

The efforts of the government to raise awareness of career paths in the industry run the gamut from exhibitions at libraries to a major television-drama series with a maritime setting. Outreach programmes have been launched in schools and tertiary-education institutions, while special programmes such as work attachments have also been created.

Tay Lim Heng, Chief Executive of the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore, says that although in the past most educational efforts centred on the polytechnic institutions, a major push is now in the works to create more skilled and value-added jobs. "We are now putting more focus on graduate level studies," he said.

He is convinced this move to a wider maritime base is a natural progression from what Singapore has been doing all these years, through its role as a hub port for the region. "But more and more I think we need to go beyond that into becoming a maritime cluster where we offer a full range of maritime services; where it becomes a one stop centre. So whether a ship owner wants ship finance, maritime insurance, or broking, or any other service, he can find it here in Singapore."

## Driving for a unilateral Asian voice?

Singapore is central to Asia's drive to have a strong maritime voice internationally but some companies believe it could play a stronger part in strengthening Asia's regional status to counter unilateral rules and regulations being imposed by Brussels and Washington which Asian countries believe can discriminate against them.



Unilateral regulation of the shipping industry has become a major concern for many Asian countries as their national ship owners battle with increased port state control inspections and changes to competition rules such as the European abolition of the liner conference system.

However, some feel that Asia should take a leaf out of the European book and start to consider its regulatory responsibilities on a more regional rather than pure national basis. One owner told *SMI*: "We have to live under Chinese, Malaysian, Singaporean, Indonesian and Japanese rules etc rather than using our single Asian voice to draw up pan-Asian rules and regulations."

According to Kenichi Kuroya, Managing Director of Singapore-based K Line Pte, while Asia was not keen on confronting unilateral regulators like the USCG or the European Commission, it should be noted that the bulk of current shipping legislation "has been initiated under the leadership of European organisations or governments. It is common sense that with more than 50% of global tonnage owned and operated by Asian shipping companies, Asian interests should be more fairly represented."

One ship owner we talked to, said that in his opinion, the Singaporean government through the MPA could play an active role in receiving and collating and responding to information from the IMO. Singapore is waiting to take the leadership, and it could feed back through its government agencies, to other Asian national ship owner organisations.

## SHOOTING FROM THE HIP



### Olav Eek Thorstensen

#### President and CEO of Thome Ship Management

"The Singaporean Government has been strong in giving tax incentives and support to shipping companies based here but while business has been booming over the last year, costs are also going up. The government should sense that the good things it has been doing have been overtaken by higher office rental costs and larger wage increases. Inflation here at 3.8% is the highest for nearly a decade which is always a major concern for ship managers.

"As shipping business is conducted in US dollars, the weaker US dollar against the Singapore dollar is also affecting us a lot. We have to see some reduction in costs as the increases need to stop. A lot of companies may have to defer some of their support services outside of Singapore because they can't survive.

"Singapore has been a very popular centre. Don't forget it is one of the world's largest ports and one of the world's largest offshore conversion centres. So as far as shipping is concerned, Singapore is definitely the right place to be but when it comes to cost issues, people are starting to feel the effect.

"Barber went to Kuala Lumpur a few years ago and is now moving out of KL. I hear that Teekay is moving to Newcastle in the UK so maybe there could be other attractive places in Europe. In our case, we are doing more work in the Philippines regarding accounting work and support. So instead of just sticking to these maritime centres such as Cyprus and Singapore, you can go to other places. Thome is committed to Singapore as a long term centre but we have opened a new office in Manila this April and this is a very important centre from us not just for crewing but also for other aspects of our business." It is not just pure shipmanagement that is interesting Thome. In the Offshore sector Thome Offshore Management recently signed a wide-ranging service agreement with Vanguard Field Development Solutions of Singapore to provide FPSO conversion and project management services. As part of the new agreement, Thome Offshore will assist with the conversion of an Aframax tanker into an FPSO, and operate that FPSO once delivered to the field.

And the time is right to achieve this aim. A boom in world trade coupled with the growth of Singapore's near Asian neighbours India and China, means the island is well sited and well suited to meet the import and export transport needs of the region. "But there are other people who are also in the middle of this trade move so I think we need to go beyond that and our strategy cannot just be to operate as a hub port. We need to go beyond that and provide better and more varied services to ship owners and ship operators who choose to base their operations here in Singapore," said Tay Lim Heng. ⇨