

# “Young seafarers will be the building blocks of a greater nation”

— Capt Rajesh Unni

Synergy Maritime CEO, Capt Rajesh Unni — on June 25, “Day of the Seafarer” — emphasizes the importance of a revolution that will put India in the limelight once again as a pioneer in the commercial shipping industry.

**S**hipping history was made on April 5, 1919, when the Indian vessel S.S. Loyalty journeyed to the UK from India. How has the shipping industry changed in India since then?

It’s been about a century since then and the progress has been slow, although steady.

The traditional model of business in India, that is still in practice, isn’t helping the industry.

Commercial shipping has taken a dramatic hit.

There are also many technological advancements happening globally. I personally wouldn’t be surprised to see Google, Amazon and other bigwigs enter the logistics business with digitally connected ships or “smart ships”. The early adapters will have an edge. It would help India to be a driver for this change rather than just follow suit.

**What can India do to stop lagging behind other**

**nations in the shipping industry?**

We cannot do profitable business by owning ships alone, or merely by being a seafaring nation. We need a whole supportive ecosystem. Today we have a good minister who knows the nuances of the shipping business but unfortunately, no authority can make big decisions without the backing of other prominent figures of authority.

**What is the issue regarding ships that have been ‘flagged by India’?**

The challenge facing us is threefold, involving access to competitive finance, attractive taxation — namely, taxes regarding shipping and seafarers working in Indian bottoms trading on the coast — and fuel prices that need to be on par with world prices. Apart from these three, we need to develop a shipping ecosystem that includes building modern



Capt Unni

ships, the ancillary machinery, and a banking system that promotes shipping and developing human capital that not only operates ships but also trades. And, of course, there is the one that I involve myself in very much these days — bringing modern technology to shipping.

We need to drastically alter the way we see shipping. Every key player must be brought on board to make Indian shipping great again.

**How is the quality of maritime education at present?**

It's very much reflective of the state of Indian shipping. We have a lot to do. Young cadets are taught and trained in institutions, and they face unexpected circumstances when on the job. We should not be happy just to produce seafarers. We need high-quality talent in every field of shipping.

The shipping landscape has changed considerably; education must increase its pace. We need to focus more on creative thinking and problem-solving abilities.

**Synergy is the largest ship management company in India. What are some of the challenges you face?**

Ship management is a service business. The key to thriving in this business is to work the technology efficiently and have a good work force that backs up your business. India is easily a prime spot with a good amount of returns on human capital. The challenge is to create the next generation of logistics business models, and that does not happen by just ship owning or management alone. The ecosystem must work in synergy. The logistics market is indeed changing, along with how we buy and sell goods. When India invests, and believes, I am sure collectively we can achieve results.

**What is your message to aspiring seafarers?**

Constant adaptation is key. Technology moves so fast, relevance can be lost quickly. So, never stop learning.

Learn to see yourself as an investment for a better tomorrow. Young seafarers will be the building blocks of a greater nation.

**What are your hopes for the maritime industry?**

As a leader in the commercial shipping expanse, it is my dream to see young entrepreneurs become ship owners. The youth should see a lucrative future in shipping and help achieve the perfect ecosystem that would help shipping flourish. I wish the younger generation would be an active part of the logistics changes and bring an entrepreneurial spirit to the maritime industry. And, I hope the leaders and pioneers in this industry engage a lot more workforce from India and help develop the trade here.

**How can a ship management company play a philanthropic role in the development of India outside the seas?**

A company is successful when it is giving back its utmost to the society. Synergy as a ship management company strives to be eco-friendly and safety-conscious at sea. On land, we have several social development programmes. We have a personal stake in integrated village development. We have helped communities achieve their development agendas via various programmes such as sanitation, education, jobs, girl child welfare, agriculture, and alternative sources of energy. Our aim is to build a network of such self-sustained village models, and we are working closely with the national committee on rural development methods.

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**Synergy Marine Group** is an integrated ship management brand with seamless operations in multiple key maritime centres globally. Founded in 2006, Synergy is today one of the most trusted, respected and leading ship management companies across the maritime industry. The Group has achieved this distinction in a short period since its inception.

The Group has its worldwide headquarters at Singapore; chosen for its key location and business-friendly culture. The Group is well-represented globally with fully functional offices in India (Chennai, Mumbai, Pune, Kochi and New Delhi), Hong Kong, Philippines (Manila and Iloilo) and in the USA (Stamford).

**Capt Rajesh Unni** is a master mariner with more than twenty-five years of experience in the shipping industry. He holds a degree from LBS College of Advance Maritime Studies Research, Mumbai. He is the co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Synergy Marine Pte Ltd and Global United Shipping (S) Pte Ltd. Driven by his vision to provide world-class services based on openness, trust and reliability, Capt Unni founded Synergy Maritime Pvt Ltd in 2006. Under the capable leadership of Capt Unni, Synergy has built a reputation for reliable service and a commitment to safety and client satisfaction.

Capt Unni also serves as a founder and trustee of Synergy Trust, a charitable organization in Chennai that provides underprivileged children with access to education and works in collaboration with several non-profit initiatives. Capt Unni is also an avid marathoner, sports enthusiast and mountaineer.