

India moves to paperless customs operations

India's Customs Department is moving towards a paperless regime by doing away with submission of certain documents physically by importers and exporters. The move would help importers and exporters shift towards electronic messaging and further enhance the 'Ease of Doing Business'. According to a Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) circular, importers and exporters will henceforth not be required to submit paper documents such as GAR 7 forms / TR 6 Challans, Trans-shipment Permit (TP), Shipping Bill (Exchange Control copy and Export Promotion copy) and Bill of Entry (Exchange Control Copy) to Banks/ DGFT / Customs Ports. The instructions are to be made operational from December 1, 2016, the circular added.

Maersk to buy Hamburg Sud

Maersk Line will acquire German container shipping line Hamburg Sud from its owner Oetker Group subject to final agreement and regulatory approvals as the world's biggest container shipping firm looks to grow market share while the battered sector goes through a consolidation phase. With the acquisition of Hamburg Sud, a leader in the North-South trades, Maersk Line will have a combined fleet of 741 container vessels with an average age of 8.7 years with a container capacity of around 3.8 million TEUs. It will help Maersk raise its global market share to 18.6% from 15.7%. The transaction will close by end 2017.

Niam Chiang Meng named head of Singapore Maritime Authority

Singapore's ministry of transport has named Niam Chiang Meng as the new chairman of the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore. Niam, the Deputy Chairman of MPA since 1 July 2016, retired from the Administrative Service on 1 August 2016 after 33 years of service in the public sector. Before his retirement, he was the Permanent Secretary to the National Population and Talent Division (NPTD) and National Climate Change Secretariat (NCCS). Niam's strong public-sector leadership experience will greatly benefit MPA, including in cementing Singapore's position as a global hub port and a leading international maritime centre.

Terminal operators facing a 'perfect storm', says Drewry

Container shipping lines are in danger of putting future port investment at risk by seeking reductions in terminal handling costs, according to the Ports and Terminals Insight report published by global shipping consultancy Drewry. Terminal operators face a "perfect storm" of rising costs due to bigger ships, greater business risks from larger liner alliances, softening global demand growth and pressure on terminal handling prices from cash-strapped carriers. The financial results of listed port and terminal operators reveal a weakness in earnings amid escalating debt levels. Stricter cost rationalisation and financial risk reduction will be necessary to retain investment interest.

FFAI signs up for eVGM platform of Kale Logistics

Kale Logistics Solutions and Federation of Freight Forwarders' Associations in India (FFAI) have signed a MoU whereby Kale's eVGM platform will be made available to its members for eVGM filing. This will help FFAI members to stay compliant with electronic-VGM as per the SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea) convention. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has amended the SOLAS Convention to require, as a condition for loading a packed container onto a ship for export, that the container has a verified weight. The shipper or its authorized representative is responsible for the verification of the packed container's weight.

Trade costs of India remain high, UN agency

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) said international and intra-regional trade costs of India remained higher compared with the trade costs of best-performing economies in Asia and the Pacific, although a declining trend has been observed since 2009. However, it said in addition to India's robust economic growth and large domestic market, the Government's "Make in India" initiative and easing of FDI regulations for about 15 sectors including aviation, defence and pharmaceuticals may contribute to the FDI attractiveness of India, ESCAP said in its recently released Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2016.

JNPT seeks to make rail handling costs on par with roads

Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust is seeking to lower its rail handling costs in a bid to make rail evacuation of containers more attractive for shippers. The current share of rail volume at JNPT, as a percentage of the total container volumes, is less than 15 percent. The port has sought approval to bring parity in the costs of rail-handling with trucking. The port has proposed reduction in rail-handling charges from Rs 1,547 to Rs 844 for a 20-foot container and from Rs 2,320 to Rs 1,266 for a 40-foot container to help divert more containers to rail.

India again extends deadline for full SOLAS compliance

India has given a further time extension to its shippers and stakeholders till March 2017 to be fully compliant with the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) verified gross mass rule. The previous deadline for full SOLAS compliance was November 30. "Considering that the implementation of the said guidelines is still in its initial stages and remote locations require additional time for gearing up to implement the same, it is necessary that a practical and pragmatic approach in the matter be extended for a further period, so that the export trade of India continues without hindrance," India's director general of shipping said.

Mwani Qatar and Milaha establish 'QTerminals' to manage Hamad Port

Qatar Ports Management Company (Mwani Qatar) and Qatar Navigation (Milaha) has signed an agreement to establish a new company QTerminals to manage the newly built Hamad Port in Doha. The port, which is scheduled to become fully operational this week, is a \$7.4 billion megaproject that the Qatari government expect will boost its logistics industry and make Qatar a key regional hub by 2030. As per the agreement, the new company will be 51% owned by Mwani Qatar and 49% by Milaha. It will manage operations at Hamad Port as an independent company with its own board of directors, executives and staff.

India starts trial run of containers via the North-South corridor

Iran, Azerbaijan, Russia and India have agreed to use the North-South international transport corridor from December for multimodal transportation of cargo from India to Russia. Shipments from India will be delivered to the southern port of Iran from where they will be delivered to Russia through Azerbaijan by trains and trucks, Vice-President of the Iranian Railways Hossein Ashoori said. The trial run of a container train on the route was flagged off two months ago. Currently, the delivery time is 22 days, but this can be cut to 19 days.