

# COMMENT

■ EDITOR'S CHOICE:

RECOMMENDED READS:

**MARITIME SKILLS** - page 06:  
SAMSA reveals the content of the detailed Maritime Skills Study at the Skills Summit in Richards Bay. Read more about this.

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**H**as the African Maritime Renaissance finally arrived? Are we on the brink of the revival of the maritime industries in Africa? There's an undercurrent of sentiment that has been bubbling just below the surface and that now seems ready to cause its own small wave of change – or am I being naïve? Since the last issue I have sat and listened to a number of esteemed speakers from the maritime fraternity discuss what needs to be done to really kickstart the revolution. From Commander Tsietsi Mokhele, CEO of SAMSA to Jeremy Cronin, Deputy Minister of Transport – there does seem to be a willingness to push the maritime agenda at the highest level.

Sure, there are momentary lapses of momentum and those that will always err on the side of scepticism, but if just a small percentage of what SAMSA aims to do for and with the various maritime sectors materialises – then we certainly are on the brink of a Maritime Renaissance.

According to Jeremy Cronin the industry can expect a Maritime Green Paper shortly for discussion and he seemed optimistic about realising some of the legislative and regulatory developments that the industry has been pushing for for some time.

Indeed conferences and seminars are abuzz with talk of coastal shipping, cabotage and transshipment hubs. These are seen as opportunities for Africa to cultivate its own maritime industry and strengthen its involvement in carrying world trade.

Time lines will have to be drawn however. There is not much time for bureaucratic bungling on anyone's part. Port Louis in Mauritius is well ahead in developing a transshipment hub and has been operating as such for some time with plans for deeper berths and increased port efficiencies.

And so while it is exciting to listen to the passionate utterings of our maritime leaders – the proof is in the pudding as they say. We are well aware of South Africa's cumbersome mechanisms for decision making within the port environment. Namibia and Mozambique seem capable of rubber stamping projects at a pace that probably make the South African administrators' heads spin.

It's a case of distinguishing rhetoric from realism and over the next few issues of *Maritime Review Southern Africa* this is exactly what we intend doing. From Maritime Universities, tender developments, legislation modifications and the dream of attracting a merchant trading vessel back to our register, there has been much promised and it is time to deliver.

And so while the dawn of the African Maritime Renaissance seems near – we do have some way to go in creating an awareness of the maritime domain on the continent. There is still

some work to be done in developing a maritime mindset at governmental level (despite crusaders such as Cronin and Mokhele).

The celebration of World Maritime Day in Richards Bay reflected the land-based mentality with which the government views transport. While the minister must be given credit for accessing information about the maritime industry for his speech, it must be said that his real focus on the day was on pushing the (very important) agenda of road safety.

And his intimation at the beginning of his speech that the demise of the South African ships register, from over 70 merchant trading ships at the beginning of the 1990's to none at the beginning of this year, is in some way connected to the uncourageous shipowners unwilling to stick around for the 1994 democratic elections is very simplistic.

It's not a statement that you will find in his official speech as published on the government website, but it's one that skirts the real issues of why the South African ships' register has lost its tonnage and makes one wonder just how serious the Department is about resurrecting it.

Interestingly the current friendly relationship between the Department and SANTACO was highlighted at the function on World Maritime Day which also served to launch Transport Month. Following the launch of SANTACO Airlines, everyone seems keen to engage with the taxi association in other transport ventures. Are we likely to see a SANTACO cruise ship in our harbour soon or few SANTACO coastal traders on our register?

To be fair when given the spotlight to address delegates, president of SANTACO, Jabulani Mthembu, was eloquent in his position on moving plans forward. Excessive red tape and bureaucracy will not be an impediment to the taxi association's plans to develop their transport offerings. They're on land and in the air – so who's to say they cannot make waves in the maritime industry too?

Colleen Jacka, editor

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