



# SEA VIEWS

## MIMA'S ONLINE COMMENTARY ON MARITIME ISSUES

**No. 2/2010**

**29 January 2010**

*SEA VIEWS is an online platform that provides an avenue for MIMA researchers to articulate their personal views on various issues and developments in the maritime sector. Hence, their commentaries do not represent the official stand of the institute on the matters discussed. Readers are welcomed to reproduce the contents provided that they are appropriately attributed to their author(s). Kindly contact the Editor of SEA VIEWS, Nazery Khalid at tel.: 603-21612960, fax : 603-217617045 or e-mail : [nazery@mima.gov.my](mailto:nazery@mima.gov.my)*

### **Malaysia's re-election as an IMO Council Member : An opportunity to shine**

**Nazery Khalid**

*Malaysia's re-election into the IMO Council reflects the nation's standing as a maritime player of significance. Expectations are high for Malaysia to exercise its clout as a Council member to highlight and advance maritime-related issues of national and international importance.*

#### **Winning the hot seat**

Malaysia's re-election as a member of Council C of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) in November 2009 presents an excellent opportunity for this ambitious maritime nation to shine on the international stage. The re-election can be seen as the international community's vote of confidence for Malaysia to be the voice of developing nations at the IMO - the United Nations body that oversees the use and management of the world's oceans - and promote their

interests. Having been given the thumbs-up by IMO members to assume the coveted IMO Council membership once again, expectations are now higher for Malaysia to make a mark at the international maritime platform.

In November 2009, Malaysia received a special recognition by the IMO for its role in fighting piracy in the Gulf of Aden. IMO commended the Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) for its role in patrolling the pirate-infested Gulf of Aden. The international body also lauded RMN's move, in cooperation with MISC Berhad, to secure the release of crew members of a vessel owned by the Malaysian national shipping line, which was hijacked by pirates operating in the waters in September 2009. The success was recognised by IMO, which also urged the other nations to emulate the move. This award coincided with Malaysia's campaign to be re-elected into the IMO Council and certainly boosted Malaysia's chance of winning the seat in the hard-fought campaign.

### **Sea of challenges**

There are several issues that need IMO's and the international community's urgent attention. Issues such as navigational safety and environmental protection of shipping lanes need to be continuously highlighted. Threats such as piracy, smuggling and pollution that pose a danger to the seafarers and maritime assets and the ecosystem need to be addressed. There is also the growing threat of global warming that is already affecting small islands and developing states (SIDS) and low-lying nations. Malaysia, as a nation that enjoys a stature of some significance among its maritime peers, can and should use its membership in the IMO Council to bring to light these issues and contribute meaningfully in their discourse.

Being the 18<sup>th</sup> largest maritime nation in terms of seaborne trade volumes and merchant shipping capacity, Malaysia certainly is no lightweight when it comes to the maritime stake. It is also one of the world's top 20 trading nations, with an estimated 95% of its international trade carried out whole or in part by ships. MISC Bhd is the world's biggest owner/operator of gas tankers while Port Klang and Port of Tanjung Pelepas are ranked 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> respectively in the list of the world's largest container ports by throughput volume handled. In addition, its container ports have been regularly winning awards such as the Lloyds List Awards and Asian Logistics Awards.

These achievements put Malaysia in a strong position to speak out on maritime matters at the international stage. It should use its clout to draw attention to issues affecting common interests and other issues that need to be urgently addressed. Malaysia should lead by example and use the momentum from its re-election victory to ratify major international maritime conventions and standards which it has yet to ratify. By doing so, Malaysia would boost its credibility as an IMO Council member, adding punch to its membership to enable it to bring forth issues related to those conventions.

## **Making the membership count**

Just like its parent body the United Nations, the IMO has been, rightly or wrongly, perceived by its the developing country members as an exclusive club of the powerful nations, which are mostly the developed countries. However, the global maritime trade's centre of gravity has been shifted to fast-developing maritime trade and development regions which mainly comprise developing countries. However, despite their increasing international clout, the voice of the developing nations in the IMO remains muted and disproportionate to their achievements and contribution to the growth of global maritime trade.

With its re-election, Malaysia has the opportunity to represent the voice of the developing maritime nations on the international stage. It should seize the day by championing the common interests of fellow developing maritime nations and giving them an audible voice at IMO. It should also represent the Asian voice to match the region's stature as the global maritime epicentre. At the same time, it must be brave and bold to draw attention to issues and developments affecting the international maritime community.

Malaysia's euphoria of winning this coveted IMO Council seat must now be carried through and translated into meaningful actions that will be beneficial to the interests of the international community that the Council represents. The responsibility that comes with the Council membership should also inspire Malaysia to adopt the best practices in the maritime industry so as to raise its standard among maritime nations. Malaysia must make its membership in the maritime sector's highest decision-making body count in a concrete and constructive way.