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# OOCL linked to more supersized newbuilds



ORIENT OVERSEAS CONTAINER Line is said to be considering orders for seven more 23,000 teu containerships, raising the prospect of another investment binge in the sector.

The company, now part of state conglomerate Cosco Shipping, aims to combine the newbuildings with the quintet of the same size already on order to form an independent loop on the Asia-Europe trade, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

The ordering plan is "at a very early stage", with the choice of shipyards and the type of vessel engines yet to be decided, the sources said.

Cosco and OOCL have been approached for comment.

Having landed more than \$1bn last year from the sale of its US terminal assets, Hong Kong-based OOCL in March signed a \$780m contract to build five 23,000 teu ships at two affiliated yards in China.

Those deliveries are scheduled for between the first quarter and the early fourth quarter of 2023.

Independent consultant Tan Hua Joo said the additional orders would make sense if the carrier wants to form a new string for the Asia-Europe routes which require a dozen ships.

"The decision is clearly driven by Cosco and is partly politically motivated given the dwindling order backlog at Chinese yards but is also in line with Cosco's growth ambitions," he added.

The newbuilding plan would help the state-owned giant — which controls the world's third-largest containership fleet — narrow the

capacity gap with the leading carrier Maersk and the runner-up Mediterranean Shipping Co.

The Cosco management appears to believe the fresh supersized tonnage is a rather "safe bet", according to one of the sources.

"In a good market, these 23,000 teu ships can surely help Cosco and the Ocean Alliance tap more Asia-Europe revenue," said the person. "When it turns gloomy, the capacity pressure can be alleviated by returning some of the chartered-in big ships and send some of the smaller ultra-large ships to the Middle East trade."

Cosco and OOCL, alongside French line CMA CGM and Taiwan's Evergreen, are members of the Ocean

Alliance. It trails the 2M grouping — Maersk and MSC — in Asia-Europe capacity.

The ordering scheme also comes as box shipping carriers have fared surprisingly well so far this year against the backdrop of the coronavirus outbreak.

Most major carriers reported satisfying profits in the second quarter, as their efforts in blank sailings managed to shore up rates on the main east-west trades.

Prospects for the second half remain upbeat as seen by some analysts, with a sizzling market recovery led by record high transpacific rates during the summer peak season, as well as a remarkable low vessel orderbook.

#### WHAT TO WATCH

# Missing livestock carrier. Survivor says vessel sank in typhoon

A LIVESTOCK carrier with 43 crew and 5,800 cattle on board sank off Japan in a storm, according to a survivor rescued by the coastguard.

The Panama-flagged, 8,372 dwt *Gulf Livestock 1* capsized in the East China Sea en route to China on Tuesday.

The Japan Coast Guard rescued one surviving crew member after a surveillance aircraft found him at sea, the Associated Press reported.

The Filipino survivor told rescuers the vessel was lost after capsizing.

He is reported to have said that from the point the ship capsized to the moment he was rescued he did not see any other crew members.

The search is continuing for other survivors.

The ship's crew reportedly consists of 39 Filipinos, two Australians and two New Zealanders.

The 2002-built *Gulf Livestock 1* is believed to have been in the storm area of Typhoon Maysak when the incident happened. The typhoon subsequently struck South Korea.

The Japan Coast Guard received a distress signal when the ship was about 185 km (115 miles) west of Amami Oshima Island in Kagoshima Prefecture.

The vessel had left New Zealand on August 14 and was on its way to China.

The ship's movements show that over the past year it has voyaged in the region, with port calls in Australia, New Zealand, China, the Philippines, Singapore and most frequently Indonesia.

The vessel is owned by Jordan-based Hijazi & Ghosheh Group, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence. The owner could not be reached for comment.

# DP World plans \$4.5bn in new port investment with Canadian pension fund

DP WORLD and Canadian pension investor Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec have committed an additional \$4.5bn to their port investment platform, almost doubling its size to \$8.2bn.

Since inception in December 2016, the fund — which is owned 55% by DP World and 45% by CDPQ — has invested in 10 port terminals globally, across various stages of the asset life cycle.

Under the plan, the platform will target both new and existing regions, including Europe and Asia Pacific.

There will also be diversification across a wider part of the integrated marine supply chain, including logistics services linked to terminals.

"The opportunity for the port and logistics industry is significant and the outlook remains positive as consumer demand triggers major shifts across the global supply chain," said Sultan Ahmed Bin Sulayem, chief executive of DP World.

"Best-in-class, well connected ports and efficient supply chains will continue to play an active role in advancing global trade and cultivating the business environments closest to their operations."

Emmanuel Jaclot, head of infrastructure at CDPQ, said the platform will seek investments in

high-quality port and terminal infrastructure assets that will help design the future of smart trade and logistics.

"We will further diversify our geographic reach and look to seize new opportunities in a sector that, even during a uniquely challenging period, is driven by long-term fundamental trends."

Anglosphere pension funds have taken on increasing exposure to ports in recent decades, with the port sector's dependable unspectacular but steady return seen as a good match for the long-term requirements of pension investors.

Britain's Forth Ports has been wholly owned by Canadian, Australian and British pension funds since 2018.

Canadian and other pension funds also hold a significant stake in Associated British Ports.

# ACL chief does not rule out UK flag return as ships move to Malta

ATLANTIC Container Line has reaffirmed its commitment to Liverpool, where it is a major customer of the port and a large local employer, as its ships are re-flagged to Malta.

Chief executive Andrew Abbott has also expressed the hope that ACL ships will eventually be able to return to the UK register.

"We did not want to leave. Why would we want to leave something that works?" he asked in an interview. "This was not a decision that we wanted."

The change of flag, which was forced on ACL by Brexit, will not have any negative effect on the company's position in Liverpool's maritime cluster, according to Mr Abbott.

The last of its five multipurpose ships, which can carry containers, vehicles, and ro-ro cargo, left the UK flag this week, much to the regret of the company, which had hoped the transfer would not be necessary.

"We waited, and waited and waited," said Mr Abbott.

However, hopes have now faded that a treaty between Britain and the European Union covering maritime issues will be agreed by the end of the year, when the UK's transition period is over following its formal departure from the bloc. Since ACL, which is owned by the Grimaldi Group, is registered in Sweden, its ships have to fly the flag of an EU country or one with which there is a relevant tax agreement.

Both Mr Abbott and Grimaldi joint managing director Emanuele Grimaldi have lobbied hard to prevent the ships from having to switch to another flag.

ACL moved from the Swedish register to the British flag when it took delivery of a series of newbuildings several years ago, and favours the UK Ship Register, which is run by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

"The people are just fantastic — helpful, smart, and if we had a problem, they would help us find a practical solution. They would always call you back," said Mr Abbott, who is a US national. "The experience we had with the British flag was just great."

Although the ships are now registered in Malta, ACL and the wider Grimaldi group remain heavily invested in the UK and in particular Liverpool, where around 170 staff are employed.

They carry out back office work for other Grimaldi divisions as well as for ACL, including money collection logistics, inland transport arrangements, and documentation for North American customers.

Productivity levels in Liverpool are invariably higher than other group offices, according to Mr Abbott.

"Liverpool has become an integral part of our system," he said.

ACL is also one of the biggest customers of the port of Liverpool, especially since Independent Container Line moved to Southampton last year.

Speaking from New Jersey, Mr Abbott said he envisaged the time when ACL and other Grimaldi

ships could move back to the UK flag if a tax treaty that meets EU ship registration requirements can be negotiated.

The move to Malta was not from choice but for legal reasons, and both he and Mr Grimaldi would like to be able to tell their customers that they operate British flagged ships.

Mr Grimaldi said a few months ago that ideally, he would like to set up a shipowning division in the UK, if the legal and tax issues can be resolved.

#### **ANALYSIS**

## Frontline chief eyes VLCCs as next investment

FRONTLINE's chief executive Robert Macleod is eyeing out potential investments in very large crude carriers.

"VLCCs would be the place to go if we wanted to do something," the executive said on an Arctic Securities webinar. "If I had to choose, I would go for VLCCs; it is the favourite segment."

At the moment, though, the company's focus was on cash breakeven, he said, which was about \$19,100 per day on average for the entire fleet.

"We are happy with our size," he added, and the medium-to-long-term view "is enjoy what we have".

Mr Macleod said he had little interest in ordering newbuildings at this point in the tanker cycle as there were opportunities in the secondhand market.

Resales were at \$92m-\$93m, while new orders were priced in the high-\$80m range, he noted, adding that ordering has been at a "controlled pace" which is positive for the market.

In addition, access to finance was also limited.

Frontline is owned by billionaire shipping tycoon John Fredriksen. It went public in 2001, trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

"Mr Fredriksen's commitment to the company is unquestionable, and will continue," Mr Macleod said.

The company lists 71 tankers in its fleet, six of which are under commercial management and two are chartered-in, according to its website.

It agreed to buy 10 suezmaxes from global commodities trader Trafigura earlier in the year, and is expecting four new ice-class aframaxes to be delivered next year.

The tanker market is down from where it was earlier in the year in what can only be described as "an exceptional year," the executive said.

"At the moment, there are too many ships and not enough cargo," he said. "When those volumes return, it should have a positive impact on rates."

Volumes being shipped are down 20% as a result of lower demand from the coronavirus backdrop.

The third quarter is generally the weakest, with refinery maintenance taking out demand, he noted. But the fourth quarter could be an "outperformer".

The orderbook to fleet ratio is the lowest since 1997, while the fleet continues to age, and the expectation is that a number of the older ships will be demolished, slowing fleet growth further, the executive said.

The time-charter market had "extreme volumes" amid volatility, with the six-month period charter seeing the most liquidity, while the 24-month charter had the least, he noted. Nevertheless, the company did conclude some deals for two-year durations.

Challenges continue to dog the market related to logistics and crew change restrictions, Mr Macleod said, which were leading to port congestion around the world. The congestion seen in China, however, had more to do with a demand rebound as its oil market was in contango.

Arctic Securities analyst Ole-Rikard Hammer said he has an upbeat view of the tanker market.

"We are entering a phase of a new upcycle," he said on the webinar, although the rates seen earlier in the year are unlikely to be repeated.

Oil demand is expected to rebound by 4m-6m barrels per day, leading to double-digit tonne-mile

growth in 2021, he said. A 100% recovery was predicted for 2022.

Production cuts by the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to a 30-year low was "just temporary," while the inventory overhang would clear in the fourth quarter.

Slower fleet growth is also expected in the next two to three years, to a level that was easier for the market to deal with, he pointed out.

## Investors advised to look to shipping tech

WOULD-BE shipowners considering entering the industry without the necessary passion and commitment have been told they would be better off investing their money elsewhere.

Not only is it very difficult to turn a profit but costs can quickly build up as compliance and other risks increase, according to TCC Group chief executive officer Kenneth Koo.

TCC, which owns a fleet of very large crude carriers and aframaxes, is well aware that especially with regulations such as OPA90, this can prove to be very costly indeed.

Regardless of whether a third party shipmanager is used or everything is done in-house, "the responsibility of the shipowner to provide safe, efficient, reliable and environmentally friendly transportation" does not change, Mr Koo said.

Instead, he suggests investing in shipping-related technology.

"There is a dire need for committed funds for technology to improve shipping," he told the online audience at the 13th Marine Money Hong Kong Ship Finance Forum. The last thing the industry needs is more asset players, he added.

He reminded the delegates attending the virtual forum that with shipping and the dry bulk market in particular having become so commoditised, the way in which the market sees the owner has completely changed in the past 10 years.

With the recent rising interest of leasing companies in the market, these need to be made cognizant of this as well in order to bring some normalcy to the shipping market.

Especially with the flush liquidity available, investors should sit down with shipowners to find out what they really need instead of just buying up assets and plunging into the business.

Mr Koo unfortunately was not optimistic that this ideal scenario would play out.

"I do not think it will happen because there is just too much free capital out there," he concluded.

# Container shipping's digitalisation at inflection point

THE pandemic has brought container shipping to an inflection point in its move towards digitalisation and it must act on the changes that are emerging to use the crisis to improve customer service.

Digital Container Shipping Association chief executive Thomas Bagge said the health crisis had changed priorities and that it was not possible to continue as before. "Online businesses are seeing huge increases in revenues, driven by the need to shop online during the pandemic," he told a webinar. "But container shipping is not digital. It is about the transportation of physical goods. Therefore, when factories shut down there was an immediate impact that carriers had to deal with."

Even those goods that were still transported faced new challenges as bills of lading were unable to reach their destination, consignees were unable to pick up containers at ports and letters of credit went undelivered.

"When we look at those things there is an immense opportunity and momentum in front of us," said Mr Bagge. "Everyone sees the pain right now and that is an opportunity we can't squander."

But the pandemic was putting a strain on supply chains that had already been stretched to their limits in terms of efficiency.

Container carriers have been forced to manage their capacity in a volatile market. But this is a short-term solution and in the long term the problems of inefficient processes still needed to be addressed.

"Customers are terribly affected by the current situation and the antiquated processes we have in international supply chains," Mr Bagge said. "We don't need to have delays because of bills of lading that did not arrive or letters of credit that have not been delivered.

"There are technologies that can eliminate these pain points. But before we can deploy those we need to start using the same language and vocabulary."

Doing so would open a "treasure trove of opportunity", he added.

Despite their strong relationships with forwarders, carriers risked competition from companies that have excellent customer service and which could disrupt the whole industry by simplifying it.

"The imperative is greater than ever and we are at an inflection point," Mr Bagge said. "The standardised products in international trade are complex. There are many parties involved with a long list of documents involved, most of which are paper-based. Then there are the antiquated processes, such as a booking process that can take up to 50 emails."

While initiatives such as electronic bills of lading could save the industry up to \$4bn over a number of years, the real necessity was to improve customer service.

"Carriers have improved the efficiency of container shipping but now must focus on the customer side."

#### **MARKETS**

## LNG shipping sees post-pandemic rebound

LIQUEFIED natural gas shipping rates have made a significant comeback since the start of the coronavirus pandemic as prices for the commodity advanced in Europe and Asia to levels supporting inter-basin trades with the US.

Spot fixtures on oceangoing LNG tankers of 155,000 cu m to 165,000 cu m rose to \$50,000 and \$54,000 for the Pacific and Atlantic basins, the latest assessment by ship brokerage Fearnleys showed.

Poten & Partners separately assessed spot rates for 165,000 cu m TFDE (Trifuel Diesel Electric) tankers at \$49,000 last week, up from \$29,000 in June.

Recent rallies in LNG spot prices have backed up such recovery in the corresponding shipping market.

For October loadings, Europe hub TTF LNG and Asia JKM LNG last settled at \$3.86 per million British thermal unit and \$4.225 per mmBtu as of yesterday, opening up the arbitrage window for trades between buyers in the two regions and sellers in the US.

Jeffrey Moore of S&P Global Platts flagged supply outages, which "initially kicked off from the unexpected extension to the maintenance at Gorgon LNG train 2 in Australia", as the key driver of the LNG price surge in Asia's spot market.

"Although the plant is not going to have to shut down fully as some once believed, the loss of supply out of the Pacific Basin helped support JKM, which rallied from \$2.25 per mmBtu on July 15 to \$4.29 per mmBtu on September 1," said Mr Moore.

Demand in Asia, the home region for the world's largest and fastest-growing LNG buyers, also rebounded strongly.

Poten's Wong Kit Ling pointed to "firm buying interest" from Taiwan, China and South Korea.

China's imports are expected to hit a new year-todate high in August, having already clawed back losses from the pandemic-led demand disruptions during the first five months to match last year's levels. Over in Europe, Germany's call to phase out nuclear energy and lower piped gas flow from Norway contributed to higher LNG prices, said Oleg Vukmanovic from Poten.

Going by the forward curve as suggested by futures trades conducted this week, LNG spot prices may well surge past \$4 per mmBtu in November and December.

These recent price moves "provide incentive for freight markets to move" as they allow offtakers of US LNG to break even at the operating level.

Poten's Jefferson Clarke in flagging the above, further suggested that LNG prices of above \$4 are expected to support freight rates of \$45,000 to \$55,000.

Mr Moore of Platts held that the expected uptick in US LNG loadings in the coming months could boost shipping demand through the end of this year, lifting freight rates once again to beyond the \$100,000 threshold.

But Mr Clarke warned against getting hopes up on "full blaze ahead" given the downside risk from high LNG storage utilisation and another warmer-than-expected winter.

By Poten's estimate, Europe's LNG storage is more than 90% utilised so the region is not as well-placed to absorb excess winter supply as in previous years.

# Columbia partners with Saudi Aramco for Mid-East expansion

COLUMBIA Shipmanagement has opened an office in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia to offer full technical and crew management to Saudi Aramco in the areas of energy, oil and gas.

In addition to providing maritime training and procurement services to the state-owned energy giant, the move is intended to start an expansion in the strategic Middle East shipmanagement market.

The Riyadh office will cover the shipping and offshore sectors, including the cruise and super yacht markets, as well as vessel digitalisation and optimisation services, in addition to training, catering, and newbuilding consultancy.

Columbia Shipmanagement president Mark O'Neil said the move comes after discussions to build partnerships with many of the region's blue-chip operators.

"There has been a real shift in the Middle East from being service-takers to wanting to provide maritime services themselves. We are talking to several companies with a view to partnering in various formats," he said in an interview. "The attitude on both sides is: 'what can we bring to the table?"

He emphasised that shipmanagers "should not just set up in Dubai and hope the business will follow. We will inevitably be looking closely at Dubai, but the tail must not wag the dog."

Mr O'Neil said the new Riyadh office would be set up according to the Saudisation policy, announced in 2016 as part of the Saudi Vision 2030 reforms, under which there is a strict obligation on training of staff.

"Columbia will train as many Saudis as we possibly can," he said, stressing the need for localisation with an international perspective.

Mr O'Neil joined Columbia Shipmanagement from the German shipping team at law firm Reed Smith in January 2017, and within the same year saw the merger with another Cyprus-based manager, Marlow Navigation. The merger operated throughout 2019 as separate brands with 13 management offices and 35 manning agencies.

The company provided full technical management for 324 vessels as at December 2019, with a further 47 vessels under crew management. The total of 371 vessels placed Columbia fifth in the Lloyd's List ranking of shipmanagers. Over the past six months, Columbia Shipmanagement has added 37 vessels and 16 vessels have been sold.

#### IN OTHER NEWS

#### Crew evacuated after fire on VLCC off Sri Lanka

ONE crew member is reported as missing after a fire broke out on a fully loaded very large crude carrier off the east coast of Sri Lanka.

The fire started in the engine room of the 2000-built, 299,986 dwt *New Diamond*, which was in the Indian Ocean, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence data.

The Sri Lankan navy confirmed that the fire has been contained and Lloyd's List Intelligence data shows that the crew have been evacuated.

## Brittany Ferries seeks state aid after 75% fall in passengers

BRITTANY Ferries has closed some services and asked the French government for financial aid.

The company says UK quarantine rules had made worse a severe hit caused by the pandemic and Brexit. The carrier will close the Cherbourg-Portsmouth and Le Havre-Portsmouth routes, having recently closed its St Malo-Portsmouth route. Its Cherbourg-Poole route, suspended in March, will stay closed for the rest of the year.

The company, which runs services between the UK, France, Ireland and Spain, will take half its 12 ferries out of service.

## Industry ready to push ahead of regulators in decarbonisation pursuit

CORPORATIONS are willing to leap ahead of regulators in pursuit of decarbonisation solutions, according to a leading sustainability initiative.

The Getting to Zero Coalition, which was formed last year to help commercialise zero

emission vessels by 2030, held its second biannual meeting this week.

"While members are working together to develop new technologies and business models, they call for ambitious, global regulation to set the industry on a climate-friendly course, but they are prepared to move ahead of the IMO and other regulators to ensure that scalable solutions are in place when regulation is adopted," said Johannah Christensen, managing director, head of projects & programmes, Global Maritime Forum, a founding partner of the coalition, in a statement.

## Hull and machinery claims down, Cefor data shows

HULL and machinery has taken only a modest hit from coronavirus so far, but the impact could be felt further down the line, according to the latest half-yearly statistical report from Cefor.

Meanwhile, total losses continue their secular downward trend and have fallen to an all-time record low, the Nordic trade association added.

In the first half of 2020, the coronavirus backdrop led to a reduction in vessel activity, and this in turn has seen a reduction in both claims frequency and average claim cost per vessel.

#### FSL taps Chinese leasing firm for twin LR2 sale-and-leaseback deal

FIRST Ship Lease Trust has signed a sale and leaseback deal with a Chinese leasing company for two long range two product tanker newbuildings.

The Singapore-based company said in a statement that the sale is expected to generate about

\$58.5m, which will be used to finance the remaining payments to the shipyard under the relevant shipbuilding contracts.

The vessels are being constructed at Cosco Shipping Heavy Industry (Yangzhou). Under the agreement, the lease term will be 10 years from the delivery of the vessels with a purchase obligation at the end of the term.

## IMO's Arctic fuel ban projected to be largely ineffective

A PROPOSED restriction on heavy fuel oil in the Arctic Sea would do little to stem its use and carriage in the region owing to potential exemptions and waivers, according to new research.

The International Maritime
Organization is developing a ban
on the use and carriage of HFO in
the Arctic Sea.

But non-profit research organisation the International Council on Clean Transportation has found that the global regulator's current plans would fall short of actually achieving that end.

#### PSA signs Singapore terminal deal with HMM

SOUTH Korean line HMM has made a prudent move to secure berth space for its ultra large container vessels, forming a joint venture with Singapore port operator PSA to work together "for enhanced operational excellence and efficiency in container operations".

The strategic partnership, which is subject to regulatory approvals, will offer long-term hubbing certainty to HMM's fast-expanding global vessel fleet in PSA Singapore, the two companies said in joint statement without specifying

investment, operational or capacity details.

The joint venture company, HMM-PSA Singapore Terminal Pte Ltd, with PSA holding a 58% share and HMM the remaining 42% through their respective units, is scheduled to start operations before the end of this year.

## Wilhelmsen in hydrogen fuel venture with Hyundai Glovis

WILHELMSEN and Hyundai Glovis have entered a joint venture to develop new fuels such as liquefied hydrogen.

The companies are expanding on an existing relationship and will exchange expertise and competency to improve existing technology and service areas, along with looking for new opportunities to shape the future of the maritime industry, Wilhelmsen said in a statement.

The aim is to explore the short and longer-term opportunities, leveraging on a shared focus on the global gas shipping market.

#### Shippers file claim over alleged Iranian petroleum cargoes seized by US

THREE shippers have told a US federal court that they are the owners of cargoes seized on board four tankers that were

accused of violating sanctions by carrying petroleum products to Venezuela from Iran.

The case in the US District Court for the District of Columbia comes after US authorities ramped up pressure in the matter by seizing internet websites used by the three companies.

United Arab Emirates-based Mobin International told the court it purchased all of the petroleum-product cargoes, chartered the tankers, and was transporting the fuel to Trinidad and Tobago, for onward sale to Peru and Colombia.

#### Singapore learns how to adapt to shipping's new normal

SINGAPORE'S maritime industry looked to the city's financial regulator for wisdom on dealing with the post-coronavirus world and was told that resilience was the key to survival.

In his keynote address at the Singapore Maritime Lecture, Monetary Authority of Singapore managing director Ravi Menon said that what the coronavirus backdrop had shown was that resilience was needed in the supply chain, in industry and the workforce as well as for the planet overall

Mr Menon reiterated that despite the pushback caused by pandemic-related supply chain disruptions, it was "not practical for most activities to be onshored".

#### US west coast risks losing more import trade to Canada

CANADA'S southwest ports of Prince Rupert and Vancouver are fast becoming major competitors for US west coast ports, joining existing rivals on the US east and Gulf coasts for market share, according to a report released by the Pacific Maritime Association.

"The US west coast ports continue to be the largest North American gateway for Asian imports, but that lead is being eroded not just by US ports in the Gulf and east coasts, but also by the two major ports in British Columbia," said PMA chief executive Jim McKenna.

The report by Mercator
International focuses solely on
what it calls "intact intermodal
cargo", which it described as "an
important segment of the cargo
market comprising containers
that are shipped directly by rail
from vessels to internal US
markets"

#### Classified notices follow



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"Request for Proposal" for Design, Manufacture, Supply, Installation. Testing, Commissioning and guaranteeing the performance of Four (4) Nos. New Rail Mounted Quay Cranes (RMQC) at Shahid Beheshti Port, Chabahar, Islamic Republic of Iran dated 20.03.2017 has been discharged and fresh bids are invited of aforesaid tender. Notice dated 31.08.2020 will be uploaded for invitation of proposals from interested bidders.

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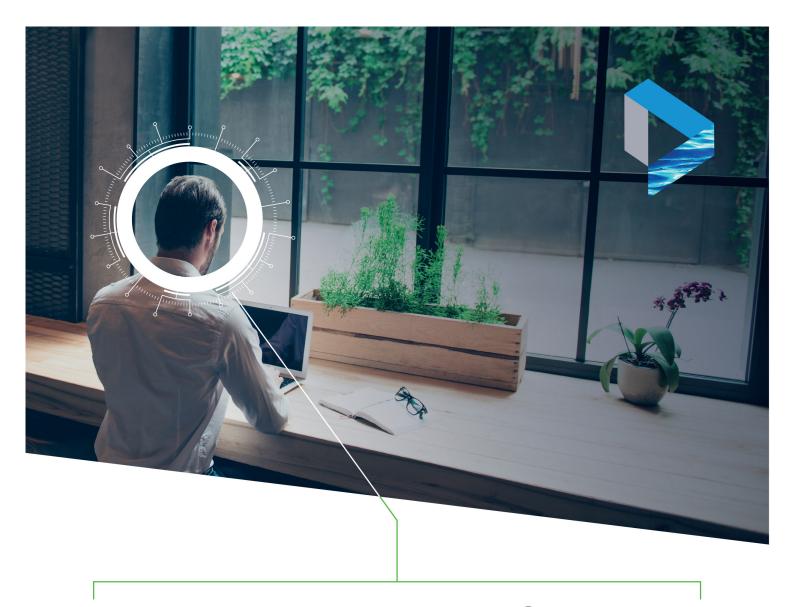
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