

DETAILED REPORT ON
SYMPOSIUM ON SEAFARERS' RECRUITMENT & WELFARE
and
Inauguration of
MMD PATNA
— KOLKATA —

Chief Guest

Shri Shantanu Thakur

Hon'ble Minister of State for Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways

Guests of Honour

Shri Shyam Jagannathan, IAS

Director General of Shipping

Date: 27th February, 2026 | Time: 09:00 AM

VENUE: RAAJKUTIR, KOLKATA - IHCL SELECTIONS
89C, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Sarani,
Phool Bagan, Kankurgachi, Kolkata - 700054



I. Introduction

The Directorate General of Shipping (DGS), Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, hosted the Symposium on Seafarers' Recruitment and Welfare and Inauguration of MMD Patna in Kolkata on 27th February 2026. Building on the success of the Delhi Symposium held on 18 December 2025, this regional initiative aims to deepen outreach, strengthen maritime governance, and bring welfare services closer to seafarers and aspiring maritime professionals from Bihar and Eastern India.

The Kolkata symposium helded special significance as it coincides with the inauguration of two major maritime infrastructure facilities, the Seafarers Outreach Center and the Mercantile Marine Department (MMD) Office. These facilities mark a major step under Maritime India Vision 2030 toward expanding maritime access, enhancing seafarer services, and strengthening the governance ecosystem across inland and coastal regions.

The event hosted 250-300 participants, including seafarers, cadets, RPSL companies, shipping companies, maritime training institutes, government agencies, and industry associations. Through interactive sessions, keynote addresses, panel discussions, and cultural engagement, the symposium:

- Reinforced ethical recruitment practices and statutory compliance
- Promoted DG Shipping's flagship seafarer welfare initiatives, including Sagar Mein Yog and Sagar Mein Samman
- Facilitated meaningful exchange between regulators, industry, and seafarers
- Showcased Patna's historical and cultural maritime heritage
- Inspired regional youth to pursue careers in the maritime sector

By integrating a cultural heritage segment celebrating Bihar's rich history through performances, exhibitions, storytelling, and artisanal showcases the symposium is designed not only as a policy-driven platform but also as a celebration of identity, pride, and community. This unique blend of regulatory focus and cultural immersion positions the Patna symposium as a model for inclusive, community-led maritime engagement.

II. Speakers' Profiles

1. Shri Shantanu Thakur, Hon'ble Minister of State, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Government of India (Chief Guest)



Shri Shantanu Thakur is the Hon'ble Minister of State in the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Government of India. With a strong commitment to public service, he has been actively engaged in strengthening India's maritime infrastructure, promoting shipbuilding and inland waterways development, and supporting initiatives aimed at modernizing and expanding the country's port and shipping sector. He is also a prominent leader of the Matua community, actively advocating for social welfare and community development initiatives.

2. Shri Shyam Jagannathan, IAS, Director General of Shipping (Guest of Honour)



Shri. Shyam Jagannathan is an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer [1997 Batch] of the Assam Meghalaya cadre in the rank of Additional Secretary to the Government of India. He took over charge as Director General of Shipping in the Directorate General of Shipping, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and 23 on 03rd July 2023. In his previous role, Mr. Shyam Jagannathan was the Development Commissioner, Santa Cruz Exclusive Export Processing Zone, Special Economic Zone - Mumbai, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Mr. Shyam Jagannathan holds a postgraduate degree in MSc (Biochemistry) with Distinction from Osmania University Hyderabad and his areas of interest are public finance and leveraging Technology for better public services.

3. Shri Sushil Mansing Khopde, IPS Addl. Director General (S)



Shri Sushil Mansing Khopde, an Indian Police Service officer of the 1995 batch from the Bihar cadre, has joined the Directorate General of Shipping under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways as Additional Director General of Shipping on 17th April 2025. He brings with him a wealth of experience from his distinguished career in law enforcement and public administration.

Shri Khopde holds master's degree in engineering from IIT Bombay. Throughout his career, Shri Khopde has held several key positions, including Superintendent of Police in various Districts,

Deputy Inspector General of Police, and Inspector General of Police as well as Additional Director General of Police heading STF in Bihar. His tenure has been marked by significant contributions to maintaining law and order, implementing community policing initiatives, and enhancing internal security mechanisms.

In recognition of his exemplary service, Shri Khopde has been conferred with the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service (2022), the Police Medal for Meritorious Service (2011) and the Police Medal for Gallantry (2015).

In the assignment of Additional Director General of Shipping, Shri Khopde is expected to leverage his extensive administrative experience to further the objectives of the Directorate General of Shipping, contributing to the development and regulation of the Maritime Sector in India.

4. Capt. Nitin Mukesh Deputy Nautical Advisor cum Senior DDG (Tech)



Capt. Nitin Mukesh - Member Secretary, Seafarers' Welfare Fund Society (SWFS); Secretary, National Shipping Board (NSB); and Commissioner, Seamen's Provident Fund Organization (SPFO) is an accomplished maritime professional whose distinguished career bridges both the private and government sectors. His comprehensive background from commanding vessels across the globe has uniquely equipped him to spearhead the safety and security of maritime operations today.

He completed the MSC Program in Maritime Affairs from WMU, Malmo, and is an esteemed member of the

Institute of Charter and Shipbroker and has successfully passed the Chartering and Shipbroking examination. He has been serving as Deputy Nautical Advisor and Senior

Deputy Director General of Shipping. Today, he plays a pivotal role in managing critical areas such as Maritime and Port Security, ISPS (International Ship and Port Facility Security), the accreditation of medical examiners, as well as the approval of Life Raft Service stations and Life-Saving Appliances on-board vessels.

Capt. Nitin Mukesh's broad experience and unwavering dedication make him an authority in maritime safety and security, ensuring that every voyage and port operation under his purview is executed with the highest standards of professionalism and care.

5. Capt. PC Meena Nautical Surveyor-cum-DDG (Tech.), DGS



Captain P.C. Meena is a seasoned maritime professional serving as the Nautical Surveyor-cum-Deputy Director General of Shipping (Technical) at the Directorate General of Shipping, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Government of India. With over 17 years of sea experience, he has demonstrated exceptional leadership and expertise, having worked on various types of vessels including commanding of Very Large Crude Oil Tankers and accumulated extensive experience in navigation and maritime operations.

His distinguished career includes pivotal roles as a Nautical Surveyor with DG Shipping and Mercantile Marine Department, Mumbai with vast experience gained in ISM/ISPS Audits, Statutory surveys of Cargo and passenger vessels, auditing and inspecting of RPSL, MTI, LSA, FFA, Radio service stations.

Captain Meena's robust educational background comprising of a Master of Science in Maritime Law and Policy from World Maritime University, a Post-Graduation Diploma in Shipping Management and Logistics from Narottam Morarjee Institute of Shipping, a Prestigious Extra Master Certificate of Competency from Government of India.

6. Shri Bharat Saboo, Yoga Expert, Sri Sri School of Yoga



Shri. Bharat Saboo is a Chartered Accountant, entrepreneur, and wellness educator dedicated to empowering individuals and organizations through the integration of financial leadership and holistic well-being.

He serves as a Faculty Member with the Art of Living Foundation and is a certified Sri Sri Yoga and Hatha Yoga teacher. Through the Happiness Program and various yoga sessions, he has guided over 10,000+ participants toward enhanced mental clarity, emotional resilience, and physical vitality. An entrepreneur carrying forward a 60-year legacy of

excellence through Saboo Sarees, he beautifully integrates leadership, spirituality, and service in his life's work.

Complementing his professional and wellness pursuits, he is also a passionate musician and singer, embodying a rare balance of entrepreneurship, spirituality, and creative expression.

7. Ms. Aparajita Ray, Surveyor, American Bureau of Shipping



Ms. Aparajita Ray is a seasoned maritime professional with over 14 years of seafaring experience, having sailed with Anglo Eastern and Royal Caribbean.

Transitioning to shore-based roles during the pandemic, she excelled as a Nautical, Marine, and Safety Superintendent with Maersk, later advancing to Vessel Manager at Berge Bulk. Beyond her career achievements, she devoted herself to family responsibilities, caring for her father until his passing in October 2025.

Today, she brings her extensive operational and safety expertise to the American Bureau of Shipping as a Surveyor, combining hands-on maritime experience with deep knowledge of vessel management and compliance.

III. Inaugural Session

a. Saraswati Vandana



The inaugural proceedings of the *Symposium on Seafarers' Recruitment and Welfare*, held on 27 February 2026 in Kolkata, commenced at 0930 hrs with the auspicious **Saraswati Vandana**, setting a dignified and spiritually uplifting tone for the event. Rooted deeply in India's cultural and ceremonial traditions, the invocation to Goddess Saraswati symbolized the values of wisdom, knowledge, creativity, and enlightenment virtues that align seamlessly with the objectives of the Symposium, which focuses on advancing the welfare, training, and professional growth of India's seafaring community.

The Saraswati Vandana marked the formal beginning of the ceremony, offering a moment of collective reflection and reverence. The performance, set against a serene depiction of the Goddess, enriched the ambience of the venue and served as a cultural bridge between the maritime fraternity and India's artistic heritage. This traditional invocation is widely regarded as a gesture to seek divine blessings for clarity, purposeful dialogue, and success in all planned deliberations.

By commencing the programme with this sacred ritual, the Directorate General of Shipping and the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways reaffirmed their commitment to grounding modern maritime initiatives in values of learning, ethical progress, and cultural respect. The Vandana served as a reminder that efforts dedicated to seafarer welfare and maritime development draw strength not only from policy and expertise but also from intention, harmony, and collective goodwill.

b. Lighting of the Lamp



Following the Saraswati Vandana, the Inaugural Ceremony progressed to the ceremonial Lighting of the Lamp, a revered tradition symbolizing the transition from darkness to illumination and the pursuit of knowledge, integrity, and ethical governance. This ritual served as a meaningful prelude to the Symposium, reflecting the maritime sector's collective aspiration toward transparency, welfare, and continuous improvement.

The ceremony was honoured by the presence of esteemed dignitaries, including:

- Shri Shantanu Thakur, Hon'ble Minister of State, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways
- Shri Shyam Jagannathan, IAS, Director General of Shipping
- Shri Sushil Mansing Khopde, IPS, Additional Director General of Shipping
- Shri. Vikrant Rai, Principal Officer, MMD Kolkata
- Capt. Nitin Mukesh, Dy. NA-cum-Senior DDG (Tech), Directorate General of Shipping
- Capt. P.C. Meena, DDG (Crew), Directorate General of Shipping

Together, the dignitaries lit the ceremonial lamp, marking the official commencement of the Symposium and reaffirming the Government's unwavering commitment to strengthening regulatory integrity, fostering transparent recruitment practices, and advancing robust welfare mechanisms for Indian seafarers. The act symbolized collective resolve, guiding the direction of the day's discussions and initiatives.

This inaugural segment concluded with the dignitaries remaining on stage for the subsequent felicitation proceedings, paving the way for the next phase of the day's programme.

c. Inaugural Welcome Address and Symposium Objectives



The Inaugural Welcome Address was delivered by Capt. Nitin Mukesh, Dy. Nautical Advisor-cum-Senior Deputy Director General (Tech), Directorate General of Shipping.

In his address, Capt. Mukesh formally welcomed the Hon'ble Minister of State, senior officials of the Directorate General of Shipping, representatives of Recruitment and Placement Service Licensees (RPSLs), industry stakeholders, maritime professionals, and members of the seafaring community.

He outlined the core objectives of the Symposium, emphasising the need to strengthen recruitment integrity, enhance regulatory compliance mechanisms, and reinforce structured welfare frameworks for Indian seafarers. The address highlighted the importance of institutional coordination, transparency in recruitment practices, grievance redressal systems, and accountability within the maritime ecosystem.

Capt. Mukesh further stressed that seafarer welfare must extend beyond policy formulation to effective implementation, measurable outcomes, and sustained oversight. The Symposium was positioned as a platform for constructive dialogue, policy clarity, and practical solutions addressing current challenges faced by RPSLs and seafarers.

The address set the tone for the deliberations that followed, aligning the day's discussions with the broader objective of strengthening maritime governance and safeguarding the rights and welfare of Indian seafarers.

IV. Strategic & Leadership Addresses

a. Strategic Insights on RPSL Challenges by Addl. Director General of Shipping



The next address was delivered by Shri Sushil Mansing Khopde, IPS, Additional Director General of Shipping, who shared strategic insights on the challenges relating to Recruitment and Placement Service Licensees (RPSLs). In his address, Shri Khopde emphasized the importance of strict regulatory compliance, transparency in recruitment practices, and accountability mechanisms within the RPSL framework.

He highlighted recurring concerns such as unauthorised recruitment activities, non-adherence to prescribed procedures, documentation deficiencies, and instances of contractual disputes affecting seafarers.

He underscored the need for robust enforcement measures, periodic inspections, and disciplinary action in cases of violation, while reiterating that regulatory oversight is essential to protect the rights and interests of Indian seafarers. The role of institutional integrity coordinated monitoring, and adherence to statutory obligations under the applicable maritime regulations was strongly emphasised.

Shri Khopde further noted that maintaining credibility in recruitment systems is critical not only for seafarer welfare but also for India's international maritime reputation.

The address provided a structured enforcement perspective and set the regulatory tone for subsequent discussions.

b. Keynote address on Recruitment and welfare (Guest of Honour)



The Keynote Address was delivered by Shri Shyam Jagannathan, IAS, Director General of Shipping, who presented a comprehensive overview of India's seafarer ecosystem, regulatory challenges, and ongoing reform initiatives.

He began by emphasising the strategic importance of seafarers in global trade, noting that over 90% of world trade is carried by sea and powered by maritime professionals. Referring to international projections indicating a potential shortfall of nearly 89,510 STCW-certified officers by 2026, he highlighted the opportunity for India to strengthen its position as a leading supplier of maritime manpower. India currently contributes approximately 12% of the global seafarer workforce, with Maritime India Vision 2030 targeting an increase to 20% by 2030.

The Director General presented year-on-year growth data demonstrating a steady rise in the number of Indian seafarers, along with a significant increase in women's participation, which has grown by over 300% since 2021. However, he acknowledged that women currently constitute less than 0.5% of the total workforce, underscoring the need for structured gender inclusion measures.

Addressing sectoral challenges, Shri Jagannathan highlighted concerns including seafarer abandonment, fraudulent recruitment agents, invalid P&I insurance coverage, delayed reporting of distress cases, and weak oversight by certain flag administrations. He noted that India continues to face a high number of abandonment cases and presented updated figures on death cases, missing cases, and repatriation efforts.

He outlined corrective measures undertaken by the Directorate General of Shipping, including:

Symposium on Seafarers' Recruitment & Welfare and Inauguration of MMD Patna

- Strengthening RPSL compliance through revised MS Notices, Circulars, and Orders
- Introduction of statutory powers under the Merchant Shipping Act (as amended) to address abandonment cases
- Blocking and withdrawal of fraudulent RPSLs, with 51 licenses withdrawn since April 2025
- Proposal to enhance RPSL bank guarantees to strengthen financial accountability
- Proposal to blacklist repeat-offender vessels, flags, and insurers
- Enhanced coordination with the Ministry of External Affairs and Indian Missions for time-bound repatriation

He also outlined digital reforms including the Crisis Module, Grievance Redressal Module, and RPSL Module, designed for real-time tracking, compliance monitoring, licence management, and transparent reporting.

In the area of welfare, he elaborated on initiatives undertaken through the Seafarers Welfare Fund Society (SWFS) and the Seamen's Provident Fund Organisation (SPFO), including multiple welfare schemes covering survivors' benefits, old age assistance, maternity support, death-on-board benefits, insurance support, and financial assistance measures. He further highlighted infrastructure projects under the Seafarers Welfare Board Audit Team (SWBAT), including the redevelopment of welfare facilities such as Marine Club Kolkata, Nabik Griha Samity, and the establishment of MMD Patna as a regional outreach centre.

The address also covered initiatives such as "Sagar Mein Samman" for gender inclusivity and "Sagar Mein Yog" for structured wellness integration within maritime training frameworks. Additionally, the "Pranaam" Seafarers Assistance Counter at Mumbai Airport was cited as an operational intervention to prevent misuse of visa channels and protect seafarers from legal and immigration complications.

Concluding his address, Shri Jagannathan reaffirmed the Directorate's zero-tolerance policy against fraudulent recruitment and illegal practices and emphasised that regulatory enforcement, digital transparency, welfare expansion, and institutional coordination remain central to strengthening India's maritime governance framework.

c. Remote Inauguration by Chief Guest and Leadership Vision for Sector Speech



In his address, the Hon'ble Minister underscored that India's maritime growth under Maritime India Vision 2030 and the broader Amrit Kaal framework must be anchored not only in infrastructure expansion but equally in strengthening the welfare, dignity, and protection of Indian seafarers. He noted that more than three lakh certified Indian seafarers currently serve across global fleets and that India's reputation as a reliable supplier of skilled maritime manpower must be preserved through robust regulation and transparent systems.

The Minister emphasised that recruitment integrity, accountability of Recruitment and Placement Service Licensees (RPSLs), prevention of abandonment, and effective grievance redressal are central to safeguarding the maritime workforce. He outlined ongoing reforms within the RPS framework, including jurisdictional clarity through State Licensing Authorities, digitisation of the Seafarers Employment Agreement, elimination of duplicate licensing requirements, and procedural streamlining to improve oversight while reducing ambiguity.

He highlighted the strengthening of welfare mechanisms through the Seafarers Welfare Fund Society, including enhanced financial assistance for retired seafarers and structured insurance support for eligible Indian CDC holders. The PRANAAM Seafarer Assistance Counter at Mumbai International Airport was cited as a facilitation measure to provide institutional support to travelling seafarers and prevent misuse or distress situations.

The Hon'ble Minister also referred to the integration of digital platforms such as e-Samudra to improve transparency, reduce physical interface, and enhance service

delivery within maritime administration. Initiatives promoting gender inclusivity and mental well-being, including “Sagar Mein Samman” and “Sagar Mein Yog,” were noted as structured efforts to improve working conditions and professional support systems.

- Remote Inauguration of MMD and Seafarers Outreach Center, Patna.



Carried out by unveiling of an inauguration video crafted to unveil the Mercantile Marine Department (MMD) Office and Seafarers Outreach Center at Nutan Rajdhani Anchal, Patna Nagar Nigam, Beli Road, Adalat Ganj, Veer Chand Patel Road, Patna – 800001, a vanguard maritime welfare hub for Eastern India.

Opening with geospatial shots and DGS/MMD branding, it saluted the enablers: Bihar Government's with its land provision, SWFS's with its funding for renovation, Shri Shyam Jagannathan, IAS [DG(S)] and Capt. Nitin Mukesh's [Dy. NA cum DDG (Crew)] transformative leadership. The core spotlighted seafarer gains i.e. curtailing travel/certification costs via on-site MMD services and a dedicated Outreach Center for counselling, documentation, and programs across Bihar, Jharkhand, and beyond showcasing upgraded cabins, offices, and modern ICT/CCTV/LAN amenities in a revitalized shared structure.

It closed proclaiming this as Eastern India's maritime renaissance, "bringing the ocean closer" to Patna. The video epitomized the initiative's monumental impact on India's seafaring ecosystem.

- Remote commencement of Renovation of Nabik Griha Samity, Kolkata



The announcement video unveiled at the symposium, heralded the monumental repair and infrastructure renaissance at Nabik Griha Samity, 1/1 Diamond Harbour Road, Taratala, Kolkata – 700038 a venerated 1954 institution, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy's legacy, and DG Shipping-sanctioned Maritime Academy of India hub.

It chronicled the heritage of this affordable seafarer sanctuary (₹150/₹80 daily rates), candidly addressing aged dormitories, ablutions, and canteen exigencies amid enduring communal affection. The opus spotlighted the flagship SWBAT Initiative providing civil restorations, refurbished dorms/washrooms/canteen, safety/ICT/security enhancements, and a pioneering girls' hostel under “Sagar Mein Sanman” ensuring MLC 4.4-compliant, gender-inclusive dignity, hygiene, and training access for all seafarers.

Culminating in visionary assurance, it enshrined Nabik Griha's legacy while catapulting it into modernity, a seismic stride fortifying Kolkata as an indomitable bastion for future mariners.

- Remote commencement of Renovation of Marine Club, Kolkata



Lastly the announcement video for Marine club was showcased at the symposium, proclaiming the epochal repair and infrastructure upgradation at Marine Club, Ram Surat Singh Road area, Kolkata – 700043, a storied Eastern India seafarer bastion proximate to Netaji Subhas Dock and Garden Reach lifelines.

It evoked the club's venerable legacy as a hallowed hostel, confronting the dilapidated rooms, hygiene deficits, and stewardship lapses juxtaposed against seafarers' allegiance as their "second home" for examinations and signing on/off preparations. The narrative expressed the SWBAT's redress through structural restorations, refurbished accommodations/ablutions, enriched amenities (Wi-Fi/ICT, recreation, safety), timelines, and costs adhering with the MLC 4.4 via stark before/after visions.

Finally, it vowed preservation of heritage amid nationwide welfare, a stride empowering seafarer with dignified, adaptive sanctuaries.

Referring to the remote inauguration of the Seafarers Outreach Centre, the MMD Office, and the commencement of redevelopment works at Nabik Griha Samity and Marine Club Kolkata, he stated that regulatory services and welfare infrastructure must be accessible, modern, and responsive to stakeholder needs.

In conclusion, the Hon'ble Minister reiterated that India's maritime ambition is not limited to numerical growth in manpower supply but is focused on building a globally respected maritime workforce supported by transparent systems, strong institutions, and reliable welfare architecture.

V. Press Conference



A press conference was held on 27th February 2026 in Kolkata during the Symposium for Seafarers' Recruitment & Welfare and Inauguration of MMD PATNA, under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways. Shri Shantanu Thakur, Minister of State, addressed the gathering and highlighted key initiatives aimed at strengthening maritime safety, digital transparency, and institutional capacity within the sector.

He was joined by Shri Shyam Jaganathan, Director General of Shipping, who outlined ongoing regulatory reforms and emphasized the Directorate's commitment to enhancing efficiency and seafarer-centric services. Shri Sushil Khopde, Additional Director General of Shipping, provided updates on operational improvements, including advancements in certification systems and modernisation efforts across maritime administration.

The dignitaries reiterated the Ministry's focus on innovation, safety, and global competitiveness, marking the event as a significant step toward strengthening India's maritime ecosystem.

VI. Session I: "Seafarers recruitment and welfare" perspective from DG Shipping, Government of India

a. Projection of seafarer welfare and future aspects and Insights on Seafarer Welfare Infrastructure Initiative



In his address, he provided a comprehensive overview of the Seafarers' Welfare Fund Society (SWFS), beginning with its mandate, financial strength, and the critical role it plays in safeguarding Indian seafarers and their families. He highlighted how SWFS, with a corpus exceeding ₹800 crores, delivers financial security across life stages through its 11 flagship welfare schemes effective from 1 January 2026 ranging from survivor and invalidity benefits to maternity support, old-age assistance, education grants, career progression funding, and crisis-based relief for abandoned and stranded seafarers. He emphasized that these schemes have been significantly strengthened in recent reforms, with increased benefit amounts, greater coverage, structured timelines, and a fully modernized governance framework. He also underscored the need for proper registration, nominee updates, and awareness among seafarers, stressing that many beneficiaries lose entitlements due to missed deadlines, incomplete documentation, or lack of information within families.

In continuation of his address, he also spoke extensively about the Seafarers Welfare Board Audit Team (SWBAT) and its pivotal role in strengthening welfare infrastructure across Indian ports. He explained that SWBAT, constituted under DGS Order No. 08 of 2024, acts as the formal inspection and oversight mechanism responsible for evaluating

seafarer welfare facilities in line with DGS guidelines and MLC 2006 standards. He highlighted that the team comprising DG Shipping officials, the Shipping Master, MMD surveyors, seafarer unions, and the Sailors Society conducts structured inspections and submits recommendations to the Seafarers' Welfare Fund Society (SWFS) for grant-in-aid decisions. He emphasised that this mechanism ensures accountability, uniformity, and quality across port-based welfare centres such as seafarers' clubs, hostels, recreation rooms, and essential services mandated under Regulation 4.4 of the Maritime Labour Convention.

He further detailed the MoU signed between DG Shipping and IPRCL (04.12.2025), noting that this partnership has accelerated the professional management of welfare infrastructure from conceptual designs and DPR preparation to civil execution, MEP upgrades, tendering, and supervision. He underscored that more than ₹35 crores worth of projects have been approved across major maritime cities including Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Kolkata, Taratala, Chennai, Kochi, Vizhinjam, Mormugao, and Patna. He outlined the current status of these projects, noting that some facilities are fully operational (like the JNPA Seafarers' Club in Navi Mumbai), while others are undergoing major renovation or reconstruction to meet modern standards. He stressed that the upgrades focus on accommodation, dining, recreation, medical support, communication facilities, and culturally sensitive, gender-responsive spaces aimed at increasing monthly beneficiaries from 5,000 to nearly 25,000 and ensuring 100% compliance with MLC norms.

He also highlighted the forward-looking introduction of a centralized national Online Booking System, which will allow seafarers to seamlessly book accommodation across all welfare centres with real-time availability, transparent tariffs, secure payments, and centralized administrative oversight. In explaining the financial sustainability model, he noted that SWFS will provide one-time capital support, after which welfare centres will transition into self-sustaining operations through revenue models such as port-levy funding, PPP management, or room-revenue frameworks. He concluded by reinforcing that SWBAT will conduct periodic inspections both initial and five-year renewal audits to ensure long-term compliance, operational quality, and continued accessibility of welfare services for seafarers nationwide.

b. Projection from seafarers' provident funds office and Pranaam Facilitation Services



In his address, he focused on the newly launched PRANAAM Seafarers Assistance & Facilitation Counter at Mumbai Airport (Terminal 2), created to support over 10,000 seafarers transiting through the airport each month. He explained how the initiative provides round-the-clock assistance for documentation, e-migration procedures, fraud prevention, emergency coordination, repatriation cases, and dedicated support for women seafarers ultimately reducing airport-related FIRs, offloadings, and compliance gaps. He noted that PRANAAM represents a landmark step under DGS Circular 02 of 2026, with plans for nationwide expansion and digital integration in future phases.

Concluding his presentation, he shifted focus to the Seamen's Provident Fund Organization (SPFO) and its role in ensuring long-term financial security for Indian seafarers under the SPF Act, 1966. He explained the importance of PF contributions, non-refundable withdrawals for essential needs, final withdrawals during retirement or disability, and settlement procedures for deceased seafarers emphasizing correct nominations, updated records, and timely claim submissions. He highlighted SPFO's digital grievance portal, new investment management through HDFC AMC, unclaimed PF outreach programs in partnership with India Post, and proposed legislative reforms to align India's PF system with international MLC 2006 standards. Through this structured, informative narrative, he reinforced a unified message: that welfare, safety, dignity, and financial security of Indian seafarers remain the core priorities driving all institutional reforms and initiatives.

c. Roles and Responsibilities of RPSL Companies & Challenges Faced by RPSL/Shipping Companies / Seafarers: Seafarer's Rights and Seafarer's Code of Conduct



In his address, Capt. P. C. Meena, DDG (Crew), provided a detailed and data-driven overview of the current landscape of Indian seafaring, highlighting both the achievements and challenges within the recruitment and welfare ecosystem. He began by presenting key statistics that underscored India's rapid growth in the global maritime workforce showing a steady rise in total Indian seafarers and a significant, year-on-year increase in women seafarers. He highlighted the expanding capacity of top-performing RPSL companies and Indian shipping firms, along with the strong seafarer representation emerging from Eastern Indian states such as West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Odisha. Transitioning to structural challenges, he drew attention to the supply–demand gap in pre-sea training, shipboard training berths, and the widening mismatch between admissions and available onboard opportunities an issue that continues to impact young cadets and ratings entering the profession.

He then spoke extensively about the statutory roles and responsibilities of RPSL companies and shipowners, explaining the obligations laid out in the Merchant Shipping (RPSL) Rules 2016 including mandatory verification of documents, transparent recruitment practices, seafarer protection mechanisms, repatriation safeguards, prompt reporting of incidents, and ensuring no exploitation or unfair charges on seafarers. Further, he addressed the real-world challenges faced by seafarers during recruitment and voyages, such as fraudulent documentation, misuse of Form-1, illegal service charges,

asylum-related misuse, vessel overcapacity issues, detentions, and delays in settlement of cases issues that continue to erode trust and create vulnerabilities for the maritime workforce.

Capt. Meena also emphasized the rising global concern of seafarer abandonment, explaining international definitions, the ILO/IMO joint database, and the alarming increase in unresolved abandonment and detention cases. He presented the latest Indian statistics on death, missing, abandoned, and arrested seafarers, along with root causes ranging from inexperienced shipowners and fraudulent RPSLs to substandard vessels and gaps in monitoring mechanisms. He then outlined the course-corrective measures implemented by DG Shipping, including stricter regulatory enforcement, blacklisting of fraudulent operators, enhanced bank guarantee norms, validation of vessel details, Form-1 reforms, suspension of non-compliant RPSLs, and the establishment of the PRANAAM support counter at Mumbai Airport for real-time assistance to crew members.

He highlighted the strengthening of grievance redressal systems, presenting data that showed a significant surge in grievance reporting due to increased awareness but also maintained a resolution rate consistently above 98% reflecting improved transparency and responsiveness within DG Shipping. He elaborated on the 24x7 DGCOMM mechanism, the escalation matrix aligned with MLC procedures, and the upcoming digital grievance portal with automated alerts and tracking. Furthermore, Capt. Meena spoke about a series of broader reforms undertaken by DGS including mandatory audits, recognition of seafarers as key workers, shore leave SOPs, revised Form-1 procedures, digitalization of contracts, vessel acknowledgment features, coordination with FRRO, and strict action against illegal agents and fake sea-service cases.

He concluded by outlining the way forward, which includes introducing digital employment contracts with OTP verification, enhancing bank guarantees based on RPSL performance, blacklisting substandard vessels, upgrading RPSL rules to match global standards, increasing collaboration with unions and international partners, establishing repatriation funds, and ensuring stronger monitoring through MTI and RPSL modules. His address reinforced DG Shipping's commitment to building a safer, transparent, and more accountable seafaring ecosystem, one where seafarers' welfare, dignity, and rights remain at the core of maritime governance.

Additionally, at the end of his address, he emphasized the importance of transparency and safe recruitment practices by playing two awareness videos for all participants one highlighting the responsibilities and mandatory compliances of DGS-approved RPSL companies, and another demonstrating the correct process for verifying Form-1 details. These videos were showcased to ensure that seafarers, families, and stakeholders clearly understand how to check the authenticity of recruitment channels and avoid fraudulent practices.

d. Sagar Mein Yog



In his address, he emphasized the growing need for a structured wellness framework for Indian seafarers, noting that life at sea demands far more than physical endurance it requires emotional steadiness, mental clarity, and a resilient inner balance. He introduced the Government of India's flagship wellness initiative, Sagar Mein Yog (SMY), designed by the Directorate General of Shipping in partnership with NUSI and The Art of Living, as the first national programme crafted specifically for the maritime community. He explained that SMY integrates traditional yogic wisdom with modern seafaring realities, offering practical routines that fit within the limited space, long voyages, isolation, and high-pressure conditions typical of shipboard life. The initiative aims to equip seafarers with simple, effective tools to manage stress, reduce fatigue, improve posture and breathing, and maintain overall mental and emotional well-being.

He elaborated on the programme's evolution and milestones, outlining how SMY has progressed from concept to a structured, institution-ready model. This includes the launch of the official logo, the signing of a historic MoU with The Art of Living, and the completion of the first Train-the-Trainer programme, which certified 56 Yoga Trainers who will now support implementation across Maritime Training Institutes and onboard ships. He explained the core philosophy of SMY, which is based on balancing the seven dimensions of human existence body, breath, mind, intellect, memory, ego, and the self and highlighted the initiative's dedicated digital Learning Management System (LMS), which ensures continuous access to guided yoga sessions even during long voyages. Through these components, SMY establishes a sustainable and scalable foundation for making wellness a permanent part of maritime training and daily life at sea.



During the session, a special video message from Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar on Sagar Mein Yog was also played, bringing an added layer of inspiration to the programme. In his message, Gurudev encouraged seafarers to adopt yoga as a daily anchor to cultivate inner peace and stability, especially during long periods away from home and loved ones. He spoke about the importance of harmonizing breath, mind, and awareness to overcome emotional fatigue, build resilience, and maintain a calm, focused state even in challenging conditions. His message reinforced the deeper purpose of SMY not merely as a physical routine, but as a holistic wellness movement that empowers seafarers to lead healthier, more balanced lives. The video deeply resonated with participants and strengthened the significance of integrating wellness into the larger framework of seafarer welfare.

e. Sagar Mein Samman



In her address, she spoke about the Government of India's flagship gender-inclusion initiative Sagar Mein Samman (SMS), highlighting its vision to transform the maritime sector into a safer, more equitable, and dignified environment for women seafarers. She explained that although women currently constitute only 1.4% of Indian seafarers, the DGS has set a bold target of achieving 12% women participation in technical maritime roles by 2030, in alignment with Maritime India Vision 2030 and SDG 5 on gender equality. She emphasized that SMS is not merely a policy, but a structured national movement aimed at dismantling systemic barriers, fostering respectful workplace culture, and institutionalizing safety, dignity, and opportunity at sea.

She elaborated on the policy foundation including DGS Order No. 1 of 2023, IMU's gender sensitization mandate, collaborations with the National Commission for Women, and the formal roll-out of SMS during GMIS 2023, followed by the issuance of DGS Order 18 of 2024, which formally institutionalizes gender equity across the maritime ecosystem. She highlighted key milestones such as the national concept launch, the MoU with the Maritime Union of India, the official logo unveiling, and SMS gaining international recognition at global maritime platforms.

Further, she presented the structured Five-Year Roadmap (2025–2030), detailing Phase II implementation, which includes national awareness programmes, gender-audit frameworks, mentorship networks, grievance-redressal systems, curriculum modernization, ToT programmes, and corporate partnerships to strengthen inclusive hiring pathways. She emphasized that SMS establishes clear legal safeguards through POSH compliance, mandatory ICCs, confidential reporting systems, and regulatory

audits transforming gender inclusion from a voluntary effort into a binding institutional obligation for MTIs, shipping companies, and RPSL agencies.

She also reflected on feedback from women seafarers, who highlighted the need for fair inquiry processes, gender sensitization at all ranks, improved physical-fitness training, paternity leave provisions, and phased deployment models to support early-career women at sea. She stated that SMS aims not only to enhance participation but to ensure that safety becomes a lived reality, enabling women to work with dignity, confidence, and equality onboard. She concluded by reaffirming that SMS represents a deep cultural shift transforming maritime spaces from traditionally male-dominated environments into ecosystems where honour, respect, and equal opportunity are woven into everyday practice.



VII. Panel Discussion with Industry Experts

a. 1st Panel discussion: Seafarer Casualties: Rights, Relief and Responsibility



Moderator: Capt. Deepak Gupta, Anglo Eastern, MASSA



Shri Capt Deepak Gupta is the Director of Marine HR handling Tanker and Gas vessels in Anglo eastern Ship Management. He is a graduate in economics besides being a Master Mariner. Prior to this role, he has been General Manager Quality Assurance, General Manager VLCC Tanker Operations, Marine Manager Operations and an Auditor. He started his career with Shipping corporation of India in 1994 and has sailed with various companies prior to joining the Anglo Eastern Univan Group in 2010.

Panelists:

1. Shri Sajendra Oraon, Dy. Chief Surveyor, MMD Kolkata



Shri Sajendra Oraon is a distinguished maritime professional currently serving as Deputy Chief Surveyor-cum-Sr. DDG (Tech) at MMD Kolkata. Since joining the department in 2013 as an Engineer and Ship Surveyor, he has held key postings in Mumbai, Jamnagar, and Visakhapatnam. His extensive technical expertise is backed by vast sailing experience on crude oil and chemical tankers, bulk carriers, and general cargo ships. Academically, he holds a Master's in Maritime Affairs from the prestigious World Maritime University, Malmö. Today, he looks after ship surveys, inspections and audits, ensuring the highest standards of maritime safety and regulatory compliance.

2. Shri V Subramanian Kumar, Advocate



Mr. V. Subramanian (Kumar) is a Practising Advocate in the Bombay High Court, specialising in Shipping & Maritime laws, and related areas, following his illustrious father & Guru, Late Mr. S. Venkiteswaran, Senior Advocate, popularly known as 'Venky.'

He is the Non-Executive Chairman of Pandi Correspondents Pvt. Ltd., the Correspondents in India for the U.K. P & I Club, the Britannia Club, London Club, Skuld Club, as also the TT Club and the ITIC Club.

Mr. Subramanian has an LL.M. in Admiralty & Maritime Laws from the Tulane University, New Orleans, U.S.A., and has over three (3) decades of experience in matters relating to maritime laws, advising Protection & Indemnity Clubs, Ship Owners, foreign entities / traders / charterers / cargo interests, etc. His experience includes handling many matters involving seafarer issues.

He has advised and assisted the Directorate General of Shipping in 2014-15 in the then revamping of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, as amended; has advised the Tariff Authority for Major Ports as it then was, etc.

3. Shri Mukul Singhi, ICCSA



Mr. Mukul Singhee is a long time member of ICCSA and the Vice President for Eastern Navigation Pvt Ltd, a 170-year-old fleet operator in the Inland Waterways, Harbor and Coastal space. He has 13+ years of experience in the areas of ship building, ship owning, and operations along with the management of large number of crew in his organization's own fleet. He brings an operator and ship owner's perspective to the all-important issue of seafarer's employment and welfare. His academic background is a Post Graduate Degree in Mechanical Engineering from Georgia Tech, USA and a B. Tech degree from IIT Kharagpur in the same field. Prior to his work with Eastern Navigation Pvt Ltd, he gathered widespread experience across industry and functions as a Management Consultant with McKinsey & Co. in their Houston office working closely with Fortune 50 companies including the largest Oil and Gas companies of the world.

4. Shri Mohammad Gulam Ali Ansari, ITF Inspector



Mohammad Gulam Ali Ansari is serving as an ITF Inspector and Organiser with the National Union of Seafarers of India (NUSI). He began his maritime career in 2011 with Anglo-Eastern Ship Management as an Engine Crew member. During his years at sea, he witnessed firsthand the hardships faced by seafarers including exploitation, harassment, unpaid wages, and repatriation delays. Driven by a strong commitment to justice and dignity for seafarers, he became actively involved in union activities and later dedicated himself fully to protecting their rights. In 2024, he began serving as an ITF Inspector based in Haldia Port and other North-Eastern ports of India, whenever required. Since then, he has successfully handled numerous cases involving crew abandonment, recovery of back wages, overtime deficiencies, repatriation disputes, and harassment cases supporting both national and multinational seafarers and ensuring compliance with international labour standards.

5. Capt. Dipankar Basu, Dy GM, MOL Maritime (India) Pvt. Ltd.



Capt. Dipankar Basu is a Master Mariner with over 16 years of extensive sailing experience, having served in progressively responsible ranks up to Master. During his tenure as Chief Officer, he played a pivotal role in the successful rescue of the full crew complement of 23 seafarers from a sinking vessel in the North Pacific Ocean an operation that stands out as a testament to his leadership and seamanship.

He brings more than 20 years of shore-based experience in recruitment, training, and placement, contributing significantly to the development of maritime professionals. His sailing background spans various dry cargo vessels, including Panamax bulk carriers and large container ships. He has also overseen the delivery of two major container vessels directly from the shipyard.

With a distinguished career of 27 years at a reputed RPSL company, Capt. Basu continues to contribute his expertise to maritime operations and professional training.

Question 1: How does a ship manager activate the crisis response framework upon receiving a casualty report?

Answer:

Capt. Dipankar Basu explained that the entire crisis response mechanism is governed by the company's Safety Management System (SMS), along with flag state regulations, RPSL licensing requirements, insurance obligations, and applicable coastal and port state laws. He emphasized that the core principles guiding the response are safety of life, protection of the environment, followed by protection of assets and legal positions. When a casualty occurs, the Master's immediate priority is to ensure safety of life and prevent pollution. The Master must promptly report the incident to the Designated Person Ashore (DPA) and preserve all critical evidence, including VDR data, logbooks, movement books, and communication records. He specifically stressed that alcohol testing must be conducted within two hours of the incident, and this requirement is followed very strictly. Once the DPA receives the report, the emergency response team ashore is activated to support the Master. Notifications are sent to the owners, flag state, P&I club, class, and RPSL company. From the RPSL perspective, the next of kin is informed about the situation. To prevent misinformation and media trials, a single media spokesperson is designated. If necessary, surveyors and superintendents are dispatched to the vessel to secure evidence and assist the Master. He highlighted that the initial response phase

is extremely important, as it establishes the factual basis of what exactly happened and forms the foundation for all further investigations.

Question 2: What regulatory process unfolds once a casualty is reported to DG Shipping?

Answer:

Shri Sajendra Oraon explained that once a casualty report is received at the 24×7 casualty reporting centre, it is immediately escalated to the appropriate maritime administration office, and an Inquiry Officer is appointed. The regulatory process begins with ensuring preservation of evidence such as VDR data, logbooks, movement books, and crew statements. A Preliminary Inquiry (PI) is conducted, and a report is submitted to the Directorate. If the gravity of the case demands, the matter proceeds to a formal investigation, which may be ordered through court processes. He emphasized that evidence must be presented as it is, without manipulation, and investigators depend on authentic records to ensure fairness. He also observed that in some cases crew members may face pressure to limit their statements, and such practices undermine the integrity of investigations. The goal of the investigation is not only to determine accountability but also to identify systemic improvements to prevent recurrence.

Question 3: How does a P&I Club respond when notified of a seafarer casualty, including missing or presumed death cases?

Answer:

Shri V. Subramanian Kumar clarified that the primary responsibility lies with the ship owner or manager, and the P&I Club only assists and indemnifies the owner for legal liabilities arising from third-party claims, including those involving seafarers. Once notified of a potential claim, the P&I Club is informed much like an insurer receiving an incident report. The Master and vessel follow their SOPs, and it is expected that evidence preservation is carried out properly. The P&I Club's role is to indemnify legally payable liabilities, and international group clubs routinely settle claims worth millions of dollars without concern about quantum, as their function is to protect ship owners. He categorized cases into illness or injury, death, and missing cases. In illness or injury cases, immediate medical attention is provided, including airlifting if required, discharge at the next port, hospitalization, repatriation, payment of sick wages, and compensation as per the Seafarer Employment Agreement (SEA) or applicable Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). In death cases occurring during the course of employment, repatriation of the body, burial expenses, and death compensation are paid, generally within about three months. The most complex cases arise when a seafarer goes missing. If there is clear evidence of suicide or self-inflicted harm, compensation may not be legally payable under Indian law and most CBAs. However, where there is no conclusive evidence and the seafarer is simply missing, the case is usually treated as presumed death and compensation is paid. The P&I Club supports ship owners through a global network of correspondents who assist with local authorities, hospital arrangements, repatriation, and investigations. He strongly clarified that there is no concept of "compensation as per P&I." Compensation is determined strictly by the employment agreement, CBA, or applicable local law; the P&I Club only indemnifies what is legally payable by the owner.

Question 4: How do the Union and ITF support injured seafarers or families of deceased seafarers during compensation and repatriation?

Answer:

Shri Mohammad Gulam Ali Ansari stated that he represents the National Union of Seafarers of India, which has maintained agreements for Indian-flag vessels for over 70 years and foreign-flag agreements for around 30 years. These agreements clearly define compensation amounts for various injuries, including detailed provisions even for partial disabilities. When an incident occurs, companies are required to inform both the union and the family. The union plays a vital role because many seafarers do not fully explain their employment agreements or working conditions to their families, and sometimes families do not even possess copies of employment contracts. The union assists by obtaining copies of agreements from the company and explaining the rights and entitlements to families. He noted that while money cannot compensate for the loss of a life, it can help families manage the financial consequences. The union also coordinates with companies, P&I insurers, DG Shipping, MMD, Port State Control, and relevant flag states to ensure fair investigation and clarity. ITF supports not only Indian seafarers but multinational seafarers as well, especially in foreign waters. He raised concern that some SEAs state "death and disability as per P&I," without specifying amounts or referencing CBAs. This was clarified as incorrect, as compensation must be defined by agreement or law and cannot be left vaguely to P&I.

Question 5: What role does leadership play in preventing casualties and ensuring proper handling when they occur?

Answer:

Shri Mukul Singhi emphasized that safety must be treated not as a slogan but as a lived value. He stated that casualty management is complicated because it involves multiple processes, stakeholders, and perspectives, but prevention rests fundamentally on leadership. Leaders must ensure zero tolerance for retaliation against crew members who report safety concerns and implement strong whistleblower policies that are clearly explained even to junior crew members. Realistic scheduling must be adopted to address fatigue and workload, and Masters must be respected when they delay sailing for safety reasons. Leadership must visibly engage with crew rather than remain distant. He highlighted that in India anyone can write to the PMO with a complaint, and similarly, organizations should create accessible channels for crew to raise concerns. He stressed that welfare should not be treated as a cost but as human capital investment and risk management. When welfare is treated as investment, both safety and productivity improve. Prevention requires collaboration among regulators, DG Shipping, unions, classification societies, training institutions, ship owners, and P&I clubs.

Question 6: What safeguards should RPSLs implement, especially when operating under agency agreements?

Answer:

Capt. Dipankar Basu explained that in his organization, which operates directly under ship owners, every incident or accident is documented as a circular with root cause analysis and circulated to vessels. These documents are accessible to seafarers through secure online systems using ID and password, and reading and understanding them forms part of the pre-joining checklist. Pre-joining briefings, onboard drills, audits, and behavioral-based inspections are conducted to prepare crew for emergencies. He emphasized the importance of ensuring correct documentation, including nominee (NOK) registration. Many seafarers fail to update nominee details after marriage or do not correct discrepancies between CDC and passport addresses. Such errors create succession law complications and delay compensation distribution even when funds are available. Therefore, RPSLs must thoroughly verify documentation before joining and educate seafarers about maintaining accurate records.

b. 2nd Panel discussion: Seafarers' Abandonment and Welfare



Moderator: Capt. Mahesh Yadav, FOSMA



Capt. Mahesh Yadav is a First-Class Science Graduate, Training Ship Rajendra in the year 1975-76, he served with the Shipping Corporation of India from 1976 to 1989 from Cadet to Master on almost all types of ships. During this period, he obtained Extra Master's Certificate in 1986. From 1989 to 1997, he was on deputation from SCI to Government Training Institutes. In August 1999, he joined FOSMA as Director, Maritime Education and Training, looking after all the Training Institutes of FOSMA in addition to performing Association functions. He participated in all IMO STCW revision meetings from 2007 to 2010 and was the Chairman of STCW 2010 implementation Committee appointed by DGS. He also conducted "Regional Seminar on Familiarization with the Manila Amendments to the STCW Convention" at Mombasa (Kenya) for African Countries as IMO Consultant in June 2011. In 2010, he was awarded on the National Maritime Day for "Outstanding Contribution to Maritime Education and Training".

Panelists:

1. Capt. PC Meena, DDG (Tech)



Captain P.C. Meena is a seasoned maritime professional serving as the Nautical Surveyor-cum-Deputy Director General of Shipping (Technical) at the Directorate General of Shipping, Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Government of India. With over 17 years of sea experience, he has demonstrated exceptional leadership and expertise, having worked on various types of vessels including commanding of Very Large Crude Oil Tankers

and accumulated extensive experience in navigation and maritime operations. His distinguished career includes pivotal roles as a Nautical Surveyor with DG Shipping and Mercantile Marine Department, Mumbai with vast experience gained in ISM/ISPS Audits, Statutory surveys of Cargo and passenger vessels, auditing and inspecting of RPSL, MTI, LSA, FFA, Radio service stations. Captain Meena's robust educational background comprising of a Master of Science in Maritime Law and Policy from World Maritime University, a Post-Graduation Diploma in Shipping Management and Logistics from Narottam Morarjee Institute of Shipping, a Prestigious Extra Master Certificate of Competency from Government of India.

2. Shri Rajan Bose, Synergy, MASSA



Mr Rajan Bose is a seasoned marine professional serving as Fleet Manager with a reputed RPSL Company in Kolkata. He is DMET 1989 - 93 batch. With over 16 years of sea experience, he has demonstrated exceptional expertise having worked on Chemical and Oil tankers. His shore journey started in 2011. The transition from Shipboard engineer to Marine HR gave him a detailed insight into the life of a seafarer. It also

taught him to align with the concept of managing people, importance of compliance and familiarity with workforce operations for seafarers.

3. N Karmakar, FOSMA



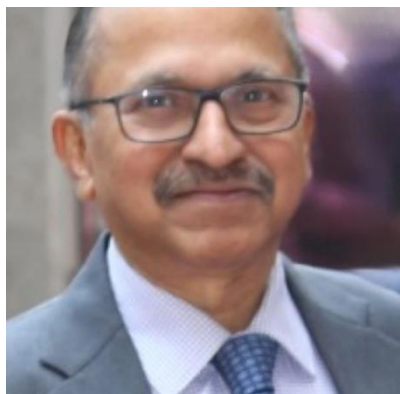
Capt. Nirmalya Karmakar, Principal, FOSMA Maritime Institute and Research Organisation Kolkata. Training Ship Rajendra B.Sc. Nautical Science 4th batch 1990 - 1993 Sea service over 60 months as Chief Mate and 54 months in command, total 14 years in senior ranks with BW Maritime on VLCCs & product tankers. 2016- 2018 involved with maritime training for nautical officers and assessment for ratings and West Bengal Inland Waterways service personnel. 2018 onwards involved with assessment of nautical competency courses. Joined FMIRO Kolkata on 01st January 2019 and promoted to Principal on 16th December 2025. Pioneered online classes for Competency Courses within 2 weeks of shutdown of physical classes. Actively involved in the revision of syllabus and question papers for nautical competency courses.

4. Ms. Bharati Bhandarkar, MUI



Ms. Bharati Bhandarkar is associated with the Maritime Union of India, where she leads the Women's Wing dedicated to the welfare of seafarers and their families. A pioneering force in the maritime sector, she advances global initiatives for women in maritime while serving as Editor-in-Chief of Bhandarkar Shipping News and Co-Director of Bhandarkar Publications, promoting unity across the industry in the spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. She has been a member of the National Maritime Day Celebration Committee since 2015, was felicitated and recognized by the Hon'ble Minister Shri Sarbananda Sonowal on the International Day for Women in Maritime 2025 and was conferred an Honorary Fellowship by the Company of Master Mariners of India in April 2025. She has also been actively involved in the Sagar Mein Yog and Sagar Mein Samman initiatives.

5. Capt. Ashok Menon, Principal, IMEI Kolkata



Capt. Ashok Menon, from the 1977–78 batch of Training Ship Rajendra, began his seafaring career with the Shipping Corporation of India, rising through senior ranks before attaining command with Essar Shipping in 1990.

Combining sea service with academic leadership, he has significantly contributed to maritime operations and education. He served as Principal of Trident College of Maritime Technology and played a key role in launching

the B.Sc. Nautical Science programme at the Institute of Technology and Marine Engineering (now The Neotia University). He later headed the Nautical Department at FOSMA Institute and is currently Principal of the Institute of Marine Engineers (India) – Kolkata Branch.

Capt. Menon also serves as an external examiner for the written and oral examinations conducted by the Directorate General of Shipping, upholding professional standards.

He has authored several books, including *Energy Efficiency in Shipping for Sustainable Development* (Taylor & Francis, 2024), internationally acclaimed for its practical insights on sustainable shipping.

Question 1: What is the current global status of seafarer abandonment, and where does India stand internationally?

Answer:

Capt. Sabyasachi Mukhopadhyay presented the international scenario of seafarer abandonment and emphasized that the issue has assumed serious proportions globally. For the last three consecutive years, Indian seafarers have unfortunately ranked number one among nationalities affected by abandonment cases worldwide. In 2025 alone, approximately 1,125 Indian seafarers were reported abandoned across different regions. A significant number of these cases have originated from the Gulf region, followed by Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. He highlighted that the matter is regularly discussed on international platforms such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), BIMCO, and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Unfortunately, Indian seafarers are frequently in the global spotlight not for achievements but for distress cases. He stressed that this is both a national concern and a reputational issue, as seafarers serve as ambassadors of India abroad. Therefore, coordinated administrative measures, stakeholder collaboration, union involvement, responsible ship ownership, and enhanced oversight are essential to reduce abandonment incidents in the coming years.

Question 2: How important is transparent communication during abandonment crises, and what welfare measures can strengthen crew protection?

Answer:

Shri Rajan Bose described abandonment as a deeply serious crisis that affects not only operational continuity but also the mental well-being of seafarers. He explained that transparent, honest, and structured communication is the single most critical factor in crisis management. During abandonment or financial distress, crew members often lose confidence and experience anxiety, which can lead to mental breakdowns. Therefore, companies must adopt a culture of clarity, ensuring open, honest, and two-way communication. Closed-loop communication systems should be implemented so that instructions are acknowledged and feedback is received. Empathy, he stressed, is essential leaders must handle situations with human sensitivity rather than only administrative formality.

He further explained that communication with families must follow the same principles of honesty and relevance. Information must be shared only with the officially declared Next of Kin (NOK), and seafarers must ensure their NOK details are correctly updated to avoid misinformation or legal complications.

On welfare measures, Shri Bose acknowledged that modern shipping has intensified workload pressures due to shorter port stays, faster turnarounds, and minimal shore leave. He agreed that reducing contract tenure especially for ratings could significantly improve work-life balance and mental health, even though it increases operational costs. He also proposed technological welfare initiatives such as a weekly digital mental well-being check-in system, where crew rate their emotional state. Low scores would trigger immediate follow-up by the company, ensuring proactive intervention rather than reactive crisis management.

Question 3: What feedback do senior officer trainees provide regarding abandonment causes, and how can risks be mitigated?

Answer:

Capt. N. Karmakar explained that based on interactions with competency and revalidation course participants many of whom are senior officers the causes of abandonment can broadly be categorized into three primary factors: financial collapse of shipowners, legal complications, and geopolitical risks. Financial distress remains the most common cause, as shipping is a high-risk, high-reward industry, and insolvency directly leads to non-payment of wages and vessel detention. Legal challenges such as vessel arrests due to pollution charges, criminal investigations, smuggling allegations, or contractual disputes also contribute significantly. Additionally, piracy and war-zone operations linked to geopolitical tensions further increase abandonment vulnerability.

He emphasized that awareness is the strongest preventive tool. Seafarers must conduct due diligence before joining vessels by verifying recruitment agencies through the Directorate General of Shipping website, checking company credentials, and reviewing vessel history via the International Maritime Organization database. Warning signs such as prolonged anchorage without voyage orders, depletion of provisions, shortage of bunkers, non-payment of wages, and loss of communication facilities must be recognized early. He also advised seafarers to understand reporting channels, including DG Shipping, flag states, port states, unions, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), the International Labour Organization

(ILO), and P&I Clubs, all of which provide helplines and intervention mechanisms.

Question 4: From the union's perspective, what does abandonment mean in practical and emotional terms, and how can awareness empower seafarers?

Answer:

Ms. Bharati Bhandarkar stated that abandonment is not merely a contractual breach but a violation of fundamental human dignity and rights. Practically, it results in non-payment of wages, lack of food and essential supplies, denial of repatriation, and legal uncertainty. Emotionally, it causes immense distress for both seafarers and their families, who often remain uninformed and financially vulnerable. The union views abandonment as a failure of moral responsibility by shipowners and a breakdown in regulatory oversight requiring international intervention.

She emphasized that unions play a proactive role in mediating with shipowners, insurers, flag states, and port authorities to secure repatriation and wage recovery. Awareness and pre-employment education are critical. Seafarers must understand their rights under the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC 2006), including wage protection, repatriation rights, regulated hours of work and rest, and grievance procedures. They must verify that recruitment agencies hold valid RPSL licenses and avoid unlawful fees or ambiguous contractual clauses. When seafarers are informed about support systems unions, port authorities, welfare organizations they transition from being vulnerable to empowered professionals capable of protecting their own interests.

Question 5: How effective are MLC Financial Security Certificates in complex cross-border abandonment cases?

Answer:

Capt. Ashok Menon explained that the financial security provisions under the Maritime Labour Convention have proven effective in several abandonment cases, particularly when strong institutional intervention exists. He cited cases where coordinated efforts between port state authorities and the International Transport Workers' Federation enabled repatriation and wage recovery within reasonable timeframes. In successful instances, P&I Clubs honored financial security obligations, and vessels were eventually scrapped to settle outstanding dues. However, he cautioned that effectiveness depends heavily on jurisdictional cooperation. In multi-jurisdictional disputes involving foreign flags, offshore ownership structures, and weak local enforcement systems, recovery may be delayed despite certification. Cross-border insolvency, court delays, and regulatory fragmentation often complicate enforcement. Therefore, while MLC Financial Security Certificates provide a structured legal framework and have significantly strengthened seafarer protection, their success ultimately depends on administrative efficiency, intergovernmental cooperation, and active follow-up by regulators and unions.

VIII. Vote of thanks



In the concluding ceremony, Shri Santosh Kumar Singh, Shipping Master Mumbai & Member Treasurer of SWFS, delivered the Vote of Thanks, extending heartfelt appreciation to Shri Shantanu Shatkur, Hon'ble Minister of State; Shri Shyam Jaganathan, Director General of Shipping; and Shri Sushil Khopde, Additional Director General of Shipping, for gracing the event with their presence and enriching the proceedings with their valuable insights. He also expressed gratitude to all speakers, delegates, organizing teams, and stakeholders for their collective efforts in making the symposium a success, reaffirming the commitment of SWFS and the maritime fraternity toward the continued welfare and support of India's seafarers.

IX. National Anthem & Vande Mataram



As the programme drew to a close, the atmosphere in the hall shifted into a moment of collective respect and unity. All dignitaries, delegates, officers, and attendees rose together to participate in the concluding ceremony, which featured the rendition of the National Anthem followed by “Vande Mataram.” The hall resonated with a sense of pride and patriotism as everyone stood in solemn attention, marking a dignified and heartfelt end to the day’s proceedings. This closing observance not only honoured the nation but also reflected the shared commitment of the maritime fraternity toward service, discipline, and dedication. The ceremony provided a fitting conclusion to the event, leaving participants with a sense of national spirit and togetherness as they dispersed.

X. Way Forward

The Kolkata Symposium reaffirmed that India's ambition to emerge as a leading global maritime manpower supplier must be anchored in a transparent, welfare-driven, and digitally enabled recruitment and governance ecosystem. While the sector has demonstrated consistent growth in seafarer numbers, women's participation, welfare schemes, and infrastructure development, several structural and operational challenges continue to impact recruitment integrity, onboard welfare, and long-term workforce sustainability.

Moving forward, the Directorate General of Shipping (DGS), in collaboration with industry stakeholders, maritime training institutes (MTIs), Recruitment and Placement Service Licensees (RPSLs), unions, and international partners, must adopt a multi-dimensional approach that balances regulatory enforcement with welfare expansion and technological integration.

Key priority areas include:

- Strengthening ethical recruitment frameworks through stricter monitoring of RPSL operations, performance-linked compliance audits, and enhanced financial accountability mechanisms such as revised bank guarantee norms.
- Accelerating digital transformation across maritime administration by integrating modules for employment agreements, grievance redressal, crisis response, and welfare access under unified platforms such as e-Samudra to ensure real-time tracking and transparency.
- Enhancing welfare infrastructure through the Seafarers Welfare Fund Society (SWFS) and Seafarers Welfare Board Audit Team (SWBAT), with a focus on gender-responsive, culturally inclusive, and MLC-compliant port-based facilities.
- Expanding outreach and facilitation mechanisms, including the nationwide scaling of the PRANAAM Seafarer Assistance Counter model to support documentation, repatriation, fraud prevention, and emergency coordination.
- Bridging the supply–demand gap between pre-sea training admissions and available onboard training berths through coordinated planning between MTIs and shipping companies.
- Institutionalizing mental wellness and inclusivity initiatives, such as Sagar Mein Yog and Sagar Mein Samman, into maritime training curricula and onboard practices to address occupational stress and promote equitable participation.

The establishment of regional facilities such as the Seafarers Outreach Centre and MMD Patna marks a significant step toward decentralizing maritime services and improving accessibility for aspiring seafarers from Eastern India. Continued investments in regional engagement will be critical to expanding participation from underrepresented states and ensuring inclusive growth within the maritime workforce.

XI. Recommendations

In light of the symposium discussions, stakeholder feedback, and emerging global challenges including rising abandonment cases, fraudulent recruitment practices, and contractual disputes, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

Regulatory & Compliance Measures

- Introduce digital Seafarers Employment Agreements (SEA) with OTP-based authentication to eliminate document tampering and improve contractual transparency.
- Implement a risk-based inspection framework for RPSLs, incorporating performance metrics such as grievance history, abandonment linkage, and compliance records.
- Strengthen enforcement through:
 - Blacklisting of repeat-offender vessels, flag administrations, and insurers.
 - Suspension or withdrawal of licenses for non-compliant RPSLs.
 - Mandatory verification of vessel credentials prior to crew deployment.

Welfare & Protection Mechanisms

- Establish a dedicated Seafarer Repatriation and Emergency Support Fund to ensure timely assistance in cases of abandonment, medical emergencies, or geopolitical disruptions.
- Promote mandatory Next-of-Kin (NOK) registration and nominee updates as part of pre-joining documentation to prevent delays in compensation settlement.
- Expand welfare schemes under SWFS to include:
 - Structured mental health support systems.
 - Periodic onboard well-being assessments.
 - Reduced contract tenure options for ratings to improve work–life balance.

Digital Governance & Transparency

- Develop a centralized National Online Booking System for seafarer welfare centres to provide real-time accommodation availability, standardized tariffs, and secure payment gateways.
- Launch an integrated grievance portal with automated alerts, escalation matrices aligned with MLC procedures, and time-bound resolution tracking.
- Enable inter-agency data sharing between DGS, MEA, FRRO, unions, and port authorities for coordinated handling of distress and repatriation cases.

Training, Awareness & Capacity Building

- Mandate pre-employment awareness programmes on:
 - Rights under MLC 2006.
 - Verification of licensed recruitment agencies.
 - Identification of early warning signs of financial or operational distress onboard vessels.
- Encourage MTIs to align admissions with realistic shipboard training capacity to reduce cadet unemployment and professional attrition.
- Promote leadership training within shipping companies to:
 - Strengthen safety culture.
 - Encourage whistleblower protections.
 - Ensure zero tolerance for retaliation against crew reporting safety concerns.

Gender Inclusion & Workforce Diversity

- Operationalize the Sagar Mein Samman Five-Year Roadmap (2025–2030) through:
 - Gender audits of MTIs and shipping companies.
 - Mentorship networks for women cadets.
 - Confidential reporting systems under POSH compliance.
 - Inclusive hiring targets aligned with Maritime India Vision 2030.

XII. Annexures**a. Minute-to-Minute**

Minute-to-Minute Programme (27.02.2026)		
Symposium on Seafarers' Recruitment and Welfare at Kolkata (Inauguration Ceremony for Seafarers Outreach Centre cum MMD Office)		
Time	Session Details	Name of speaker
0900 - 0930	Delegate Registration and Welcome Reception	Crew Welfare Branch, DGS
0930 - 0945	Lighting of the Lamp and Saraswati Vandana	All Guests
0945 - 1000	Inaugural Welcome Address and Symposium Objectives	Capt. Nitin Mukesh, Dy NA cum Sr. DDG (Tech), DGS
1000 - 1015	Strategic Insights on RPSL Challenges	Shri Sushil Mansing Khopde, IPS, Addl. Director General of Shipping
1015 - 1035	Keynote address on Recruitment and welfare of Seafarers (Guest of Honour).	Shri Shyam Jagannathan, IAS, Director General of Shipping
1055 - 1130	Remote Inauguration by Chief Guest: 1. Inauguration: SO Centre & MMD Office 2. Commencement of Redevelopment Works: Nabik Griha Samity 3. Commencement of Redevelopment Works: Marine Club Kolkata	Shri Shantanu Thakur, Hon'ble Minister of State, MoPSW
	Leadership Vision for the Sector Speech by the Chief Guest	
<u>Session - 1: "Seafarers recruitment and welfare" perspective from DG Shipping, Government of India</u>		
1130 - 1200	Projection of seafarer welfare and future aspects and Insights on Seafarer Welfare Infrastructure Initiative	Capt. Nitin Mukesh, DDG (Crew) /Member Secretary (SWFS)
1200 - 1215	Projection from seafarers' provident funds office and Pranaam Facilitation Services	Capt. Nitin Mukesh, DDG (Crew) /SPFO Commissioner
1215 - 1300	Roles and Responsibilities of RPSL Companies & Challenges Faced by RPSL/Shipping Companies / Seafarers: Seafarer's Rights and Seafarer's Code of Conduct	Capt. PC Meena, DDG (Crew)
1300 - 1400	Lunch Break	
1400 - 1420	Sagar Mein Yog	Shri Bharat Saboo, Yoga Expert, Sri Sri School of Yoga

Minute-to-Minute Programme (27.02.2026) Symposium on Seafarers' Recruitment and Welfare at Kolkata (Inauguration Ceremony for Seafarers Outreach Centre cum MMD Office)		
Time	Session Details	Name of speaker
1420 - 1440	Sagar Mein Samman	Ms. Aparajita Ray, Surveyor, American Bureau of Shipping
<u>Session - 2: Panel discussion with Industry experts</u>		
1440 - 1530	1st Panel Discussion: Seafarer Casualties: Rights, Relief and Responsibility	
	Experts from Industry - 1. Shri Sajendra Oraon, Dy. Chief Surveyor, MMD Kolkata 2. Shri V Subramanian (Kumar), Advocate 3. Shri Mukul Singhi, ICCSA 4. Shri Mohammad Gulam Ali Ansari, ITF Inspector 5. Capt. Dipankar Basu, Dy GM, MOL Maritime (India) Pvt. Ltd.	Moderator Capt. Deepak Gupta, Anglo Eastern, MASSA
1530 - 1620	2nd Panel Discussion: Seafarers' Abandonment and Welfare	
	Experts from Industry - 1. Capt. P C Meena, DDG Crew 2. Shri Rajan Bose, Synergy, MASSA 3. Capt. N Karmakar, FOSMA 4. Ms. Bharati Bhandarkar, MUI 5. Capt. Ashok Menon, Principal, IMEI Kolkata	Moderator Capt. Mahesh Yadav, FOSMA
1620 - 1635	Session on Question and Answer	
1635 - 1650	Vote of thanks	Shri Santosh Kumar Singh, Shipping Master, Mumbai/ Member treasurer, SWFS
1650 - 1700	National Anthem & Vande Mataram	
1700 - 1730	High Tea and Networking	

b. Important Links

i. PPTs

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EfgDsaWbcSLS69hFlpbbd4mZ27A4B9so?usp=sharing>

ii. Photos

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1k3HqfaF1xbAYSvFoIrqWcr0ogSR8I0et?usp=drive link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1k3HqfaF1xbAYSvFoIrqWcr0ogSR8I0et?usp=drive_link)

iii. Registration Form

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1zYFvSNeloBDSUtRrOzGTtu6Rl8z9j1C/edit?usp=drive link&ouid=106798669720862645447&rtpof=true&sd=true](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1zYFvSNeloBDSUtRrOzGTtu6Rl8z9j1C/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=106798669720862645447&rtpof=true&sd=true)

iv. Print Media

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IqeH_1Ufzc4OwMSIKF7erWppzG2btDus/view?usp=drivesdk

v. YouTube Live Link

<https://youtube.com/live/WzGrUczPVMI?feature=share%0A%0AYoutu%20be%20Live%20Link%0A>

c. Organizing Team



The event also highlighted the dedicated efforts of the organizing team, who worked under the guidance of Capt. Nitin Mukesh, DDG (Crew), to ensure the seamless execution of the Symposium on Seafarers' Recruitment & Welfare and the Inauguration of MMD Patna. Shri Sumit Patra, Project Consultant, played a central role in planning and on-ground coordination. Ms Aishwarya Malve, DGS SEED EY Consultant, contributed extensively through structured programme management and core operational support. Shri Arinut Sharma, Project Consultant, provided key logistical and technical coordination throughout the event. Ms Devika Tiwari, from the Crew Technical Support Unit, was responsible for managing end-to-end social media updates, ensuring timely communication and digital coverage of all sessions. Ms Pooja Vakani, Legal Consultant, managed the emcee script and supported event flow through precise content alignment and documentation. Together, their teamwork, professionalism, and commitment played a pivotal role in the overall success of the programme.