

Hong Kong Branch China Maritime 2012

The Hong Kong branch were heavily involved in the fourth biennial China Maritime exhibition and seminars held at the end of February this year.

Baird Publications once again kindly offered the branch a stand at the exhibition, and we were present throughout the three days. If the exhibition was slightly smaller this time due to the rather uncertain economic conditions, the standard of visitors was high, and we were able to meet a number of potential new members, and sell a few NI publications. We also introduced many visitors to the excellent publications available from the Institute.

A dinner was arranged at the Indian Recreation Club, and 50 members and guests enjoyed sumptuous Indian food and some lively interaction – helped by the excellent beer and wine on offer. A raffle raised HK\$2,440 for the Missions to Seafarers.

The highlight of our participation was undoubtedly the half-day seminar organised by Captain Vikrant Malhotra MNI, Hon Sec, Captain Sanjeev Mathur MNI, Chief Volunteer, and their team. Entitled *Challenges of Electronic Navigation*, it naturally focused on ECDIS and the potential problems the industry is facing with the introduction of this technology.

The keynote speaker was Captain Amit Bhargava AFNI, of Chellaram Shipping, who gave a masterful introduction. He described how his company started to prepare for the transition to ECDIS in 2004 by placing ARCS systems on selected vessels and gradually introducing deck officers to the concept of electronic navigation. He also gave high praise to the various NI publications which cover the subject, and claimed they were an invaluable tool.

Describing the search for the best ECDIS system, Captain Bhargava claimed 'There are some good systems, and some very good systems'. He said reliability, screen size, cost and service support were the main factors his company took into consideration, but it is also important to decide which extras add value, and

which are gimmicks. It is absolutely vital to standardise equipment throughout the fleet, so it must be the best available.

Understanding what can go wrong is very important. Systems can crash, or get viruses. Sometimes, even apparently minor components can cause major issues. The main problem for Captain Bhargava's company has been a US\$ 10 cooling fan, so better fans have been sourced, and plenty of spares are carried. Captain Bhargava claimed ECDIS is actually saving him money, but only because of careful chart ordering policies.

Finally, he stressed the absolute need for thorough training, particularly when vital

factors such as the loading of licenses and ENC's may not be covered by standard training courses, and he cautioned that familiarity with the system takes time.

In the future, we need larger screens, better chart coverage, more data from the Sailing Directions and more flexible licensing. If these things are not done, Captain Bhargava concluded, we may see a rash of ECDIS-assisted groundings.

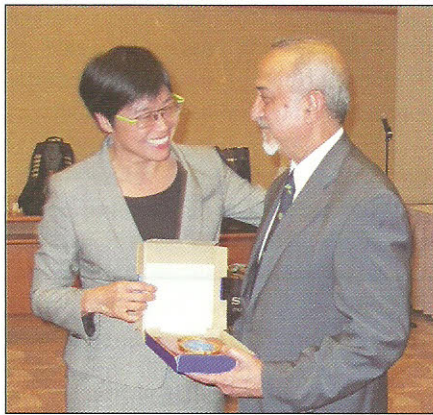
George Arts, Chairman of the Marine Press of Canada, was unable to attend, but his paper was ably presented by Captain Sanjeev Mathur MNI, our Chief Volunteer. Mr Arts also highlighted licensing problems, and stressed



▲ ECDIS Speakers: L to R Captains Mathur, Gandhi, and Bhargava



▲ ECDIS conference: A full house at the conference



▲ Petty Leung MNI, Branch Chairman, presents plaques to Captain Honawar FNI (top) and Captain Law FNI

that the needs of the mariner must always be the first consideration. He discussed the benefits and drawbacks of outsourcing chart ordering and supply, and gave advice on what to look for in an agent.

He believes ENC distributors must become the central point of contact for mariners and hydrographers, to ensure the industry gets what it needs, but this is proving very difficult in practice.

Finally, Mr Arts discussed the Pay As You Sail (PAYS) model of chart purchase, which he considers a sensible idea although it has not been properly developed.

Captain Bhupesh Gandhi, a former mariner who is now with MARIS, discussed the hardware selection process, and urged everyone to consider Mean Time Between Failures (MTBF), which he believes the most important factor in selecting a system. He also warned members to beware of cheap peripherals which do not meet IEC standards, but can be 90% cheaper than the real thing, and echoed Captain Bhargava's point when he claimed that ECDIS can be like a smartphone, with too many useless options or functions. Users should always go for reliable, user-friendly equipment.

After describing the five vital components of ECDIS – hardware, software, chart handling, training and support, Captain Gandhi concluded by saying there have not yet been any ECDIS-assisted collisions. Members were sceptical of this claim.

Nigel Cleave, CEO of Videotel Marine, spoke

about training and the options available. His theme was that training matters, and ECDIS is likely to throw up the same challenges as ARPA, GMDSS and AIS when they were first introduced. He cited one client, a ship management company, which has over 40 different types or models of ECDIS in the fleet. This, he claimed with masterful understatement, 'might be a problem for the ship managers'. He showed photographs of the cockpits of modern aircraft of different types to demonstrate that standardisation is possible, and lamented the fact that shipping lags aviation considerably in this regard.

His company is trying to produce training materials which will help develop an 'ECDIS mindset'. They do not attempt to replace the standard shore-based training.

Like Captain Bhargava, Mr Cleave considers the equipment can lead to a lack of situational awareness. He believes many users may defer implementation until the last possible moment as they seek to learn from the experience of others. But, like all our speakers, he believes ECDIS is a good system if it is used properly. He left us with the profound thought that 'everything will be OK in the end. If it's not OK, it's not the end'. Did he realise this is not exactly reassuring for the mariner, who is piggy-in-the-middle as usual, and nowhere near the end? Of course he did!

The final speaker was, in many ways, the most important. Captain Sriram Rajagopal served at sea with the equipment before being appointed Training and QHSE Superintendent by Anglo Eastern. He is a professional to his fingertips, and obviously cares deeply about our business and the safety of our crews. He spoke about the drawbacks and advantages of ECDIS from a mariner's perspective.

The main advantages are that you always

know where you are and where you will be, and the equipment permits watchkeepers to focus on traffic, not position fixing. It reduces workload and fatigue, and it makes supplementary information about lights and tides much more readily available. Switching on the AIS overlay helps situational awareness.

However, there are drawbacks. Passage planning takes longer, the mouse is difficult to use, the screen is too small, and plotting positions manually is tedious.

Captain Rajagopal has also experienced areas where, as he put it, the ECDIS and GPS lie. He cited parts of the Great Barrier Reef as an example, and showed us screen shots to prove it.

By far the biggest drawback, though, is the lack of standardisation. He concluded with the statement 'ECDIS is a fantastic system. Please make it better'.

After a lively question and answer session, there was a short summary before we adjourned for cocktails. The themes of the seminar were clear from speaker after speaker:

- Licensing procedures must be improved;
- The needs of the mariner must be given greater consideration;
- Screens are too small;
- Standardisation is vital;
- It requires great thought to select the right system;
- Training must be thorough. The standard courses are not sufficient;
- ECDIS is a good system, but it can and should be much better.

The overall success of the seminar can be gauged by the fact that we were fully booked a week before it was held, and almost every delegate remained until the very end. The 90 delegates were treated to an excellent and thought-provoking afternoon.

Thanks to the generosity of the organiser and



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our sponsors, all the branch activities during China Maritime were free of charge, and we managed to raise some money for the branch and the Mission to Seafarers. The final pleasure, at the cocktail party, was the presentation of plaques to Captains Deepak Honawar FNI and Marso KP Law FNI, to celebrate the recent news that they have both been awarded Fellowship of The Nautical Institute.

Captain Alan Loynd FNI