

# Seafarers' Welfare at the Forefront- initiatives by Merchant Navy Welfare Board (India)

Merchant Navy Welfare Board (India) Holds Key Meeting on Seafarers' Welfare in South Indian Ports at Radisson blu Hotel, Chennai on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

The Merchant Navy Welfare Board (India), under the chairmanship of Dr. N. Reuben Paul, held an important meeting on the evening of 4<sup>th</sup> November at Radisson Blu, Chennai, to discuss a wide range of seafarers' welfare issues. The meeting brought together representatives from seafarers' welfare organizations and Port Welfare Committees (PWCs) of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, covering all South Indian ports. The key agenda was to assess the implementation of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006, Guideline 4.4, across these ports and to address ongoing welfare issues faced by seafarers.

**Capt. Dr. Daniel Joseph, Deputy Director General of Shipping, Mumbai, graced the occasion as the chief guest and engaged in discussions with key stakeholders focused on promoting seafarers' welfare in India and the region.**

## **Seafarers' Welfare at the Forefront**

Dr. N. Reuben Paul, Chairman of the Merchant Navy Welfare Board (India), highlighted the pivotal role of the Board and its member organizations, including the Port Welfare Committees of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. He emphasized the significant contributions of Port Chaplains such as Mission to Seafarers and Sea Missions, who provide both spiritual and material support to seafarers when needed. Additionally, the efforts of Ship Welfare Visitors who regularly visit vessels with welfare kits and gifts, and PWC Welfare Officers who offer vital assistance to distressed seafarers, were lauded. These welfare officers are in constant contact with relevant authorities and provide special assistance to seafarers facing issues like abandonment, vessel arrest, unpaid wages, work-related problems, and hospitalization.

Dr. Paul stressed the collaborative nature of these services, which ensure that seafarers receive comprehensive support, both at sea and in port.

## **Historical Context and Development of Port Welfare Committees**

During his address, Dr. A. Balasamy, representing the Port Welfare Committee of Tamil Nadu, spoke about the International Committee on Seafarers Welfare (ICSW) conference held in Chennai in 2005, where he, alongside national and international delegates, discussed the development of seafarers' welfare across Southeast Asia. This conference led to the adoption of a four-year development program that culminated in the formation of the National Seafarers Welfare Board (NSWB) in India in 2006, under the leadership of Shri. Michael Pinto, IAS, former Shipping Secretary of the Government of India. This initiative was aimed at improving seafarers' welfare through the establishment of Port Welfare Committees across Indian ports, in line with International Labour Organization (ILO) standards. Dr. Balasamy shared that this initiative has been successful in fostering collaborations across ports such as Kandla, Andhra Pradesh, Chennai, and Kochi, and these committees continue to function effectively till date.

## **Government Support for Seafarers' Welfare**

Capt. Dr. Daniel Joseph, Deputy Director General of Shipping, reinforced the government's commitment to improving the lives of seafarers in India. He mentioned the circular released by the

Director General of Shipping regarding the establishment of Port Welfare Committees at all Indian ports to promote seafarers' welfare in line with global standards. Capt. Joseph further expressed the government's goal to not only improve seafarers' lives but also to enhance employment opportunities for Indian seafarers in the global shipping industry, contributing towards India's vision of becoming a maritime superpower.

He acknowledged the progress made in South Indian ports, where Port Welfare Committees are already in place and operational, and reassured attendees that the DG Shipping is committed to strengthening these committees and welfare centers to meet international standards.

#### **Support for Existing Welfare Facilities**

Dr. Babu Mailan of ISWOT, spoke on behalf of the Port Welfare Committee of Tamil Nadu and expressed concerns about the creation of new welfare establishments in the region. He urged the DG Shipping authorities to continue supporting the existing welfare facilities rather than creating new ones, as this would lead to more efficient service provision and avoid unnecessary duplication.

#### **Progress in Kerala**

Dr. Cyril George, Chairman of the Port Welfare Committee of Kerala, highlighted his past experience as Deputy Chairman of Chennai Port and expressed his satisfaction with the fast-paced implementation of the MLC 2006. He commended the efforts of the DG Shipping in enhancing welfare services for seafarers and supporting Port Welfare Committees across the nation.

#### **The Path Ahead**

Concluding the meeting, Dr. N. Reuben Paul, Chairman of the Merchant Navy Welfare Board (India), reiterated the importance of collaboration and support from the Director General of Shipping to further enhance welfare, recreational, legal, and spiritual services for Indian and international seafarers visiting Indian ports. He emphasized that with continued cooperation, the welfare services in Indian ports will align with global standards, ensuring that seafarers receive the care, support, and recognition they deserve.

The meeting concluded on a positive note, with all participants agreeing on the need to work together to strengthen seafarers' welfare initiatives and to continue improving facilities and services for those who spend months at sea, away from their families and loved ones.



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