Policies, resolutions adopted at 70th National Congress

The JSU convened its 70th National Congress in Matsuyama, Ehime prefecture on Nov. 4-6. Attending union members held several sessions, which led to the adoption of JSU policies that had been proposed by headquarters as well as nine amendments and three resolutions.

In the resolutions, the JSU (1) requested that Kuroshima/Kanaya services remain operating, (2) demanded that ferry and passenger services be maintained, and to promote a shift to more environmentally friendly modes, and (3) stated that it is definitely against the Japanese government’s toll-free-expressway scheme, and asked to secure necessary funds for those working on expressways and bridges.

The meeting of the committee of ocean-going sections was held Nov. 5, and attended by many union members who work in the ocean-going shipping industry.

The meeting reported on nine topics, including developments made by the revised labor agreements and the committee with JSA for discussing issues relating to female Japanese seafarers.

There were also reports on 14 subjects concerned with international affairs, such as developments made at ITF-related meetings and IBF negotiations as well as the international joint project for developing Asian seafarers.

The meeting encouraged attendees to exchange views to better understand the issues.

Discussions began in the afternoon of Dec. 5 on JSU policies for fiscal 2010, which were adopted by an absolute majority.

ITF addresses seafarer safety in piracy areas, reviews FOC campaigns

In respect to the issue of piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Aden and waters off the coast of Somalia, the ITF designated them as a high-risk area and enhanced its security efforts.

The fleet of naval ships deployed by governments began an escort mission.

Although these efforts resulted in a certain degree of deterrence, the ITF’s Seafarers’ Committee held on Nov. 16-17 confirmed that pirate attacks are still frequent.

As such, the ITF indicated that it is necessary to make public basic ITF policies for combating piracy, which will cover all ships regardless of flag.

Therefore, the meeting adopted an ITF Policy Statement to address the piracy issue, which clearly articulates a role of the ITF in monitoring piracy and that of ITF inspectors in dealing with seamen and their families in respect to providing welfare-related support.

ITF’s Statement on Piracy

The ITF (International Transport Workers’ Federation) Seafarers’ Section, having assessed the growing problem of piracy in the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Somalia, and now wider in the Indian Ocean, has determined that Nov. 25 must be kept under exceptional circumstances, ships should not transit the area.

The risk of attack is now so great that putting seafarers in harm’s way amounts to a breach of the ship owner’s duty of care.

The exceptional circumstances relate to:
- threats of direct and active protection of naval forces or being in a convoy with adequate naval escort;
- or the ship can be classified as low risk and has a proven level of protection measures in place.

The ITF also considers that seafarers should suffer no detriment from refusing to take ships into these high-risk areas. Seafarers have a right to refuse to put themselves in harm’s way and the right to be relieved before the ship enters a high-risk area. The ITF calls on flag states and ship owners to uphold seafarers’ rights in this regard.

The ITF reaffirmed the position that seafarers should not be armed.

The ITF calls on the wider shipping industry to support this position and to take all measures to ensure the protection of seafarers by not putting them in harm’s way.

Q&A

Q. Is the ITF recommending stopping all movement across the entire Indian Ocean unless they are in a convoy or escorted by a warship? But surely there isn't enough of a warship? How can ships be considered a reasonably safe vessel?

A. There are currently insufficient naval forces to escort more than a small proportion of essential vessels; however, only a third of the flag states are actively contributing to vessel protection and there is much more that littoral states can do to police their coastal areas.

Q. How many convoys are there now? Does a vessel join them or get protected?

A. There is protection through the transit zone offered by EU NAVFOR Somalia (EU Naval Force) through MSC HOA (Maritime Security Centre, Horn of Africa), which 10 ships which should – but don’t always – register. There are also convoys offered by some naval forces for their own flag vessels.

This leaves a massive area where vessels have limited protection. It is estimated that there are 25 to 30 naval vessels operating in the area at any one time. It has also been estimated that it could take closer to 400 vessels to do the job properly.

Q. What’s a “low-risk” vessel, given the range of the types of ships attacked in the past? And if high-risk ships disperse from the area, wouldn’t the low-risk ones be attacked anyway?

A. Pirates have attacked both low- and high-risk vessels, but EU NAVFOR has stated that 80% of ships taken fall into the high-risk category. This assessment is based on the vessel’s speed and freeboard (height of the ship’s sides) as well as manning levels, and training and protective measures onboard. The pirates have changed their tactics constantly so no vessel can be certain of being safe from attack. But with appropriate naval support, it can be considered a reasonably safe vessel.

Q. Does the ITF believe that next month or next year there will be a real reduction in ships using the Indian Ocean unless they’re in a convoy or under close escort?

A. There are already many companies that divert their vessels around the Cape and we expect that, given the current increase in successful acts of piracy, more companies will make this choice.

Q. Wouldn’t it be simpler to target and arrest pirates or blockade their ports?

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Q. What impact does this have on our merchant voyages and the IBF? (The IBF is a forum that brings together the ITF and employers’ groups. For more detail, see www.fifaforsafe.org/about-IBF.php)

A. The expanding area of pirate operations will be raised at the IBF, which already recognizes specific high-risk areas off Somalia in addition to the universally agreed war zones; however, the danger zone is rapidly increasing.

Q. Will ships actually stop transiting the Indian Ocean because the ITF says it’s dangerous?

A. The ITF position is that vessels should not transit these areas if protection of seafarers onboard cannot be assured. We accept that while this is our position the actions of seafarers and owners must be subject to their own risk assessment; however, we would stress to them that recent events have shown that very few ships can be classified as safe.

Q. Are you leaving it to flag states and ship owners to decide whether to divert ships away from the danger areas?

A. Ultimately flag states and ship owners will make their decision, just as seafarers will make the decision as to whether the risk is unacceptable and they will wish to be discharged. The issues of duty of care, however, are likely to become increasingly important and the judgment of the owners on whether to put their seafarers at risk will come into question in the near future.

Q. What effect would a necessary avoidance of the danger areas (i.e., by re-routing around the Cape) have on world trade and on the littoral states?

A. Potentially, a huge effect on the littoral states.

Q. The ITF statement says seafarers should not be armed. What is the ITF’s position on armed non-seafarers aboard merchant vessels?

A. The unions’ and industry’s firm position is that seafarers should...
United Kingdom changes policy on non-European officers

The United Kingdom has removed ship and hovercraft officers from the “shortage occupation” list, in a move that will significantly tighten the rules on the use of seafarers from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) in UK waters.

The step was immediately criticized by the Chamber of Shipping, which said it was “dismaying” at the outcome, insisting that the move might even put some shipping operations at risk. The chamber dismissed the suggestion that it was primarily interested in cheap labor, as under the points-based immigration scheme that is being phased in, any national of a non-EEA state working in the United Kingdom must be paid the same as a UK national in the same job.

However, officers’ union Nautilus International argued that the decision, announced by Border and Immigration Minister Phil Woolas, would help safeguard employment for UK seafarers at a time of redundancies and restructuring. Shortage occupations are exempt from the so-called resident labor market test, under which vacancies must be advertised in the United Kingdom for two to four weeks before non-EEA nationals can be recruited. But following a recommendation from the Migration Advisory Committee, ship and hovercraft officers are no longer designated as shortage occupations.

Nautilus International said that it could provide concrete examples of ships operating between two UK ports without UK nationals, and that “some sort of controls to regulate matters” would be needed until industry consensus can be reached. (Source: Fairplay)

U.S. advises Greek ship owners to arm crews sailing off Horn of Africa

The United States is advising Greek ship owners that they should enhance their crews’ protection against attacks by pirates off the Horn of Africa.

The advice to members of the Union of Greek Shipowners is that they “will find it in their own best interest to implement appropriate self-protection measures,” the U.S. State Department said in a report on a meeting between the Greek magnates and department officials including Andrew J. Shuey, assistant secretary of state for political-military affairs.

The ship owners’ fleets control about 20 percent of the world’s capacity in deadweight tonnage. Theodore Veniamis, president of the Union of Greek Shipowners, headed the Greek delegation. Somali pirates have taken dozens of vessels this year in the Gulf of Aiden and the Somali Basin.

Known as the Buccaneer, the system uses compressed gas to stop attackers by tangling their propeller up in ropes. In a demonstration off England’s Portland Harbour found their propellers after speeding over it. The Buccaneer can also be used to shoot golf balls or live persons. The cost? About US$20,000.

BCB has already had queries from shipping companies around the world, and from one, presumably wealthy, yacht owner. “There are enormous difficulties for shipping companies, from the point of view of having armed guards on board,” said Peter Holmes, the firm’s sales manager.

“We are offering an entirely non-lethal device, which also has an attractive price. Instead of firing remotely so that crew members do not have to put themselves in harm’s way.”

He explained that the Buccaneer’s origins lay in another product, the Wall-breaching Cannon, that’s been sold to police in hostage-rescue situations. It fires a projectile from a compressed air gun in order to break down walls or doors. The latest is a growing arsenal of weaponry that is being amassed to counter the pirate threat off the coast of Somalia.

Other systems include a military-grade laser that can cause temporary blindness. The Sealase, which was developed by the Finnish company Lasersec Systems, is advertised to have a range of four kilometers and becomes harder for the attacker to look at the closer he comes. (Source: ShipTalk)

Manila weighs crewing changes

The Philippine government is considering new laws that would affect the country’s crewing industry.

Under the proposed changes, operators would not be able to require seafarers to have health examinations at specific clinics or undergo training at designated institutions. Instead, seafarers would be allowed to choose where they are examined and trained.

If the amendments to the Migrant Workers Act are passed, any officers from ship management or crewing agencies who violate the laws could be fined or imprisoned. The legislation would also provide for a system that would allow operators to send seafarers, in addition to benefits available under existing employment agreements.

It will be added burden to vessel interests who are already doing their best to keep their Filipino seafarers employed despite the economic recession,” P&I correspondent Del Rosario of Pandipil said. (Source: Fairplay)

“Zero recruitment in Europe.” Those were the four stark words that headed one of the paragraphs in a memo from Maersk Ship Management to all its Dutch-cruised vessels. At least nobody can accuse the company of not getting straight to the point.

The world’s biggest boxship outfit will not be recruiting officers in Western Europe, at least for the time being, and instead will turn to Asia. Where Maersk leads, others will surely follow. European officers are already an endangered species. Famously, there are already more blue whales than there are British seafarers on British ships. The difference is that people are taking conservation measures to save the whale. Does this matter?

Asian seafarers perform the jobs on salaries a fraction of what Europeans are ready to work for, and generous in terms of what else they could be doing. So everyone is a winner, right?

The wisdom of this policy will only be judged several decades from now. Concerns will focus on the erosion of Europe’s maritime skill base. The optimists say Asian officer cadets will fill shore jobs in Europe’s maritime centers. But will they want to, especially if shipping’s center of gravity shifts to the East?

It is time to drop the insistence that seafaring offers graduate-caliber European worldwide career prospects. It doesn’t. (Source: Lloyd’s List)
How to stay awake at work: healthy ways to fight fatigue

Staying awake through a meeting, the graveyard shift, or a long day can be a challenge. Try the following suggestions to shake up the routine and keep the eyes open.

Change Your Routine

Often, sitting in the same position causes fatigue. A short break will jump start your body and fight boredom. Talk to a co-worker, switch to a different activity, run some errands, or drink a glass of water. Alternate tasks to stay alert. Set a schedule, with regular breaks, or divide a larger project into smaller chunks. Plan ahead. Procrastination can perpetuate a cycle of fatigue, as doing everything last minute can be stressful.

Move the Body

Just moving the body gets blood pumping and fights fatigue. Spend time during breaks exercising in the company gym or walking around the building. Find a friend to stay on track with at-work exercising, and be sure to exercise regularly outside of work, too. Offer to run errands at work, deliver a memo in person instead of sending e-mail, and take the long way around the facility. If appropriate, walk around the building – outside – to enjoy fresh air and sunshine.

If unable to physically leave your workspace, try doing some quick stretches. Reach tired fingers high over the head, stretch out sore legs, and comfort a cat to ease back pain. Stretch any part of the body that feels tense, tired, or numb. Make a habit of listening to the body. Many aches and pains occur from sitting in an uncomfortable position for too long.

Escape the Office

Try the following office escapes to wake up and get back on track:

- Think of a favorite place or memory. Spend a couple minutes in that place, remembering the details and happy feelings.
- Decorate a workspace with pictures of family, friends, a beloved pet, and a favorite vacation spot. Take a few seconds to look at a picture and remember why one is working in the first place.
- Music can also offer welcome escape and energy. Choose music that is stimulating and does not generate negative feelings, as these will contribute to fatigue. Just doing something unusual will help you out of the rut. If no one else is around, sing a song or whistle. Jump up and down. Take a yo-yo out of the desk drawer and practice a few moves, as long as the boss isn’t looking. Be creative, and be as random as possible without harming self or others.

Eat Healthy

Many people reach for carbohydrates when tired, but carbs just make the fatigue worse. They burn off a short time later, leaving the person more tired than before. Try a slow, natural rush of energy with high protein foods such as low-fat cheese or yogurt and low-salt nuts. A piece of fruit offers a short-term burst of energy, but it is healthier than junk food.

- Drinking soda and other highly sugared drinks is easy when tired. Get in the routine of drinking water instead. For a while, the sugar withdrawal may be painful, but in the long run, the body will function more effectively and efficiently on water than artificial liquids packed with chemicals and sweeteners.

Meditate

A quick meditation can boost energy and break the monotony of the day. Here are several quick and easy exercises that may help.

- Try the tree pose, a yoga position. Remove shoes, and stand up straight. Curl the toes up, and visualize the balls and pads of the feet sinking into the ground, like roots. Breathe deeply three times, then lift up the arms, like branches during an inhal, and turn the face upward to the sun, even though it’s beyond the office ceiling. Arch the back, as desired, and continue to breathe deeply for as long as desired.

- Find lemon or other essential oil in an invigorating scent, such as peppermint, ginger, or citrus. Gently massage the lotion into the hands slowly. Visualize the tension seeping out of the hands. When the hands feel relaxed, lift the hands up to the nose, and breathe in the scent with several deep breaths.

Staying awake at work can be a challenge. With a few simple tricks, fighting fatigue can be healthy, too. However, there are only so many tricks to keep you awake. The best remedy for fatigue is to get enough sleep as soon as possible.

VOICES from SEAFARERS

Capt. Reyno P. Socco of WORLD SPIRIT

Communication and good harmony onboard is a very important part of our seafaring life. I would like to propose to the JSU to negotiate with ship owners to include a provision in the next CBA for a “Wireless Internet Broadband” provider onboard for easy communication access with our families.

Jonathan Barcelon, J/O of NESTIA LEADER

On behalf of the Filipino crew onboard, I would like to thank the JSU for all the support that you have given us. You have provided us with valuable and useful information.

Capt. Edgar L. Uy and crew of JP GUNJO

The JSU Union Officers and AMOSUP’s L.O. visitations provide us with all the latest information and updates, the funding of various facilities, training, etc., and show that the JSU really cares for all its members. We understand that the JSU and AMOSUP are trying their best to get us an increase in our wages and benefits, and for this, we salute you.

JOKE CORNER

Deadly Wife

The sailors used to play mahjong during their free time. In one of their sessions, a sailor who already lost $500 suddenly grabbed his chest and dropped dead on the mahjong table.

The Captain didn’t know how he would break the sad news to the sailor’s wife. “I want to tell some good news about your husband. I hope you would just take it easy,” the Captain said over the phone. “He lost $500 at mahjong.” The wife screamed angrily. “Tell him to drop dead!”

Submitted by ISS John Canto
U.S. issues directive on ships from Madagascar

Vessels bound for the United States that previously visited ports in Madagascar, off the southeastern coast of Africa, might be required to post armed guards at ship access points while in U.S. ports.

The U.S. Coast Guard issued a directive today because it said Madagascar ports have not abided by a May 2007 U.S. request to maintain effective antiterrorism measures, a notice in the U.S. Federal Register explained.

Ships from Madagascar seeking entry to U.S. ports must also be able to show that access points were guarded while at port in Madagascar.

Guards may be provided by the ship’s crew or by outside security forces. Vessel officers must report actions taken to the Coast Guard captain of the port before arriving in U.S. waters. Ships arriving at Toamasina (also known as Tamatave) during their last five port calls are exempted.

The regulation became effective as of Dec. 4. (Source: Fairplay)

Shipping warned of icebergs moving toward New Zealand

New Zealand authorities have issued an urgent warning to shipping that a group of Antarctic icebergs are traveling toward the coasts.

Maritime New Zealand said many of the bergs are big enough to be picked up on radar, including one estimated at 500 meters by 50 meters. But others might be submerged or too small to be tracked.

The group of icebergs is reported to be moving at 4-5km a day. They are thought to have originated in the partial disintegration of the Ross Sea Ice Shelf in 2000. Some of them passed within few hundred meters of Macquarie Island, and the closest are moving within 250km of the Southland/ORUgo coast.

The New Zealand Press Association reported that a group of Australians plans to travel by helicopter from the New Zealand coast to the nearest iceberg to carve out an ice bar and set up a disco. (Source: Fairplay)

EU urges HoA-bound vessels to register, apply BMPs

As many as 25 percent of vessels passing through the Gulf of Aden have not registered with the MSCHOA (The Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa). They have also not applied the Best Management Practices (BMPs), said Capt. Richard Farrington, chief of staff of the EU Naval Force (NAVFOR) and co-chairman of the Shared Awareness and De-confliction (SHADE) mechanism.

He was updating a recent meeting of the Working Group of the UN/IMO’s contact group on piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) on the latest operational achievements, development and planning of the international anti-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden, focusing on information exchange, the internationally recommended transit corridor (JRTC) and the JRTC military coordination guide.

Crucially, he pointed out that seven out of eight vessels hijacked recently had not been reporting their movements to UKMTO (United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations) and not registered in the partial disintegration of the Ross Sea Ice Shelf in 2000. Some of them passed within few hundred meters of Macquarie Island, and the closest are moving within 250km of the Southland/ORUgo coast.

The New Zealand Press Association reported that a group of Australians plans to travel by helicopter from the New Zealand coast to the nearest iceberg to carve out an ice bar and set up a disco. (Source: Fairplay)