Tuesday March 23, 2021

Lloyd's List
Maritime intelligence | informa

Daily Briefing
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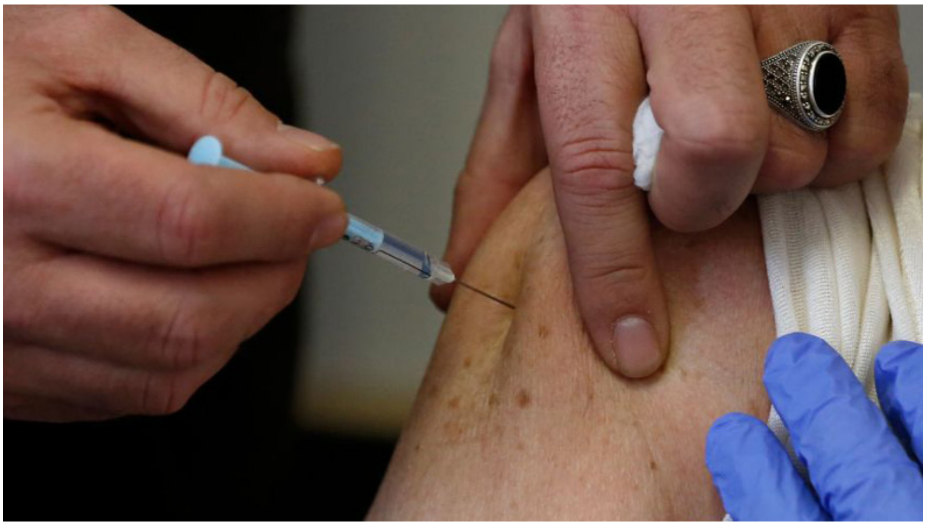
Seafarers cannot be forced to accept vaccination, ICS warns



SEAFARERS CANNOT BE compelled to be vaccinated against coronavirus even where states insist all crew members must be inoculated prior to making port calls, the International Chamber of Shipping says.

The situation could put owners in the invidious position of having to cancel voyages rather than take on the legal, financial and reputational risks of being denied entry, the trade association added.

Some ports in China, a vital destination for both box and bulk vessels, and the United Arab Emirates, a key region for transhipment, have already refused entry on vaccination grounds.

Owners have for some time urged that seafarers should be accorded priority vaccinations on account of their vital economic role. But this has not been widely granted.

Mass vaccination programmes are well underway in some richer countries, although many developing countries will take until 2024 to complete roll-out.

With some 900,000 seafarers hailing from the developing world, this issue is also of concern to the ICS.

Where jabs are available, seafarers in most cases will likely be keen to receive the protection immunisation brings.

But significant numbers could refuse, citing religious reasons or belief in scientifically discredited "anti-vaxx" ideas.

At present there no way of knowing how many seafarers will be prone to what has become known as vaccine hesitancy.

But polling evidence has found reluctance to be widespread in the general population, running as high as 30% in the US and even 40% in some European Union countries such as France.

ICS legal director Kiran Khosla has prepared a legal opinion to be distributed to members later this week as the industry prepares for the resumption of more normal trade in the wake of vaccination roll-out. The document is based on information picked up through industry networks and an understanding of employment law.

"The basic principle is that no one can be forced to have medical treatment, and if you try to impose a vaccine on someone who is refusing, that would be in contravention of their human rights concerning their own person," she said in an interview. "What the shipowner must then do is look at the reasons for that refusal and see if it is reasonable or not."

If existing contracts of employment do not insist on all necessary vaccinations for countries of port call, they cannot be unilaterally varied in retrospect. So in the first instance, a way would need to be found to work around the problem.

If this proves not possible, consideration must be given to whether it is reasonable to require the seafarer to leave the ship at the next possible place.

However, the situation changes as contracts come up for renewal. At that point, owners can justifiably require vaccination as a condition of employment, which they will likely do in the expectation that most places will require it at some point.

"Then it is up to seafarers to decide whether they can sail on those terms. If they are vaccine hesitant, they will not take the employment. We've heard the phrase 'no jab, no job' within the UK, and I think that will translate to the shipping environment."

The starting point for the analysis is the Maritime Labour Convention 2006, which obliges owners to provide access to medical care on board ship and ashore, but does not explicitly include provisions for vaccinations or immunisations.

In this respect, the national law of the flag state or of the seafarer's home country is determinant. While it was not feasible to review the laws of all states, it is possible to establish general principles based on English law.

Firstly, employers have a duty of care and an obligation to reduce risks in the workplace, which would justify them encouraging employees to be vaccinated to protect themselves and their workmates.

However, vaccination requires an individual's informed and voluntary consent. Owners must consider any vaccine refusals on its own facts and offer an individual response.

This could entail implementing alternative solutions, such as the use of personal protective equipment, additional social distancing measures, or an alteration of work duties to reduce contact with other seafarers.

But if the refuser's presence in the workplace poses a threat to the wider workforce, employers may ultimately consider not allowing unvaccinated employees to work.

In some limited circumstances, employees could be dismissed for refusing the vaccination if it means they will present a threat to themselves, patients or customers.

Another issue is the lack of any universally approved vaccines so far. The safest option for shipowners, is to include a provision in the contract of employment requiring all new onboarding seafarers to be vaccinated in accordance with vaccines approved in their home country.

Vaccines can currently only be accessed through government-run programmes, but it may in near future be possible for owners to obtain authorised vaccines, and for vaccinations to take place on board under approved conditions.

Where vaccination effectively becomes an occupational requirement for work at sea, the owner is liable for ensuring that it has been offered, at no cost to the seafarer. This condition would be met where governments provide free vaccinations for citizens.

Where seafarers fall ill due to a reaction to an approved vaccination, the shipowner's liability for illness and/or death is as stipulated under the terms of employment and any applicable collective bargaining agreement.

However, where the seafarer has voluntarily taken the vaccine, for example because it has been offered by his or her government, then the shipowner would not be liable, the ICS document stated.

WHAT TO WATCH

Insurer of Israel oil-spill tanker cancels cover

THE insurer of the aframax tanker accused of an oil spill that closed Israeli beaches has retrospectively terminated the vessel's cover, raising questions about liability and who will pay for clean-up costs.

Lloyd's List understands the United Arab Emirates-based Islamic P&I Club cancelled the Panama-flagged *Emerald's* so-called blue certificate, issued to cover civil liability for oil pollution damage, from its inception date of January 10 for "non-compliance of club rules and regulations".

The retrospective termination means the insurer bears no liability for damage arising from the oil alleged to have spilled from the vessel last month in the Mediterranean Sea during its voyage to Syria from the Middle East Gulf.

The Islamic P&I Club has not responded to requests for further comment from Lloyd's List over the past 13 days. The reason for the cancellation remains unknown.

Protection and indemnity clubs commonly insert clauses that retrospectively cancel cover for violations including shipping sanctioned cargoes, unauthorised ship-to-ship transfers, or switching off vessel-tracking devices.

In addition to the cancelled cover, the Panamanian registry said last week it had issued a "prohibition for sailing" order for *Emerald* from March 12 while it concludes its investigation.

On March 4, Israel's environment minister identified the vessel as being responsible for the 1,200 tonnes of oil that washed up and polluted some 100 miles of Mediterranean coastline from February 17.

Oil sampling, laboratory tests and satellite tracking pinpointed the tanker from another 35 candidates sailing in the area at the time when the spill was said to have occurred, the government said.

A Greece-based lawyer acting for the registered owner, Marshall Islands shell company Emerald Marine Ltd, last week contacted Lloyd's List to say the tanker was not responsible.

It is understood that evidence being provided by the club and owners to Israeli authorities include crew depositions, cargo samples, and monitoring from the ship's cameras.

The tanker's Automatic Identification System was switched off for a protracted period during the voyage, including a 36-hour period shortly after it transited the Suez Canal from February 1, when the oil spill is said to have happened.

Takis Chiotelis, a partner at Chiotelis & Co, subsequently said in an email that the oil cargo was of Iraqi origin, not Iranian. He also said that the beneficial owner of the vessel, purchased last December, was not Oryx Shipping.

Information provided to Mr Chiotelis by the beneficial owners, who declined to be identified, is at odds with information and vessel-tracking information provided to Lloyd's List.

Mr Chiotelis said the vessel has always carried Iraqi crude and that evidence was available to prove this. The cancellation of blue certificates and prohibition of sailing order was standard practice when an investigation was under way, he added.

Two satellite photos seen by Lloyd's List identified *Emerald* at Iran's Kharg Island anchorage on January 15 and January 17, while its AIS transponder was switched off, and at the time when the vessel would have loaded its 90,000-tonne crude cargo, based on sailing times.

Lloyd's List provided the vessel co-ordinates to Mr Chiotelis on March 19, but he has yet to respond.

Mr Chiotelis had also disputed reports that Piraeus-based Oryx Shipping bought *Emerald* (IMO: 9231224) in December. The seller, Libya's General National Maritime Transport Co, confirmed to Lloyd's List that Oryx Shipping purchased the tanker on March 4.

The lawyer said *Emerald* was owned by Lebanese interests and managed from Beirut.

He also said that Mr Luay Mallah, linked to Oryx Shipping, was not a shareholder, director or managing director, as he has previously acted for this company.

The Islamic P&I club was also said to be supporting the investigation, even though *Emerald* is no longer entered.

The club is not one of the 13 members of the International Group of clubs that provide cover for some 90% of the global fleet.

After discharging its cargo in a series of ship-to-ship transfers off the Syrian coast in mid-February, *Emerald* sailed back to the Middle East Gulf, where it arrived on February 28, and is now signalling its position at anchorage near Iran's Saroosh terminal.

Mr Chiotelis last week said the vessel was at Umm Qasr, Iraq. This may have been during gaps in the tanker's AIS transmission, either between March 13 and March 20, or February 28 and March 2, vessel-tracking data shows.

Aegean Shipping fixes 'green' aframaxes for at least two years

AEGEAN Shipping has clinched time charters for as many as six aframax tankers, including four upcoming newbuildings from Cosco Yangzhou Shipyard.

Sources close to the Piraeus-based company confirmed that *Green Admire* and *Green Adventure*, both due in the first half of 2022, have been taken by Trafigura for at least two years each at a daily rate of $23,000.

Under the deal, the charterer has options to extend employment for a third and a fourth year, respectively at rates of $26,000 daily and close to $30,000.

At the same time Lloyd's List was told that the company, which has branded its fleet as 'the Green Fleet', has also reached an agreement with major charters for the third and fourth tankers in the 114,000 dwt series.

It is also said to have fixed its existing two aframaxes, *Green Attitude* (IMO: 9808156) and *Green Aura* (IMO: 9808168), built at the Cosco Zhoushan yard in 2018 and 2019.

The charters of the other four vessels could not immediately be verified, but it is believed that all charters are for two years with an option for an additional year.

Some of the contracts are understood to allow for market-linked profit-sharing, offering the owner a share of the upside if the market strengthens.

Senior management at the company could not immediately be reached for comment.

George Melissanidis-led Aegean ordered *Green Admire* and *Green Adventure* plus one option last October in a digital ceremony with the yard. It later declared the option and upped the project to four vessels.

The owner also has three medium range product tankers and, under the management of affiliate Aegean Eco Carriers, six kamsarmax bulk carriers delivered by the Cosco Group in 2019-2020.

The company's vessels boast a range of "green" features including Samsung vibration and energy reduction fins, asymmetric rudder bulb, electronic engines, efficient lighting systems, protected oil tanks, and maximum use of recyclable construction materials.

OPINION

Global Container Terminals chief takes an incremental approach to investing

EVEN amid the coronavirus pandemic, which has created almost overwhelming amounts of cargo around the globe, GCT Global Container Terminals is confident it has more than enough capacity to serve shippers.

That is no small achievement when other ports and terminals across North America are struggling to cope with the influx of ships and containers arriving in seemingly greater numbers week by week.

For Doron Grosman, chief executive of the Vancouver, Canada-based company, that ability has not come by accident but instead by the convergence of several factors which the firm has intentionally brought into play.

"Now, despite the surge going on, we've been proactively investing in capacity expansion, and that's why we are where we are and we're investing further," he says.

Global Container Terminals' investment also is in the people needed to keep cargo flowing.

"We have been maniacally focused on keeping our workers and employees healthy. So we are not suffering from some of the challenges that some other marine terminals in North America are suffering from," he says.

Not least, given how "absolutely critically" important getting to zero emissions and reducing our carbon footprint is, "we're very, very focused on investing in and around ESG so that we are responsible marine terminal operators in the communities and countries in which we live".

"So, we're really in many respects, the marine terminal operator of choice for shippers who are coming in or would like to come into Vancouver or New York," he says.

GCT operates four container terminals: one each in New Jersey and in New York, and GCT Deltaport and GCT Vanterm in Port Metro Vancouver.

Mr Grosman is highly aware of the problems at other ports and terminals, drawing attention to the backlog of ships and the labour shortages due to the coronavirus pandemic that have contributed to the congestion.

He says there are just four ships at anchor waiting to enter GCT, and regarding the loss of longshore workers due to the coronavirus, "we have fewer than the number of fingers on my hands".

"So, we've got the workforce, we've got the capacity and we certainly have the technology. That's why, whether they are the ONE alliance or THE or even the 2M alliance, they are moving significant volumes to us."

In terms of investments, Mr Grosman refers to two types: those made in the past 24 months that are now fully operational and those that will be operational in "the near future".

He mentions the terminal in Bayonne, on the Upper New York Bay in Jersey City, where the company has invested "heavily in terms of dedicated and committed technology" in the form of semi-automated RMG stacks which are "decoupled" from the yard activity.

"So, we can move velocity through there faster and more efficiently and also safer," he says.

In Deltaport, GCT had completed part of its rail expansion with five tracks "before we even knew how to spell Covid" and then by the May to June timeframe the remaining two tracks were installed.

"So, we had seven tracks of what people call the most advanced, most automated rail loading facility in North America," he says. "That project has increased the terminal capacity in Deltaport as of the middle of last year to 2.4m teu and its rail handling capacity went up by about 50%."

The investment enabled GCT Canada "to keep pace with our customers' sudden return in vessel capacity, moving from void sailings to extra loaders," he says.

Among other current investments, Mr Grosman notes the three-year modernisation project at Vanterm which has received two new super post-panamax cranes, now being made operational.

That will complete $160m of investment in Vanterm alone, counting the cranes along with other equipment and work done in the yard, all of which "increases terminal capacity there by 25%".

Beyond those three investments, GCT has two further "very significant projects" in the pipeline. The first is in Bayonne, where the firm is intending to add a third berth and four new ZPMC super post-panamax cranes.

"A lot of the permitting around that is already done. The engineering is underway, the environmental stuff is underway, and that is about a $150m project" with completion expected by "the middle of 2024".

On the Pacific coast, the company plans to add a fourth berth to its deep terminal facility at Deltaport. "That project is already in the detailed project description phase. We've completed the initial project description, and the feedback period from the communities," he says.

Expanding Deltaport is a "billion dollar" project and the firm anticipates having the impact statements for it completed in late 2023, with construction starting in the second quarter of 2006 and "everything should be completed and operational by the end of 2029".

Mr Grosman neatly sums up the investments: "Bayonne, the stacks; Vanterm, the modernisation;

and Deltaport, the rail. The two that we are investing in right now are Bayonne, the third berth; and Delta port, the fourth berth."

While the investments being made — and in the making — have enabled the company to weather the ups and downs of the surges wrought by the pandemic, Mr Grosman is clear that no one invests in anticipation of surges.

"One builds a port not for a single-day surge or a single-week surge or a month surge. You build terminal capacity for steady growth into the future," he says.

Such construction creates "swing capacity to deal with things sometimes in favour of what the BCOs and the shippers want. And sometimes the dwell times do extend a little bit, not out of desire, but you can't have idle assets sitting there waiting for volume."

"That would not be a reasonable businessperson's investment, putting $100m or whatever the number is, $1bn, in the ground and then sitting around waiting for volume," he says.

For Mr Grosman and GCT, the key is to build incrementally instead.

"Our approach continues to be to provide adaptable, incremental capacity that appropriately services our customers while maintaining our competitiveness for the discretionary gateway traffic."

ANALYSIS

Biden administration 'committed' to Venezuela shipping sanctions, says opposition

THE new US administration remains committed to sanctions on Venezuela's oil and shipping sector, according to a leading figure in Venezuela's opposition party.

"The Biden administration said it is not planning to lift sanctions any time soon," Carlos Vecchio, the US-recognised interim Venezuelan president Juan Guaido's ambassador in the US, told Lloyd's List in an emailed statement.

"With this new administration, we see a strengthening of like-minded partners' coordination to rebuild multilateral pressure, including targeted sanctions against those responsible for corruption and human rights abuses in Venezuela."

Greek shipowners who previously carried 80% of crude lifted from Venezuela are looking for signals on how the new president will manage the 26-month sanctions on the South American country.

It was business as usual for Greek shipowners until mid-2020 when six vessels owned by four prominent Greek shipowning families were targeted and briefly blacklisted in May and June by the former Trump administration.

The measures deterred most Greek owners from directly lifting cargoes from the South American country.

"We stand by the Union of Greek Shipowners' commitment to the US not to collaborate with the Maduro regime," said Mr Vecchio.

Nicolas Maduro is not recognised as the president of Venezuela by the US or the UK, who maintain that opposition leader Mr Guaido is the interim president following a disputed election in 2018.

The designation as head of state was made in January 2019, and Guaido was initially recognised legally by the European Union, including Greece, until January 2021.

The Union of Greek Shipowners said last June that Greek shipping was committed to implementing US sanctions with members urged to refrain from conducting business with Venezuela until there was a change in regime.

Even so, low tanker freight rates during the past six months have seen some Greek shipowners return surreptitiously to trading in 2021, betting that sanctions enforcement will be laxer under the Biden administration.

Ship-to-ship transfers of Venezuelan crude delivered by other tankers to Malaysian waters have been identified transferred cargoes on to several Greece-owned tankers for onward voyage to China.

Mr Vecchio said co-operating with the Maduro regime was toxic and destructive and posed a high-risk liability for those engaging in business with it, given transnational criminal networks.

"We are confident that Greece's most significant industry and players will have a crucial role in rebuilding Venezuela's oil industry once the peaceful transition in Venezuela is secured and investment guarantees are offered under the rule of law," his statement said.

Venezuelan crude exports have been cut by more than two-thirds since the unilateral sanctions were introduced.

February volumes totalled some 370,000 barrels per day, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence data, compared with 1.4m bpd seen in February 2018, data shows.

Underinvestment and poor maintenance by national oil company PDVSA is pushing production to levels last seen in 1939, at just over 500,000 bpd last month, based on data from the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Ship-to-ship transfers tracked involving Greek shipowners include the Djibouti-flagged very large crude carrier *Mirame* (IMO: 9227948) on to the Liberia-flagged aframax *Euroglory* (IMO: 9249087) on March 9 at the Tanjung Pelepas Anchorage, Malaysia, Lloyd's List Intelligence data shows.

Eurotankers, the beneficial owners owned by the Gotsis family, has been approached for comment.

Another aframax tanker owned by Eurotankers, *Eurostrength* (IMO: 9543524) undertook several other shipments to China from Malaysia since October.

Suezmax tanker *Cape Bella V* (IMO: 9232929) owned Piraeus-based Edge Maritime loaded a Venezuelan cargo in waters off Venezuela around early February and sailed for Malaysia, vessel-tracking data shows.

No details were available about the owner, which bought the vessel in September 2020 from Hamburg-based Ernst Russ AG.

US demand surge set to continue as inventories remain low

HIGH levels of consumer demand and low inventory quantities mean congestion bottlenecks in the US are unlikely to clear for some time.

Even though volumes imported into the US in the second half of last year set new records, US Census Bureau data for January shows the sales-to-inventory level fell to 1.25 in the latest figures.

Between 2016 and 2020 the inventory ratio had settled at an average of 1.4. As sales plummeted at the outbreak of the pandemic there was a spike in inventory levels, but this quickly dissipated. By January, there was another significant fall.

"This means the demand boom experienced in second half of 2020 was sufficient to cater for sales, but not sufficient to fully replenish the inventories," said SeaIntelligence.

The development was much more severe in retail inventories than in manufacturing or wholesale, although these too declined in December and January.

"Following the initial short spike, a retail demand boom took off in earnest and almost instantly led to a very deep decline in the relative size of the retailers' inventories," the analyst said. "This low level was maintained until October, whereupon there was a brief period of increasing inventories at the end of the year, albeit to nowhere near the prepandemic level."

But January again saw a sharp fall in the relative size of retail inventories.

"Despite the boom in import cargo, this was insufficient even keep pace with actual sales."

While the ratio figures show inventories relative to sales, in real terms inventories also fell sharply.

The build-up that has fuelled part of the demand boom in in the second half of 2020 was only sufficient to match half of the decline, leading to the fall in inventories at the start of this year.

"From this perspective alone, we should expect a continued boom in import demand into the US, simply because the retailers have far from completed replenishing the levels in their warehouses."

Moreover, the growth rate of US consumer spending on goods was also rising again in January and with further stimulus coming, this acceleration was likely to continue.

"The concurrent developments in the inventories and in the sale of goods, lead to the conclusion that the pressure on the containerised supply chain into the US will not abate in the near-term future. If anything, the January data points to an increase in the strength of the boom, as especially retailers struggle to not only keep up with sales growth, but also to replenish their inventories."

But for those suffering from poor service levels and long delays because of bottlenecks along the supply chain, the "chicken and egg question" remained unanswered.

"The current bottlenecks prevent importers from getting their cargo in time. This causes some to try to front-load volumes to secure timely delivery. This in turn intensifies the demand pressure, making the bottlenecks worse — keeping the high pressure on freight rates. And, as can be seen, with no immediate resolution in sight."

MARKETS

China equipment shortage easing

THERE are signs that equipment availability may be improving after a long period of container shortages at China's main export hubs.

New figures from container trading platform Container xChange show the number of inbound containers to China's main ports is up 56% compared with before last month's Chinese New Year holiday.

"Trade traditionally slows down in China for an extended period during and after the Chinese New Year holidays as factory workers travel to visit families and output drops," said Container xChange chief executive Johannes Schlingmeier.

"Most data suggests Covid-19 travel restrictions and high demand for exports meant that many factories continued operations. But it seems the drop off in output, even if less than normal, was enough to allow the container supply/demand imbalance to reduce.

The company's Container Availability Index, where a number over 0.5 shows that more containers enter a port than leave, has increased at several of China's main ports.

At Shanghai and Qingdao the index for 20 ft and 40 ft containers has returned to positive territory after being below 0.5 for several months.

Shanghai had seen a 64% increase in available 20 ft boxes when comparing pre- and post-Chinese New Year figures, while the availability of 40 ft boxes had more than doubled in the same period.

"One week of index values greater than 0.5 does not mean so much but exceeding the 0.5 marks for several weeks in a row like Shanghai and other main ports in China have done means that finally more containers are entering ports regularly, giving them the chance allow the container supply/demand imbalance to reduce," said Mr Schlingmeier.

For those still struggling to find equipment in Shanghai, Container xChange suggested using Qingdao, Dalian or Ningbo as alternatives.

Dalian, with the highest equipment availability of the three ports, shows the highest post-New Year index values, with 0.79 for 20 ft dry containers and 0.80 for 40 ft dry containers.

At Qingdao, 20 ft dry and 40 ft container availability readings are 0.64 and 0.65, up from 0.42 and 0.39 in the pre-New Year period.

Another sign of improving availability was a fall in the price of equipment, Container xChange added.

After record highs for used containers in January of $5,593 for cargo-worthy containers, prices fell to $3,750 in February.

"These prices are still far higher than buyers usually pay for newly built containers, but this is still good news for companies who export from China," Mr Schlingmeier said.

But he warned that with supply chain disruptions still evident, availability of equipment was likely to remain volatile, adding "there are positive signs that availability at key export hubs is improving".

Qatar Petroleum tenders charter for up to 100 LNG carriers

QATAR Petroleum has floated a tender to shipowners for chartering up to 100 liquefied natural gas carriers to support a major expansion of its LNG exports.

The oil giant said it has issued an invitation to tender to a large group of LNG shipowners, which includes an option to replace time charters for several of Qatar's LNG carriers that will expire in the next few years.

It said it will review bidders' technical and commercial capabilities "with the objective of assigning selected shipowners to the shipyards' construction slots, which were previously reserved at a number of Chinese and South Korean shipyards".

LNG carrier charterer Qatargas, which operates the Q-ship fleet of 45 Q-Max and Q-Flex LNG carriers, will handle the shipowner selection, it said.

"The release of this ITT package is a major milestone in our efforts towards securing the most qualified shipowners and operators for our future LNG carrier fleet," said Saad Sherida al-Kaabi, chief executive of Qatar Petroleum and Qatar's energy minister

Qatar Petroleum announced agreements to reserve LNG ship construction capacity in China and South Korea last year.

It signed three agreements with South Korean shipbuilding yards in June last year to reserve newbuild slots for LNG tankers at a combined cost of almost $19bn for the North Field gas expansion projects and for the Golden Pass LNG export project in the US

Qatar Petroleum is planning to increase its domestic LNG production by 64% by 2024 via the two-phase North Field expansion project, which will take the Middle East Gulf state's capacity from 77m tonnes a year to 126m tonnes per annum by 2027.

When complete, Qatar should regain its crown as the world's leading LNG exporter.

IN OTHER NEWS

Zim sets sights higher after record full-year result

ZIM, the Israel-based container line, has delivered a record-breaking performance in its first results as a listed company.

"Our all-time record results in 2020 and the significant milestones we have achieved year-to-date in 2021 represent a truly momentous time for Zim," chief executive Eli Glickman said in a statement.

Zim reported full-year net income of $524.2m, reversing a loss of $13m in 2019, on the back of a 21% increase in revenues to $4bn. This in turn was driven by a 22% increase in average freight rates to $1,229 per teu and a slight uptick in volumes lifted to 2.8m teu.

Cargill chief to head shipping's emissions reporting scheme

THE marine and decarbonisation heads of Cargill and Trafigura will lead the steering committee of green charterer initiative the Sea Cargo Charter.

Cargill ocean transportation unit head Jan Dieleman and Trafigura global head of decarbonisation Rasmus Bach Nielsen were confirmed as chair and vice-chair of the 13-member committee.

The Sea Cargo Charter initiative, announced in October, hopes to make shipping's emissions reporting more transparent, and to help assess companies' progress meeting decarbonisation targets.

First LNG ship-to-ship for aframax crude tanker off US

THE first ship-to-ship liquefied natural gas bunkering for an aframax tanker serving US–Europe trades has taken place in Florida.

Sovcomflot's 113,170 dwt crude tanker *Gagarin Prospect* (IMO: 9826720) received 1,075 cu m of marine LNG from Shell's chartered articulated tug and bunker barge *Q-LNG 4000* off Florida's Port Canaveral last week.

This bunkering operation spells the start of ship-to-ship transfer for marine LNG on the principal transatlantic tanker trades between Europe and the US Gulf, and the US Gulf and east coast Canada, Sovcomflot said.

Iranians charged with conspiracy to evade US sanctions

THE US has charged 10 Iranian nationals with operating a nearly 20-year-long scheme to evade sanctions, including efforts to buy two oil tankers valued at more than $50m.

The defendants — all believed to be residing outside the US — are charged with conspiracy to violate the Iranian Transactions and Sanctions Regulations, the Iranian Financial Sanctions Regulations and the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. The 132-page complaint was filed in October 2020 in United States District Court in Los Angeles.

"The defendants worked to disguise hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of transactions on behalf of a state sponsor of terrorism," US assistant attorney-general for national security John Demers said.

Merger creating Mexico–Canada railroad set to link key ports

MORE than 20 ports in the US, Mexico and Canada will be joined together by a single railroad network after the approval of a proposed $25bn merger of Canadian Pacific Railway and Kansas City Southern rail.

"This will create the first US–Mexico–Canada railroad," said Canadian Pacific chief executive Keith Creel. The combined entity, to be called Canadian Pacific Kansas City, or CPKC, will be based in Calgary.

The proposed merger will have to be approved by US Surface Transportation Board, a federal agency that oversees the economic regulation of many modes of surface transportation, primarily freight rail.

UK announces $27m green shipbuilding fund

THE UK has announced a £20m ($27.7m) fund for innovations in greener shipping.

It urged scientists and academics to collaborate with UK shipping, ports and shipbuilders to enter proposals, saying investments in maritime would drive economic growth and ensure the UK "builds back greener" from the coronavirus pandemic.

"We have a proud shipbuilding history and, together with industry, I am determined to build on that as we look to develop the innovations of the future and meet our net-zero target," said transport secretary Grant Shapps.

Classified notices follow