



Guiding Spirit to Shipping Industry

# Sagar Sandesh

Maritime Tabloid English Bi - Weekly E - Paper

In association with R L Institute of Nautical Sciences, Madurai, Tamil Nadu. | RNI No. TNENG/2012/41759 | Monday, August 31, 2020 | Voyage 9 Wave 31

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**From This Issue Onwards "Sagar Sandesh"  
is Transforming as a Bi-Weekly E-Paper and will be  
Released on Every Monday & Thursday**



## Maritime Education: Challenges and Course Corrections during the Pandemic By Dr.Malini Shankar, IAS (Retd.)- Vice Chancellor, Indian Maritime University; Ex Chairperson, NSB, EX DG



Dr.Malini Shankar, IAS (Retd.) - Vice  
Chancellor, Indian Maritime University; Ex  
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**C**ounting the centuries which have gone by, no pandemic has had a kind of spread as the current Covid is having. All generations and all professions are affected and the maritime domain is no exception. Being a service segment, shipping and related activities are impacted more. Global economy cools, shipping gets the cold!

Economic disruptions apart, the education sector also has faced serious handicaps. While the campuses around the country closed and cleared the student populace, the challenges have multiplied. The latter half of 2020 lingers on and getting the students back could possibly be the last item to tick in the normalcy checklist.

Maritime training and education relies on a vocational model where practical exercises are the

preferred mode for preparing a student for the profession. The pandemic precludes the gathering of students and the hands-on training. This is an enigmatic challenge.

Maritime careers are entwined with competencies and so the professionals undergoing training at support, operational and management level competencies are affected by this disruption bump. The short duration training formats (read: Preparatory/Modular Courses) had come to a standstill. The challenge was to restart this engine. And there were efforts...

The efforts can be broadly seen as those taken up by the Administration, which were supportive and those by the Maritime Training Institutes (MTI) themselves, which could be termed self-sustaining and innovative. These, more importantly deserve introspection. In reality, when such efforts fan out, the crucial issue will not only be training but also the welfare of the students and the faculty. I share few of the efforts and approaches of IMU Campuses and the Affiliated MTIs with focus on the pre-sea training programmes. There could be valuable takeaways from these.

### Dissemination of Training Modules

The initial steps were to maintain the continuum of the lesson deliveries. The training modules for classroom deliveries had to be 'zoomised' or 'googlised' for online mode. The storyboards which evolved (still evolving) will need to be objective-focussed and the time-consuming distractions which occur during direct contact classes were to be absent. The modules ready, the next step was to connect with the students on an everyday basis. The challenge here was the reach out to students at corners of the country and across the seas to the islands (many in the A&N, Lakshadweep Islands had poor connectivity). On the peninsula also, there were corona-cordoned pockets where communication by email or WhatsApp (WA) was difficult. Many MTIs proactively organised familiarisation workshops for Faculty and students at the start of the first lockdown phase. In some cases, the licensing issues added to the little hurdles. To add some

comfort, IMU decided to bear the mobile phone charges (to a limited extent) for the students of its Campuses.

The training delivery packages included power point presentations with limited slides to digest, short notes with explanations, solved problems with explanations, diagrams with explanations, lecture clips (short, up to 10 minutes) shared through available platforms (email; WA groups etc.). There were two or three questions at the end of each module for self-assessment. Skill videos were also prepared where required and shared.

It is pertinent to observe that while bulk of the communications were on WiH (Work from Home) mode, Campuses had also geared up with the IT Teams ready for contingencies. A very important part of the exercise was the pipeline for feedbacks. This would give inputs on the course corrections in core issues (e.g., doubts on content etc.) and support framework (e.g., Connectivity issues, large file downloads etc.). A significant variable to be measured from feed backs was the level of comprehension of the students. The effectiveness of the online mode of dissemination is a matter of concern for the pre-sea students since most of assessment elements could only be based on knowledge rather than application abilities.

A standard dissemination session lasted for 30-40 minutes and about 4 to 5 classes could be effectively scheduled in the working day period and about 5 days of the week were made good. With conventional tools such as white boards, slides, animation and videos from web, the target was to complete the academic syllabus. Managing the dissemination was another challenge which involved tracking of student attendees, time keeping etc. While the courses neared completion and assignments and MCQ tests followed, value added short courses were done by few MTIs. A number of webinars of marine interest were sighted while being circulated to students (Naval Architecture, Modular course examinations etc.).

**To Be Continued In Next Publication issue on  
3rd September, 2020.**





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In association with R L Institute of Nautical Sciences, Madurai, Tamil Nadu. | RNI No. TNENG/2012/41759 | Thursday, September 3, 2020 | Voyage 9 Wave 32



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SCI - Top employer of women



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(Continued from last publication on 31st August, 2020)

### The Post Sea positives

The post-sea courses, when they kick started again, had lesser number of issues. The students apparently were quite receptive of the online mode of dissemination. The students, having seen ships, were able to comprehend and have the doubts cleared swiftly. Self-study discipline, preference to

spending more time at home etc., could be the reasons for post-sea cohorts preferring the online mode. Significantly, the Faculty also were less stressful for post-sea deliveries. The downside was with the online simulator training where difficulties were encountered in monitoring terminals effectively.

### Welfare

From hostel shut down till the students reached home, monitoring was done by all available means. Frequent

enquiries on health were made not only with the students but also with many parents. Over the period, the Faculty interacted with the students on tips of doing Yoga and checks on students' rooms and belongings were done and students were advised. Document deliveries were made good by courier where and when it became possible.

It needs a good mention that during the lockdown, placement exercises continued. IMU Campuses conducted mock interviews, webinars on

placements and facilitated the Shipping Companies to conduct online tests and selections.

Updates on the virus were shared during the online contact periods as well as on the website. Students were urged to download and use AarogyaSetu app. Webinars on maritime topics (e.g., Shipyard practices; Shipping Logistics etc.) were organised or routed to the students and the Faculty. Fee payment deferrals were done by few MTIs.

### Way forward from what we learnt so far

1. More expressive and demonstrative learning modules can be developed using virtual reality, augmented reality etc. These may complement the practical training but cannot replace it.

2. A stronger and wider network system needs to be developed.

3. More Virtual laboratories for performing experiments, virtual workshops for basic skills (e.g., welding simulator) and virtual ships and equipment for walk through and work can be developed.

4. Creative Assessment modules can be developed to assess cognitive and psychomotor domains.

5. Rubrics for assessing practical abilities can be drawn based on demonstrative actions.

6. Learning management Systems (LMS) architecture facilitating content development, uploading, assessments, two-way communication ease, administrative functions (track

attendance, marks etc.), hosting question banks etc. are needed. We are already sighting many LMSs (time tested and tailored to maritime training) and will see more in times to follow.

7. A Crisis Management Plan can be developed, which can be put on rail when such situations occur.

In no way can these efforts become a 'silver bullet' resolution package; especially considering the hands-on training which require physical engagements of both the trainer and the student. In fact, many issues such as examinations, new entry processes etc., remain to be resolved to a good finish. But these efforts have given the impetus and confidence as we forge ahead.

For MTIs, given the unique requirement for a ship berth (for training), placing the student who has completed the training on board, will be the biggest challenge. While we surmount the challenges, maritime training fraternity might well become a paradigm for the tenacity of the human spirit that may prevail.

On the note of continued efforts and action, Jonathan Winters, the comedian said, 'If the ship does not come in, swim out to it.' Well, we are all doing just that and reach the ship, we will. Lastly but importantly my gratitude to Dr Rajoo Balaji-Director IMU Chennai Campus in providing the input for this article.