



US seizes tanker used to evade North Korea sanctions



The United States has seized a Singapore-registered oil tanker that was used to make oil deliveries to North Korea in violation of international sanctions, the Justice Department said.

A New York federal judge is set to order the ship to be seized and the US to take ownership of the MT Cheonghae, which is currently in Cambodia.

The ship, which has a capacity of 2,734 tonnes, was bought by Singaporean-owned Kwak Keong, who remains at large, according to a Justice Department statement on Friday.

The statement said the ship was reportedly used to transfer oil products to North Korea vessels and to make direct shipments to the North Korean port of Nampo.

"Criminal charges of conspiracy to evade economic sanctions on the DPRK, and money laundering by among other things, against the alleged owner and operator of the Cheonghae, Kwak Keong, a Singaporean national who remains at large," said a Justice Department statement on Friday.

The statement said the ship was reportedly used to transfer oil products to North Korea vessels and to make direct shipments to the North Korean port of Nampo.

"Kwak and his co-conspirators sought to conceal these sanctions-evasion transactions by, among other things, using front companies to disguise the nature of the transactions," it said. It did not name any co-conspirators.

Relations between Washington and Pyongyang are strained, with North Korea's foreign minister in June calling out any talks with the US, saying such dialogue would "get on nowhere".

Negotiations between the two countries have long been stalled over the international sanctions imposed on the nuclear-armed state and what North Korea should give up in return for their lifting.

COVID-19 vaccines not strong enough to stop Delta variant alone: Study

COVID-19 vaccines are not powerful enough to stop the emergence of new and more infectious variants and precautionary measures must be followed to prevent the virus from spreading, a new study found.

The study conducted by researchers from the Institute of Science and Technology, Australia, published in *Nature Scientific Reports*, shows that preventive measures such as social distancing and mask wearing are necessary along with vaccination to reduce the threat of new variants emerging.

As seen in the past year, the virus will continue to change and new variants will continue to emerge. But the study found that if more people adhere to rules while the world continues to get vaccinated, the virus will eventually stop changing.

"We found that a fast rate of vaccination decreases the probability of emergence of a resistant strain," the study stated.

Concomitantly, when a relaxation of non-pharmaceutical interventions happened at a time when most individuals of the population have already been vaccinated, the probability of emergence of a resistant strain was greatly increased.

The researchers added that their findings suggested that policymakers and individuals should consider maintaining non-pharmaceutical interventions and transmission-reducing behaviors throughout the entire vaccination period.

The United States' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently released an initial report which found that the Delta variant was far more transmissible than older strains and that it could cause severe disease, a finding which has also been backed by the new study.

The report added that there was evidence that those fully vaccinated against COVID-19 could still transmit the Delta variant as easily as unvaccinated individuals. However, it added that vaccines were still effective at preventing people against severe infections, hospitalization, or death.

The CDC has urged Americans to wear protective masks indoors, strictly in areas where the risk of virus transmission is "high" or "substantial".

Although COVID-19 infections have mostly been occurring in unvaccinated people, the health agency estimates that 13,000 vaccinated individuals in the US could be getting infected with the virus each week, *al-Jazeera*.



Saudi-initiated cultural talks take place during G20 meeting in Italy

The second Cultural Ministerial Meeting (CMM) took place in Rome on Saturday, a Saudi-led initiative inaugurated in 2020 at the Italian G20 summit.

The G20 members are expected to soon adopt a Ministerial Declaration on culture which would endorse mutual agreements to strengthen relations and combatting illicit trafficking of cultural property and promoting the role of culture in a driver of climate action and the preservation of cultural heritage.

At the meeting, they were also expected to promote growth or investment in education, training and employment related to the cultural sector and to provide greater access to culture online, according to a statement.

It added that initial indications were that the meeting would be a success, but it is not yet clear if the meeting will be a success.

The CMM, which aims to tackle issues of critical importance to the global cultural and creative economy, was attended by Saudi Arabia's Minister of Culture Prince Badr bin Abdulrahman bin Abdulaziz.

A sector affected by the pandemic more than most, the cultural sector is estimated to be worth \$2.3 trillion. Adding to the G20 agenda was an effort to boost the sector through creative initiatives.

The meeting was developed by the Group of 20 and the Italian G20 presidency and 80 percent of global GDP, the statement continued.

For the last two years, G20 members have discussed the cultural importance of culture - its preservation and development as a driver of economic growth," said Prince Badr.

Iran hints at role in drone attack on Israeli-managed tanker

Two crew members of an oil tanker managed by a prominent Israeli businessman's company were killed off Oman in what appears to be a drone attack, the Israeli media reported, and the US military said Friday that Israel had been hit.

Oman's state news agency said the country's navy dispatched a ship and confronted the attack took place outside the nation's territorial waters.

"Probably Iran," the United States, a key ally of Israel and a vocal critic of Iran, expressed concern and said it was working to "smooth the facts".

Miri Ziv, a senior expert on Iranian diplomacy and security at Israel's IDC Herzliya university, said the attack was "most probably Iran".

"It's a clear message to a democratic world," he said, adding that the attack was "a message to a democratic world".

Iranian media said the attack was "a message to a democratic world".

Iranian media said the attack was "a message to a democratic world".

Iranian media said the attack was "a message to a democratic world".

US hails EU decision to adopt new sanctions regime for Lebanon

The US on Friday hailed the European Union's decision to adopt a new sanctions regime against individuals in Lebanon that have caused the crisis-ridden nation to suffer economic collapse.

The US said the EU's decision to do so is a "significant step" and that it will "assist" the US in its efforts to bring about a new sanctions regime to promote accountability and reform in Lebanon.

The US said the EU's decision to do so is a "significant step" and that it will "assist" the US in its efforts to bring about a new sanctions regime to promote accountability and reform in Lebanon.

Malaysia: Hundreds take to the streets in anti-government protest



Hundreds of Malaysians staged an anti-government protest on Saturday in defiance of a ban on public gatherings under coronavirus curbs, piling pressure on the embattled prime minister to resign.

Protesters, wearing masks and keeping distance from one another, waved banners reading "Malay government is corrupt" and "Malay government is corrupt".

It was the first sizable demonstration in Malaysia for some time, so many had been reluctant to take to the streets due to COVID-19-related restrictions and fear of getting infected.

But anger is growing at the government's handling of the coronavirus outbreak - which is worsening despite a lockdown - and Prime Minister Mahatir Mohamad's attempt to keep his coalition administration in power.

"We fight because while people are suffering, this government is busy playing politics," Karmun Lok, taking part in the protest in downtown Kuala Lumpur, told the AP news agency. "This government is... corrupting the country's democracy."

Malaysia's "a terrible prime minister" added domestic abuse Wang Khye. "He made blocked attempts by protesters to enter a central square before the rally peacefully dispersed."

Organizers said about 1,000 demonstrators took part but police put the number at approximately 400.

Police said local media that the protesters will be called in for questioning as they had violated the ban on gatherings.

Malaysia took power at the head of a scandal-plagued coalition last year, without an election administration. But the government is accused of dodging a vote that would have ended its shaky majority, drawing a new crisis from the country's fractured parliament.

Sunday is the final day of the six-month state of emergency that the national lockdown will remain in place.

Malaysia has reported almost 1.1 million virus cases and more than 8,500 deaths.

The Israeli official wanted that "our company against them" will continue.

Zohar Maron, owned by Israeli billionaire Eyal Ofer, and the incident on board the MT Mearia, which is owned by Ofer, is a case of a British merchant ship, who was a part of British marine security firm.

The vessel was in the north-east Indian Ocean, travelling from Dubai to Salalah in Oman with no cargo onboard when the attack occurred.

As a result of a maritime vessel's own area where (Iranian) facilities can go in at least 100 miles, he added, calling the incident an escalation in the "shadow war" between the two Middle Eastern powers.

But he stressed the deadly mental damage of the rivalry would shape little.