

>> **themed issue comment:** training & education

Seeking Indian seafarers

Capt Kersi Deboo, director and principal of the Anglo-Eastern Maritime Training Centre in India, explains the difficulties of training and retaining high-quality seafarers

The BIMCO manpower update in 2010 showed that, worldwide, there were 747,000 ratings and 637,000 officers. Approximately 12.8% of the latter were from the Indian subcontinent.

In 2009 the Indian Ministry of Shipping asked consulting firm McKinsey to carry out a study and propose initiatives to increase the share of Indian seafarers in the world shipping fleet. That study, published in July 2010, indicated that active seafarers from India accounted for only 7% of the total.

The proposal was that over the following 10 years India would produce sufficient well trained and competent seafarers

to represent 9% of the global total by 2015 and to 12% by 2020. This meant it needed to train an additional 65,000 officers and 45,000 ratings in a six-year period, taking into consideration annual attrition.

To this end, the director-general of shipping opened up marine training, encouraging more private entities to establish pre-sea training institutions. Today 140 institutions conduct marine training in the country, with an annual output capacity of 6,000 officer cadets and a similar number of trainee ratings.

All this, however, was before the maritime bubble burst and

freight rates came tumbling down. Indian registered tonnage accounts for only 1,178 ships, totalling about 10.5M gt. This is less than 2.5% of the world fleet and indicates that more than 70% of Indian seafarers are employed on foreign-flag ships.

Many large ship management companies have a recruitment base in India. Anglo-Eastern, for example, employs more than 13,000 Indian seafarers.

Indian officers have generally been well regarded as competent, academically sound and versatile. This has made them popular for senior ranks on board tankers and other specialised vessels and their

growing number in the world fleet is significantly higher than for Indian ratings, whose age profile has been generally higher than for counterparts from other parts of the world.

The McKinsey report showed that, demographically, India is well placed to increase its manpower supply by almost 20% in the next 10 years. With a population of 435M in the 15–34 age group and a per capita income of under \$100/month, there will always be enough young people wanting to go to sea. It's just a question of attracting the right talent.

Today, with good employment opportunities ashore coupled with negative publicity about ships getting hijacked by pirates and seafarers being criminally prosecuted in foreign ports, very few young people from cities such as Mumbai, Delhi,

Kolkatta, and Chennai opt for a career at sea. Companies such as Anglo-Eastern have short-listed the top 50 schools and colleges in India, which its recruitment teams visit to raise awareness of seafaring careers.

With the market downturn, recruitment of trainees has taken a beating. Between 2008 and 2010, all 6,000 new recruits to pass out from the training institutes were absorbed by shipping companies and manning agents. Providing onboard training slots was no problem. Now close to 50% of the trainees are struggling to get placements on ships to enable them to complete mandatory structured onboard training.

The Indian government has taken some bold measures to rectify this situation. One is that institutes must demonstrate a tie-up with shipping companies and manning agents and only train as many students as are

assured of a shipboard training slot on completion of their pre-sea course. Another is that where a foreign-flag vessel stays in Indian waters for more than 30 days, a certain percentage of the crew must be made up of Indian deck or engine trainees.

In recent years large ship managers such as Anglo-Eastern have commenced their own pre-sea academies and post-sea training centres to ensure that the seafarers who will man their ships in years to come will have undergone high-level practical training incorporating best industry practice and good company safety culture.

In the words of Peter Cremers, CEO of Anglo-Eastern Group: "We now have full control of the quality of our crew, from graduating high school to getting their master's ticket." ■

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'With the market downturn, recruitment of trainees has taken a beating' Kersi Deboo

Media training is not optional

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New media have a key role in accidents and incidents, argues **Richard Clayton**

The shipping industry is starting to understand how social media can be used as a crisis management tool, Navigate Response director Mike Elsom told *Fairplay*, although there's some way to go before senior management accepts its full capability.

Navigate is one of a handful of media management specialists active in emergency response.

Demand for training in citizen journalism is growing as social media competes with TV, radio, and print for coverage. "News about maritime accidents and incidents is put out by Twitter and on Facebook before head office knows what's happening. We try to raise awareness about social media among senior people, and help mid-level staff use it effectively," Elsom explained.

The controlled certainties – press releases, media conferences, and websites – still have a role to play but the need now is to manage social media before a drama becomes a crisis. Navigate's training sessions are tailored to

each client's requirements but there are core points. "You have to identify the key messages and get them across, whichever media you are using," he emphasised. Given the pace at which news gets out, the key messages have to be settled before incidents occur, not as they develop.

Training begins gently with insight into how the media operate, particularly the need to identify possible suspects and the importance of still and video images. Simple questioning introduces the significance of first contact with external media, before the pressure is raised with rules of engagement for TV,

radio, print, and social. Then the heat increases as participants are introduced to the radio interview, the on-camera TV interview, and the press conference. Playing these back for further discussion is an important part of the day, partly because the process identifies those who are comfortable and confident under live questioning and those who aren't.

Media training also forms part

of the Ship Superintendents' Course, run twice a year in the Isle of Man by ECMS

International. Originally designed for new recruits to the position of superintendent and seagoing engineers and deck officers coming ashore, it has evolved to provide training in all aspects of maritime operations. Topics range from commercial knowledge, cost control, insurance, and law through to communication skills and emergency response workshops. *Fairplay*, attended the media day back in April, when

training was run by Bruce Holcombe, director of MCM, a crisis management specialist. He advised delegates to identify key roles within the response team rather than working response around the individual team members. "Team leaders shouldn't try to run everything," he said, stressing that the CEO isn't always the right person to face the media.

This course is fully supported by the Isle of Man government, Döhle Isle of Man, and the Bernhard Schulte Group, accredited by DNV and endorsed by IMarEST. The backing of major industry partners provides this course with currency, as many delegates use the expertise gained in their daily work.

Course leader Steve George told *Fairplay*, the workshops benefit hugely from active participation by key members of deck and engine teams who have been in situations similar to those played out here.

Media training is important in protecting a company's reputation when incidents occur. But care is paramount: Carnival Corp CEO Micky Arison's Twitter reaction to the sinking of the *Costa Concordia* was disappointingly brief, even though he was a keen tweeter before the sinking. Failure to use social media as a way to control the agenda was a decision that brought little applause from his followers. ■

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Pictures of a casualty, such as the *Rena* off New Zealand (pictured) in 2011, can be tweeted around the world before the CEO hears of it