

O' God! ; Have Mercy on these Amphibians

Captain Shahrokh Khodayari

When you read a text of biology that explains how the life started at sea or in water and then came to dry land; there are many interesting points in it. We may compare the insolate migration of the sea-creatures to land to what is happening to seafarers these days.

* They wanted food as it was scarce at sea, this may not at first glance be comparable but let's see it from another point of view. It is true that the seafarers may get more money than most of those with the same education or experience ashore but at what price?

In many parts of the world, the overtime wages are dependent upon the time of that overtime and if after midnight or so during bank holidays, the rate is quite high. The reason may be the fact that the person is actually compensated for the effort being spent and being away from the family, friends or whatever else desired. The wages at sea may be higher than shore due to this fact, but the question is: are they really compensating!?

* They are *Ectothermic* or rather *Poikilothermic* i.e. their temperature changes with the ambient temperature and adapt themselves as so. The mariners are very much adaptable too; there are quite a number of changes every day in the normal routine of their work and life as well as the various shocks being felt due to new regulations and laws being enforced. They not only adapt to such atmospheres but later on try to make use of and get professional in. This perhaps is the nature that helps them but what we are seemingly forgetting is that how far we can push or where the limits are.

* The amphibians escaped to land to avoid the predators such as giant fishes and sharks which were growing larger and larger as the time passed by and there was no way to stay away from. Very unfortunate but it is a bitter fact that the seafarers are being repelled from sea for the same of so many reasons. The world trade depends on them in a vital way but yet again the arena is getting so tight that whoever has a chance would not like to stay at sea anymore.

It seems to be the *Chytridiomycosis*♦ of the mistreatments that are being practiced against the mariners which is the major causes of this migration and or initially having seen no interest in joining the career.

If we try to have an honest look at the treatment they are receiving in various sections; we will know how repugnant the attitude is:

1. The unreasonable and inhumane treatment in alleged pollution cases, this perhaps is the only area in the world that the person will be criminalized/imprisoned before the case is proven. There had been many cases that a seafarer has been deprived of basic human rights only after a suspected case & he/she would be taken off normal living condition and if lucky; in a reasonable custody until the courts decide otherwise and if the person is unlucky; he/she will be sent directly to prison along with all the criminals that are convicted of a crime; until the case is judged.

With this unfair treatment what can we expect from the mariners, those who are in the job, will be waiting for a chance to get away & those who may have had a plan to join sea, will be highly discouraged as it really is not worth doing with so much of vulnerability and openness to punitive measurements even before the misconduct or wrongful act is proven.

◆ Chytridiomycosis: A type of fatal disease which affects the amphibians

2. The attack of various port officials on board exerts a great deal of pressure on ship staff especially the master. This is really one of the most undesirable experiences the seafarers are confronted with. After a long sea-passage with god knows how many troubles passed by, on the early moments of arrival in a port, the ships are raided by so many squads that if we stop a second and look at the whole operations, we will admit that they are getting off-limits. The agents would be there for the ship's main business, the various inspectors want the ship as nice as their standards stipulated in the books say. There had been occasions that they do not even consider the vessel's passage through heavy seas and the damages or ugly looks would be noted down as lacks of maintenance and proper workmanship on board. The owner's groaning after the reception of the reports and so many other consequences that might have resulted from the office-engineer-like views. The variety of inspectors, port officials, ISPS & ISM officers as well as the ship's commercial activators all want their errands and tasks to be attended at the first priority and strangely consider their own business the most important . Consequently the master has no choice than doing this one before the other and this continuous chafing along with physical tiredness will really be nerve breaking.

This way we again are repelling the sea-farers from the life they have chosen.

3. With the ISPS regulations in force, many of the sea ports are fully or partly closed to seafarers. One should imagine how he or she would feel that after a long sea passage and life away from the family or society, the treatment is worse than animals in a zoological garden. It is interesting that how comes that a ship and cargo plus lives on board worth millions of currency units is safe in the hands of that group of amphibians that are called mariners when at sea, but they cannot even take a walk in the nearby city. The place with possibilities which may only satisfy a minor fraction of their requirements as a simple demanding human entity.

We really need to revise our systems and views. How much of the crime in the world is committed by the seafarers? Are they really the dangerous group of invaders to a country?

Seemingly not but they are so unfairly taken wrong and mistreated.

It is obvious that no-one will ever like to join such life. We will keep on losing the number of seafarers everyday.

4. The increasing work-load / lack of professional workers /reduction of manning scales as well as requirements after the attack of new regulations and conventions; have really burdened the modern mariners' lives to an intolerable level. One wonders why there were lesser regulatory bodies before but lesser accidents and losses. It is agreeable that so much of shipping needs so many rules to follow but we should not forget that these crowded roadsteads need seafarers to run the ships in and the over loading that is being forced onto them is getting out of hand.

There is a fine note to quote from Plato that : " there are two reasons or driving forces in life; one is pleasure & the other is material; once any of them is discarded or is of no more utility; you should change the life style"

According to what came earlier in this essay; we leave no other choice for the seafarers than to leave sea and this career. It is not strange to see very few youngsters who have interest to join this profession.

There are many striking news nowadays that there will be a great shortage for merchant seaman, especially the ranks as master & senior engineers. As per studies; the time required to raise a senior officer is about 12 years, this means that we are already lagging a great deal.

What needs to be reiterated here is the fact that for god's sake let's look at what we are doing with the seamen. We are really pushing these people out of the sea. We make their lives miserable and expect far too much from them everyday by giving nothing or very little in return.

The world trade owes a lot to the mariners but we are observant to the deteriorating conditions at sea. We may have stipulated conditions for living/sleeping quarters for seamen but we do not give them time to rest or sleep. We have devised Ship Security Alert System for ships but honestly is it really of much help to mariners, if you are being attacked, you are most probably in a remote and exiled area that there are little rules and your cry for help will not actually be responded.

We have implemented ISM code everywhere in the industry; not denying the help to safety it has provided; one must not forget the bureaucratic burden it has created for the ship's personnel that at times renders the system incapable and useless.

We have created the ISPS to restrict mariners only, there are still lots of wrongdoers there in the ports, lots of smuggling is going on but we only stop the seafarers to walk ashore and so the story goes on.

The maritime world needs to come back to simple principles; the human element is the basis for the industry. We should value them in a humane way we do value others. The rest periods regulations are there, but are we checking that how can that be possible with these many errands that we have created for the seafarers?

The industry should take the warning that in a few years there shall be lots of ships and cargo to trade with but not enough crew to run them. This bitter fact has seemingly reached our tastes already.

This part is not like the migrations of the sea-creatures that these amphibians will soon stop going back to sea & would become landlubbers.

This part is surely not matching the ethos of evolution.