

FET colleges to offer maritime courses

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CAPE TOWN: As part of an initiative to reduce the vacancy rate of at least 45 000 jobs in the maritime industry, 12 FET colleges across the country will start to offer courses aimed at equipping young people for a career in the industry.

Addressing media on Friday at the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, Deputy Transport Minister Sindisiwe Chikunga said 12 Further Education and Training colleges (FETs) will from next year begin to offer courses.

"Some colleges will tweak the courses that they're offering, while others will start afresh. This initiative will affect unemployment immediately. The jobs are there but our nationals don't have the skills to fill them. That's why we import labour."

While Chikunga was excited by the prospects presented by the initiative, she was equally worried about the situation which necessitated the project.

"It's ... worrying that we can't fill these jobs. We have to work to ensure that we do it because skills development is a priority. It's important that we identify people and fill these positions. We can't delay. The maritime sector has the potential to fight unemployment and poverty."

The FET colleges will meet at least 80 percent of the industry's skills demands, producing artisans such as riggers, welders and boiler makers.

Chikunga said not many countries were in South Africa's position of having two oceans, the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, on its coastline. "We can't take these things for granted. The initiatives we are driving will help us take our place as a leading international maritime nation."

The CEO of the SA Maritime Safety Authority, Commander Tsietsi Mokhele, said presently, between 1 200 and 1 600 students entered the maritime industry after completing their studies every year. But this total was not enough to meet the industry's immediate needs.

"At this rate, we won't be able to fill all the vacancies," he said. "And we're only talking about the shortage in the maritime industry. We're not even talking about the needs of the fishing industry."

The deputy minister was in Cape Town, South Africa's oldest working harbour, to bid farewell to Africa's first-ever training vessel, the SA Agulhas, which will go to Ghana, Abidjan in Cote d'Ivoire, before docking in Canary Wharf in London.

She said that through its involvement in the African Union, South Africa was leading the development of an integrated African Maritime Strategy.

It was for this reason, she said, that "we insist that this vessel is not solely for the benefit of South Africa but the whole African continent. Halala Africa halala!"

On her way to London, the SA Agulhas will pick up 12 cadets to join the 51 already on board. The 12 cadets represent a myriad of cultures from Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana and Ivory Coast.

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