OCTOBER 2026

NEWS LETTER

EIGHT BELLS



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EDITORIAL

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As we progress through another eventful year for the maritime industry, this edition of our newsletter provides an opportunity to reflect on the activities of the Company of Master Mariners Sri Lanka and the continued engagement of our members in promoting maritime knowledge, professionalism, and fellowship.

One of the notable highlights during the past quarter was the participation of the Company in the Organization of Professional Associations (OPA) Annual Conference 2026, held on 11th and 12th August at the Cinnamon Grand Colombo. The conference brought together professionals from a wide range of disciplines to discuss issues of national importance and professional development. The presence and contribution of CMM members at this prestigious forum underscored the continuing role of the maritime profession in supporting Sri Lanka's economic growth and international connectivity. Such engagements not only enhance the visibility of our profession but also provide valuable opportunities to exchange ideas and perspectives with leaders from other professional sectors.

Looking ahead, members can anticipate another rewarding opportunity for professional engagement through the forthcoming CMM visit to Hambantota International Port. As one of the country's most significant maritime infrastructure developments, Hambantota Port continues to play an increasingly important role in regional shipping and logistics. The visit will provide members with firsthand insight into the port's operations, facilities, and future development plans, while also offering an excellent occasion for networking and fellowship among members.

The strength of our newsletter depends greatly on the willingness of members to share their experiences, expertise, and perspectives. I would therefore like to encourage all members, both active seafarers and those ashore, to contribute articles, technical notes, case studies, personal reflections, or historical pieces for the next edition. Every contribution enriches the collective knowledge of our fraternity and helps preserve the valuable lessons learned throughout our maritime careers.

The coming quarter also promises to be an active and engaging period for the Company. Members can look forward to the P. B. Karandawala Memorial Lecture, one of the most anticipated events in our annual calendar, which continues to honour the legacy of a distinguished maritime professional while providing a platform for thought-provoking discussion on contemporary maritime issues. In addition, we are pleased to be planning a seminar in collaboration with the Organization of Professional Associations (OPA), further strengthening the longstanding relationship between our two organizations and fostering broader professional dialogue.

As always, the continued success and relevance of the Company of Master Mariners Sri Lanka depends on the active participation of its membership. Whether through attending events, contributing articles, mentoring younger professionals, or sharing valuable experiences, every member has a role to play in advancing the objectives of our Company.

On behalf of the Editorial Committee, I thank all members for their continued support and involvement. I encourage you to remain engaged with the activities of the Company and look forward to meeting many of you at our forthcoming events.

Fair winds and following seas.

Rajitha Semage

Editor

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COMPANY OF MASTER MARINERS OF SRI LANKA

OPA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026











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1970s was a unique era, stood the transitional period on the edge between the classical traditional age of seafaring and the dawn of modern shipping. While containerisation was slowly gaining a foothold, the global merchant fleet was yet dominated by conventional breakbulk general cargo vessels, a few gas ships and tankers. Truely fit into the life at sea in mid 1970s, a mariner had to possess a rugged blend of mental self-reliance, rigorous mathematical competence and a good physical perseverance. The sea in those days quickly weeded out anyone who lacked above attributes if not dropped behind rest of the pack. There were no satellite screens, no digital chart plotters and no GPS on the bridge. Satellite navigation (like any early system) was a luxury reserved for western naval or specialised vessels. A deck officer had to be an exceptional practical mathematician. Navigating across an ocean required a skilful relationship with the sextant, the marine chronometer and referring to thick volumes of sight reduction tables and tables like Norie's. Finding the ship's position meant standing on a rolling wing of the bridge 1000 hrs and at meridian passage of the Sun, at twilight catching a horizon that was barely visible and shooting a few star for fixing the position. If the sky remained overcast for few days, the ship survived purely on "seaman's eye" and an intimate understanding of wind drift and current set. A sailor could know all the textbook theory on collision avoidance, but in the 1970s, radar was still relatively basic (no automatic tracking). Avoiding a close-quarters situation in a crowded strait relied heavily on the mariner's eye, the ability to look through a pair of binoculars at a ship's sidelights in the dark, manual bearings in bridge wings then judging what the other ship is doing and feel the relative motion.

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Unlike today’s automated container systems where computers calculate the ship's stresses instantly or the stowage, the Chief Officer in that era handled highly complex breakbulk operations all by manual stowage plans for stowage and segregation and calculations. Chief Officer would have been lucky to have a calculator in hand. A single cargo hold might contain everything from heavy machinery, knocked down tractors, paper reels, dangerous goods and steel pipes to spirits, barrels of coconut oil and crates of tea. Chief Officer had to meticulously plan the stowage plan to ensure the ship remained stable, the cargo was compatible in the hold, ensure not move around in stowage and it was loaded in the correct order for multiple discharging ports. Chief Officer calculating ship stability had to manually calculate the vessel's Metacentric Height and account for the free surface effect or the inertia of moving liquids. A mathematical error meant the ship could structurally fail or develop a dangerous list at sea. Understanding how to rig traditional swinging derricks, manage heavy-lift gear and apply proper dunnage (wood used to protect cargo) was a mandatory daily skill. Ships in that era were intensely mechanical, on a general cargo ship, a mate couldn't just push a button to operate cargo gear. They had to understand the physical angles, stresses, and rigging of swinging derricks and jumbo lifts. If a guy-wire parted or a winch jammed in a remote port, the officers had to roll up their sleeves, work alongside the deck crew, and fix it. A cadet or junior officer who acted like a gentleman academic but didn't know how to splice a wire, handle a heavy mooring line, or trace a bilge line in a flooded hold would quickly lose the respect of both the crew and the old man.
One of the greatest differences defining a mariner in that era was their capacity for extreme isolation from family and friends. There was no internet, no email, no WhatsApp and no satellite telephone. Mariners didn’t hear a single word from the family for months. Communication with the family happened almost entirely through handwritten letters sent via post office which the mariner picked up at the ship's next port of call weeks or months later. Then the reply to that letter to the family would take another week or more after handing over the letters to the ship’s agent. Ships business was handled by the Radio Officer (Sparky) tapping out Morse code or using a crackling unique-frequency contacting the nearest radio station.

This environment demanded men of steel with immense emotional self-reliance. The sailor had to be completely comfortable in your own skin, able to leave the shore life at the gangway and focus entirely on the ship for nine months at a stretch. Ports were not automated, therefore the ships did not just tie up for twelve hours and leave. A general cargo ship might sit in a port for a week or even two weeks waiting for stevedore labour to tally and unload and load the holds manually.

Most positive aspect of all above in that era is the circumstances that lead to creation of a rich and vibrant shipboard culture that has largely disappeared today. The ship wasn't just a workplace, it was a tight-knit community like. Officers and crew spent their pre-lunch and evenings in the smoke-filled smoke rooms or bars, watching real film from projectors, playing darts and having a yarn on many interesting topics while sipping a scotch on rocks or a chilled beer after the watch. The bar was run on trust, just walk in, pour the drink and enter in the book.
For CSC vessels calling Port of Hull, it was the same stevedores boarding for cargo

For CSC vessels calling Port of Hull, it was the same stevedores boarding for cargo operations regularly, the Stevedore Supervisor too had an account in the bar enjoying a beer. Lifelong camaraderie forged in those cross-ocean transits were solid. Everyone knew every twist, every strength and every story of the men on board shared the watch with thereby building lifelong bonds of trust.

The training of the mid-1970s reflected this dual need for academic discipline and practical survival. Training ships were run with strict, semi-naval discipline, cadets were taught to respect the chain of command without reservation, maintain meticulous uniforms and take immense pride in the professional integrity. None could do “cherry-picking" easy tasks. If you were a cadet or a junior mate, you were expected to get your hands dirty alongside the crew, chipping and painting decks, splice a wire rope, fish oil the wire ropes, checking the striker plate in ballast tanks creeping in the tank unsafely though or cleaning bilges so that by the time you wore the officer’s stripes, no sailor on board could trick you about how a job was done.

The mariners of mid 1970s were proud, highly disciplined professionals who viewed seafaring not just as a job or a pay check, but as a total way of life. They were practical sailors who carried the traditional wisdom of centuries of sail directly into the modern era of digital screen ships. They were the ultimate practical sailors. They mastered the science of navigation, fluid dynamics, and thermodynamics purely so they could practice the art of seamanship. They didn't look at a ship as a corporate office or a digital control station, they looked at it as a living, roaring machine of steel and canvas that required constant, physical vigilance. They were scholars of the book but masters of the deck, the last generation to truly command global trade using nothing but their own calculations, their own hands, and raw seafaring instinct. They were highly disciplined professionals who viewed seafaring not just as a job or a pay check, but as a total way of life. They were practical sailors who transitioned the traditional wisdom of centuries of sail directly into the modern era of digital screen ships.



A cadet standing on a modern bridge or in a highly automated, air-conditioned engine control room today is surrounded by incredible technology. Yet, the most valuable asset they can bring to a watch isn't a digital certification, it’s the distinct mindset of the mariners who went to sea in the 1970s. That generation mastered a foundational way of seafaring that automation can easily obscure.

Modern bridges and engine rooms are full of data (an alarms) but data is not reality. Today’s cadets face a constant temptation of screen blindness, trusting a digital readout implicitly without verifying it physically. 1970s navigator knows that an electronic chart or radar vector is just a mathematical model. They can teach a cadet to look at the screen, but then immediately look out the bridge wing window to verify the target’s aspect with their own eyes. Similarly, an engineer from that era didn't just read an automated temperature log, they walked the plates, smelled the oil, felt the specific frequency of a bearing's vibration, and listened to the engine's sound. Cadets today must learn to use all five senses to read the health of a ship, treating automation as a tool, not an absolute truth.

In the modern maritime world, when a component or an auxiliary pump fails, the standard operating procedure is often to pull up a software diagnostic tool, identify the error code, replace the module and order a complete replacement module from shore support. Mariners of the 1970s operated in an era of absolute mechanical self-reliance. If a machine broke down, they couldn't download a patch or call a field technician. They had to trace the root cause, understand the underlying engineering and fix the issue using what’s available on ship. Cadets today need to learn this deep, diagnostic troubleshooting mindset. Understanding how a machine works inside out, rather than just knowing which button resets it, what keeps a vessel safe when blackouts occur or satellite connections drop.

Today's cadets can learn that financial gain and career advancement are simply the natural byproducts of becoming an unshakeable master of your craft. When professional integrity comes first, safety and respect automatically follow.

With the advent of onboard Wi-Fi and satellite internet, modern ships can paradoxically become lonely places. It is common for crew members to retreat straight to their individual cabins after watch to connect with their favourite on screens. 1970s, the ship was a tightly knit team. Out of total isolation from the shore grew an intense, unbreakable shipboard camaraderie. This wasn't just about passing the time; it was a critical safety mechanism.

When you know your shipmates deeply, their backgrounds, their temperaments, and their strengths, you build an implicit layer of trust. When a crisis erupts on deck at 0200 hours in heavy seas, that mutual trust translates into a unified team that moves seamlessly to protect one another. Cadets today need to close the laptops occasionally and actively invest in the human community on board.

Ultimately, today's technology allows ships to move faster and more efficiently than ever before. But technology is fragile. By anchoring their modern training in the rugged, clearheaded and deeply proud traditions of the 1970s mariners, today's cadets can ensure they possess the ultimate maritime quality, absolutely ready for any sea or situation.

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The greatest threat to a modern cadet's development is "computer hypnosis", the tendency to look at an ECDIS or ARPA screen and treat it as the absolute reality, rather than a delayed mathematical model.
During safe, clear-weather daylight ocean transits, implement a "Screen-Down" watch. Challenge the cadet to step away from the centre console and stand on the bridge wing with a pair of binoculars. When a target appears on the horizon, do not let them look at the AIS data. Get them to determine what the target is doing, estimate its heading, and calculate a rough Closest Point of Approach (CPA) using the bearings etc. Once they have made their physical assessment, allow them to return to the screens to verify their accuracy. This demonstrates to the cadet that their senses can be just as fast and reliable as the automation.

A vessel talks to its crew constantly through vibration, sound, temperature, and smell. Modern cadets must be taught how to listen. It is ideal not to let a cadet just read the digital gauge panels. Teach them to put a hand on a pump housing (where safe) to feel the frequency of the vibration, to smell the subtle difference between hot oil and scorching insulation, and to identify the exact pitch of a main engine or generator running under a normal load versus one that is struggling.
Have them walk the pipelines (and trace) or cargo spaces safely and read the tension by the tone of the groan in the wires (stay safe) or judge a changing wind direction and incoming weather front by the sudden drop in air temperature and the smell of the spray before checking the weather tools. When automation handles the daily routines, the human brain drops into a passive mode. To build practical resourcefulness, mentors must move the cadet's brain back into active, diagnostic thinking. Instead of giving orders or immediately providing answers when a fault occurs, ask targeted questions that make the cadet to think and trace. By getting them to explain the physical loop behind the digital readout, the mentor prevent them from treating the ship as a software program. They learn that behind every flashing light on a console is a heavy piece of steel, a valve, or a hydraulic line that requires physicalunderstanding.
The goal is never to make the cadet feel inferior for using modern electronics but to teachthem that technology is merely an extension of the sailor's eyes and hands. If the electronics fail, the officer should know how to get around the job.



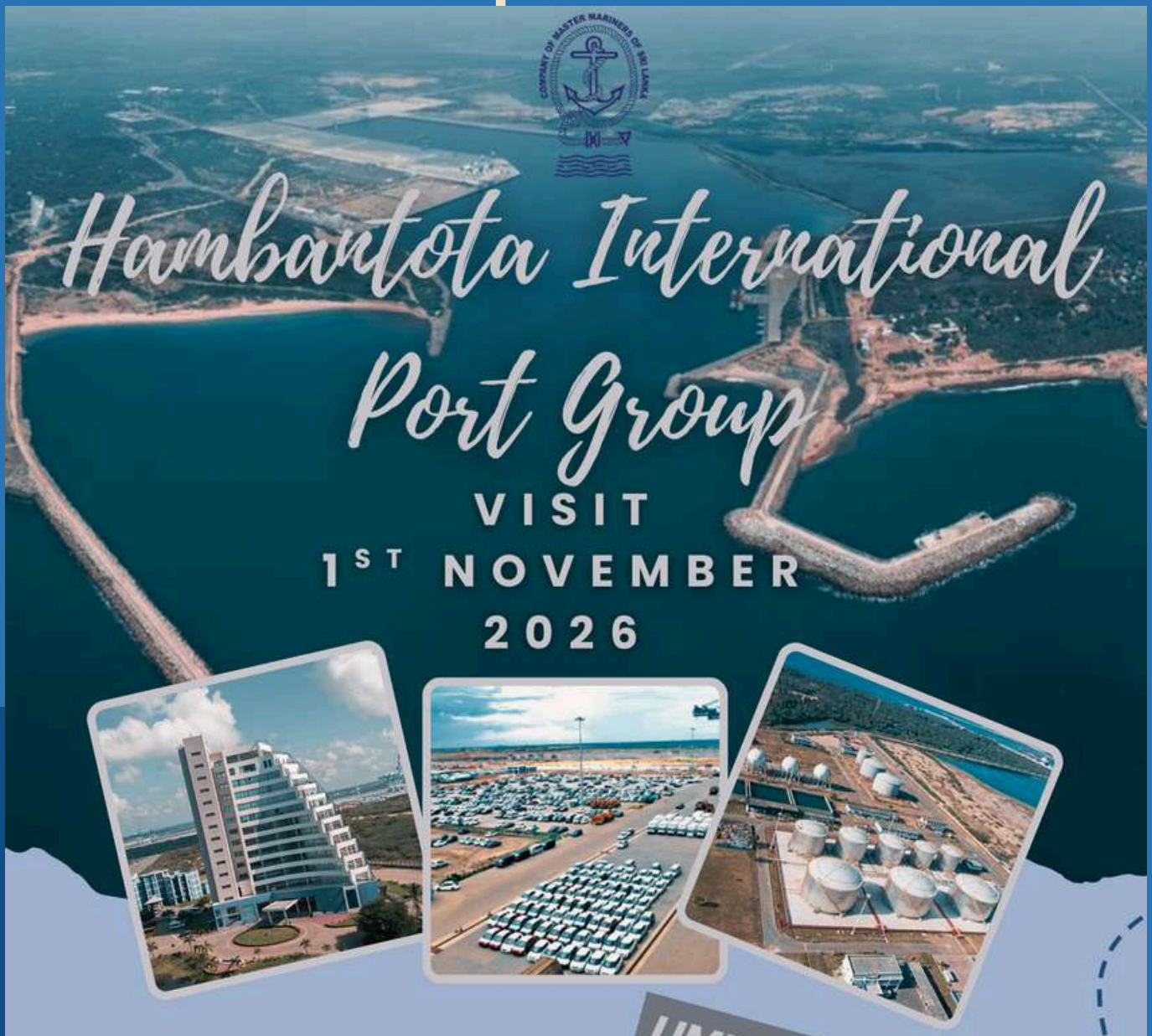
Conclusion

The modern bridges and engine rooms you stand in today are marvels of engineering, packed with instant data that the mariners of the 1970s could only dream of. But never forget, data is a tool, not an absolute reality. When a satellite signal drops, a software loop glitches, or a sudden blackout hits, a digital readout won't save your vessel, your core seamanship will. To truly master your craft and earn the genuine respect of both the crew and the Old Man, you have to look past the digital console. Step onto the bridge wing, feel the physical frequency of the machinery and use all five senses to read the health of your ship. Don't let "computer hypnosis" blind you to the living, roaring machine beneath your feet. Treat automation as an extension of your eyes and hands, never a replacement for your instinct. Professional integrity always comes first. When you become an unshakeable master of your craft, diagnosing mechanical faults from first principles and verifying radar vectors with your own eyes, respect and career advancement naturally follow. Finally, remember that a ship is only as strong as the human community on board. Step out of your cabins, close the screens and actively engage in the shipboard



CAPT. CHANDRA GODAKANDARACHCHI

Whats up next CMM?



REGISTER NOW

- Assembly Point: Lake House Car Park
- Reporting Time: 5.30 AM
- Departure: 6.00 AM Sharp
- Arrival at HIPG: Approximately 8.30 AM. Tour of HIPG 1.5-2.0 Hrs
- Meals: Breakfast arranged by HIPG. Fellowship and lunch to follow after the visit

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- **A seminar organized with the OPA.**
- **P.B. Karandawala Memorial Lecture**

The Company of Master Mariners Sri Lanka warmly invites members to contribute articles, experiences, technical insights, and professional viewpoints for publication in the CMM Newsletter. Your valuable knowledge and maritime experiences enrich our collective learning and help strengthen the professional bond within our membership. Kindly share your contributions with the Editor and support the continued success of our publication.

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The end