

**LEAD STORY:**

Yantian 'contagion' will spread around the world

**WHAT TO WATCH:**

Shotgun marriage of shipping and private equity stumbles on

Lives are being lost amid crewing crisis, Anglo-Eastern chief says

**ANALYSIS:**

Shipping warned not to ignore safety in sustainability push

Surge in US demand adds to supply chain woes

Digitalisation critical to ports' supply chain success

**MARKETS:**

Sembmarine projects face delay as skilled worker supply falls

**IN OTHER NEWS:**

Argentina taps Excelerate FSRU to stave off winter shortfall

Höegh LNG buys majority stake in green hydrogen company

Spain signs up to ship recycling convention

Zhuhai Port to acquire stake in Chinese gas firm

Marinakis orders MR2 newbuildings from Hyundai

WEC Lines brings Spanish service to UK

NYSHEX plans to launch in Europe

## Yantian 'contagion' will spread around the world



LONG-SUFFERING CARGO OWNERS face another wave of pain as the terminal congestion from the coronavirus outbreak in southern China threatens to ripple around the world.

The ports of Yantian, Shekou and Nansha have been affected to varying extents by a spread of infection that has led to reduced handling capacity at terminals since the end of May, when a six-day stop on export containers entering Yantian was imposed.

Carriers have already announced significant disruptions to sailings and schedules due to the outbreak.

The Alliance has cancelled or transferred 29 calls since the end of May and has confirmed omissions running up to June 25.

Maersk's most recent customer update said that the situation at the Yantian/Shekou/Nansha complex "continues to deteriorate" as more positive coronavirus cases had been confirmed.

"We continue to closely monitor the situation and are doing our best to mitigate the impact on your supply chain where possible," it told customers. "Yantian International Container Terminal yard density remains elevated with disinfection and quarantine measures being continuously implemented by local authorities to prevent the spread of coronavirus. We expect continued terminal congestion and vessel delays upwards of 14 days in the coming week."

It said several vessels would be omitting of Yantian and Shekou in order to protect schedule reliability.

Data from Lloyd's List Intelligence vessel tracking service shows 33 containerships lying at anchor off Yantian, the largest being the 19,197 teu *MSC Eloane* (IMO: 9755957)

Another 32 are anchored Wanshan Archipelago, south of Hong Kong, an area normally reserved for vessels awaiting for terminals in Hong Kong, Shekou and Guangzhou's Nansha.

One senior executive at a major global logistics operator said that the situation in Yantian was shaping up to be a major issue, and that the chaos could last for months.

Speaking in a webinar, Drewry ports and terminals analyst Eleanor Hadland said that the disruption in China would eventually spill over and disrupt European and North American markets again.

"We're seeing this contagion spread around the world and there is just a lack of resilience," Ms Hadland said. "There is no spare capacity in North America or China at the moment to handle this level of disruption.

Congestion was an increasingly widespread problem, she added.

"Following on from *Ever Given*, we have seen congestion yo-yo back and forwards. The equipment shortage, the delays in getting containers back to China and now we have had the coronavirus

outbreak in Yantian, which has impacted port productivity there."

Even minor events such as the crane accident at Kaohsiung, a weekend of port closure due to bad weather or staff sickness could now have big knock-on effects across the supply chain.

Writing on LinkedIn, Vespucci Maritime chief executive Lars Jensen said that shippers should not underestimate the magnitude of the coming ripple effects.

"Yantian handled 13.3m teu in 2020; that equals 36,400 teu per day," he said. "This has now been ongoing for 14 days which means the port has been unable to handle some 357,000 teu."

He compared this to the Suez Canal blockage that affected daily flows of 55,000 teu, but lasted for only six days.

"Every day increases the pile of backlogged cargo," Mr Jensen said. "Once the ports re-open to normal operations we should expect a surge of cargo, at least to the degree there are even vessels available to handle this.

"This in turn will cause ripples of potential congestion at the destination with a lag time of some two to five weeks. And in all of this there is the issue of the disruption of empty flows back into South China to contemplate as an additional ripple effect."

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## WHAT TO WATCH:

# Shotgun marriage of shipping and private equity stumbles on

IT IS five years ago this month that Scorpio Tankers' president Robert Bugbee coined the word 'prexit' before a New York audience to describe the exit of private equity from shipping.

That was a pretty good play on words just days before the country of his birth voted to leave the European Union. But for some, the neologism may have carried an unmistakable note of Schadenfreude.

The middle years of the 2010s saw PE get into shipping in a big way in the wake of the global financial crisis, generating a certain degree of friction in the process.

Grateful as owners were for the money, badly needed as bank after bank left them in the lurch, many detected an element of condescension on the part of their new investors.

After all, Ivy League MBAs are all very well, but the quiddities of our industry are some of the things they don't teach you at Harvard Business School.

The stereotype was that the PE boys considered some shipowners functional morons, and arrogantly assumed they would be able to come in, kick some backsides, and get out again in five years with shedloads of essentially looted cash.

After recent PE divestments from both Genco and Star Bulk, the question being asked is, is the rush for the door now actually happening?

It is true that the intervening period has seen some PE outfits pull out of shipping investments. It is also true that new investments have been entered into.

But with details of many deals — or even the fact they happened — not in the public domain, it is impossible to reach a definitive conclusion on where the balance lies.

There have been highly publicised instances of private equity losing money hand over fist. But in other cases, it seems to have done pretty well.

Lloyd's List spoke to two partners from the New York office of law firm Watson Farley & Williams, Will Vogel and Steven Hollander, who said their firm impression is that the exit is starting to happen. But things have not panned out in the way many initially anticipated.

“Some of these funds have been in these investments for seven or eight years, which is a lifetime,” said Mr Vogel.

However, there are still obstacles to making exits happen. These include insufficient liquidity in shipping stocks for those seeking to sell into public markets.

“If there's not enough liquidity in the stocks, you have trouble attracting institutional investors, and that in turn is helping to depress the share price. That is part of the explanation for why shipping stocks trade below net asset value.

“That is why these recent sales are a bit of a breaking of the dam, and it will be interesting to see where it goes.”

Mr Hollander said that the key to whether or not deals had made money was precise timing. Probably the best year to have first become involved was 2013.

Even then, it will have been necessary to show patience, a quality not typically associated with PE.

Those who went in with overoptimistic expectations of easy pickings in 2010 and 2011 are more likely to have taken a bath.

“When you are in a private equity fund's position, you buy at the low end and you hope for the rise.

Some of them thought they were buying at the low end and the stock price dipped lower.”

That said, Mr Hollander said he was aware of profitable private transactions that could not be divulged on grounds of client confidentiality.

Many of the current sell-offs are in dry bulk, a sector that has seen a spike after generally calamitous times in recent years.

“It is having a bit of a run now, and it is not surprising that [firms] are going to sell into rising prices and take the opportunity now that it has finally presented itself.”

Mr Vogel said: “There is a lot of talk about get in and get out in five years, and hard deadlines for exit for the funds. It turns out five years isn't a hard deadline. The private equity funds that are getting out now have been in longer than five years.”

Even the likes of Oaktree Capital are only taking some of their money off the table and are keeping an eye on how things are going.

If dividend payments and asset sales are sufficient, some investments will pay off overall, even if the final exit is not as spectacularly profitable as had been hoped.

In some cases, PE has effectively become a long-term shareholder, and has even been involved in governance. Neither of those things is supposed to happen. Isn't this rewriting private equity 101?

“There is private equity that invested in public shipping companies and private equity that invested in private shipping companies where the stocks aren't trading publicly,” said Mr Vogel.

Private companies, particularly those under family, can act in their own long-term best interests, even if they clash with short-term interests. Public companies are obliged to act in the shareholder interest.

“Private equity is still out there with private fleets and their exodus is yet to come, whether it is going to come in mergers and acquisitions, an IPO or just an asset sale. In dry bulk, forward freight agreements indicate an improving market and the question is whether they are going to stay in or just get out.”

Funds also have to reckon with opportunity costs. Even if they made money from a dalliance with

shipping company X, it may have been that they could have made more money with tech start-up Y or mining house Z.

Mr Vogel and Mr Hollander conclude that we are seeing an increase in exits, and the trend is likely to be ongoing, especially given the prospect that most shipping segments will do well out of the predicted post-pandemic upturn in world trade.

## Lives are being lost amid crewing crisis, Anglo-Eastern chief says

EIGHTEEN seafarers working for shipmanager Anglo-Eastern have died while on home leave in recent months, the company's chief executive has said, amid frustration from shipping heads at lack of progress on the crewing crisis.

Bjorn Hojgaard said most of the men were breadwinners for their families and their average age was 37.

"It's a tragedy of epic proportions," he told a Capital Link webinar.

He said seafarers needing a job were unable to go to work at sea while others could not go ashore to be with sick relatives.

Mr Hojgaard, chairman of the Hong Kong Shipowners Association, said in one case a captain could not leave his ship when his spouse died in intensive care.

"It's just heart-breaking and it's shameful that we as an industry have been unable to sort this out," he said.

Mr Hojgaard was not immediately available to confirm to Lloyd's List whether the 18 deaths were the result of coronavirus infections.

BW Fleet Management vice-president Dennis Hansen said: "We had one case of someone dying from natural causes on board. We had to sail around for many days and call at many different countries to try and get the body off before we actually managed.

"It will be interesting to see to what extent we have got a reshuffling of the deck, but it is too early to tell," said Mr Vogel. "Are there going to be significant institutional shareholders coming in to replace private equity that has been in there, or is there going to be a more broad-based shareholding?"

"It looks like it's going to be the latter, and that changes the characteristics of these companies quite a bit."

"And of course the hardship the crew go through, the trauma they go through, by having somebody lying in the freezer on board, and going from country to country... that is tough."

The Marshall Islands Registry senior vice president Robert Fay said there had been several cases in the past year of non-coronavirus deaths onboard, as well as ill seafarers unable to be treated ashore.

An Evergreen boxship, the 5,090 teu *Ital Libera* (IMO: 9322475) was diverted and quarantined when its master Angelo Capurro died on board in April.

Mr Hojgaard told the webinar Anglo-Eastern had vaccinated 4,000 people in India through private drives in the last 10 days, while another 1,000 people on more than 60 ships had been vaccinated in the US in recent weeks.

But the increase in seafarer vaccinations had not made their travel any easier, he said.

Safe Bulkers chief executive Polys Hajioannou said the industry had made no progress on crew change in the past two months.

He was frustrated at charterers blacklisting vessels due to change crews to dodge the higher repatriation costs.

"I'm fed up with negotiating with my charterers how not to do crew changes," he said.

## ANALYSIS:

# Shipping warned not to ignore safety in sustainability push

SHIPPING's move to decarbonisation should not be "at the expense of the safety of seafarers and vessels," according to Intercargo president Dimitris Fafalios.

Speaking on a Capital Link webinar, he urged the industry to find a balance between decarbonisation and safety.

Focusing specifically on an expectation that vessel speed could be reduced to cut emissions, Mr Fafalios said dry bulk ships are traditionally low-powered. "If we drop the power even more, we will have safety issues."

Intertanko chairman Paolo D'Amico agreed that safety becomes an issue if vessels are operated at or below certain levels.

"What comes first," he asked, "emissions or the safety of the crew?"

InterManager president Mark O'Neil stressed that a multi-fuel future for shipping would bring new requirements on crew training.

"Training, crew availability, and competence will be even more of a challenge in future," he said. "Then you have the safety factors associated with handling fuel sources that are potentially more dangerous than existing fuels."

Mr Fafalios reiterated that "safety of the new fuels is paramount," cautioning that regulatory bodies including the International Maritime Organization and the International Association of Classification Societies have not yet fully developed safety criteria for many of the future fuels.

"There is an example in ammonia, which is highly toxic. Recently, one seafarer died and three are

## Surge in US demand adds to supply chain woes

US CONTAINERISED imports, buoyed by the return of consumers to normal shopping patterns, had their busiest April on record and look set to improve further.

critical from ingesting ammonia on a liquefied petroleum gas carrier. Futureproofing is a wonderful word," he said, "but we have to put safety and reality ahead of the dream."

John Butler, chief executive of the World Shipping Council, said the most important message shipping could bring to the COP26 climate change meeting later this year is that the IMO must be "the home of the solutions".

He said the issue of sustainability in shipping cannot be solved if there is a "Balkanised regulatory world" where regional or national governments compete with their different regulations.

Mr Butler warned that regulatory competition brings with it commercial and trade disruption and "saps the energy and the will of the IMO member countries to do the job right."

But he called on the IMO to provide clear regulatory policy signals and to leave them in place long enough to enable the industry to react properly to them.

He said it was critical for the organisation to give "a clear idea of where we're trying to go and what the timelines are. We need innovation and investment, and neither of these respond well to uncertainty."

Mr O'Neil said it was "ridiculous" to stick to the IMO's 2050 decarbonisation timeline. "It will be far earlier than that because the Greta Thunbergs of this world will not allow it. We need to look at those timelines being shortened as opposed to querying whether we are going to meet them."

He said the environmental lobby has picked up a head of steam during the pandemic and shipping will have no choice but to respond.

But there are warnings from the world's largest retail trade association that the added growth may come at a cost, exposing shortages of labour, equipment and shipping capacity to meet the demand.

“Vaccine rates are increasing, shoppers are back in stores and retail supply chains are working overtime,” said Jonathan Gold, vice-president for supply chain and customs policy for the National Retail Federation.

Consumer spending, the biggest source of economic demand in the US, rose 0.5% in April after surging in March, the Commerce Department said.

After months of buying goods online, vaccinated Americans now feel secure enough to go out and buy things in person, a change that economists say is crucial to getting the economy running at full speed again.

Bank of America Corp chief executive Brian Moynihan said consumer spending has surged amid the reopening, much of it fuelled by leftover government stimulus money.

“Our consumers have lots of money in their chequing accounts,” Mr Moynihan said in a media interview. “They have not spent about 65% to 75% of the last couple rounds of stimulus.”

Spending by consumers at the second-biggest US bank exceeds \$1trn so far this year, up 20% over 2019, he said. The US economy is projected to grow 7% this year and 5.5% next year, according to Bank of America.

The key risks to economic growth are supply chain and labour shortages, Mr Moynihan said. In a spring survey conducted by the bank, small businesses said their top concerns were getting workers and supplies to match the demand. “That’s something that’s straightening out, but will take a little time,” he said.

The National Retail Federation said there was no shortage of demand from consumers, but there continues to be shortages of labour, equipment and shipping capacity to meet that demand.

“Supply chain disruptions, port congestion and rising shipping costs could continue to be challenges through the end of the year,” said Mr Gold.

Ben Hackett, founder of retail consultant Hackett Associates, said supply chains were finding it difficult to keep up with demand as shipping capacity struggles.

“A number of vessels taken out of service when volumes were low remain in drydock, while others are delayed in congested ports, which face a lack of manpower both because of coronavirus illnesses and the tight labour market,” he said.

“Many people remain hesitant about returning to work, affecting ports, rail, trucking and distribution centres. We are projecting import volume for 2021 of nearly 29m teu, which would be a 14.5% increase over 2020. As we come out of the V-shaped recovery, we expect to see growth rates stabilise to normal demand on a like-for-like basis going into 2022.”

Global Port Tracker, the throughput analysis tool produced for the National Retail Federation by Hackett Associates, projects nationwide imports for May at 2.32m teu, which would be up 51.1% from the same time last year and would beat March’s total to set a new record for the largest number of containers in a single month.

June is forecast at 2.13m teu, up 32.8% year on year; July at 2.19m, up 14.2%; August at 2.26m teu, up 7.5%; September at 2.14m teu, up 1.7%, and October at 2.07m teu, down 6.5% for the first year-on-year decline since July 2020.

The first half of 2021 is forecast at 12.8m teu, up 35.3% on the year-earlier period. As with each month this spring, the comparisons are skewed owing to the sharp decline in imports during the first half of the past year.

But the six-month total would put 2021 on track to easily beat 2020’s full-year total of 22m teu, which was up 1.9% over 2019 despite the pandemic.

US west coast loaded imports in 2021 are projected to increase by 14.3% over 2020 with a total of 15.5m teu, while east coast loaded imports in 2021 are projected to increase by 14.8% to 11.9m teu.

The Global Port Tracker report covers Los Angeles, Long Beach, Oakland, and Seattle/Tacoma on the west coast; New York/New Jersey, Norfolk, Charleston, Savannah, Port Everglades, Miami and Jacksonville on the east coast, and Houston on the US Gulf coast.

# Digitalisation critical to ports' supply chain success

RISING consumer expectations of the availability of goods and the speed of delivery is proving damaging for global supply chains and terminal operators need to pay as much, if not more, attention to digital infrastructure as to physical infrastructure if they are to maximise the opportunities created by the global shift towards ecommerce.

“While major ecommerce vendors such as Amazon have spearheaded the push towards end-to-end visibility, the rest of the supply chain needs to close the gap,” said Drewry ports and terminals analyst Eleanor Hadland. “Ports and terminals must be able to handle data as effectively as they handle containers.”

The global ecommerce market is estimated to have been worth \$25.6trn in 2018, equivalent to around 30% of global GDP. The pandemic had only accelerated the expansion of the sector.

“While it is expected that as lockdown restrictions ease, bricks-and-mortar retail will regain some market share, ecommerce is unlikely to fall back to pre-pandemic levels,” Ms Hadland said.

While most focus in the ecommerce supply chain had been on optimising the last-mile delivery to the consumer, recent global supply chain disruption was leading major players to look more closely at the first mile.

“End-to-end visibility cannot be achieved if the system does not look beyond the reception bays at the distribution centre,” she said.

Ports had a direct role to play in respect to ecommerce supply chain requirements.

The shift to ecommerce was increasing the demand for warehousing space, with every additional \$1bn of ecommerce sales generating demand for 1m sq ft of warehousing.

“Ports are well positioned to deal with this demand,” said Ms Hadland. “They are already in the supply chain and this type of investment aligns with the vertically integrated business model that is commonplace across the sector.”

This would be a boost for operators pursuing a port-centric business model. This worked best for ports with populous hinterlands and large land resources, as it offered retailers and logistics operators cost-saving opportunities.

“Compressing the supply chain at the point of entry can save a costly inland move that may not be required.”

The ecommerce model could also prove a boost to older city centre ports that had not yet been redeveloped, as unlike deepwater coastal ports, these were closer to the markets for distribution, and retained multimodal transport options that could be adapted to serve the ecommerce market.

But to work effectively, ports would have to invest in their digital infrastructure.

“There is a growing requirement for an efficient transfer of data,” Ms Hadland said. “Now, more than ever, shippers want end-to-end visibility of their supply chains.”

The implementation of digitalised processes would also help boost greater operational efficiencies within a terminal. This was the usual justification for the initial investment in digital technologies but these had now become service lines in their own right.

“The drive for end-to-end supply chain visibility will require ports to address data flows as well as cargo flows,” she said. “The shift to ecommerce reinforces the business case for port-centric logistics, but a failure to invest in digital connectivity could result in a loss of physical connectivity.”

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## MARKETS:

# Sembmarine projects face delay as skilled worker supply falls

SEMBCORP Marine, the Singapore-based marine and offshore engineering company, has warned that a skilled manpower shortage owing to

draconian border controls linked to coronavirus restrictions is holding back its project completions.

A coronavirus outbreak among foreign labourers in Singapore stalled the country's yard operations in the past year. Yard operations have resumed since an outbreak at foreign worker dormitories came under control.

The government moved on May 16 to restrict entry of foreigners, particularly those from countries deemed more exposed to the coronavirus.

This added to the challenge of recruiting new skilled workers for various projects at the yard, Sembmarine said.

"The group continues to face challenges in recruiting new skilled workers for its various projects," it said. "The group has therefore been exploring alternative sources for skilled workers, which is likely to incur increased manpower costs for some ongoing projects."

It is considering rescheduling deliveries, but it maintained that none of its existing projects have undergone cancellations.

The company's comments come a day after it announced that its Jurong Shipyard has agreed to revise the delivery dates of two ultra-deepwater drillships it has contracted to build for Transocean Offshore Deepwater Holdings.

Sembmarine said Transocean has agreed to reschedule the delivery of drillship *Deepwater Atlas*

(IMO: 9735268) to this December and its sister vessel, *Deepwater Titan* (IMO: 9735270), to May 2022.

Sembmarine will defer the due dates on the payment of the final instalments for the pair of drillships.

"Transocean will make a partial delivery payment, followed by deferred delivery instalment payments of the balance amounts payable under the contracts," it said.

Delivery of the two rigs was repeatedly postponed even before the coronavirus outbreak. The original contract valued at \$1.1bn called for the yard to deliver the rigs in the second quarter of 2017 and the first quarter of 2018.

The deal for the drillships, which were the first to be built from scratch out of Singapore, was announced in February 2014 before a collapse in oil prices triggered a multi-year downturn for the offshore and marine sector.

"Resolving the skilled manpower shortage on a timely basis remains a key priority and the group will continue to work expeditiously with the relevant authorities to expedite the entry of the skilled workers into Singapore," Sembmarine said, adding that it will work with customers "to co-ordinate and re-schedule project completions".

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## IN OTHER NEWS:

### **Argentina taps Excelerate FSRU to stave off winter shortfall**

ARGENTINA plans to import liquefied natural gas from a leased floating storage and regasification unit to fulfil its heating demand during the coming winter.

State-owned oil firm IEASA has secured Excelerate Energy's floating storage and regasification unit *Exemplar* (IMO: 9444649), which returned to Argentina in late May, 10 years after it was last deployed in the Latin American country.

The 150,900 cu m FSRU has begun operations in Bahia Blanca

and will deliver LNG for the 2021 winter season, Excelerate said in a statement.

### **Höegh LNG buys majority stake in green hydrogen company**

NORWEGIAN shipowner Höegh LNG said it has bought a minority stake in aspiring green hydrogen producer Gen2 Energy and will collaborate on carriage and potentially the use of the zero-carbon fuel.

The companies said they aim to establish a seaborne logistics chain for green hydrogen, with Höegh LNG contributing through its experience in operating natural gas logistics chains and Noway-based Gen2 Energy

providing expertise in the production and safe handling of the fuel.

"The partnership targets to take a first mover position in seaborne transport of green hydrogen, a market that does not exist on a large scale today," Höegh said. "Green hydrogen can be produced at cost competitive levels, but several of the optimal production sites are at remote locations, making transport by land expensive.

### **Spain signs up to ship recycling convention**

SPAIN has signed up to the International Maritime



Organization's treaty aimed at safe and environmentally sound ship recycling.

It is the 17th country to join the Hong Kong Convention, which represents almost 30% of gross tonnage of the world's merchant fleet, the IMO said.

Under the treaty, ships to be sent for recycling are required to carry an inventory of hazardous materials, specific to each ship.

### **Zhuhai Port to acquire stake in Chinese gas firm**

CHINA's state-owned Zhuhai Port Co has agreed to acquire a 12% stake in privately run Tian Lun Gas.

The HK\$921.6m (\$118.8m) deal will help the Shenzhen-listed arm of the Southern Chinese port further expand its presence in the domestic natural gas market.

In addition to its core business, the port operator runs part of the gas pipelines in the city of Zhuhai in China's Guangdong province.

### **Marinakis orders MR2 newbuildings from Hyundai**

THE Evangelos Marinakis-led Capital Maritime has signed a letter of intent with Hyundai Mipo Dockyard for four medium-range-two tankers that will be configured for a range of emissions reduction technologies.

The intended orders are priced at about \$36m for each vessel and include two optional tankers that would extend the series to six if exercised.

It is understood that the tankers may be built at affiliated yard Hyundai Vinashin Shipyard, with delivery of the series due to start at the end of 2022.

### **WEC Lines brings Spanish service to UK**

AS THE UK and the European Union prepare to do battle over the transport of sausages across the Irish Sea, shortsea shipping is continuing to emerge as one of the winners in the Brexit lottery.

London Thamesport has received its second new shortsea service in less than a week with the first call of a WEC

Line vessel serving the Iberian peninsula.

"Brexit has shaken up the European logistics landscape with more and more operators seeking the reliability and predictability afforded by shortsea container services," said London Thamesport director Mark Taylor.

### **NYSHEX plans to launch in Europe**

THE New York Shipping Exchange is to begin operations in Europe in the second half of this year and has appointed former chairman and Maersk executive Jeremy Haycock as managing director for Europe.

The Europe office, which will be based in the UK, will seek to establish NYSHEX's business model of mutually enforceable ocean freight contracts, which to date has only been available on the transpacific market.

Mr Haycock will join from Maersk, where he was most recently managing director for UK and Ireland. But he was also an early investor in NYSHEX and served as the company's chairman from 2015-2019.

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## **Classified notices follow**



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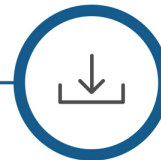
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