

Crew crisis: time to drop pretence

by
RAMADAS RAO, ASIA EDITOR

IT IS OFFICIAL, the crewing shortage is a crisis not of perception but of fact. Delegates at last week's Maritime Manpower Singapore Conference called on fellow owners to leave behind the apathy, to start investing in training and to stop poaching trained officers from other companies.

At the one-day biennial event, it was noted that alternative sources of trained crews are fast drying up. Delegates were informed that China cannot find enough men and women to serve on its own expanding merchant shipping fleet, with Croatia, Latvia and Poland declining as crew centres while Russia and Ukraine are emerging as leaders.

Carlos Salinas, chairman and president of the Filipino Shipowners' Association, confirmed that the Philippines is experiencing its own supply crunch.

Only India seems to be well placed to turn out officers in fairly steady numbers for global intake, thanks to concerted efforts by the government and the private sector to boost training capacity.

The private sector is pouring money into institutes that provide post-sea training and what Capt Pradeep Chawla, of ship manager Anglo Eastern, described as "value-added" courses.

Chawla added: "This trend of post-sea training and continuous professional development is not seen in most crew-supplying nations."

The number of deck and engine



All smiles: industry experts were delighted at striking a consensus in tackling crew shortage at the MMS Conference

cadets being employed from India has been rising "significantly" over the past three to four years, according to Chawla. He pointed out that there are up to 5,000 trainees annually passing out, with the capacity being boosted to double this figure.

Chawla said that he expects India to remain an important crewing source for at least another 20 years, with Indian officers increasingly sought to man LNG, LPG, chemical, oil and large container ships.

Other speakers emphasised that there is a need to invest in training infrastructure, in order to generate a pool of qualified officers.

Heng Chee How, Singapore's Minister of State for Health and the deputy secretary-general of the National Trades Union Congress, told delegates that he wanted training to focus on upgrading skills of existing seafarers. He hit out at com-

Making waves

MMS CONFERENCE 2007

Held on 7 September at Raffles City Convention Centre, Singapore
Organised by the Seafarers Training and Education Advisory Committee
Managed by Wavelink

CREW CRISIS

'Worldwide shortfall of 10,000 officers in 2005 is expected to reach 27,000 officers by 2015'

BIMCO/ISF

POACHING

'At least one LNG tanker master was reportedly offered more than \$18,000 a month, way over the typical range of \$13,000-\$14,000'

Carlos Salinas

President of Filipino Shipowners' Association

panies for poaching crew members, which is rampant, and warned: "If everybody expects someone else to do the training and themselves to do the poaching, then the skilled manpower pool will not grow and the shortages will only get worse."

Thomas Tay, the general secretary of the Singapore Maritime Officers' Union, has mooted the idea of collective tripartite training funds to beat the officer shortage.

He said: "The fund can be invested in the establishment of regional training centres in either Singapore or in other parts of Asia."

Consensus in the industry is building towards providing cadet berths on board ships, which owners have been resisting.

Chawla said: "The only way to prevent future shortages is to make two cadets a mandatory requirement in the manning scales for ships." ■