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WMU studies a spur for change in Malaysian shipping

Karuppiah Ramadas was the first Malaysian student to attend the World Maritime University (WMU) in Malmö, Sweden. Following a two-year MSc study programme in General Maritime Administration — one of seven courses offered by the University — he graduated in 1985. Now occupying a senior position within Malaysia's Ministry of Transport, he is responsible for advising the national administration on all aspects of maritime safety. In this article, Mr Ramadas describes how the WMU has influenced his contribution to the development of Malaysia's maritime policies.

Following his appointment as Head of the Maritime Safety Unit within the Malaysian Transport Ministry in 1986, Karuppiah Ramadas has seen a number of recommendations contained within his World Maritime University thesis adopted by the Malaysian Government. Work continues on their implementation. His report urged the Government to take steps to establish an integrated maritime administration able to respond in a dynamic manner to change in the national and international shipping arena.

"A conducive environment is an essential pre-requisite for growth within any industry," says Mr Ramadas. "It is of vital importance to create a strong institutional framework, providing the leadership and effective administrative functions to enable that industry to flourish and grow."

During his studies at the WMU, which included an extensive programme of field trips to maritime administrations in Europe and the United States, Mr Ramadas examined ways in which maritime administration in Malaysia could be rationalised. He took account of the fact that shipping was the responsibility of three government departments — each managing sets of regulations and with different centres of interest and priorities. He saw the need to unify these functions, so as to allow Malaysia to better meet the challenge of modern maritime activities.

One of Mr Ramadas' key recommendations called for the establishment of a Malaysian Maritime

Authority (MMA). This body would centralise regulatory functions. The MMA's remit would encompass maritime development and the safety of ports, shipbuilding, shipping and offshore exploration activities.

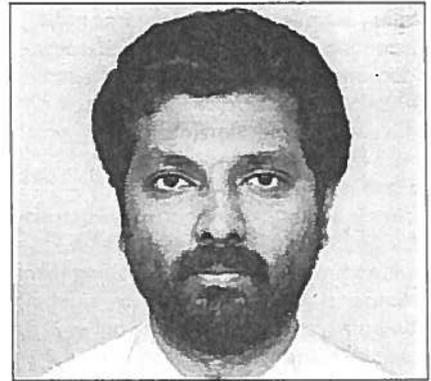
Under the proposals submitted for governmental consideration, the MMA would be established following the integration of the marine departments and the Maritime Division of the Ministry of Transport.

"Malaysia's maritime industries are experiencing rapid development," says Mr Ramadas. "Today, the offshore sector is the country's largest foreign exchange earner. Meanwhile, the Malaysian fleet has expanded significantly — the establishment of MISC and PNSL were major landmarks in its development and the recent liberalisation of registration conditions has provided an impetus for further growth. It is interesting to note that growth has been more moderate in sectors where there has been little or no Government intervention — areas such as maritime law, banking and the marine sciences."

Recently, Mr Ramadas attended a session of IMO's Maritime Safety Committee. A number of agenda items were of direct relevance to Malaysia's developing maritime policies, including those relating to the removal of offshore structures, the new guidelines for safe ship operation and the latest Solas amendments.

"As an emerging shipping nation, it is essential for us to play an active role within IMO and its various committees, to enable us to keep up-to-date with current best practice and future developments," he adds. "We will then be in a better position to co-ordinate our own maritime activities and adopt policies to ensure a technically safe and commercially viable industry."

Since the preparation of Mr Ramadas' thesis and his return to Malaysia, a National Shipping Council has been formed, to co-ordinate and foster links with the Malaysian shipping industry. A National Maritime Council has also been established to co-ordinate policies and programmes, with a particular emphasis on those relating to the law of the seas.



Karuppiah Ramadas MSc

Proposals to integrate the marine departments have been agreed in principle. Mr Ramadas is now directly involved in the legal and administrative aspects of the MMA reorganisation process. The extent of the MMA's responsibilities has yet to be finalised, but work continues on a number of detailed recommendations.

"The MMA would be the catalyst and co-ordinator for closer co-operation between Government departments," he says. "It would reduce the number of staff engaged peripherally on maritime activities, but, more importantly, the needs of government departments and other agencies would be better served by a more readily accessible, centralised source of expertise."

A firm supporter of the WMU, Mr Ramadas still maintains close links with the University and its graduates. He readily acknowledges the WMU's contribution to his own knowledge and expertise and, ultimately, to the development of new structures and policies within Malaysia's maritime administration.

"The WMU engenders a real sense of vitality amongst its students and graduates," he adds. "The circle of professional contacts across the globe increases year by year as more students graduate. Even if you are not acquainted with them as individuals, you are still joined by the common bond of having participated in an unusual and highly successful educational endeavour. I am convinced that such unity of purpose is making a major contribution to improved safety, better pollution control, and a more efficient shipping industry overall." ●