conditions." He stated that there was a lot of pressure on certification and compliance than on competence.

This was followed by a short brainstorm session with representatives from the administration, industry, institutes and seafarers on the panel.

GlobalMET took the opportunity to salute those who had devoted their lives for the cause of education. In appreciation of their life-time service to Maritime Education and Training, seven outstanding personalities were honoured for their dedication and works. These were: Mr Inderjit Singh, Capt TK John, Mr BN Bera, Capt H Subramaniam, Mr TK Sanyal, Capt Kothurkar and Capt T Hazzari. In his acceptance, GlobalMET presented mementos to all of them.

- By Our Correspondent