The Association of Maritime Education and Training Institution in Asia Pacific (AMETIAP) that boasts of over 90 institute members across the world, held a crucial conference in Mumbai on 21\textsuperscript{st} February 2004 at the Renaissance Hotel, on the theme 'Training the Asian Seafarer for future Employment'. The Association, which has grown rapidly and has established strong links with Asian Ship-owners’ Forum and other regional and international organisations from California to the Maldives, Vladivostok to Tasmania in order to meet the rapidly growing need for maritime knowledge, drew a large participation from different countries.

Capt. K. N. Deboo, General Manager (Principal) of Anglo Eastern Maritime Training Centre welcomed the delegates and the speakers who had come from various quarters of the globe.

Capt. Rod Short, Executive Secretary of AMETIAP in his opening remarks presented an account of the activities undertaken by the organisation since inception, its objectives and outlined how these were being realised. He informed about the partnership AMETIAP had established with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and about the extent of activities that IMO has been funding.

He declared, “The maritime education and training institutions in Asia Pacific have, of their own accord, created a viable network with a major potential to assist the development of maritime education and training in the region. AMETIAP now seeks to expand and develop greater collaboration with peak bodies ASF, ILO, IMO, ISF, UNCTAD, UNESCAP, etc. and other organisations in the shipping and maritime industries, in realising this significant potential to develop a global approach to the development of high quality maritime education and training for seafarers and others employed in the maritime industry.”

As the chief guest, Dr. B. L. Mungekar, Vice Chancellor of the Mumbai University could not attend, Capt Mukherjee read his message to the august gathering. In his message Dr. Mungekar highlighted the importance of Competence based training, which he said has become indispensable.

Presiding as the Chief guest Capt P. S. Barve, Nautical Advisor (Retd) to the Government of India, in his address maintained that learning system & education is important now more than ever. “You don't have sufficient newspapers which give you the type of technical information that is desired,” he said. “When speakers use short forms how does one find the meaning? Things are changing now but the learning process never stops. Specialised ships require specialised training and much more than what is required under the STCW 95,” he asserted.

The first speaker of the first session, which was chaired by Capt. S. S. Naphade, Nautical Advisor (Retd) to the Government of India, was Mr. Ajoy Chatterjee, Chief Surveyor with the
Government of India, Directorate General of Shipping. In his speech 'Grading of Maritime Training Institutions', he gave a brief history of the development of maritime training in India. He highlighted the pioneering role played by the government run institutes for almost three quarters of the last century. It was because of the growing demand for seafarers he said that the maritime training field was thrown open to the private sector. With private institutes having flourished all over India beginning from the West, then the South of India and eventually the East and North, today he said they number over 130. But the quality of training being imparted in several of these institutes has begun to pose a problem.

"The need was felt to regulate the training and hence the introduction of the grading concept was introduced," Mr. Chatterjee said. "We are not a police organisation. We can only lay down the grading standards and expect institutes to comply. Hence three independent international agencies have been selected for benchmarking the institutes and the grading is being done on a five-point scale. This idea was mooted by me, after Mr. D. T. Joseph had taken over. It took some time to take shape but we started working on it from 2002."

Mr. Chatterjee went on to explain the details of the concept of grading the institutes, how it would be carried out, the objectives, the benefits, grading models and how it is supposed to work.

Capt. Darrel J. Silva, Director of Maritime Operations CINEC Maritime Campus, Sri Lanka talked on the 'Training being done at CINEC to prepare the Sri Lankan seafarer for the next 10 years'. He stated that there were five institutes in his country imparting training for only a limited number of courses in maritime training and only one college viz CINEC which offered the entire spectrum of training for seafarers. He pointed out that a considerable majority of Sri Lankan seafarers would have to look for employment on non-Sri Lankan owned ships. However, he showed deep concern to the turn of events wherein many seafarers were leaving the sea for shore jobs after a few years of sailing.

He advised, "The burden of preventing seafarers from leaving the sea life should not fall only upon the shoulders of the training institutes, but also on those having the requisite authority like the port state control, administration, and examiners to purge out the substandard ships that employ substandard crew, undercut comparatively expensive and quality seafarers, purge out the substandard training institutes, enforce more than minimum IMO standards related to the context of safety, environment protection, manning and working conditions of the seafarers to be improved. We at CINEC will never be satisfied with only complying with what has been said in the IMO model course because these are only guidelines and not standards."

But is it possible to reverse the trend of seafarers quitting the sea life after a short stint? Evidently not, considering that the only attraction for them happens to be the hefty pay cheque. With the crew strength having come down to just 20/22 persons the work pressure can at times be unbearable.
Talking in the same tone, Dr. P. Misra, Deputy Chief Surveyor, Directorate General of Shipping, informed about distressing news of the situation whereby a large number of trained ratings would never be able to pursue a merchant navy career. This is on account of 35 pre sea rating institutes that were annually churning out cadets in excess of 8000 or thereabouts while only a fraction of these numbering about 1400 to 1500 were being absorbed into the industry despite their having spent colossal sums of money in getting themselves trained.

Another equally disturbing bit of information he offered was about the study undertaken over a ten-year period. The observations made on completion of this study showed that for every 3000 seafarers who completed their training and went on board, only about a third stayed on continuing to work as seafarers while the remaining two-thirds possibly disillusioned by the rigours of life at sea opted out of sea-life seeking more amenable employment ashore.

The reason for this is obviously the sea changes that have taken place in seafaring activities over the years. Seafarers prefer using the career more to generate finance for investment purposes, which can be used in a shore based business and not necessarily to further the shipping profession.

Dr. Misra informed that one of the important findings of the Directorate General of Shipping has been that a number of seafarers are keen on pursuing higher studies midway through their sea career even at a much earlier stage since the maritime profession does not appeal to them for whatever reason. Thus there has been a large outflow of engineers to quality institutions offering MBA. Many maritime professionals at a young age take up specialisation and diverse academic courses that lead them to very successful careers in banking, insurance, finance, construction business, entrepreneurship, legal activities, etc.

Today's lifestyle at sea is dissimilar in many ways from the lifestyle of the past. Whereas a crew of 50 manned the vessel then the present strength of 21 crewmembers vastly reduces the luxury of a wider friend circle as well as the options for choosing one's company. Besides the ship stayed in port for 22 days then which is a far cry from the present where ships wait in port for a mere six hours. Port State Control, which didn't exist then is much more focused now. Neither was there any inspection then so mistakes were often overlooked or glossed over because life as a whole was slower paced and people accepted it as such.

In the second session chaired by Capt H. Subramaniam, Former Principal of LBS College of Advanced Maritime Studies and Research, Mumbai, Mr. Karl Lumbers, Manager of UK, P & I Club, gave the Underwriters' view of the Human factor in claims in his speech on "No Room for Human Error". The hard fact he informed was that human error was responsible for 54 per cent of the P & I liabilities claims. Value-wise the human factor was responsible for 62 per cent which amounts to a hefty sum of $1622 million. Of this the deck officers alone were responsible for 30 per cent of the errors and the Engine officers for 2 per cent.

An analysis of most incidents showed that these consist of hazards linked to energy source, prevalent condition, etc. that causes or has the potential to cause injury, damage or loss, i.e. source of extreme heat, materials kept under pressure, flammable material, toxic material, moving equipment, weather, etc. They could be related to targets such as victim or object of harm, i.e. people, assets, environment, reputation. Or there may be errors related to events such as happenings or change of state whereby this target is adversely affected, such as a collision, an explosion or an oil spill.

It was Dr. Helen Sampson, Director, Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC), UK who came up with reasons for accidents in her talk on 'Avoiding accidents safeguarding seafarers: An exploration of the erosion of safety standards at sea.' According to various studies carried out she explained that there was a need for improving the educational standards of training. She also mentioned that the companies that source their labour from less economically developed regions are likely to find it necessary to 'do-up' on the education/training of cadet recruits before entrusting them with positions abroad their vessels.

In his talk on 'Alert The Human
elements programme of the nautical institute' Capt. Pradeep Chawla, Director, Quality Assurance and Training, Anglo Eastern Ship Management Ltd. Hong Kong, took an unique approach to the safety culture. It was based on improving awareness of the human element in the maritime industry.

"We are working like dogs. But don't forget we are also human!" he cautioned. "The key to improvement is in the close involvement of all stakeholders to ensure that a ship is 'fit for purpose', and the master and his crew are provided with the proper tools and are adequately trained to be able to conduct their business in a safe and efficient manner."

'Getting the message across' was one important way for promoting awareness. 'Alert' was one such avenue, he contended.

Capt. Chawla urged, "India has a history of being a learning centre. We have the people, the skill and the strength. We could do it with a little co-operation. There is a new vibe of change and progress, which I have observed in the presentations made today. There is synergy out there."

Taking a similar perspective he said, "We need a representative in the IMO at all times. There should be representatives at all major marine events. Globalisation of the image of the Indian seafarers was essential."

The final session was chaired by Capt. P. S. Barve. The speech of Mr. S. C. Sood, M. D. of IMS Ship Management Pvt. Ltd. on 'Training of Asian Seafarers for Future Employment' was read out by Capt. Vikas Vij. He contended that training should complement recruitment. The inputs of the sea training required should be in the right perspective. The cadets should be clear about the function of the seafarer's role not being that of a white collar job and that it would never be so. In fact only the brave hearted should choose the seafaring career.

He went a step further by stating that the pre sea training should be subsidised and the trainees should not be charged for on-board training but rather they should be given a stipend. Talent is not a domain of only the rich and famous. There is a lot of talent among the lower middle class coupled with great aspirations. Once training is available at affordable cost to all sectors of the society, we can choose the right input.

On the aspect of training he stated, "Engineers need engine specific training on modern technology. Electronic & electric knowledge is required to complement marine engineering in today's ships. Paint subject is taught at 2" Mate level when deck officers become chief officers to manage maintenance most of what was learnt is forgotten whereas the actual user of such skills i.e. the seaman have no formal training in paint technology.

"Indian owners must provide all available trainee berths, if India has to emerge as a maritime supplier to the world. In the eighties the SCI policy of introducing cadetship with 12/13 cadets having three years hands on training gave excess and tough officers to the world.

The conference concluded with a lively panel discussion. Reviewing the deliberations Capt. Short ended the conference summing up the seminar proceedings. Capt. Tescelin Almeida proposed a vote of thanks.