

A vital cog in the safety ecosystem

As shipping goes through tectonic shifts, safety must overarch commercial aspects of shipping and focus be given to the importance of the human element

Arun Sharma, executive chairman of the Indian Register of Shipping

► **The shipping industry is going through rapid,** some might say tectonic, changes that impact on the global regulatory regimes. The market conditions of the last 10 years have put immense pressure on the ship owning fraternity in terms of lower incomes, higher expenditures, and the added demand of meeting new regulations.

Throughout this, safety generally over arches the technical and commercial aspects of shipping and is, in my opinion, more of a state of mind, a deep-rooted culture that should percolate through an organisation, from the top-down.

In my years of experience of being involved in ship operations and then viewing these operations from the stand point of Class, I have found that in any business the organisation and the management must be fully committed to safety and quality.

In the past, some thought the level of safety had something to do with its affordability, in other words if you could not afford it, you could be unsafe. Fortunately, times have changed and so have the thought processes of shipping managers. To put it simply, if you cannot afford to be safe, you cannot afford to be in the business of shipping.

The human element is a vital factor in maritime safety. Statistics confirm that 'human error' is identified as one of the largest factors for accident and incidents on board. As such the maritime industry must address safety in a holistic way with all the stakeholders in the supply chain following safety norms, be it ports and terminals, charterers, and cargo handling.

There are experts in maritime offices who can handle assets in inclement weather and are able to advise crew on the best routes to take to avoid the worst of the weather; after all the prime responsibility of the master is to safely take the ship, its crew, and the cargo from the port of loading to the port of discharge.

This aspect, however, simple as it may seem, is not easy and depends entirely on the skill of the operational people. Hence, in my view, a safe ship means recruiting the right people, giving them the right training to handle the current technology, and timely upskilling to meet the rapid technological changes that are happening in the industry.

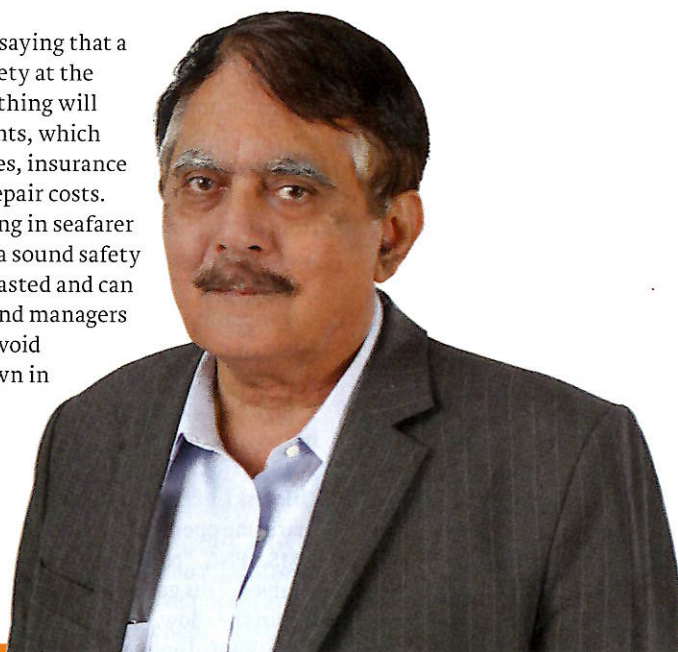
With the growth of technology and digitisation, the seafarers' role onboard is increasingly specialised and there is a learning gap that needs to be addressed. The importance of maintaining maritime skills and ensuring that seafarer training and the qualification framework keeps pace with technological advancement needs greater emphasis, especially in this era of smart shipping.

Radical changes in training and certification are required. We are already seeing the introduction of virtual reality in crew training programmes that help seafarers learn by performing tasks in a safe virtual environment. Recent studies have shown that knowledge retention is better when a person performs a task rather than passively watching or reading about it.

It goes without saying that a crew that puts safety at the forefront of everything will have fewer accidents, which means less off-hires, insurance claims, and ship repair costs. Therefore, investing in seafarer training to instill a sound safety culture is never wasted and can save shipowners and managers cash reserve and avoid eventual breakdown in the long run. ■

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