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Major advances in maritime safety

URING the last ten years, major advances have been made in the implementation of International Maritime Organisation measures for improving maritime safety and preventing marine pollution from ships. Most all the major conventions and other treaty instruments of IMO are now in force, and the codes and recommendations developed by the Organisation are widely implemented.

There is evidence that these measures have already made a substantial contribution to maritime safety and the improvement of the marine environment. Accident statistics have shown a steady decline in recent years and there is ample reason for saying that the work of IMO has contributed considerably to this improvement. For example, the collision rate has fallen automatically in areas where IMO's traffic separation schemes are in operation.

The progress is just as encouraging in the field of pollution preven-

C. P. Srivastava, secretary general of the International Maritime Organisation, reviews progress towards improving maritime safety and preventing marine pollution from ships in the ten years since the International Maritime Industries Forum was founded.



tion and control. Statistics produced by the United States' National Academy of Sciences show that the oceans are a great deal cleaner today than they were in the early 1970s, and much of this is due to the introduction by IMO of measures to control operational pollution and reduce the effect of accidental pollution.

Concern has been expressed in some quarters that the economic malaise currently affecting shipping and shipbuilding may lead to a deterioration in safety and anti-pollution standards, because in the

compulsion to economise, expenditure on safety measures may also be affected.

It would not be wise to dismiss such fears, although there is no concrete evidence to support them. Besides, there is now in force a regime of international conventions, protocols and codes whose effective global implementation is being given high priority and attention by the International Maritime Organisation and its member states. To assist these endeavours, technical advisory missions, workshops, seminars and symposia are

being organised by IMO in different parts of the world.

The overwhelming majority of shipowners, governments and others concerned with world shipping are determined to maintain the steady progress made in recent years towards achieving IMO's twin objectives of "safer shipping and cleaner oceans" by ensuring that they remain at the top of the preoccupations of the international maritime community.

This is well demonstrated by the very positive attitude taken by governments and the maritime industry in recent and current discussions within the IMO bodies. Many member governments of IMO have already announced that they intend to enforce more effectively and more thoroughly the international safety requirements and pollution prevention requirements. This is a most welcome development.

The industry interests and associations enjoying consultative status with IMO have generally given strong support to IMO measures, even when the implementation of those measures

may involve extra expense to their industries. Furthermore, information on technical developments in the industry have been made readily available to the IMO member governments, and this has enabled the relevant IMO bodies to introduce improved regulations and procedures quickly and effectively.

In the face of the positive attitude of governments and the maritime industry, there is no reason at all to expect that there will be any significant deterioration in maritime safety nor an increase in marine pollution in the future.

Indeed, there is every likelihood that the improvement will continue as a result of the beneficial impact of new measures. The International Convention on Standards of Training, certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers entered into force last year. This convention introduces, for the first time, basic minimum requirements in the important area of crew standards. The expected wide application of this convention will result in considerable improvement in safety at sea and efficiency in maritime operations by reducing

the number of accidents attributable to human error.

In addition, the existing conventions and regulations of IMO are now being implemented on a wide global scale. For example, not less than 95% of the world's ships are currently covered by the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (Solas). The Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea 1972, now covers 98% of world shipping.

Other IMO initiatives are expected to contribute further to the improvement of maritime safety in the near future. This summer the first group of students will graduate from the World Maritime University, which was established by IMO two years ago.

But while a great deal has been achieved, there is no room for complacency. Our confidence about the future is based on the conviction that governments and industry will continue to attach prime importance to maritime safety and the prevention of marine pollution. It is essential for the future that this concern be maintained.