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Capt Sanjay Maini
Country Head (Indian subcontinent), IRI



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Successful flag states keep abreast with the dynamic maritime world to service clients

– Capt Sanjay Maini



Our cover personality is master mariner Sanjay Maini, Country Head (Indian subcontinent), International Registries, Inc. and its affiliates (IRI). Capt Maini joined IRI in 2007 and established the Mumbai office.

Capt Maini's seafaring career spanned more than 20 years, including eight as a master on tankers. He last sailed with Tesma Shipping, where he helped develop standards regarding safety, quality, and security. He also lectured part-time at a maritime institute in New Delhi, teaching Tanker Economics and Tanker Safety.

He's on the Technical Committee of the Indian Register of Shipping, a part of the advisory board of various maritime committees and is also a founding member of the Maritime Awareness Program Society (MAPS). He is Secretary of the Dufferin Rajendra Chanakya Ex Cadets Association (DRACEA). Capt Maini has lectured and hosted many maritime forums and seminars, is an avid golfer, and has been instrumental in setting up many golf tournaments in India.

In an exclusive interview with **TradeMaker magazine**, he interacted with its **chief editor**, providing insights about the flag registry business practice, IRI, shipping, and seafaring.

Excerpts...

Please tell us about IRI's Maritime Registry, Corporate Services, and Yacht Registry divisions. Does the team in India cater to all the three?

IRI provides administrative and technical support to the Republic of the Marshall Islands Maritime and Corporate Registries through its network of 27 worldwide offices. Each of these offices offer full registry services, which means the Mumbai office has the authority to register a vessel or yacht, including those under construction, record a mortgage or financing charter, incorporate a business entity, provide technical support and inspection services, issue seafarer documentation, and service clientele.

The RMI Maritime Registry is one of the largest registries in the world and was recognized this year as the world's youngest and greenest fleet by Clarksons Research's World Fleet Register. As of 31 October 2021, 5,032 vessels were registered with the RMI, representing more than 186 million gross tons. The fleet includes traditional vessels such as bulk carriers, container ships, tankers, passenger vessels as well as super yachts, mobile offshore and offshore wind units, and cutting-edge vessels using new and innovative technologies. The RMI Yacht Team works within the RMI Maritime Registry to provide targeted customer service and support for the RMI yacht fleet.

We provide a full range of services for corporate and business entities. With a focus on streamlining

administration and compliance with the international regulators, it attracts a wide variety of business entities. Because services can be rendered by any office, entities can be formed in as fast as 24 hours, with no downtime waiting for approvals or decisions in other time zones.

How has the COVID-19 crisis affected IRI's businesses globally, including India? What did Team IRI do differently to tide over this crisis, and deal with the 'new normal'?

At least a decade-long investment in technology, as well as our decentralized structure, allowed IRI to seamlessly transition services and operations between offices as the pandemic swept across the world. Here, in Mumbai, we were able to quickly provide the necessary equipment and technology to our staff for a safe and secure 'work at home' environment.

While the country was in complete lockdown, we were able to shift processes like seafarer documentation production to other offices in areas of the world with fewer restrictions, ensuring that client services were not disrupted due to local restrictions. Because we regularly work with other offices, we had the systems, operations, and technology in place to quickly transfer and support each other as restrictions changed around the world.

During the restrictions, IRI Mumbai held regular virtual staff meetings and our morale remained high.





Capt Maini won the 'overall' award at the Golden Eagles Golf Championship on 16 Nov 2019, at the Oxford Golf Resort, Pune

Some business travel is essential. How did IRI deal with this challenge, considering frequent and elongated travel bans, enforced in line with COVID restrictions?

Without doubt, digital media interaction is not the same as physical interaction and there is value in shaking hands with a client. Meeting clients in person is far more productive than meeting them over video calls, but we all must adapt during these unprecedented times. As such, we maintained contact and relationships with clients — thanks to virtual meeting platforms. We look forward to getting back to physical meetings and events.

Please talk about the progress, new developments, plans, and changes in 'IRI India' over the years.

In December 2007, IRI opened the Mumbai office with two professionals to serve clients in and around Southeast Asia. The office has now grown to a team of 24 professionals who provide full registry services for both corporate and maritime clients. Given that a significant number of Indian seafarers serve on foreign-flagged vessels, including those flagged with the Marshall Islands, we have a large seafarer documentation department, with 13 staff members who work directly with more than 70 Indian manning agencies. There's been a noticeable increase in Indian manning agencies providing Indian seafarers to RMI flagged vessels, so I see our seafarer documentation department growing in the future. Our team also

provides support and services to IRI's other offices around the world.

How and why did you choose to be a part of a flag registry? What made you stick to this trade as well as the same company, for so many years?

When I joined IRI in 2007, the Registry was served by 14 worldwide offices. Continual expansion of the RMI fleet, and a strong desire to provide technical services in local time, led to the interest in adding an office in India. Once hired, I trained with the IRI team in Hong Kong and immediately I felt welcomed and valued, much like family. The transparency and professionalism I saw made a deep impression on me straightaway. I was then sent to Singapore, Reston (our head office), and London, for further training before I came to Mumbai. The more I learned about the organization and the team, the more rewarding it became. My colleagues in other offices made me feel very welcome and I have never looked back.

Opening a new office is challenging, but I had excellent support from the senior management and other offices, and we were able to settle in smoothly. Flag state work is unique and unless you become a part of it you really can't appreciate the scope. The phrase that says you learn something new every day is so apt if you work for a flag state. The RMI flag is held in high esteem and recognized worldwide for its commitment to quality and safety, and I am truly proud to be a small part of it.

For the benefit of our readers, please throw light on the flag registry trade. What role has IRI played to enhance the image of the flag registry sphere?

Flag states are a unique sector of the industry and successful flag states keep abreast with the ever-changing world of the maritime industry to serve clients. Although the duties of a flag state are governed by Article 94 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), each flag state operates differently. With our focus on collaboration and communication with our clients, from providing no-charge technical support to enhancing safety aboard vessels, to communicating with port state control (PSC) authorities and identifying trends, we have set a high standard for registries worldwide.

Last year, the RMI Registry achieved 17 consecutive years on the United States Coast Guard's QUALSHIP 21 register, the only registry in the world that has done so. The Registry also remains in the top 10 of the White Lists for the Paris and Tokyo Memorandums of Understanding, a recognition that has only come through teamwork and a fleet-wide focus on safe vessel operations. Through our global office network, our clients can access flag state support in local time, and at any time, so we serve not only as a regulatory authority, but as a partner with our clients to ensure safe, efficient vessel operation. Each of our offices has full decision-making authority, so we can provide solutions, answers, and decisions quickly and efficiently.

Please provide your views in relation to decarbonisation, VLSFO, scrubbers, and battery-operated ships.

Decarbonisation is perhaps the largest topic looming over our industry and one that we are already addressing as a flag state. Increasing pressure to decarbonize and reduce emissions has led to a plethora of new technologies and developments in the alternative energy sector. The IMO's ambitious greenhouse gas (GHG) strategy to reduce emissions 50% by 2050 gives the industry a timeline to implement these new methods and technology. Reaching this target is challenging, as you can appreciate. This is a complex challenge and perhaps needs multiple solutions across the shipping industry.



Each of the new technologies you mention, very low sulphur fuel oil (VLSFO), scrubbers, and battery-operated ships, and other alternatives, come with questions and challenges which will need to be addressed at every level of the industry. From a flag state perspective, we are working on research and review projects with partners worldwide to ensure that RMI owners and operators have access to the data and information they need to make informed decisions about these new technologies.

Decarbonisation and alternative technologies will not happen overnight, but the industry has already begun to move in that direction. In fact, in 2021, RMI's fleet was recognized as the youngest and greenest fleet in the world because so many of our owners and operators have already begun to implement sustainability technologies, practices, and solutions to their vessels. There can't be a single solution. Use of low carbon and alternative fuels, hybrid technologies, and above all "innovations" are the way ahead if the industry is to achieve the IMO's decarbonisation targets.

Please talk about a few areas that require urgent attention and improvisation in the global maritime world.

Like the Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, change is the only constant in this world. The maritime industry too must change and evolve. The pandemic saw the industry reinvent itself to handle change(s). Suddenly, work from home became the new normal, however, vessels still had to trade and remain at sea, and crew still needed to travel to and from their vessels. The maritime industry has always been a silent industry that often goes unnoticed.

The relevance of the shipping industry and its role in modern society should be known to the world. Nishit, as you are aware, that was our goal when we started the Maritime Awareness Program Society (MAPS). Awareness brings about participation which naturally leads to rapid technological advancements and attracts the best talent. What then follows is significant productivity benefits across all verticals of the shipping industry, and the world at large.

Seafarers have never received their recognition as key workers, but the pandemic underscored how critical seafarers are to the global economy and how important the maritime industry remains. While some countries like the Republic of the Marshall Islands began to recognize seafarers as key workers, there is still much work to be done to protect seafarers and the maritime industry from future global disruptions. The international community must come together to recognize the importance and value our industry provides.

The security of vessels is still a grey area. We are in the 21st century, and piracy still exists! The world must join hands and eliminate this threat. This is easier said than done and collective action is needed.

On the horizon, of course, remains the significant challenges of decarbonisation and digitalization. While the pandemic hastened the process of digitalization and implementation of new technologies, there is still a long way to go to integrate vessels, shoreside teams, and other stakeholders for visibility, efficiency, and optimization. Regulations are changing to address technological advancements, but without uniform

frameworks or structures in place it can be difficult for our seafarers to keep pace. For example, while many countries are turning to fully electronic logbooks and signatures and certificates, some are not, and require paper documentation and certificates. Digitalization and decarbonisation are being addressed through technological advancement, but in order to succeed there must be collaboration. We must not forget that seafarers will need training, support, and assistance in implementing these technologies and new procedures, so their voice needs to be heard and considered as the maritime industry evolves.

What is the mantra of success you follow and also advise your team members?

When I was sailing, I would often tell my colleagues onboard that if you look after your ship, the ship will look after you. This is exactly what I tell my colleagues ashore. Go home each day, after work, satisfied. The work that we do is quite specific, and each of us learns on the job. Complacency leads to errors, and one must learn ways to reinvent oneself to have an active mind. Interest in what you do is critical.

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