

Ongoing challenges faced by seafarers in Indian ports - High level meeting organised by **Merchant Navy Welfare Board (India)**

Seafarers Welfare Meeting Organized by Dr. N. Reuben Paul, Chairman of the Merchant Navy Welfare Board (India) at Hotel Taj Santacruz, Mumbai on 15th November 2024

Dr. N. Reuben Paul, Chairman of the Merchant Navy Welfare Board (India), convened a high-level meeting with key members of the Board to address the ongoing challenges faced by seafarers in Indian ports. The meeting, held at Hotel Taj Santacruz, Mumbai, was attended by representatives from various port welfare committees, seafarers' missions, Indian seafarers' welfare organizations, the Mission to Seafarers, ITF-affiliated seafarers' union FSUI, maritime health organizations, and the Maritime Legal Cell.

The session was presided over by **Capt. Mohan Naik**, of Dynacom Tankers Management, who led the deliberations on several critical issues impacting seafarers across India's major and minor ports, private terminals, and anchorage ports.

The meeting was graced by several esteemed dignitaries, including:

- **Dr. Malini Shankar, I.A.S.**, (Former Director General of Shipping and Chairperson of the National Shipping Board, Government of India), and Vice-Chancellor of Indian Maritime University, as the **Chief Guest**.
- **Prof. Maximo Q. Mejia**, President of the World Maritime University, Sweden, as the **Guest of Honor**.
- **Mr. Amitava Majumdar**, of Bose & Mitra Law Chambers, and **Dr. Ilona Denisenko**, WISTA President, Russia, as **Special Guests**.

The discussions at the meeting were wide-ranging and covered a variety of pressing issues affecting seafarers, including:

- **Shore Leave and Crew Change** challenges at various Indian ports.
- Welfare of seafarers in **Minor and Major Ports, Private Terminals, and Anchorage Ports**.
- **Seafarers' Health Issues**, including medical emergencies and the need for improved medical facilities.
- The provision for **Air Ambulance** services.

- Enhancing **Communication Facilities** for seafarers.
- Addressing **Seafarers' Mental Health** and the need for specialized **Mental Health Counselling** services.
- Strengthening the role of **Ship Welfare Officers** across Indian ports.
- The establishment of a **Maritime Task Force** to provide legal assistance during emergencies, such as shipwrecks, accidents at sea, abandonment, and unpaid wages.

Global maritime dignitaries contributed invaluable insights, emphasizing the importance of promoting seafarers' welfare at Indian ports in line with **international standards**. Key points discussed included:

- **Dr. Babu Mailan** of ISWOT and **Revd. Nitin** of the Mission to Seafarers highlighted the need for **Seafarers Welfare Centres** at dock areas, **Mobile Van Seafarers Centres** for remote terminals, and **Boat Floating Seafarers Centres** at Anchorage ports.
- **Mr. Manoj Yadav**, General Secretary of FSUI, raised concerns about the lack of shore leave in many ports, while **Capt. Mohan Naik** noted that crew change is not permitted in certain ports due to the unavailability of immigration authorities.

Capt. Dr. Daniel Joseph, Deputy Director General of Shipping, Government of India, expressed the **DG Shipping's commitment** to improving welfare facilities for seafarers across all Indian ports. He confirmed that **DG Shipping** is working in close coordination with other relevant departments to address issues like shore leave and crew changes.

Dr. Vidya Barnes emphasized the need to address **seafarers' mental health**, stressing the importance of targeted interventions to support the well-being of seafarers on long voyages.

Mr. Amitava Majumdar, from the legal forum, provided valuable insights into dealing with **legal issues** concerning seafarers, including **abandonment, arrest of vessels, accidents at sea, and unpaid wages**. Drawing from his extensive experience, he stated that while ship owners, banks, and P&I clubs are often involved in such cases, good ship owners always support their crew members during difficult times.

In his concluding remarks, **Dr. N. Reuben Paul**, Chairman of the Merchant Navy Welfare Board, stated that the **MNWB** is actively training **Ship Welfare Visitors** and officers nominated by the port welfare committees to address the welfare and practical needs of seafarers across all Indian ports. He thanked all the distinguished guests for their participation and insightful contributions. He also expressed his heartfelt gratitude to **Capt. Dr. Daniel Joseph** for his continuous support and commitment to advancing seafarers' welfare initiatives throughout India.

The meeting concluded with a renewed commitment from all stakeholders to ensure the continuous improvement of seafarers' welfare in India, with a strong focus on aligning facilities and support systems to **global standards**.





