

China flags off freight train to London

China launched its first freight train to London covering 12,000 km as the world's second largest economy looks to expand rail links to new markets to improve its dwindling exports. The train departed from China's commodity hub Yiwu in Zhejiang Province a few days ago, it will travel about 18 days to reach London, the 15th city in Europe added to the China-Europe freight train service, the China Railway Corporation said. Yiwu is a hub for producing small commodities and the train mainly carried such goods, including household items, garments, cloth, bags and suitcases. It will pass through Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Germany, Belgium and France before arriving in London.

Global shipping has its task cut out in 2017

The shipping industry has its task cut out in 2017 with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasting the lowest level of global GDP growth since 2009. 2017 will see another year of die-hard competition, which now includes tankers. In 2016, the container shipping industry bit the bullet on demolition and consolidation to help the market to recover. The dry bulk sector needs to copy that approach. The longer global economic growth remains weak and lacks investment, the lower future growth potential for shipping. For eight years, the world has struggled to cope with huge changes and challenges brought about by the crash of the financial market in 2008.

China set to seal pact to run Sri Lankan port

The Sri Lankan government is said to be closer to a deal that will allow China Merchants Port Holdings Company Ltd to operate a port in the country for almost a century. The Hambantota Port in southern Sri Lanka is currently under construction through a \$1.4 billion loan from China. The port is said to become one of South Asia's largest ports when completed. The Chinese entity is to hold an 80 percent stake in the port along with rights to operate the port for 99 years. The Chinese firm will also be in charge of the security of the port, according to a draft agreement to be signed later this month by the two parties.

Outlook brightens with M&As and waning appetite for shipbuilding, says Drewry

With fewer global carriers and a break from ordering big newbuilds, conditions are improving for carrier profitability, according to research firm Drewry. "It might seem counterintuitive to hold a more bullish view so soon after one of the industry's most high-profile casualties in Hanjin Shipping and a third-quarter when financials were splattered in red ink leading to a collective operating loss of over US\$1 billion. But such has been the intensity of consolidation that there does seem to be a very high probability that better times are just around the corner, and potentially really good times when the current orderbook is delivered," says Drewry.

Iran selects Daewoo for a new ship yard

South Korean shipbuilder Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering (DSME) and Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) have agreed a mutual cooperation related to the Iranian shipbuilding industry. The parties signed a Head of Agreement (HoA) under which they plan to establish a Joint Venture company (JVC) to develop an Iranian shipyard through cooperation with DSME's Okpo Shipyard. "IDRO has been seeking a partner having advanced technologies and experience in order to build the vessels in Iran on time for the fleet expansion of Iranian shipping companies and DSME has been selected finally," the Korean shipbuilding giant said.

Mobile app for Indian Merchant Navy officers

The Maritime Union of India (MUI), country's oldest union representing Indian merchant navy officers, has launched android based mobile app named MUI. The app seeks to connect the maritime fraternity across the country to facilitate and enable officers to share comments, knowledge and other things related to their profession. "The app will help Indian merchant navy officers to share comments, knowledge, latest updates, and also engage in video chats to bolster the growth of skilled Indian seafarers working aboard specialised cargo ships across the globe," the MUI said.

Dubai plans to build large harbour, 135-meter-tall lighthouse

Dubai's ruler has announced that the sheikhdom which is home to the world's tallest skyscraper will build a new 1,400-berth marina and massive lighthouse along its coast. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum announced that the planned new Dubai harbour would be spread over 20 million sq. ft and include a cruise ship port and terminal. The project also will include a 135-metre tall lighthouse. Meraas, a developer backed by Sheikh Mohammed, will build the project between Dubai's Jumeirah Beach Residence neighbourhood and the man-made Palm Jumeirah archipelago. Dubai is the commercial hub of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Weather related delays at many Indian ports

Adverse weather conditions, specifically dense fog, has resulted in transit delays for freight train services to and from the ports of Mundra, Pipavav, and Nhava Sheva – resulting in delays at their respective Inland Container Depots (ICDs). Trains in the area have also been experiencing a 1-2 day wait because of power shortages at ICDs. Transit time to and from Mundra, Pipavav, and Nhava Sheva has increased by 2-3 days, resulting in congestion and scheduling problems.

Marine crew baggage scanners soon

India's Customs Department will soon install scanners for inspecting baggage of marine crew at Krishnapatnam and Kakinada seaports. The move is aimed at checking scope for smuggling gold and cigarettes and Indian currency hidden in the baggage of crew of Indian and foreign vessels anchoring at the ports. Customs Commissioner of Andhra Pradesh S.K. Rahman said that contraband like gold bars and narcotics could be easily smuggled by stuffing them into crew baggage and it was not possible to open each one to check them physically.

IMO's IGF Code take effect

A new mandatory code for ships using gases or other low-flashpoint fuels took effect from 1 January 2017, along with new training requirements for seafarers working on those ships. The International Code of Safety for Ships using Gases or other Low-flashpoint Fuels (IGF Code) aims to minimize the risk to ships, their crews and the environment, given the nature of the fuels involved. New ships have to comply with the requirements of the IGF code, which contains mandatory provisions for the arrangement, installation, control and monitoring of machinery, equipment and systems using low-flashpoint fuels, focusing initially on liquefied natural gas (LNG).