

Singapore union wants Asian seafarer training fund

SMOU says it should be similar to Norwegian fund to ensure future supply of cadets and officers

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SINGAPORE Maritime Officers Union general-secretary Thomas Tay has called for Asian countries to establish a seafarer training fund similar to that run by Norway to ensure a future supply of cadets and officers.

Mr Tay told an SMOU conference that he would like to see a tripartite training fund in Asia established by shipowners, unions and flag states.

In 2006, SMOU set up its own initiative, the Singapore Maritime Training Fund, which currently stands at S\$3.1m (\$2m). "This is a very small sum," he said.

Following the model of the Norwegian Training Foundation, which collects S\$100 per European Union national seafarer working on Norwegian-flagged vessels, Mr Tay would like to see a similar fund in Singapore and among other major Asian shipowning nations.

The Norwegian fund collects S\$10m

annually and trains more than 1,000 cadets and seafarers a year.

"I am suggesting \$10 per seafarer per month," he said.

With an estimated 28,500 seafarers working on Singapore-flagged vessels, a \$10 per month levy would raise \$3.42m annually.

A Singapore fund would not just provide training for Singapore-national seafarers but also to those from other Asian countries. With a population of just four million, its own seafarer pool will never be sufficient to meet the demand of Singapore-registered tonnage.

China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Taiwan could come together with the republic on the training fund, he added.

The same \$10 levy per month per seafarer, based on 15 seafarers each on some 8,500 ships, would collect \$13.3m annually.

"This money does not have to come from shipowners. If you work the wage scale smartly, it comes from the seafarer," he said.

Mr Tay sees such a fund providing what he described as value-added training in Asia. An example of such training is the CadetPlus — pre-sea preparatory course that is supported by the existing training fund and partnered with maritime training institutes in the region.

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