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Shipping industry updates guidance on large scale migrant rescue as Mediterranean crisis continues

The global shipping industry, represented by a wide cross-section of international shipowners' associations and seafarers' unions, has collectively updated the industry's Guidelines on Large Scale Rescue Operations at Sea.

This is in response to the continuing crisis in the Mediterranean, in which merchant ships and their civilian crews have so far assisted in the rescue of over 50,000 people. But the Guidelines are also applicable to other regions where ships may have to assist with rescue operations involving large numbers of migrants or refugees, including South-East Asia.

The new Guidelines update those originally produced by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) at the end of 2014, but now take account of the considerable recent experience gained by shipping companies and their crews.

The Guidelines are now supported by a wide range of maritime industry organisations, including the European Community Shipowners' Associations, the Asian Shipowners' Forum, the International Transport Workers' Federation, the European Transport Workers' Federation, Intercargo, Intertanko, IPTA and InterManager.

An important aspect of the revised Guidelines is the additional attention given to ensuring that rescued people are looked after safely once they have been embarked on board commercial ships, whilst also ensuring the safety, security and welfare of the seafarers undertaking such rescue operations, which often involve a significant degree of risk.

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The guidance has also been expanded to include multi-lingual notices that might be utilised by ships when people from Africa and the Middle East are rescued.

The authors of the document are clear in emphasising that the guidance should not in any way be regarded as 'best management practices' (such as those which the industry has developed to address the threat of Somali piracy). Ship operators should be free to use them or not as is deemed appropriate in the context of their operations and existing company procedures.

The shipping organisations also make it clear that the revision of the Guidelines does not in any way suggest that shipping companies or their crews are reconciled to the continuing failure of governments to provide adequate state-backed rescue resources, as required by international law.

Centre committed to development of Paradip Port, says Gadkari

The Central government is committed to take all possible steps for the development of Paradip Port. It has decided to set up medical college, super-specialty hospital for the poor sections of people, workers and others, said Mr Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Shipping, Road Transport and Highways, while inaugurating the Southern Oil Jetty here recently.

The Southern Oil Jetty has been constructed at a cost of Rs 811 crore to cater to requirements of oil refinery project of IOCL. It will enable Paradip Oil Refinery to import crude oil and export products.

Over 212 vessels can be loaded from the Southern Oil Jetty per year. Addressing the gathering, Mr Gadkari said, the "state government should provide required land for setting up medical college, hospitals, educational institutions, drinking water projects and improvement of drainage system in Paradip".

He asked the authorities of Paradip Port Trust (PPT) to prepare master plan for implementation of these projects.

Effluent and polluted water would not be released into the sea, so development plan is required to make this city a clean city. There should be no interference from politicians in developmental works, he noted.

He also highlighted the progress of inland waterway linking Kalinganagar industrial area and eventually Talcher to Paradip and Dhamra ports.

Mr Gadkari said the Union government has committed to make Major Ports of the country at par with international operating standards. Port capacity has to be increased, he added.

The Chairman of PPT, Mr M.T. Krishna Babu, informed, "PPT has all facilities, including land facilities so we are committed for development of its infrastructure. We have targeted to reach traffic record of 100 million tonnes by 2018. PPT achieved an all-time high traffic throughput of 71.01 million tonnes during 2014-15, as against the previous year's traffic of 68 million tonnes, exhibiting a growth of 4.42 per cent year-on-year."

Earlier, Mr Gadkari reviewed PPT's developmental activities and also interacted with trade union leaders, stevedores and others in Paradip.

He also dedicated to the nation draught enhancement in Central Dock Multi Commodity Berth (MCB) to 14.5 m.

He laid the foundation stone of dust barrier system under environment management programme.

India may not import more wheat due to high global prices

India may not import more wheat due to the surge in global prices and concerns that the government may anytime levy 10 per cent duty on inbound shipments, say traders.

According to a prominent trader, global wheat prices are starting to rise due to El Nino concerns, and there is also the fear that the government could impose 10 per cent import duty on wheat.

Private flour millers had recently contracted 5 lakh tonnes of wheat from Australia for the first time in a decade due to sluggish supply of domestic high protein wheat and lower international prices. They had plans to contract another 5 lakh tonnes from France and Russia.

Outlook for cargo growth at ports seen remaining strong

The outlook for cargo growth at ports continues to be strong over the medium to long term, driven by the domestic requirements of coal for power and other sectors; crude oil for meeting domestic petroleum requirements; and containers, given the cost and logistical advantages associated with containerisation, according to an analysis by ICRA

Some near term uncertainty may, however, be associated with particular cargo categories like imported coal due to uncertainties plaguing the power sector and persisting delays in execution of greenfield power projects; iron ore, due to unresolved pricing/policy issues; and containers, due to the relatively weak global environment affecting ex-im trade, the report said. Iron ore still continues to be shrouded with policy-related issues and accordingly its volumes are also expected to be modest over the near term at least.

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The 10 per cent reduction in export duty on low grade iron ore in April 2015 and restarting of mining operations in Goa should support export volumes to some extent; however, the prevalent export volumes would continue to be weighed down by high export duty of 30 per cent on higher grade of iron ore, the sharp drop in prices in recent months and the ban on mining in Odisha and Karnataka, according to the report.

It highlighted that the new tariff policy, which has brought long-awaited clarity on tariffs going forward, is a favourable development. The past fiscal has witnessed a keen interest of the government of India on the development of infrastructure sector, including ports, which is evident in the ambitious launch of the Sagar Mala project and various other schemes and initiatives.

In the long run, ICRA believes the implementation of Sagar Mala could lead to increased cargo for ports. However, several challenges remain. The actual materialisation could take significant time, given the time-consuming legislative framework required for efficient collaboration between the Central and state governments, it pointed out.

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