HK Garrison boosts maritime search and rescue exercise

The Marine Department’s Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) conducted a maritime search and rescue exercise on July 12, in the waters off Tseung Kwan O, in conjunction with the Hong Kong Garrison of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), Government Flying Service, Marine Police and Fire Services Department.

Code-named “SAREX 2006”, the exercise was conducted under International Maritime Organisation (IMO) guidelines to test the efficiency of the alert and response systems between the MRCC and
The Permanent Secretary for Economic Development, Ms Eva Cheng, congratulated 13 cadets who recently completed their employment contracts as well as 14 engineer cadets and five deck cadets who finished their cadetship training since the launch of the Sea-going Training Incentive Scheme.

“It is heartening to learn that among these cadets, 14 of them have passed the examination and obtained their first professional qualification. This proves the success of the scheme and that we are attractive to enthusiastic and intelligent young people who wish to join our thriving maritime industry,” said Ms. Cheng.

She also thanked all industry participants, especially employers of these cadets, for their strong support. The Sea-going Training Incentive Scheme was launched in July 2004 with the Hong Kong Maritime Industry Council’s (HKMIC) full support to alleviate the shortage of home-grown ex-seagoing professionals to fill shore-based positions.

A total of 48 applications were approved as they met the criteria and original target in full.

At the Scheme’s recent promotion campaign, some 20 cadets had indicated that they will join the Scheme in summer.

“Also, it is likely that the number will rise in the coming years,” Ms Cheng said, adding that with everyone’s concerted effort, the shipping industry would be able to attract more new blood.

Ms. Cheng said the HKMIC will soon launch a Ship-repair Training Incentive Scheme to attract more people to the ship-repair industry, which is facing serious shortage of skilled workers.

The first training under the scheme will be on ship-repair welding. Depending on the industry’s demand, the scheme may be extended to other ship-repair skills.

HK Shipping Register crosses 31 million DWT mark

The Hong Kong Shipping Register has crossed the 31.24 million deadweight tons (DWT) mark and had 1,125 ships on its registry as at September 25, 2006.
SAR obligations reaffirmed

New amendments to the SOLAS and SAR Conventions concerning treatment of persons rescued at sea have entered into force since July 1, 2006. These amendments were developed following a number of well publicized incidents surrounding treatment of persons rescued at sea, especially those involving asylum seekers, refugees or undocumented migrants.

The longstanding maritime tradition of a shipmaster’s obligation to render assistance to any person found in distress at sea is reaffirmed in the amendments.

Clearer definitions of search and rescue services and the respective obligations of those involved, in particular, the Rescue Coordination Centres and the other national authorities in the process of rescue and disembarkation of persons rescued at sea to a place of safety are also provided.

Rescue of persons like asylum seekers, refugees and migrants would involve non-SAR considerations beyond the scope of the SOLAS and SAR Conventions. Government agencies and ship operators should be aware of assistance that international organizations or authorities of other countries might be able to provide in such cases.

More guidance information is available in the Merchant Shipping Information Note No.56/2006, which can be found on the MD website - www.mardep.gov.hk
HK and MD officials support shipowner at naming ceremony

Permanent Secretary for Economic Services, Ms. Eva Cheng, Deputy Director of Marine W. K. Lee and Assistant Director/Shipping K. L. Lee showed their support to Valles Steamship Company, Ltd by officiating at the naming ceremony of two vessels in Shanghai on August 15.

The two Hong Kong registered vessels are the m.v. Silver Phoenix - a bulk carrier of 40,489 gross tonnage, and the m.v. Silver Dragon - a bulk carrier that is under construction. Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding (Group) Co. Ltd. is the builder of both vessels which are classed by American Bureau of Shipping (ABS).

Permanent Secretary for Economic Services, Ms. Eva Cheng, delivers a speech at the ship naming ceremony in Shanghai.

The m.v. Silver Phoenix has a length of 218.22 metres, breadth 32.26 metres, and moulded depth of 19.6 metres. The registered owner and representative person of the vessel are Oceanlink Incorporated and Valles Steamship Company, Ltd, respectively.

The vessel m.v. Silver Dragon that is still under construction is estimated to have a gross tonnage of 40,489 tonnes. It will have an estimated length of 225 metres, estimated breadth 32.26 metres and estimated moulded depth of 19.6 metres. Its registered owner is Allied Shipping Ltd and the representative person is Valles Steamship Company, Ltd.
The Water Supplies Department has recently taken delivery of a new vessel - “Water Supplies I” - which was commissioned by the Marine Department.

The purpose-built vessel is design fitted with sophisticated equipment such as sampling tools to measure the water quality indicators of temperature, pH, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, etc. It is to help monitor the water quality in the first “Reservoir in the Sea”, Plover Cove Reservoir, and has been built to specific standards.

The “Water Supplies I” is a 9.5-metre glass-fibre reinforced plastic vessel powered by a diesel engine of 93 kW. The specialised boat can carry a total of 13 persons at a maximum speed of 9 knots.

Apart from this key operation, “Water Supplies I” will also be used as a patrol boat and provide transport for visitors within the reservoir.

About 100 attend water sports safety seminar

The Marine Department, Hong Kong Police Force, Fire Services Department and Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) jointly presented a water sports safety seminar on September 22 that was attended by about 100 people from the boating community and water sports associations.

The seminar’s topics included Speed Restricted Zones (SRZ); safety guidelines for water-skiing, jet ski drivers, kayaking, sailing, and windsurfing; demonstrations of anti-speeding operation and display of diving support vessel.

“Water sports are lots of fun; but proper lookout and safe speed are the two crucial factors to achieve this,” a Marine Department spokesman said, adding that the seminar aimed to enhance safety awareness among the boating community and people participating in water sports so that extreme care is exercised while having fun at sea.

The Marine Department and the Marine Police usually organise two to three safety seminars for the floating community every year. Four talks have been conducted since April this year, attracting about 300 participants.

As part of safety operations, both the Marine Department and the Marine Police have stepped up patrol services at a number of popular beaches and SRZs, and LCSD has put up notices at gazetted beaches to advise swimmers to stay within the boomline and shark prevention net areas.
A Hong Kong delegation visited the United States Coast Guard (USCG) at the Ports of Los Angeles (LA) and Long Beach (LB) between July 11-13, 2006 to study how the ports’ security had been strengthened with the implementation of the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code.

The delegation, led by the Deputy Director of Marine, Mr W. K. Lee, included GM/PD&PS Mr. S. M. Chung and MO/PSA Mr. T.K. Lam, officials of the Hong Kong Police Force and Immigration Department. They paid the visit at the invitation of the USCG’s International Port Security team to reciprocate their visit to Hong Kong in October, 2004.

During the visit, USCG Commander Nguyen gave an overview of Sector LA-LB’s main duties, responsibilities and roles as well as discussed maritime security related issues with the delegates.

The delegation visited the Customs & Border Patrol (CBP) at Evergreen Terminal where CBP officers explained their work at the terminal and also demonstrated the cargo scanning process, which included x-ray and gamma-ray scanning.

The delegation also visited various port facilities in LA-LB which included container terminal, cruise terminal, oil terminal and marine exchange and vessel traffic service to observe and discuss the implementation of the ISPS Code. A harbour tour around the port facilities in LA-LB was also conducted.

The delegation observed that LA-LB had implemented the ISPS Code well and the USCG had established a good monitoring system. The port facilities were in general found to have more sophisticated security installations than those found in Hong Kong.
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passenger ships, their on-board contingency plans and safety procedures, as well as the communication systems of the various parties involved.

Senior Marine Officer (Search & Rescue) Mr. Chan Kwok-wai, head of MRCC, said: “The annual drill is essential to ensure that quick responses and appropriate action are in place in times of emergencies.”

The PLA’s participation in the exercise for the first time this year provided a valuable opportunity for various Hong Kong government search-and-rescue units to strengthen cooperation and technology exchange with this elite team.

Xiamen United Enterprises (HK) Limited provided the passenger vessel “Ji Mei” for the exercise, during which a mock scenario was established that a fire had broken out on board the vessel off Tseung Kwan O, which also caused an explosion.

Upon receiving the report, MRCC immediately mounted a search and rescue operation. The PLA, which happened to be in the vicinity for a drill, volunteered to help out.

The two-hour exercise included passengers abandoning the vessel onboard life boats and rafts, rescue units combating the fire and searching for passengers trapped in the blaze. Rescue was also carried out to save those who had fallen into the sea and the injured were airlifted to hospital.

More than 200 staff members from the participating bodies were involved in the exercise. Two helicopters, two police launches, three fireboats, two Marine Department launches, six PLA boats and one passenger ship were deployed.

The search and rescue responsibility for maritime distress situations occurring within Hong Kong waters and the major part of the South China Sea covering a sea area of about 450,000 square nautical miles, as agreed internationally, rests with the MRCC and the Guangdong Province.

In 2005, the centre handled 227 cases of vessel emergencies, 62 of which developed into search and rescue operations, including 13 medical evacuations. A total of 349 persons were rescued.

In recognition of its expertise, the Hong Kong MRCC has been selected as a member of the IMO/International Civil Aviation Organisation Joint Working Group for Search and Rescue.
China’s top leaders praise HK’s rescue operations

China’s top leadership paid tribute to the Government Flying Service (GFS) for its daring rescue of 91 Mainland crew members who were in distress on two barges off Shangchuan Dao, in the Southwest of Hong Kong, during Typhoon Prapiroon on August 3 and 4.

“After learning that the crewmen had been safely rescued by GFS, President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and Vice-President Zeng Qinghong felt delighted and praised the GFS for its professionalism and spirit of humanitarianism. They directed us to convey their thanks to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government and the GFS crew,” said Vice-Minister of Communications, Mr. Huang Xianyao.

During Mr Huang’s two-day visit, he met the Secretary for Economic Development and Labour, Mr Stephen Ip; the Permanent Secretary for Security, Mr Stanley Ying; and the Director of Marine, Mr Roger Tupper.

Mr Wong also visited the Marine Department to thank MRCC for their effective coordination of the above two fearless operations.