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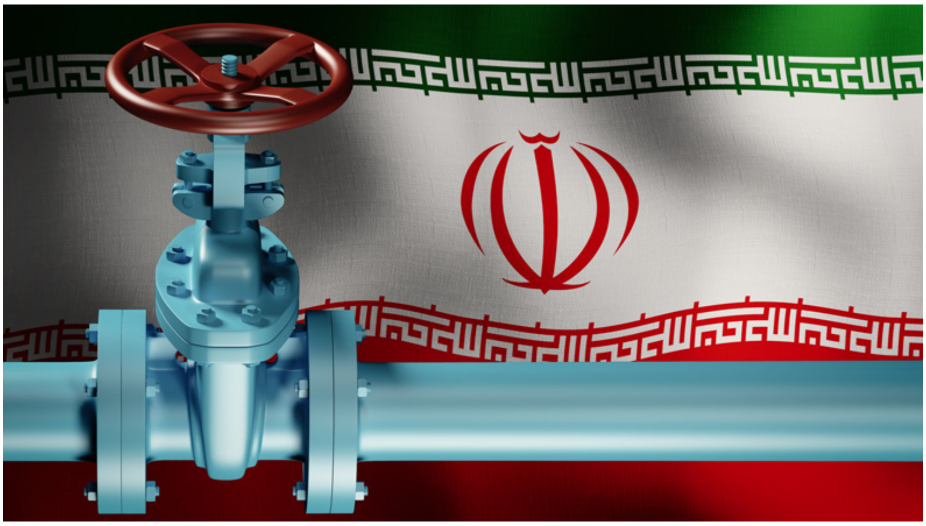
Panama-flagged LPG carriers investigated for Iran shipments



THE MARITIME AUTHORITY of Panama is investigating a fleet of eight Panama-flagged liquefied petroleum gas carriers linked to sanctioned Iranian shipments to China and India, and engaged in shipping practices that the US has labelled as "deceptive".

The authority's marine chief Rafael Cigarruista said the vessels are being investigated, but he was not able to provide a more detailed response by the time of publication.

Previous investigations have resulted in deregistration because the owners could not satisfy the flag they were not involved in sanctions-busting activities.

All of the vessels may be sailing without liability insurance as they have not been entered with any P&I clubs since coverage stopped in the second half of 2019, according to the Lloyd's List Intelligence database.

A separate check showed all eight vessels were also not entered in any database operated by the International Group of P&I Clubs — the 13 clubs covering 90% of the world's international fleet.

One of the LPG carriers, *The Weisse* (IMO 8818843) was tracked via satellite imagery loading at Iran's Asaluyeh terminal on November 14, when its Automatic Identification Satellite transponder was turned off, according to information from US-based non-profit group C4ADS.

Lloyd's List first wrote last June about a fleet of Chinese-owned LPG carriers shipping Iranian LPG to China via a series of ship-to-ship transfers off Malaysia, using the same logistics chain and shipping practices as sanctioned crude shipments.

Six of the eight LPG vessels were previously or currently linked to two beneficial Chinese owners.

These are either Kunlun or the Cosco tanker unit subsidiary, Cosco Shipping Tanker (Dalian) Seaman and Shipmanagement. Both units were sanctioned by the US for a five-month period over September through to January. The LPG carriers were reflagged to Panama from Liberia in late 2019, at the same time as P&I cover was withdrawn.

News that the LPG carriers are still switching off their AIS for periods of time in and around Iranian waters and conducting STS transfers is the first test for the Panama flag's tough new position on deceptive shipping practices.

The Panama Maritime Authority's directorate of merchant marine said in a circular last week that it would fine owners $10,000 or deregister them for any gaps in AIS or Long Range Identification Tracking systems.

The move was in response to a global shipping advisory released on May 14 by the US State Department, Treasury Department and US Coast Guard.

AIS gaps or "going dark", as well as irregular trading patterns and STS transfers were singled out, along with three other deceptive shipping practices, used by ships to obfuscate the destination and origin of sanctioned cargoes.

The new sanctions guidance came as the Trump administration sought to increase pressure on both Venezuelan and Iranian regimes whose energy commodities exports have been crippled by the unilateral sanctions extending more than 18 months.

The vessels that have reflagged and do not have P&I cover include *Sapphire I* (IMO 9193721), *Gas Orpheus* (9046784), *Nexo* (9014456), *Sea Gloria* (9005053) and *Gas Coral* (9114581).

C4ADS identified a further three other Panama-flagged vessels, *The Weisse* (IMO 8818843), *Gas Line* (9014420) and *Standorf* (8902993) in a separate investigation into Iranian LPG shipments.

The Weisse conducted at least five clandestine voyages from Iran, including one loading while its AIS transponder was off on November 14, satellite images show, according to C4ADS. The cargoes were delivered to an import terminal near Mumbai, according to vessel-tracking data.

Its registered owner is Olddorf Shipping, with technical and ISM managers listed as Gas Master Shipping, according to the Lloyd's List Intelligence database. The latter's address is c/o Istanbul-based TGM Deniz Isletmeciligi ve Acenteligi. Gas Line and Standorf are also linked to the same Turkish company, according to the Lloyd's List Intelligence database and the C4ADS investigation.

The other five LPG carriers have a more complicated ownership chain. The vessels reflagged and changed ownership at the same to a series of unknown single-registry Panamanian companies. Emirates-based Waves Shipping Line FZE is providing ISM management for three of the carriers. China Cosco Shipping is showing as the beneficial owner for the Gas Orpheus, although the registered owner, technical and ISM manager changed in August 2019.

Sea Gloria has also been managed by Waves Shipping Line since February 2020. China Cosco Shipping was listed as the beneficial owner from August 2019 to January 2020 before the vessels ownership changed, along with the registered owner, which is now an emirates shelf company in Dubai.

C4ADS said it was also investigating other LPG carriers involved in Iran–Pakistan trade routes as well as those shipping to India and China. One of these was flagged in Panama and another in Sierra Leone.

So called flag-hopping was another practice identified by the US as a sign of deceptive or illicit shipping practices. A further two LPG carriers were reflagged to Belize and remain uninsured in addition to the eight Panama-flagged ships. *The Wiesse*, *Gas Line* and *Standorf* have all been flagged with Panama for longer periods beyond the imposition of US sanctions on Iran.

WHAT TO WATCH

Why shipping must embrace the green recovery

A TRILLION euros here, a few billion dollars there — stimulus packages are being puffed into the global economy daily by panicked governments struggling to patch up the burst whoopee cushion of central bankers' shrinking forecasts.

The shipping industry should be watching carefully, and not just in terms of demand creation.

Success in such scenarios is of course a relative concept. By the Bundesbank's own estimate issued on Friday, Germany's economy will shrink 6% this year — only faring better than other big European countries thanks to Berlin's €130bn ($165bn) stimulus package unveiled in recent days.

Germany's typically robust approach comes after the European Commission touted its €750bn package and South Korea's new government detailed a $110bn programme.

Such eye-watering figures are no doubt impressive, but the significance for shipping lies more in the common thread of the green requirements being written into these recovery plans.

Governments have long accepted that the next phase of industrial decarbonisation will require significant green supports, albeit without much urgency tied to that acceptance.

Coronavirus has tipped the balance by creating the need for governments to pump cash into the system now rather than later. Why inject a black stimulus now when a green stimulus would have been required five years down the line anyway, is the basic economic calculation at play here.

For shipping to move away from fossil fuels, hurdles need to be overcome.

Despite the much-vaunted zero-carbon ambition being touted by a handful of eager industry leaders, the maritime decarbonisation project is still very much at the piloting phase where research and development is essential and expensive to the tune of billions of dollars.

That investment requires a business case with more detail than we have available right now.

The technical immaturity of solutions on offer do not lend themselves to private sector punts and even with land-side subsidies in play and the assumption of super-cheap electricity down the line to kick-start renewable fuel solutions, there's no immediate guarantees that we will be looking at options that are cost competitive with the fossil fuel habit we are so desperately trying to kick.

Government green subsidies need to be teamed with policy to incentivise a switch, and while the prospect of carbon pricing will no doubt send shivers down the spines of shipping's old guard this is the time to get behind the acceleration of the new green economy.

For shipping to move beyond the current tendency towards greenwashing and fake zeros, government subsidies, incentives and clarity regarding regulation are the base case for success and, ironically for those who rail against the unfairness of national supports, our best hope of a level playing field.

The industry needs more specific definition around green financing to support the investment cases and allow government backing with tangible metrics. Ambition without clarity is only fluff when it comes to decarbonisation, but that applies to government and industry equally.

Supporting economies in "building back better" and in decarbonising is a move to welcomed by shipping, but don't mistake this for an easy hand out — it will require a long-term commitment to change across the industry and there are no quick and easy wins here.

ANALYSIS

Seafarers face uncertain future amid crew-change crisis

THREE days before the end of a two-month voyage, an engineer on a containership was called to his captain's office and told his sign-off was cancelled. The engineer — who, for the purpose of this article, will be referred to as Justin to protect his identity — was told his next chance to go home to England was the following week.

Then his company suspended all changes until mid-April. Then mid-May. By then, some crewmates on five-month contracts had been on board the vessel for seven months.

"I feel like I have less hope than I did when it all started," Justin told Lloyd's List. "And the lack of information [or] regular updates from the company does not help mentality out here. It feels more like out of sight, out of mind."

Justin is one of more than 150,000 seafarers who were unable to leave ships as authorities restricted their movement to slow the coronavirus pandemic.

The latest Seafarer Happiness Index paints a grim picture. "Seafarers reported feeling that not enough is being done to ensure the safety of those on board," it said. "They reported feeling physically exhausted, mentally disturbed, homesick and anxious."

Stress and financial hardship Calls to the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network helpline have tripled as crews seek assistance for psychological stress and financial hardship.

The industry scrambled to come up with protocols to change crews safely. An alphabet soup of industry groups and the International Maritime Organization put out a 12-step road map early in May.

However, since it has been up to individual governments to make the changes, progress has been slow. "It's been two months and it is probably going to be another month,"

International Chamber of Shipping secretary-general Guy Platten predicted, as unions agreed on a 30-day crew change "implementation period".

Andy Cook, global crew operations director at V.Group, says tensions were rising as crew got further overdue.

He says some countries have recognised seafarers as essential workers, but besides a greater appreciation of their work, "I don't see a lot of tangible changes that have helped the situation right now".

"We are at the mercy — to some degree — of the authorities and also of air transport," he says.

Uncertainty is also a problem for those on shore.

Jamie Edwards, a second officer at Princess Cruises, spent weeks at home waiting for the call to board. He was still being paid but worried for those seafarers who were not.

"If they can't get out soon enough, then they're going to have to look for other jobs," he says.

Danica Crewing Services managing director Henrik Jensen says about a third of his seafarers were overdue. The ships he crews are mainly bulk carriers on the tramp and spot markets, so it can be hard to plan two weeks ahead to allow for quarantines, he says.

Mr Jensen says his seafarers — mostly from Eastern Europe — do not have access to the government benefits rolled out in western countries. He says their lot may worsen as the coming economic downturn causes companies to lay up vessels, creating a labour surplus.

Crew at sea have also been unable to get medical help for coronavirus and other ailments.

International Maritime Health Association president Robert Verbist says that authorities in many ports have prevented doctors from treating seafarers. Ships, seen as carriers of disease during the Ebola outbreak, are now more at risk from infections on land, he says.

While Kuba Szymanski, secretary-general of Intermanager, says crew changes were more difficult, but were still happening.

He says Polish seafarers were being sent through Germany, and Ukrainians through Belarus, as managers found ways around travel bans.

Media "myths" about the extent of the problem have not helped, he adds.

"When we hear, for example, airports closed — yes, for the general public, but not for us," he says. "The charter flights are flying, seafarers are going through."

Capt Szymanski says he has been working closely with ports, customs and other authorities and feels the industry has shown its strength with its collaborative response.

He is also quick to dismiss the idea that virus fears could put seafarers off returning to sea: "Seafarers are very keen to go back to work because they need money."

Cruiseship crews are more numerous and less welcome ashore than their cargo counterparts. The Cruise Lines International Association estimates about 70,000 crew would go home by sea as ships were forced to sail for days to drop crew off at their home countries.

In the Bahamas, companies were transferring crew according to nationality to sail home some 50,000 people before the June hurricane season. The Norwegian Seafarers Union has criticised the major flag state for not allowing charter flights out, accusing it of doing the bare minimum to help.

NSU director of cruise operations Lena Dyring told Lloyd's List a responsible flag state should be there "not just when the sun is shining, seas are calm and income opportunities from vessel registration seem ripe".

Mr Platten says the pandemic has a long way to run and travel restrictions will stay in place for some time.

However, green shoots are emerging, with some countries allowing changes and others easing restrictions.

"I do sense now that things are starting to move. We just need to keep the pressure on," he says.

Virus testing

ICS says it is working on improving crew access to medical care, a common protocol for virus testing, and help for crew renewing visas and passports.

Mr Platten says the collaboration between the industry groups and UN agencies has been second to none: "I've really seen the best of our industry in this pandemic."

Yet Justin, who was still on board his containership, says the industry has not done enough.

"They seem quite happy to continue to trade and line their pockets, but seem no closer to a real solution to crew change than they did two months ago," he says.

Justin says there are now so many conditions preventing crew changes that it feels like "an unlimited extension". And even if these are met, the biggest hurdle for him is having a reliever.

"Until I know India or the Philippines are allowing seafarers to leave their home countries, I can't be relieved, and therefore won't be able to leave the ship, even if we call into ports that are allowing crew change."

Australia's LNG exports remain strong during pandemic

THE coronavirus pandemic has hurt revenue but not the volume of exports from Australia's liquefied natural gas sector, which has so far drawn support from multi-year contracts binding buyers to take committed volumes.

Shipments from the world's second-largest LNG exporter to north Asia have even expanded during the first three months of the pandemic, Australia-focused consultancy, EnergyQuest said in its latest quarterly report.

LNG shipments from plants primarily located in the states of Western Australia and Queensland along the east coast, rose by 1.7m tonnes quarter on quarter during the three months to March 31, backed by growth in volumes headed to South Korea, China and Taiwan, which offset a dip in exports to Japan.

Some 304 LNG cargoes were exported from Australia during the same period, with the majority headed to traditional markets for the supercooled fuel – China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, data cited by EnergyQuest showed.

Shipments in March and April hit 6.8m and 6.9m tonnes, nearing the record high of 7m tonnes set in December 2019.

Australia shipped 101 cargoes or 6.9m tonnes of LNG to China during the January to March quarter, up from 6.18m tonnes for the same period a year ago.

It exported 2.46m tonnes and 1.09m tonnes of LNG to South Korea and Taiwan during the first quarter of 2020, up compared with a year ago, from 1.5m tonnes and 944,000 tonnes.

First quarter of the year shipments to Japan however, were marginally down at 8.05m tonnes from 8.2m tonnes the previous year.

Average prices for Australia's term cargoes sent to north Asia, which were indexed against oil prices, have nonetheless slipped to below $9 per million British thermal unit.

Both Brent and West Texas Intermediate benchmark crude prices crashed through the floor following a price war sparked by a spat between Saudi Arabia and Russia during negotiations regarding an Opec+ production cut.

Oil prices have recovered some ground, but are still way off previous year's levels after the Opec+ cartel managed to reach a deal.

Taking in the slippage seen in prices of Australia's LNG shipments to north Asia so far, EnergyQuest projected a significant decline in the country's export revenue for the next financial year.

Australia's LNG export revenue is expected to reach about A$50bn ($34.9bn) for the year ending in June this year, but may fall to as low as $30bn the following year.

The consultancy also warned of possible cancellations on Australia's cargoes going forward.

Contracts tied to Australia's LNG offtake, however, are not as flexible as those in the US, which extend buyers room to cancel scheduled cargoes in exchange for certain fees.

Australia has also benefited from calls made by US LNG producers to come to the market to source for spot cargoes now available at depressed prices instead of supplying directly to buyers in Asia.

Cheniere Energy has bought a cargo from Woodside Petroleum's North West Shelf project in Australia for loading on June 16–17 at $1.85 per mmBtu to deliver to Taiwan, Platts reported on May 27.

Still, EnergyQuest pointed to more possible falls in Australia's LNG exports because of buyers seeking greater leeway by exercising downwards quantity tolerances, which are allowed under term contracts with sellers.

DQT provides for buyers to substitute a limited number of contract cargoes with purchases on the spot market.

Buyers have already exercised DQT on volumes contracted with the Gladstone LNG and APLNG plants in Queensland this year, said Santos and Origin Energy in their quarterly reports, both of which own interests in the two projects.

Investing in maritime safety pays dividends, says RightShip chief

MARTIN Crawford-Brunt's determination to push for higher levels of safety at sea and greater respect for seafarers lies deep in his soul.

Now chief executive at the risk management and environmental assessment organisation RightShip, he recalls his early days as a surveyor at class society DNV. To gain valuable understanding of how ships operated, he spent two months on a Gearbulk handysize bulk carrier.

While crossing the Bay of Biscay, the ship was hit by a storm so severe it is commemorated at the lighthouse in Biarritz. "All the way through the night there were ships sending out mayday alerts… Three or four ships sank in that storm," he says.

"The whole bridge window shattered, not because a wave went through it, but because the ship was racking so much. I had the toggles on my cabin window wound down so I could make a quick exit if I had to. We came into Santander with the pilot on the bridge wing."

On another occasion, he went on board a cruiseship in danger of sinking with its elderly passengers and crew. The captain was under so much commercial pressure he admitted he hadn't slept all night.

"When I got there, [the captain] was completely distraught," Mr Crawford-Brunt remembers. "I told him, I'm going to make this very straightforward: you're not going anywhere. You are welcome to phone whoever you like in the organisation, but I'm taking that decision from you. You are going nowhere until [damage to a bulkhead] is fixed."

Those were the most rewarding cases as a surveyor, he says, the days when he could help seafarers.

"Sometimes seafarers are ignored, they are faceless, they have no voice." He sees his current role as returning that voice, showing real respect for what seafarers are doing day by day, and supporting them wherever possible. They are almost fighting the system."

Martin Crawford-Brunt grew up in Cape Town, South Africa. He was introduced to the world of engineering and technology at an early age by his father, a mechanical engineer. Passionate about surfing, swimming and water sports, he combined engineering with his love for the ocean by taking degrees in engineering and naval architecture at Stellenbosch University.

He won a prize from the South African Institute of Mechanical Engineers for the best undergraduate thesis on the practical application of the Flettner rotor principle to fishing vessels.

South Africa had world-class facilities and laboratories. These attracted lecturers from overseas who spent six to eight weeks teaching specialised post-grad subjects. His naval architecture professor was German. After graduation, Mr Crawford-Brunt worked as a project manager at a port authority, looking after the drydock division. His responsibility was drydocking ships safely and looking after the port authority's fleet or tugs and other boats.

On a personal call, his naval architecture professor suggested looking at a company called DNV. "They were offering opportunities as a surveyor. That was the start of my career in safety."

He joined DNV in Cape Town, went on to Durban, and from there to Singapore. "I was focusing on safety on an asset-by-asset basis, trying to improve the safety of each individual ship that I was surveying."

With promotion he conducted International Safety Management audits, which widened his safety horizon from asset by asset to company by company. As he moved up the structure in classification, he became more involved with industry associations, governments, and others trying to broaden out to include environmental impacts.

It had already become clear to him that safety and commercial operations were mutually inclusive. "A successful voyage starts by being safe, first and foremost," he insists, "and has to be commercially successful to fund the ongoing investment required to manage and train the crew and ensure you look after all the best practice."

He believes the safety culture is a vital ingredient if a programme of continuous improvement is to work. "You can jump through hoops and demonstrate things but if you want to be really serious about improving safety, it comes from the top down.

"The culture is what is done when nobody's watching. Are the right things being done? Are the right methods being followed? There's a danger that it becomes overcomplicated: too much guidance, too many documents and processes in place. Often the simplest approach will give you a better outcome."

In 2017, he was approached by a search firm looking to fill the vacancy left when Warwick Norman stepped away from RightShip. "When they started a conversation with me," he says, "it was obvious it fitted into my background and everything I had done prior to that."

With the support of the company's owners — BHP, Rio Tinto, and Cargill, all of which had a strong desire to see an improvement in safety, environment and welfare outcomes — Mr Crawford-Brunt has set about transforming the risk rating and Qi platform, for which RightShip is best known.

"It is really difficult to properly convey a due diligence process in a single number," he explains. "The oversimplification doesn't aid the process; the focus becomes the rating in isolation rather than everything around that. I think we lose a lot of the value and benefits of running the vetting process."

Shipowners complained they did not understand the rating or how they could influence it positively. The feedback confirmed that RightShip was trying to do too much with one number.

"We have engaged the industry. We gathered around 200 participants and asked them what they would like to see in a safety score. It was through those conversations that we began to understand what the industry was looking for."

In the existing rating, some elements are difficult to influence. "It's logical that we create a scoring system that is within the grasp and influence of ship operators. The elements that comprise the score should be part of running a successful shipping company," he says.

"We are not putting in any additional requirement, just a consistent way of keeping the score in terms of improvement."

The total package is the safety score alongside the new platform. "Charterers see the safety score in the context of the other information we display on the platform, and this enables them to make better decisions. It gives the ship operator the opportunity to present their ship in a favourable way because they can influence all the components. The conversation moves to what's best practice."

Changes, such as in class, have been viewed negatively; now they will be seen as an incentive to improve performance. "The platform provides more information and makes it visible to all parties who can then make their own assessment as to how they choose to use that information."

RightShip is about to launch a widespread campaign to educate its many customers, industry associations, and other users through online training, webinars and Youtube videos. "Covid-19 has fundamentally changed out roll-out," says Mr Crawford-Brunt. "We have had to tear up our plan and rebuild it digitally."

Meanwhile, the chief executive has put in place a more global structure built around expertise in APAC, EMEA, and the Americas to offer customers swifter response, and a new management is being installed.

"Success would mean we'd see a meaningful improvement in safety levels," he believes. "Companies will see that investing in safety, environmental improvements, seafarer welfare is good for business. It begins to be self-perpetuating, it finds its own momentum. A good safety culture pays dividends."

And it will mean those ignored, faceless seafarers will find a voice.

MARKETS

CMA CGM expects 15% drop in second-quarter volumes

CONTAINER shipping could already be going through the worst conditions it will face this year, but may have weathered the storm financially.

"We believe the second quarter of the year will be better than the first quarter," CMA CGM group chief financial officer Michel Sirat told Lloyd's List in an interview.

"We are going to post much lower volumes than last year in the second quarter, probably down by 15% from last year. But the industry has been very agile in its capacity management and if you look at freight rates you see that there has been no fall in rates, and hence good performance in terms of load factors and revenue."

A fall in bunker prices would also help carriers, said Mr Sirat, which should make for a positive quarter for the whole sector.

Beyond the second quarter of 2020 was harder to predict, however.

"Like everyone we have our scenarios for V-shaped and U-shaped recoveries, but in all scenarios we think the second quarter will be the lowest point in terms of volumes for the year," he said. "We do not have a scenario where we believe third quarter of the year volumes will be lower than the second quarter."

Container shipping as a whole had managed well in adjusting capacity to demand in the second quarter of 2020 and CMA CGM does not expect demand to be at a lower level in the third or fourth quarters.

"Presumably, that means we should have relatively satisfactory quarters for the rest of the year."

Previous demand slumps have inevitably led to price wars and lower rates, but Mr Sirat said the sector had improved now.

"The industry has changed dramatically due to consolidation and because the industry has matured and has a better relationship with its customers, allowing it to better predict demand," he said. "I believe these changes are structural."

Mr Sirat was speaking as the company posted a 3% fall in revenues for the first quarter of the year, as volumes fell 4.6% to 5.2m teu.

Ocean freight revenues were down 3.3% to $5.7bn, but sharp cost-cutting measures helped the carrier achieve a net income of $48m, reversing a $43m loss in the corresponding quarter last year.

"We had a very strong operational performance despite the fall in volumes," said Mr Sirat. "The shipping industry has managed very well in the current environment."

He added that the company had reinforced its liquidity significantly through the sale of its terminals and a $1.1bn loan guaranteed by the French government.

"We had very good performance, both in terms of cost containment and ability to pass through bunker costs," he said. "That had been one of the main concerns for the industry just a few months ago but we have done it."

The company had also had some "good commercial developments" in terms of its airfreight and contract logistics business undertaken by its CEVA Logistics subsidiary.

"It is a much better performance than most people would have expected," added Mr Sirat.

Cost cutting had played an important part in the company's results, with tight controls over capacity and utilisation of assets.

"This quarter we had the benefit of reducing capacity in synch with the reduction in demand," he said. "We have a very large proportion of chartered vessels, which gives us the ability to push back vessels to owners."

The same had been true of equipment, and the company had returned unused rented containers.

"These types of actions that we have put in place reduce significantly our cost per teu," he said. "This quarter compared to last year excluding bunker prices, we have reduced our operating expenses per teu by $50."

IN OTHER NEWS

Maritime universities' survey reveals long-term impact of coronavirus

THE current pandemic is expected to have long-term implications for students hoping to be taken on by shipping companies and by maritime universities themselves, according to a new survey.

The study found that the coronavirus has significantly reduced activities at nine out of 10 universities, with almost 10% offering no activities at all in May. The majority of universities had shifted teaching from classrooms to online in a short period of time.

While some responses showed the transition had been smooth, others observed concerns about student assessment and practical exercises including first aid, safety at sea, and fire fighting. Comments revealed that internet connectivity is inconsistent, electricity supply is not always adequate, the necessary software is not always available and teachers are sometimes uncomfortable using the software.

Wood targets 40% cut in carbon emissions by 2030

WOOD, the global engineering and consultancy company, has committed to cutting its greenhouse gas emissions by 40% over the next decade.

The London-listed firm said the target would apply to its scope 1 and scope 2 emissions. Scope 1 emissions concern all the direct emissions from assets owned or controlled by the company, while scope 2 emissions cover those indirect ones produced during the generation of energy the company purchases.

Wood's 2019 scope 1 and scope 2 emissions from its controlling interest activities amounted to 179,587 tonnes of CO_2 equivalent.

EU sets September deadline for South Korean yards merger ruling

THE European Commission has resumed an anti-trust investigation into the merger proposal between Hyundai Heavy Industries and Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering.

The authority is now expected to make a decision by September 3, according to a disclosure, nearly four months behind the original schedule.

The commission announced its latest suspension at the end of March, citing the two South Korean shipbuilders failure to provide requested information because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Singapore pushes forward with 2020 maritime tech accelerator programmes

SINGAPORE is pushing forward with its maritime tech accelerator programmes, with the Eastern Pacific-Techstars initiative, and Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore and NUS Enterprise PIER 71's Smart Port Challenge 2020 both inviting new applications, with a particular emphasis on dealing with the coronavirus outbreak.

The accelerator, which was launched last year, is a mentorship-based initiative formed by EPS and Techstars that addresses maritime challenges by investing in start-ups offering potential solutions.

"While applications for year two are open to any start-up with technology applicable to the maritime industry, special attention will be given to those tackling sustainability, safety and health challenges in the wake of the global pandemic," EPS said in a statement.

Small tech start-ups unite to join Asian logistics network

SMALLER Asian logistics players are gaining better access to new digital services specially catered for them as start-ups Qwyk and SimpliShip have collaborated to help companies digitalise their customer processes.

The two companies, which specialise in different parts of the logistics chain now offer a combined platform, and have signed up forward-looking Asia-centric logistics technology platform Ai Logistics Alliance International as a key customer.

Shanghai-based AiLa has 1,000 forwarders but is expected to grow this number to more than 2,500 in 2021. This digitalisation initiative is expected to help it provide a better digital service offering to its customers and achieve a significant reduction of manual processes.

Port of Houston targets ship channel expansion

THE port of Houston has had its fair share of buffeting from the ill effects of the coronavirus pandemic this year, but the vision of executive director Roger Guenther remains firmly focused on plans for future prosperity.

"We've had 26 announced blank sailings this year including seven for the month of June. It is yet to be seen what July will look like, but hopefully we'll see some improvement into the summer," Mr Guenther told Lloyd's List.

Recent numbers are telling of the turmoil caused by the pandemic as the monthly container volume at Port Houston showed a 12% decline in April, falling to 221,540 teu from 252,693 teu in April 2019.

Classified notices follow