



MAKING WAVES

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Acknowledgement: 'Making Waves' is a compilation of maritime news and news analyses drawn from national and international online sources. Drawn directly from original sources, minor editorial amendments are made by specialists on maritime affairs. It is intended for academic research, and not for commercial use. NMF expresses its gratitude to all sources of information, which are cited in this publication.



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Maritime Security Exercise SEACAT Kicks Off In Singapore

SINGAPORE, Aug 22 (Bernama) -- Naval forces from nine countries are gathered for a maritime security exercise in Singapore, which began Monday. Vietnam News Agency (VNA) reports that the participants include forces from Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, Cambodia and the US. Lieutenant-Commander Arlo Abrahamson, a spokesman for the US Seventh Fleet, said the exercise called "Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) will focus on anti-piracy and search and rescue operations at sea.

The event also aims to increase cooperation on combating smuggling and other illicit activities. About 100 personnel and 12 vessels including navy ships and patrol boats and two P8 maritime patrol aircraft are involved in the five-day exercise. The drill is expected to enable participating countries to respond more effectively to maritime threats, and thus better defend the security of their seas, Abrahamson added. SEACAT began in 2002 with a view to combating piracy. Ten years later, it expanded the scope of training related to maritime smuggling and prevention of illegal activities.

Source: bernama.com, 22 August 2016

Rule of law ‘Common Denominator’ in Maritime Security

-Tama Salim

The rule of law will keep the playing field level when it comes to debating maritime security in an Asia-Pacific region charged with competing interests, international maritime law experts argue.

As Asia is increasingly becoming the center of global economic growth, the region's existing maritime security architecture needs to be improved, says Deputy Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs Arief Havas Oegroseno.

Balancing between traditional and non-traditional security threats, domestic factors, the need for operational-level arrangements and the undeniable influence of Sino-American relations on the region, Havas argued that regional policymakers at the highest levels needed to keep the playing field level, or risk seeing regional tensions escalate.

“[We have] all these elements in the larger picture of what I call the ‘Paradox of Asia’: On the one hand, Asia has tremendous economic development, [...] but in strategic and security issues sometimes our behaviour is still [stuck in the] 19th century,” he said in a keynote speech at an international maritime security symposium in Jakarta.

One of the best solutions that countries in the region can rely on regardless of their economic, political and demographic standing, is the rule of law, Havas added. “Going back to the law is very important because we have a common reference of what it is in terms of the conduct of countries in the region.”

This assertion was supported by Robert Beckman, professor at the Centre for International Law at the National University of Singapore.

“The Law of the Sea is critically important to protect the interests of the coastal states in the region,” said Beckman, referring to the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

He did, however, point out that relying on the general principles of international law alone would not suffice and that more rules of engagement were needed to encompass all the outstanding issues in the region.

“If we talk about maritime security issues, we must talk about where the actual events are, whether in territorial seas, straits, archipelagic waters or economic zones, but in many other respects, maritime security issues are not handled in any detail in UNCLOS,” he said.

Beckman said most countries in Southeast Asia, or at least all the countries surrounding the South China Sea, were parties to UNCLOS, with the exception of North Korea and Cambodia.

Beckman also shone a light on the US, which has yet to ratify the convention. With regard to this, Havas urged the US to ratify UNCLOS “as soon as possible” to maintain credibility and engagement in the region.

For Southeast Asia, at least in Indonesia’s perspective, UNCLOS has been pivotal for maintaining peace, stability and allowing countries to prosper economically, especially as regards the South China Sea issue.

A recent international tribunal ruling has provided a buffer against China’s expansionist claims in the sea, allowing smaller countries with competing claims like the Philippines to negotiate on an equal standing with the East Asian giant.

The ruling, based on the principles of UNCLOS, dismantled Beijing’s controversial nine-dash line, the basis for its unitary claim over features in the South China Sea.

Beijing rejected the ruling and its application, but the Indonesian Foreign Ministry’s leading legal expert, Damos Dumoli Agusman, argued that the decision remained valid even without China’s political support, although it was still up to the claimants to resolve the core issue.

Besides the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam and Vietnam also have competing claims with China and Taiwan in the disputed body of water, through which US\$5 trillion of global trade passes each year.

Source: thejakartapost.com, 23 August 2016

Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training Enhances Cooperative Maritime Security between Navies in Southeast Asia

SINGAPORE (NNS) -- The 15th annual Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) exercise commenced at the Republic of Singapore Navy's Multinational Operations and Exercises Centre (MOEC) Aug 22.

SEACAT focuses on regional cooperation to address shared maritime security challenges like smuggling, piracy and other illicit activities at sea by bringing together liaison officers (LNOs) from Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and the United States to collaborate and execute practical maritime responses to multiple realistic scenarios.

"SEACAT enables nations to work through complex maritime security challenges in a cooperative and inclusive environment," said Rear Adm. Don Gabrielson, commander, Task Force 73. "Sharing ideas, innovation and experience allows us to learn from each other and capture best practices to prepare for real-world contingencies."

During the five-day command post exercise, liaison officers will receive simulated reports of suspect vessels in the Straits of Singapore and Malacca, the Andaman Sea or the South China Sea. After sharing information from all available sources such as Singapore's Information Fusion Centre, Malaysia's International Maritime Bureau, or the Philippines' Coast Watch System, the LNOs will develop and implement response plans during a concurrent field training exercise. Based on the situation, aircraft and ships from participating navies and coast guards will investigate and conduct on-scene boardings as necessary.

SEACAT 2016 continues the trend of increasing complexity and increased participation in the exercise. This year, coast guard personnel from the U.S., the Philippines, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency are also participating in the exercise.

Also participating in SEACAT for the first time is USNS Montford Point (T-ESD 1), which was re-designated by Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus as an expeditionary transport dock. ESDs are part of the new Expeditionary Support class of ships and can be utilized for various scenarios in expeditionary logistics, as well as maritime security platforms for exercises and operations.

SEACAT, which began in 2002 under the name "Southeast Asia Cooperation Against Terrorism," was renamed in 2012 to expand the scope of training among regional navies and coastguards.

"Effective communication and coordination is essential when multiple nations are working together in response to maritime security issues," said Captain H.B. Le, commodore, Destroyer Squadron 7. "SEACAT provides the opportunity for multiple nations to enhance these skills so that we are better prepared to respond together when faced with real-world challenges."

Other U.S. assets participating in SEACAT 16 include fleet replenishment oiler USNS Walter S. Diehl (T-AO 193), two P-8A Poseidon aircraft, and staff from Task Force 73 and Destroyer Squadron 7.

Commander, Task Force 73 and Destroyer Squadron 7 staff conduct advanced planning, organize resources and directly support the execution of maritime exercises such as SEACAT, the bilateral Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise series, and the Naval Engagement Activity (NEA) with Vietnam.

Source: navy.mil, 23 August 2016

Coast Guard tightens Maritime Security with TWIC card reader requirements

-Greg Grisano

The U.S. Coast Guard has issued a final rule requiring owners and operators of some of its facilities to conduct electronic inspections of Transportation Worker Identification Credentials as an access control measure.

The final rule was published Aug. 23 on *The Federal Register*. The rule also implements recordkeeping requirements and security plan amendments that will incorporate TWIC requirements as part of a multilayered system of access controls designed to enhance maritime security. The rule implements electronic reader requirements from the Security and Accountability for Every Port Act of 2006. The electronic readers are designed to “mitigate the threat of an individual gaining access to a vessel or facility using forged or stolen TWIC” the rule states.

The final rule will ensure that prior to being granted unescorted access to a designated secure area, an individual will have his or her TWIC authenticated. The status of that credential will be validated against an up-to-date list maintained by the Transportation Security Administration. The individual’s identity will be confirmed by comparing his or her biometric (i.e., fingerprint) with a biometric template stored on the credential. TWIC has been used as a secured entry device at maritime facilities since April 2009.

“The benefits of this final rule include the enhancement of the security of vessels, ports, and other facilities by ensuring that only individuals who hold TWICs are granted unescorted access to secure areas at those locations,” the Coast Guard said in the final rule. “The provisions in this final rule target the highest risk entities while maximizing the net benefits of the rule.” Doug Morris, OOIDA security operations director, said the card reader rule is aimed at helping curtail the usage of expired TWIC as well.

“The TWIC is presently being used as a flash card with very little scrutiny,” Morris said. “When the TWIC reader is implemented at a particular facility, those folks with expired

cards or who have biometric issues will be turned away and those with counterfeit cards will be dealt with accordingly.”

Morris, who sits on the TWIC Stakeholder Communication Committee, said the committee is working with Congress and the Department of Defense to systematically standardize port security. However, some states, like Florida, do not allow TWIC holders access to ports unless the card holder has also undergone an additional background check through the state.

“A driver or transportation worker is forced to pay additional fees, which undermines the Congressional intent of the TWIC,” he said. The final rule notes that the agency used a risk-based approach to apply the regulatory requirements to less than 5 percent of the total population of facilities and vessels regulated by the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002, but that group represents approximately 80 percent of the potential consequences of a transportation security incident.

The rule affects 525 facilities and one vessel deemed “Risk Group A” by the USCG. The Coast Guard estimates the annual cost of this final rule to be approximately \$22.5 million, and the 10-year cost at \$157.9 million.

The main cost of this rule for driver is the acquisition, installation, and integration of TWIC readers into access control systems. Annual costs will be driven by costs associated with updates of the list of cancelled TWICs, recordkeeping, training, system maintenance, and opportunity costs associated with failed TWIC reader transactions.

The final rule notes that in response to publication of the March 22, 2013, NPRM, the Coast Guard received more than 100 comment letters, consisting of over 1,200 unique comments.

In response to comments that the Coast Guard’s threat analysis methodology did not address security issues raised by cargo containers themselves, including potential threats concealed within the containers, the agency stated the inspections are designed to address attack scenarios “that require physical proximity to the intended target.”

“For this reason, our analysis in this final rule focuses on threats that could be prevented or mitigated through use of electronic TWIC inspection. Concealed items or persons smuggled inside cargo containers are not attack scenarios that transportation worker identity verification (and electronic TWIC inspection in particular) addresses,” the Coast Guard noted in the final rule.

Source: landlinemag.com, 24 August 2016

Japan, Australia agree to beef up Security ties to counter China’s regional Maritime push

The Japanese and Australian defence ministers agreed Thursday to strengthen security cooperation amid China’s growing maritime assertiveness and North Korea’s repeated ballistic missile launches, including one fired the previous day.

“I have been clearly instructed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to promote defence cooperation between Japan and Australia. I would like to deepen the relationship,” Defence Minister Tomomi Inada said at the outset of the talks with her Australian counterpart Marise Payne in Tokyo.

Payne also noted the importance of the two countries’ cooperation for regional peace and safety amid growing security challenges.

On Wednesday morning, North Korea test-fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile toward the Sea of Japan. Japan said it was the first time this type of missile had reached the country’s air defence identification zone.

The two ministers agreed to strengthen defence cooperation through joint drills and oppose any unilateral actions that escalate tensions.

Japan has been concerned by China’s military buildup in the contested waters of the South China Sea and repeated intrusions by Chinese government vessels in Japanese

waters around a group of islets in the East China Sea, controlled by Japan but claimed by China.

The ministers also affirmed a plan to hold “two-plus-two” talks involving the two countries’ defence and foreign ministers later this year in Tokyo. Such security talks between Japan and Australia were previously held last November.

The defence ministerial talks were the first between the countries since Japan failed to win a multibillion dollar deal to build submarines for the Australian navy.

Source: scmp.com, 25 August 2016

Nigerian Navy warns against illegal Maritime Security agencies

The Nigerian Navy on Friday in Calabar issued stern warning to organisations operating in the maritime industry to stop patronising with illegal maritime security agencies.

The Navy issued the warning when the Akwa Ibom state oil and gas monitoring and implementation committee paid a courtesy call to the Flag Officer Commanding (FOC) Eastern Naval Command (ENC), Rear Admiral James Oluwole, at the Command Headquarters in Calabar.

Speaking during the event, the FOC, who was represented by the Chief Staff Officer, ENC, Rear Admiral Obi Ofodile, stated that organisations should be wary of those parading themselves as maritime security agencies without legal backing from the Federal Government as listed in Nigerian Constitution.

The FOC stated that the Navy will withdraw her support from any organisation found to be collaborating with illegal maritime security agencies, and such agencies will be sanctioned and their members arrested and prosecuted accordingly.

“Every maritime security agency operating illegally in Nigerian maritime domain is our enemy and we cannot support any organisation dealing with them”, Oluwale said. The FOC promised that the Nigerian Navy will collaborate with the committee.

He said with the current economic realities, states need to look inward on how to increase their internally generated revenue. He said the Navy is willing to assist legally constituted committees, agencies and organisations operating legally in the Country’s maritime domain.

Source: thisdaylive.com, 26 August 2016



Nigerian Navy unveils 30 made-in-Nigeria gunboats

The Nigerian Navy on Wednesday in Lagos inaugurated 39 gun boats and 45 operational vehicles to assist the fight against criminalities in parts of the country. Thirty of the boats were built in Nigeria.

At the inauguration, Minister of State for Defence, Mohammad Dan-Ali, said the gun boats were fitted with appropriate weapons and anti-ballistic protection to enhance optimal efficiency. The minister was represented by the Permanent Secretary, Danjuma Sheni. "The country's security challenges have continued to demand a great deal of human and material resources to surmount, which in the light of dwindling revenue would be sustainable only with generous innovations and incorporation of home grown solutions," Mr. Dan-Ali said.

He said the 30 8.2 metre boats, which were constructed for the navy by Epenal Boat Yard in Port Harcourt, would be deployed for rigorous patrols in the Niger Delta while additional 20 would be delivered subsequently.

"I am hopeful that the boats being launched today would further boost the ongoing patrol efforts in the various rivers and creeks of the country to the immense benefit of the nation's maritime security," the minister said. He thanked President Muhammadu Buhari for his continual support and commitment to the Armed Forces.

The Chief of Naval Staff, Ibok Ete-Ibas, a vice admiral, in his welcome address, said the Epenal boats were an improvement on 30 others unveiled in Port Harcourt in February. "These boats, no doubt, have boosted navy maritime operations.

“However, as part of the efforts to continue to achieve unchallenged dominance of our maritime environment, the navy within a space of six months has launched another 39 specially built patrol boats into her fleet.

“These efforts, both then and now, represent navy’s modest contribution to enhance national security and prosperity. “Of the 39 boats launched, nine were acquired from Sri Lanka and would be greatly helpful for patrol of territorial waters and the contiguous zone,” said the naval chief.

Mr. Ete-Ibas said the decision of the navy to build 60 boats locally was part of its resolve to look inwards in the production of the nation’s naval hardware.

“The mounting operational challenges in the face of progressively dwindling economy necessitated the navy to explore more cost saving options through local construction of these patrol boats. “The cost of production of a unit of the boat is less than half the cost of producing similar boats from overseas.

“These boats retained all positive features of the previous set including being fitted with appropriate weapons for credible firepower,” Mr. Ete-Ibas said. According to the naval chief, the gun boats also benefitted from the incorporation of anti-ballistic protection, giving it an edge for more audacious and aggressive employment.

“They are also expected to present a better sea-keeping ability with a wide margin for the many corrections applied to the design concept of Lot 1, through series of stage trials in the production cycle.

“I can say we are gradually but steadily moving towards the saturation of the nation’s backwaters with patrol boats for improved security of our maritime domain, Ete-Ibas said, adding that the boats would be deployed optimally by relevant navy units.

The Chairman, Senate Committee on the Navy, Isa Aman-Isa, said the committee was doing everything possible to support the navy in tackling maritime insecurity to the fullest.

Present at the inauguration were the Chief of Defence Staff, Gabriel Olonisakin, a General, and other top brass in the military.

Source: premiumtimesng.com, 17 August 2016

Indian Navy helicopter had precautionary landing at Uran

A Chetak helicopter of the Indian Navy made a precautionary landing around 10.15 am on Thursday at an Advanced Landing Ground (ALG) near Uran in Raigad district after the pilot suspected a fuel leak in the engine. Navy sources said there were two crewmembers onboard.

A naval official, speaking with The Asian Age, said that at the time of the incident, the aircraft was undertaking a routine practice sortie. Later, after Naval engineers checked the aircraft, it returned to naval base INS Shikra around 5 pm. According to the defence sources, this is the third occasion in the last 12 months where an armed forces aircraft made a precautionary landing near Mumbai.

A Navy official said a support helicopter was sent from Mumbai to assist the Chetak around 9.30 am. Later, after a thorough check, both aircraft flew back to Mumbai. “It wasn’t an emergency landing. It was a precautionary landing as the pilot had noticed a technical snag,” said a defence spokesperson.

Earlier, on October 21, 2015 an Indian Air Force MI-17 helicopter with four crew members made an emergency landing around 2.30 pm at Bandra-Kurla Complex’s MMRDA ground after a technical snag.

Source: asianage.com, 19 August 2016

U.S. Navy orders First P-8 Aircraft for Royal Air Force

-Richard r. Burgess

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Navy has modified a contract to accommodate an order for the first two P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft for the United Kingdom.

Naval Air Systems Command on Aug. 18 awarded to Boeing a \$68.4 million modification to an advance acquisition contract for long-lead parts and work for two P-8As within Full-Rate Production Lot 4 through the Foreign Military Sales Program.

The United Kingdom announced on July 11 that it would order nine P-8As for the Royal Air Force (RAF). The RAF had retired its Nimrod MR.2 maritime patrol aircraft in 2011 and had canceled development of the improved MR.4 version in 2010. The P-8 will restore a long-range anti-submarine and surveillance capability to the Royal Air Force.

RAF personnel have been flying as crew members on U.S., Australian and New Zealand maritime patrol aircraft to preserve their expertise until the U.K. government made its decision on a future maritime patrol aircraft.

Source: seapowermagazine.org, 22 August 2016

The F-35 'will absolutely thrive' in the most militarized region on the planet

-Amanda Macias

As tensions mount in the troubled waters of the South China Sea, US might is considered crucial for reassuring allies. And a weapon considered well suited for the region is almost ready for deployment: the F-35 Lightning II.

"It will absolutely thrive in that environment," retired Air Force Col. John "JV" Venable told Business Insider.

At a cool \$100 million per jet, Lockheed Martin's "jack-of-all-trades" aircraft is America's priciest weapons system, and its development has become one of the most challenged programs in the history of the Department of Defense. Since its inception, in 2001, the F-35 has experienced setbacks that include faulty ejection seats, software delays, and helmet display issues. In July 2015, after cost overruns, design modifications, and serious testing, the Marine Corps became the first of the sister-service branches to declare the tri-service fighter ready for war.

A year and change later, the Air Force also declared their version of the fifth generation jet initial operational capability (IOC). Currently the US Navy variant, the F-35C, is slated to reach IOC by February 2019. "Having three different types of fighters working for you in that environment [South China Sea] is also an extraordinary advantage," Venable, a fighter pilot and former commander of the celebrated Air Force Thunderbirds, told Business Insider. Currently the US, with the world's largest navy, dominates the region; however, that is poised to change as Beijing dramatically expands its naval capabilities.

"At some point, China is likely to, in effect, be able to deny the US Navy unimpeded access to parts of the South China Sea," Robert Kaplan, senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security and author of "Asia's Cauldron," wrote.

"The withdrawal of even one US aircraft carrier strike group from the Western Pacific is a game changer." According to Venable, the F-35, designed to marry stealth and avionics, would thrive in the armed camp that has become the South China Sea. "The Chinese would be right to fear the United States Air Force, United States Navy, and the United States Marine Corps armed with those jets."

Source: businessinsider.in, 24 August 2016

China's 3rd Gen Surface-to-Air Missiles Boost Attack Ability

China's 3rd-generation surface- to-air missile system is combat-ready as the PLA prepares for a major upgrade in the range of missiles to counter deployment of sophisticated US THAAD anti-missile system in South Korea which Beijing views as a major security threat. The new surface-to-air missile system will boost the attack ability of the military, a Chinese air force official said.

The People's Liberation Army Air Force will use the home-developed, ground-based air defence and anti-missile system, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post quoted Air Force spokesman Shen Jinke as saying.

"The system can cover from short-to long range and strike low- to high altitude targets," Shen said. "Air defence and anti-missile systems are critical parts of the air force's strategic capability," Shen said. "The system consists of new missiles and launching systems. The air force is transforming from territorial air defence to being capable of both attack and defence," he said.

"We will fully upgrade our strategic early warning, air strike, anti-aircraft and anti-missile, information countermeasure, air landing, strategic aerial delivery and comprehensive support," he said.

His remarks follow China's repeated protests against South Korea's decision to deploy a US-developed anti-missile system, which Beijing says poses a serious threat to the nation's security. South Korea says the shield is needed to protect against North Korea's provocative nuclear weapons programme.

The Chinese defence official said the American Terminal High Altitude Area Defence, (THAAD) anti-missile system missile battery has a radar detection range of 1,000-2,000km and minimal firing range of 40km. Given the geographical environment on the Korean Peninsula, the US and ROK's claim that the deployment is to "deal with nuclear threat from DPRK" without "targeting any third country" is too lame and

hypocritical, the Chinese Defence Ministry said elaborating on why China opposed to the deployment of the THAAD missile systems.

Earlier this month, Chinese Aero space officials said China's next-generation cruise missiles will be developed based on a modular design, allowing them to be tailor-made for specific combat situations with high level of artificial intelligence.

Source: deccanherald.com, 29 August 2016

V.S. Pathania takes charge as Coast Guard Commander

Inspector General V.S. Pathania on Tuesday took charge as the 13th Commander of the Indian Coast Guard's western region at a ceremonial parade held at the Coast Guard Regional Headquarters, Worli.

An alumnus of the Defence Service Staff College, Wellington and National Defence College, New Delhi, the Flag Officer joined the Indian Coast Guard in January 1986. A helicopter pilot, he has been decorated with the Tatrakshak Medal for Gallantry and a Director General Indian Coast Guard Commendation.

Commander Pathania has undergone special courses in Search and Rescue and Port Operations with the U.S. Coast Guard. He has held prominent assignments at the Coast Guard Headquarters including Command of Aviation and Afloat units.

He has held various important operational, command and administrative appointments including Chief Of Staff in the northwest region, Chief of Staff Operations of the western region, command of ICG ship *Sarang*, *Vigraha* and *Ranijindan*, the Air Station at Chennai and Principal Director of the Human Resource Directorate at New Delhi.

Strengthening coastal security through coordination with all state and central agencies and making the seas safe for all fishermen and merchantmen on the west coast will be his top priorities in the new posting.

Source: thehindu.com, 31 August 2016



Thousands of Ships are being Destroyed - and it's Terrifying News for the Global Economy

-Danielle Muoio

The shipping industry is taking a beating. As the Wall Street Journal reports, about 1,000 ships capable of hauling 52 million metric tons of cargo will be cut up and sold for scrap metal this year. Owners have only ordered 293 vessels this year through July - a stark decrease from 2010 to 2015 when owners were buying 1,450 ships annually.

The reason? A stagnant global economy that stems back to little growth in Europe and a slowdown in China. Chinese imports from the European Union fell 14% last year, the WSJ reports. In the first quarter of this year, Chinese imports from the EU fell 7% from a year prior. Exports to Europe have fallen as well.

All of that means there's an overcapacity of ships, leaving owners no choice but to leave them idle or recycle them. Typically, ships are recycled every 30 years. But this year, the average of ships getting recycled is 15 years.

"If you go back five years ago, people saw growing demand at very high rates. There was a bit of an uptick in the number of ships that were brought on, particularly in 2012, 2013, and 2014," Sean Monahan, a partner at the consulting firm A.T. Kearney, told Business Insider.

"But generally demand has flattened, and in some cases a little bit declined there are a lot more ships either being dry docked or being scrapped," Monahan, who is an expert on shipping, said.

And owners aren't getting the same bang for their buck when recycling ships, either. A sharp drop in the price of steel has dropped the rate of return an average of 10% to 15% of the price of a new ship, the WSJ reported.

Monahan said he sees this being an issue for the next two to three years before demand bounces back to the point where more ships can be in use.

Source: businessinsider.in, 18 August 2016

Moody's: Shipping Crisis Strains Maersk's Credit Worthiness

International credit rating bureau Moody's notes that recent developments in the container industry combined with disappointing second quarter result from Maersk Line and Hapag-Lloyd put a strain on the credit worthiness of the two carriers, explains Moody's senior analyst and VP Maria Maslovsky to ShippingWatch following an update about Maersk Line and Hapag-Lloyd.

Moody's notes in the update the negative impact on the two carriers of the fact that the second quarter results were as low as was the case. Maria Maslovsky explains that the bureau is not planning, or even considering, to lower the ratings for the two North European container carriers, which currently stand at Baa1 and B2, respectively.

The credit ratings are fixed for now, but Moody's is keeping a close eye on developments in the container sector these days, at a time when rates and the carriers' finances are scraping rock bottom. And she does not hide the fact that the market conditions and the latest key figures from the sector put added pressure on the industry and the two market players.

"They are operating in a difficult market environment. In our view their credit worthiness is weaker than previously," she tells ShippingWatch.

Maersk's credit rating is strong, she explains, and stronger than Hapag-Lloyd's, due to the fact that the German carrier operates exclusively in container shipping, whereas Maersk Line as part of the Maersk Group belongs to a conglomerate with activities scattered across a range of different sectors.

Up to AAA

The Moody's rating is a crucial factor for virtually all banks and financial institutions lending money to the business sector. The higher the rating, which goes all the way up to AAA, the better. The rating bureau has no set dates for when it publishes updates, as this depends entirely on how the sectors develop and what the published numbers look like.

In its update, Moody's cites the fact that Maersk Line's operating profit declined 63 percent in the second quarter, and that container rates dropped 24 percent. For Hapag-Lloyd, the operating profit went down 65 percent and freight rates dipped 19.4 percent.

"We expect global trade to grow 2.6 percent this year and 3.0 percent next year, after growing just 1.6 percent in 2015. At the same time, the global container fleet is at an all-time high of approximately 20 million twenty-foot equivalent units, teu, with more than 2.5 million teu scheduled for delivery over the next three years. These factors are putting severe negative pressure on freight rates," writes Moody's.

Even though more, bigger and younger container vessels are being scrapped, Moody's projects that this is far from sufficient to bring balance to the market:

"However, we still project that supply will continue to exceed demand for the balance of 2016, a conclusion supported by Hapag-Lloyd's negative revision to its 2016 outlook, in which both EBIT and EBITDA decrease for full-year 2016. Meanwhile, Maersk continues to expect significantly lower 2016 results compared with 2015 for both the overall company and for Maersk Line," notes Moody's.

Source: shippingwatch.com, 25 August 2016

India's Ocean Churns Again: Mohamed Nasheed plans to return Maldives to Democracy, India should help him

Democrats and dictators are at it again in the Indian Ocean, churning the waters for their shot at immortality. Except in this version of the 'samudra manthan,' former president of the Maldives Mohamed Nasheed is allying himself with former autocrats, promoters of coups as well as confirmed Islamists in order to unseat the man responsible for the successive waves of unrest washing over this coral paradise on earth, current president Abdulla Yameen.

In exile in London since he was allowed to leave the Maldives last year for medical reasons after being incarcerated on false terrorism charges for 13 years – a deal brokered by India, the US and UK with the Yameen government – Nasheed flew into Sri Lanka last week, to discuss plans to return his beloved island-nation to democracy.

The assemblage of characters in this charge against Yameen is enough to make a riveting Bollywood potboiler. Right in front is Yameen's half-brother Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, a man India knows very well, having rescued him from a potential coup in 1988 under the orders of Rajiv Gandhi; but Gayoom became increasingly dictatorial and ran the Maldives with an iron fist for 30 years, until he was overthrown by Nasheed in the first open elections in 2008.

There is Gasim Ibrahim, a Maldivian magnate who owns several gorgeous island resorts and also dabbles in politics, in a party called the Jumhooree Party. He and Nasheed started off as friends in 2008 when Nasheed became president and then slowly fell out.

And then there is the Adhaalath party, the self-proclaimed Maldivian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and other secular Maldivians initially shied away from Adhaalath. Its leaders, including the India-trained eye surgeon Mauroof Hussain, are well-known for spreading Islamic consciousness across Maldives' sun-and-sand-drenched islands and atolls. Last year as the MDP ramped up protest against Yameen's decision to throw Nasheed in jail, Adhaalath joined

hands with the MDP. And when its current president, Sheikh Imran Abdullah, delivered a speech in favour of Nasheed, Yameen threw him into jail without trial.

Over the last year, in exile in London and Sri Lanka and other parts of the world, MDP leaders have worked hard to stitch together an anti-Yameen coalition. Amal Clooney, the internationally recognized human rights lawyer, was commandeered to represent Nasheed against the Maldives government. America's John Kerry issued a few statements against the travesty of justice. Britain's then prime minister David Cameron called the Maldives a "frontline state" in the restoration of democracy in the Indian Ocean.

Except the two biggest nations who lie astride the Ocean, said nary a word. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, wary about China's expanding footprint in the Ocean, travelled to Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka in early 2015, having cancelled a visit to the Maldives because of the political instability in that country. Meanwhile, Chinese president Xi Jinping became the first Chinese president to visit the Maldives in late 2014, promising loads of freebies in terms of building bridges, roads, a new airport at Male and even the ministry of foreign affairs.

But as Nasheed becomes the lynchpin in a renewed effort to return the Maldives to its democratic moorings – albeit, under the leadership of the former dictator Gayoom – the opportunity for India to rectify a major foreign policy error of the past has fallen into Modi's lap.

In 2012, when Nasheed resigned in the face of an attempted coup so as to avoid further bloodshed, the Congress-led government in Delhi refused to support him. India not only abandoned a friend in the Maldives – one who has repeatedly extolled the virtues of Indian democracy as well as its wonderful bookshops in Delhi's Khan Market, Chennai and Bangalore – it also dumped its own democratic tradition by quickly kissing and making up with Nasheed's hardline successors.

The fear of China ruled the roost in Delhi. Nasheed was becoming close to the Chinese, it was said – certainly, he inaugurated the Chinese embassy on the day former prime

minister Manmohan Singh landed in Male for the Saarc summit in 2011 – and India could not afford to trust him. Even in the early Modi years, the foreign policy establishment couldn't bring itself to come to terms with the fact that this Maldivian leader, president of a country of 320,000 people, the size of Khan Market, couldn't help but speak his mind.

In the “ji huzoor” darbar culture that reigns in India, despite a unique freedom movement that delivered democracy not revolution as well as the peaceful transfers of power ever since, the person who bows and scrapes is much preferred over the person who speaks up. Mohamed Nasheed, former president and Amnesty prisoner of conscience, firmly belongs in the latter category.

And so the Indian Ocean is churning once again. As Gayoom leads the charge against his own half-brother in the 85-member ‘Majlis’ or Parliament, Modi's good friend, president Maithripala Sirisena of Sri Lanka is hosting Nasheed in Colombo as he plots Yameen's peaceful removal.

If this is, indeed, India's ocean – a name that so enrages the Chinese – then Delhi must assert its credentials by helping democrats to come to power. If Gayoom the autocrat has had a change of heart, courtesy some hard-nosed realpolitik and the backing of Nasheed, more power to him. The Maldivians are looking at Delhi for support. Hopefully, we won't fail them this time.

Source: timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 30 August 2016

Port Officials Chart Course for Maritime Trade Growth

-Cheng Sokhorng

Port officials from ASEAN member states gathered in Phnom Penh yesterday to discuss ways of improving the region's cargo port system and further standardising maritime trade procedures, a Cambodian port official said yesterday.

Lou Kim Chhun, CEO of Sihanoukville Autonomous Port, said the 37th ASEAN Ports Association (APA) working committee meeting represented an important step for efforts to increase cargo and passenger flow across the region and bridge the free-trade gaps within ASEAN.

"Today we will discuss issues related to cargo clearance systems, implementing greater use of electronic management of goods and simplifying documentation requirements," he said.

"We want to simplify trade procedures across all ASEAN ports and improve the efficiency of shipping management systems."

Cambodia's government needs to work closely with the private sector and logistics firms to improve the competitiveness of the Kingdom's ports, said Nhiev Kol, Cambodia general manager of CMA-CGM, one of the world's leading container shipping companies.

For the country to compete regionally and globally, adoption of new technologies needs to be more widespread, he added.

"Electronic documentation, e-clearance of shipped goods and other general online tools are becoming increasingly useful in reducing manual work, hidden costs and unnecessary paperwork," he said.

"Cambodian port terminals need to start using electronic data interchanges and improve their facilities to reduce operational inefficiencies so that the country can attract more vessels to its ports."

Cambodia is behind most other countries in the region it comes to implementing electronic systems for the management and operation of its maritime trade hubs, according to Kol.

He added that logistics firms have an important role in supporting import and export activities, especially when it comes to driving Cambodia's exports of agricultural products.

Source: phnompenhpost.com, 30 August 2016

Coastal Shipping: Indian Government Reworks Port Financial Support Scheme

The Centre has formulated a revised central sector scheme to offer financial support to ports for creation of infrastructure aimed at facilitating movement of cargo or passengers by sea or National Waterways. This is in line with the ministry's port-led-development programme, Sagarmala, for creating better infrastructure and promoting coastal shipping for saving logistics costs, the Shipping Ministry said in a statement. Financial assistance under the revised scheme will be given up to 50 per cent of the total cost of the project subject to certain conditions while the balance will be borne by ports or respective states, it said.

Under the scheme, projects for construction or upgradation of exclusive coastal berths for coastal cargo and berths or jetties for passenger ferries, mechanisation of berths, capital dredging, construction of breakwaters and platforms or jetties will be considered for assistance, the ministry said. The conditions include a maximum assistance of Rs 25 crore for construction or upgradation of exclusive coastal berths, Rs 10 crore for construction of platforms or jetties, Rs 15 crore for mechanisation of coastal berth, and Rs 50 crore each in the case of capital dredging.

“The main objective of the revised scheme is to promote coastal shipping and increase its share in domestic cargo movement, which is currently only as low as 7 per cent, compared to other developed countries in Europe and Asia,” it said. Better infrastructure for coastal shipping in terms of handling facilities will decongest rail and road network as well as ensure competitive cost and effective multi-modal transportation solution, it added.

The statement said the country has high potential to use coastal shipping for its internal cargo movement, given its 7,500-km long coastline. The National Perspective Plan of Sagarmala envisions the potential to save around Rs 21,000-27,000 crore through coastal shipping of 230-280 million tonne a year of key commodities like coal, cement, fertilisers, iron and steel, food grains and petrol, oil and lubricants by 2025.

Under the scheme, the creation of exclusive berths for coastal shipping and its mechanisation will reduce waiting time for coastal vessels resulting in reduced cost.

The capital dredging and construction of breakwaters are expected to help in smoother navigation of large vessels into the ports and facilitate development of existing and greenfield ports. The financial assistance (grant-in-aid) given under the scheme will be subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

Source:hellenicshippingnews.com, 30 August 2016

62 Bangladeshi fishermen repatriated by Indian Coast Guard

A group of 62 Bangladeshi fishermen, who were rescued last week by Indian Coast Guard, were handed over to Bangladesh Coast Guard on Wednesday. Four Bangladeshi fishing boats - Allardan, Farhad, Nahim and Ma Ganga - got adrift in Indian waters due to mechanical failure post-depression in northern Bay of Bengal on August 17 and 18.

Two of the four stranded boats were sighted at 35 nautical miles south of Sagar lighthouse by a Coast Guard aircraft, officials said. The other two fishing boats were sighted stranded inside the creek by a Coast Guard surveillance aircraft on Aug 18. The fishing boats had departed from Maipur and Cox Bazaar in Bangladesh and were caught in the cyclonic winds that hit the Bay of Bengal.

Two fishing boats were towed to Coast Guard station Frazerganj. The marooned crew was provided with medical treatment, food and additional clothing during their stay.

"All Bangladeshi fishermen were provided with necessary logistics and medical treatment," Coast Guard commander (North East Headquarters) Inspector General K R Nautiyal said.

Joint interrogation by Coast Guard, marine police and SIB were also carried out to confirm the authenticity of the fishermen on arrival at the fishing port. FB Allardan and FB Farhad were handed over on Wednesday while the remaining two boats will be handed over post repairs that are being carried out locally, officials said. Four fishermen have stayed back to oversee the repair work.

Source: thestatesman.com, 31 August 2106



‘Paper cat’ Australia will learn its lesson

Around the announcement of the arbitration tribunal over the South China Sea, Australia was one of the most delirious countries. Canberra immediately supported the arbitration result and claimed China "must" abide by it, and also signed a joint declaration with the US and Japan. Australia has inked a free trade agreement with China, its biggest trading partner, which makes its move of disturbing the South China Sea waters surprising to many.

Australia is a unique country with an inglorious history. It was at first an offshore prison of the UK and then became its colony, a source of raw materials, overseas market and land of investment. This country was established through uncivilized means, in a process filled with the tears of the aboriginals.

Even with a scarce population and vast land, Australia has disputes with other countries over territory. It claims nearly 5.9 million square meters of land in the Antarctic, accounting for 42 percent of the continent. In order to back its territorial claims, Australia even brought up the activities of the British in the Antarctic as evidence.

Since The Antarctic Treaty was signed, all territorial claims over the continent were suspended. Canberra then raised another claims to demand the Antarctic continental shelf. It cited Article 298 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to avoid a demand by arbitration by others.

Both historical rights and the exemption of arbitration as ruled in Article 298 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea were denied by the arbitration tribunal. Australia

showed blunt double standards as if no one had a memory of what it did and said over the Antarctic.

Australia calls itself a principled country, while its utilitarianism has been sizzling. It lauds Sino-Australian relations when China's economic support is needed, but when it needs to please Washington, it demonstrates willingness of doing anything in a show of allegiance.

Analysts say that besides trying to please the US, it also intends to suppress China so as to gain a bargaining chip for economic interests. China must take revenge and let it know it's wrong. Australia's power means nothing compared to the security of China. If Australia steps into the South China Sea waters, it will be an ideal target for China to warn and strike.

Australia is not even a "paper tiger," it's only a "paper cat" at best. At a time when its former caretaker country the UK is dedicated to developing relations with China, and almost the whole of Europe takes a neutral position, Australia has unexpectedly made itself a pioneer of hurting China's interest with a fiercer attitude than countries directly involved in the South China Sea dispute. But this paper cat won't last.

Source: globaltimes.cn, 30 July 2016

Marian devotees in Vietnam urged to take responsibility for Environment

-Joachim Pham

Catholics in the central Vietnamese diocese of Vinh who attended feast of the Assumption celebrations Aug. 15 were urged to help victims of marine pollution and to work to protect the environment.

Some 50,000 Catholics gathered in Xa Doai Cathedral and its square in Nghi Loc, Nghe An province for feast day celebrations. Among them were more than 1,500 parishioners who marched 5 kilometers from Nhan Hoa deanery to the cathedral, carrying banners reading "Close down Formosa," and "protecting the environment is protecting our life."

Fr. Joseph Nguyen Xuan Phuong, parish priest of Nhan Hoa, said they marched to protest the Taiwanese-built steel plant, a unit of Formosa Plastics, which allegedly discharged toxic waste, including phenol and cyanide, into the waters of four provinces, killing masses of fish in April. The plant is based in Ha Tinh province under the diocesan administration.

The priest said diocesan leaders asked Catholics to attend the feast of the Assumption celebrations to pray for national peace and prosperity, for the victims of the environmental disaster and that the country's leaders would protect the country.

In his homily, Bishop Paul Nguyen Thai Hop of Vinh said Mother Mary loves, supports and consoles her children around the world. She is concerned about people's sufferings and the injustices they face, he said.

"As Catholics and citizens, we have responsibility for our nation and younger generations and are determined to build a fairer and more humane society, protect the environment and express our solidarity with victims of the environment disaster," Hop told the congregation.

He urged parishioners to "exercise your civil rights as allowed by law, to moderately request transparency of governing the country and dealing with the disaster from the government, and ask the government to bring those who caused the disaster to justice and compensate victims properly."

Vietnam's Natural Resources and Environment Minister Tran Hong Ha said July 29 that Formosa had paid the first half of a \$500 million fine that will be used to clean the water and compensate those affected. Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Nguyen Xuan Cuong said the ministry was counting the number of people whose livelihoods were hurt by the marine disaster. Activists said the compensation is insufficient to pay

the cost of cleaning the sea, a multi-year process, and to help hundreds of thousands of victims return to their normal life.

On Aug. 7, the diocese organized a "day for the environment" in all parishes to raise public awareness about environmental protection. They held Masses and the adoration of the Eucharist, conducted peaceful demonstrations and cleaned up garbage around the churches and parish buildings. The diocese's Justice and Peace Commission organized the event.

On July 27, the commission also petitioned the government to provide emergency aid to fishermen. "Many fishermen get into heavy debt due to losing [their] income and having no work," it said.

Source: ncronline.org, 16 August 2016

‘Blue Economy promises investment opportunities’

The prime minister’s energy adviser Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury has urged the local entrepreneurs to come forward with greater investment for oil and gas exploration in deep sea area. “The price of oil is now experiencing a downward trend on the international market. So, oil exploration in a broader way at this time won’t be viable, though we’re ready to give contract for deep sea exploration,” he said.

Chowdhury was addressing a seminar titled ‘New Investment Horizon: Blue Economy’ at Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) with its president Hossain Khaled in the chair. Maritime Affairs Unit secretary rear admiral (retd) Md Khurshed Alam and US envoy in Bangladesh Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat were present as special guests.

The energy adviser said the government is planning to import gas from Myanmar and set up power plants in Chittagong. “Bangladesh is the largest user of solar home system which is 4 billion in quantity,” he said.

Chowdhury said the government has established Power and Energy Research Council (PERC) for conducting research and development works aiming to create skilled manpower. On domestic use of gas, he said they have to think about alternative to it now as gas is not unlimited. The energy adviser said the government is planning to distribute liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) to domestic users through the existing pipeline network.

Khurshed Alam said the total maritime boundary is about 81 per cent of total land area which is really big and stressed for skilled workforce to tap the potentials of blue economy. The government has instructed universities in Bangladesh to teach Oceanography in order to create skilled manpower and do research works, he said. Khurshed Alam urged the business community to use river ports to transport their containers to Dhaka from Chittagong sear port. He said Bangladesh has to pay \$6 billion per year as freight charge which they can save by investing in shipbuilding industry.

Bernicat said a healthy ocean is truly essential to way of life but oceans are at risk now due to overfishing, marine pollution and global climate change. “Overcoming those challenges and sustainably developing marine resources are the key to global economic growth going forward,” she said.

The ambassador said Bangladesh has already taken steps to overcome the challenges of overfishing, marine pollution and global climate change. Hossain Khaled said some 70 per cent trade and 30 million people of Bangladesh are dependent on ocean fishery, seafood and commercial transportation. He said the blue economy has been endorsed in UN SDG which also rationalises more investment. Chairman of Department of Oceanography, University of Dhaka Prof Md Kawser Ahmed presented the keynote paper.

Source: en.prothom-alo.com, 20 August 2016

China seeks diplomatic edge with Suu Kyi visit

-Shuheiyamada

BEIJING/YANGON -- Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's state counselor and foreign minister, has gotten an unusually warm reception on her trip to China, meeting with both Premier Li Keqiang and President Xi Jinping as Beijing tries to regain clout with its neighbor to the south.

China, not the U.S., became Suu Kyi's first destination beyond Southeast Asia after her rise to power in Myanmar's new government, formed in March following her National League for Democracy's victory in elections last year.

Myanmar's previous government, the first since the country began the transition to democracy in 2011, sought to ease a dependence on China that had arisen during the era of junta rule. Instead, Myanmar turned toward the West.

This time, China made sure to invite the democracy crusader before she visited the U.S. Beijing is trying to regain the initiative in regional diplomacy after losing time to maritime and other disputes.

Most of Suu Kyi's talks in Beijing concerned economic cooperation. In their meeting Friday, she and Xi affirmed that Myanmar has a role to play in China's Belt and Road initiative, a trade and development strategy stretching across Asia. Suu Kyi plans to visit Shaanxi Province, where Xi was born, as well as Yunnan Province, which borders Myanmar, before her trip to China ends Sunday.

Li, who met with Suu Kyi on Thursday, called for the restart of the Chinese-led Myitsone hydroelectric dam project in northern Myanmar, which the previous government halted in 2011.

Global Times, a Chinese newspaper affiliated with the Communist Party-run People's Daily, ran a front-page story Friday on Suu Kyi's visit, describing her treatment as fit for a head of state. In an editorial, the paper expressed hope that the dam construction would restart now that politics had been put aside.

Having Myanmar squarely on its side would give China easy Indian Ocean access, allowing it to bypass the troubled South China Sea and advance its infrastructure campaign. A close relationship with Myanmar could also serve to keep India, China's rival among emerging Asian powers, on guard.

Suu Kyi's motivation in visiting China stems from the pragmatic recognition that her country's economy still needs Chinese support. China remains Myanmar's top trading partner and its biggest foreign investor, accounting for nearly 30% of total foreign capital inflows since 1988.

Outside investment is precious to a nation whose infrastructure development was stunted by the international isolation of the junta years. While some construction projects face opposition from locals, as with the Myitsone dam, Chinese investment still has an important role to play.

China National Petroleum Corp. opened a section of natural gas pipeline running from Kyaukphyu, on the west coast of Myanmar, inland to southern China. Plenty of other big Chinese investments are in the works. Among them, conglomerate Citic has plans for an industrial park in Kyaukphyu, while Guangdong Zhenrong Energy is gearing up for a refinery project in the southeastern coastal city of Dawei.

Suu Kyi also wants China's help in negotiating cease-fire agreements with armed ethnic-minority groups that have clashed with Myanmar's Burman majority since the country achieved independence. The transition to democracy in 2011 brought an acceleration of peace talks. Eight rebel groups have agreed to stop fighting government forces, but more than 10 have not.

Three of the most hardened holdouts are based in the northeastern state of Shan. Chinese companies are said to cooperate with militants in exploiting the state's rich mineral deposits. The rebels also are believed to get supplies of arms from across the border. On Thursday, these three groups suddenly announced their willingness to join peace talks with the Myanmar government. Many observers see this as a sign that China put pressure on the militants in exchange for an early visit from Suu Kyi.

Source: asia.nikkei.com, 20 August 2016

Vietnam's central waters safe for swimming, farming after mass fish deaths: Ministry

Seawater along the Vietnam's central provinces is now safe for swimming and fish farming operations, four months after the region was hit by mass fish deaths, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment confirmed Monday.

The ministry released its conclusion on the situation of maritime environment in the area at a conference it jointly organized with the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology (VAST), Vietnam National University – Hanoi, and local officials, in Quang Tri, one of the four affected provinces.

A large number of dead fish were washed ashore in the central provinces of Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Quang Tri, and Thua Thien-Hue in early April. In late June, it was concluded following a series of examination from local and international scientists that wastewater of the Vietnamese steel business of Taiwan's Formosa Plastics Group is responsible for the environmental disaster.

The Taiwanese company has publicly apologized to the Vietnamese government and people for causing severe environmental pollution, and pledged a total compensation of VND11.5 trillion, or US\$500 million. Chairing Monday's conference, Vo Tuan Nhan, Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, and Chau Van Minh, chief of the VAST, stated that questions regarding the safety of maritime environment and local seafood, and resumption of fishing operation would be answered. Several experts weighed in during the event, stating the findings of their examinations conducted in the area.

According to Professor Mai Trong Nhuan, lecturer from the Vietnam National University – Hanoi, test results of water samples taken from 19 beaches across the four affected provinces showed that all parameters were within normal limits.

The amount of toxic substances measured at the bottom of the sea has been decreasing considerably, Prof. Nhuan elaborated, adding that the ecosystem has also showed signs of recovery since June. Dr. Schroeder, a German scientist, asserted that seawater along the beaches was safe for swimming, adding that further research would be carried out to determine whether the fish there are edible.

Concluding the meeting, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Tran Hong Ha considered the experts' reports valuable. Most of the central waters are now safe for swimming and aquaculture activities, with the exception of some areas, according to Minister Ha. More tests will be conducted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure that the entire sea area is safe, before an official announcement will be released.

Source: tuoitrenews.vn, 22 August 2016

Marine Plastic Debris and Micro-plastics: A new UNEP report on Plastic Pollution in our Oceans

-Sustainable Brands

Just a day after a group of cross-party MPs called on the UK government to ban microbeads, Greenpeace released a report outlining the science on the impact of microplastics, including microbeads, on oceans and seafood. The non-profit is also urging the UK government to ban microbeads, “both due to the damage they cause to marine life and as a precautionary measure against the risk of human consumption.”

Greenpeace's report, entitled *Plastics in Seafood*, collates academic research to identify risks of plastics spreading toxic chemicals, being eaten by marine life, and traveling up the food chain. The non-profit launched a campaign in spring 2016 to persuade the UK

government to ban the use of solid microplastics in consumer products such as toothpaste, washing powders and facial scrubs.

“As more and more research shows that microplastics can harm marine life and even end up on our dinner plates, a ban on microbeads is a simple way for Theresa May’s Government to show that they take the effects of plastic pollution on marine life and human health seriously,” said Louise Edge, a Senior Oceans Campaigner at Greenpeace UK.

“An estimated 8 million tonnes of plastic enter our ocean every year, and whether it is in the form of microbeads or throwaway plastic packaging, the science shows us that it’s a toxic time bomb. We need action now to stem this tide of plastic waste and an easy first step is to stop companies deliberately putting tiny plastics into products. Theresa May’s Government needs to take the bull by the horns now and bans microbeads outright.”

Many companies have already made voluntary commitments to phase out microbeads from their products: Unilever and adidas have already phased them out, while others such as L’Oréal, Johnson & Johnson and P&G aim to eliminate them by the end of 2017. Nonetheless, the UK government’s cross-party Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) is calling for a national ban – and later ideally a Europe-wide ban – to create a “level playing field for all cosmetics companies,” and encourage laggards to catch up. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) also proposed a ban in its 2015 report, *Plastics in Cosmetics*.

Microplastics are often the result of plastic litter such as packaging breaking down in the ocean, but microbeads are unique in that they are manufactured at a tiny size for use in a range of household products. Greenpeace’s study reveals that the potential consequences to human health of both microbeads and other microplastics are “greatly under-researched.” While the effects on human health remain unclear, the report does provide evidence of microplastics appearing in seafood. A study from the University of California, Davis and Hasanuddin University published last September found that roughly a quarter of the fish sampled from fish markets in California and Indonesia contained man-made plastic or fibrous material in their guts. Greenpeace

argues that a “prolonged industry-led phase out of microbeads simply isn’t good enough.”

Source: sustainablebrands.com, 26 August 2016

South China Sea dispute: Pakistan supports China's stance: Aziz

Pakistan unambiguously supports China's stance in relation to the South China Sea dispute. This was stated by Adviser to Prime Minister Sartaj Aziz at a joint sitting of Senate Standing Committees on Defence and Foreign Affairs, presided over by Senators Nuzhat Sadiq and Mushahid Hussain Sayed here on Thursday. Sartaj Aziz also said that border management with Afghanistan is necessary to stop illegal border crossings. "Pakistan supports China's stance on the South China Sea dispute," he said.

He said the US is supporting Pakistan in border management with Afghanistan, adding border management is in favour of Pakistan and Afghanistan. "We're ensuring facilities for border crossings with valid travel documents, so that no one can cross the border without valid travel documents," he added. He said there are several groups of Taliban in Afghanistan, of which some want talks while some of them are not ready to come to the negotiation table. Secretary Foreign Affairs Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry said Pakistan fully supports reconciliation process in Afghanistan towards peace in the region.

He said peaceful negotiations with Taliban and the Haqqani network are the only solution in Afghanistan, adding thousands of people cross Pak-Afghan border at Torkham and Chaman border points daily. He said Pakistan established the gate along Afghan border on its land to check illegal crossings. He said that work on four major crossing points is under way, for which Pakistan has also talked to the Afghan government.

"Pakistan believes that there is a need for a more unified and coherent messaging from Afghanistan in favour of peace and they [Afghanistan] should seriously give a message to Taliban for talks," Chaudhary said. The Foreign Secretary Aizaz Chaudhary said Afghanistan should give a unified and coherent message for peace and reconciliation with Taliban as military offensive is no solution to the problem. The officials of the Defence Ministry informed the meeting that Pakistan will build all the crossing points as the World Bank has agreed to provide funds for its construction.

They officials said that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has directed for strengthening Pakistan's relations with Russia. The government is also trying to improve our strategic relations with North and South Koreas. Secretary Defence told the meeting that we have 2600 kilometers-long porous border with Afghanistan and maximum work on Torkham Border management has been completed. The meeting discussed the situation arising out of the drone strike against Mullah Mansour and the impact on the Pak-US security relations.

Source :www.brecorder.com, 26 August 2016