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Nearly 300 tankers flying in sea with false flags



Nearly 300 tankers are flying false flags according to data from Israeli maritime analysts firm Windward despite an increasing crackdown on the practice in recent weeks.

As 2025 drew to a close, approximately 285 internationally trading tankers were broadcasting via AIS under the flag of a fraudulent or unknown registry, according to Windward. The company has identified 18 such fraudulent registries, noting that 91% of vessels using these fraudulent registries were already sanctioned by Western authorities.

The most frequently used fraudulent registries were Guinea (51 ships), Netherlands Antilles (45), Guyana (44), and Aruba (24).

"False flags weaken the commercial and legal infrastructure that global shipping depends on to function predictably," Windward stated in a new update.

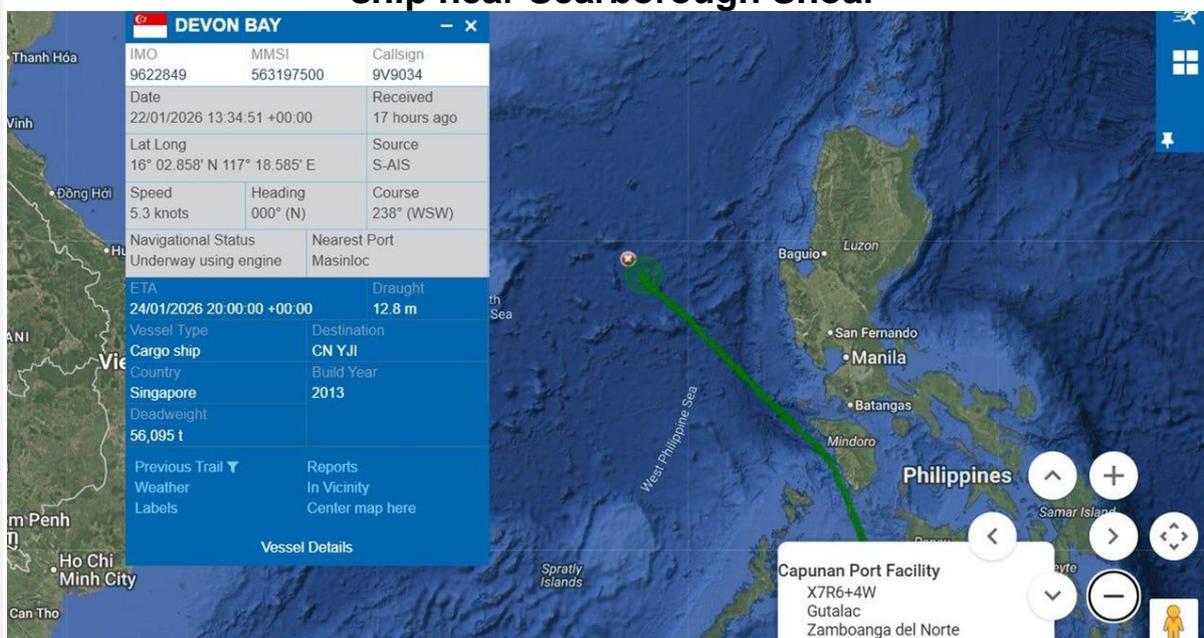
Recently the West has started to crack down on shadow vessels – the US apprehending seven tankers linked to Venezuelan trades over the last seven weeks, while France boarded a Russian aframax yesterday flying a false flag in the western Mediterranean.

Countries are also becoming more vocal in distancing themselves from organisations claiming to flag vessels on their behalf. The Tonga government, for instance, issued a statement earlier this month denouncing any foreign vessel claiming to fly its flag. It said Tonga's international registry of ships was closed in 2002 and the kingdom does not register foreign vessels engaged in international voyages.

"When a vessel claims a fraudulent or nonexistent registry, the mechanisms that underpin maritime trade begin to fail," Windward stated, going on to explain: "Flag-state responsibility becomes unenforceable. Insurance and classification linked to that flag may be invalid, suspended, or impossible to verify."

At scale, Windward argued that widespread false flagging erodes confidence in documentation, registries, and compliance processes that global shipping relies on to move safely and efficiently.

China, Philippines launch rescue missions for distressed cargo ship near Scarborough Shoal



China and the Philippines said on Friday they launched rescue operations after receiving reports of a distressed cargo ship near the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea carrying 21 Philippine crew members.

The Chinese Coast Guard said it rescued 13 of the crew after receiving a report at 01:34 on Friday that a foreign cargo vessel had capsized in waters near the shoal. It dispatched two ships for search and rescue operations. Thirteen people have been saved so far, it said, adding that rescue efforts were continuing.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said it deployed BRP *Teresa Magbanua* ([vessel review here](#)), BRP *Cape San Agustin* and two aircraft to rescue the Philippine crew from the Singaporean-flagged bulker *Devon Bay* loaded with iron ore that was en route to the southern Chinese city of Yangjiang.

"The PCG Command Center acquired information from the Hong Kong Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre that 10 of the 21 Filipino crew members were rescued by a passing China Coast Guard vessel," it said.

Scarborough Shoal is one of Asia's most contested maritime features and a frequent flashpoint in disputes over sovereignty and fishing rights. China claims almost the entire South China Sea, overlapping the exclusive economic zones of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam.



Shipbuilding yard to come up at Kerala's Ponnani port under PPP model

A major shipbuilding yard is set to be established at Ponnani port in Malappuram, Kerala. This public-private partnership project will be the second largest in the state after Kochi. The facility will initially focus on building small vessels, with plans for larger ships in later phases. The project is expected to create around 1,000 jobs and significantly boost regional development.

Malappuram: A large shipbuilding yard will soon be set up at Ponnani port here, boosting development in the Malabar region, officials said on Sunday.

The tender process for the proposed shipyard, to be developed under the public-private partnership (PPP) model, has been completed, they said.

The shipyard will be established on about 29 acres of coastal land on the western side of the Ponnani Fishing Harbour under the Kerala Maritime Board, making it the second shipyard in the state after Kochi, according to a statement.

The agreement with the private partner is expected to be signed within two weeks. A shipbuilding-related training institute will also be set up, and cargo-handling operations are planned to begin soon after the shipyard becomes operational, the statement said.

In the first phase, the facility will focus on building small vessels. A wharf will be constructed adjoining the breakwater at the estuary for this purpose. An investment of around Rs 200 crore is expected in this phase.



Did US force India to pull out of Iran's Chabahar port?



A report about India's strategic withdrawal from Iran's Chabahar port triggered a political slugfest between the Congress and the BJP. Experts suggest the Chabahar story is less about an exit and more about managing strategic ambition under Trump sanctions.

In the last few days, reports and opinions suggesting that India has been forced to "withdraw" from Iran's Chabahar port under US pressure have been doing rounds. This has triggered a political slugfest at home. A report in a leading financial newspaper on Thursday (January 15) noted that "India's decade-old, turbulent involvement in developing Iran's Chabahar port has collapsed after US President Donald Trump said on January 12 that any country doing business with the Persian Gulf nation will face a 25% tariff on any and all business being done with the USA."

The Congress alleged that "Prime Minister Narendra Modi had surrendered to US President Donald Trump, compromising a key national interest. The BJP hit back, calling the charge "pure fiction" and accused the Congress of peddling lies. It shared a clip from the spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Randhir Jaiswal, stating the Centre's stand on the matter.

A day after the report was published, the MEA clarified that **India continues to operate at Chabahar** under a valid US sanctions waiver till April 26, 2026. The MEA said New Delhi is engaged with Washington DC to extend and operationalise the arrangement.

Experts, meanwhile, have questioned both the premise of an "exit" and the logic of sanctioning a project that undercuts China-Pakistan strategic gains by being a strategic counter to the Gwadar Port in Balochistan. Was India forced to leave Chabahar? And if yes, how big would the loss be?



Indian Port Sector

Vizhinjam seaport in Kerala to begin ₹9,700-crore second phase of expansion on January 24



Ports Minister Vasavan says second phase works to be completed by 2028

Marking another milestone in the construction and operation of the Vizhinjam international seaport in Kerala, the second phase of its development will officially commence on January 24, bringing in an investment to the tune of ₹9,700 crore by the port concessionaire Adani Vizhinjam Port Pvt. Ltd. (AVPPL).

Kerala is set to accelerate its maritime ambitions with the launch of Phase-2 construction of Adani Group's Vizhinjam International Deepwater Seaport on Friday, marking a decisive step towards positioning the port as India's largest transshipment hub.

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The development programme, involving an investment of Rs 9,700 crore, will be formally inaugurated by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, said State Ports Minister V.N. Vasavan on Thursday. Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal will attend the event as the chief guest, underscoring the Centre's strategic interest in the project.

Minister Vasavan said the second phase represents a "critical scale-up" of capacity, infrastructure and global competitiveness for Vizhinjam, which began commercial operations barely a year ago. Under Phase-2, Vizhinjam's container handling capacity will expand five-fold -- from one million TEUs to five million TEUs annually. Berth length will be increased from the existing 800 metres to 2,000 metres, and the breakwater will be extended to four kilometres, enabling the port to handle multiple ultra-large container vessels simultaneously.

Once completed, Vizhinjam will become India's largest straight-berth port, capable of accommodating four mother ships at a time. New infrastructure planned in this phase includes a railway yard, a multi-purpose berth, a liquid terminal and a tank farm.

The liquid terminal, in particular, is expected to give Vizhinjam a competitive edge by allowing large vessels to refuel during long international voyages, currently available only at select global ports.

Given Vizhinjam's proximity to major East-West shipping lanes, the facility is expected to attract significant additional traffic and generate substantial tax revenues for the state. Vasavan said a major advantage of the Phase-2 expansion is that it will not require additional land acquisition.

Around 55 hectares will be created through sea reclamation, while container yard capacity will rise from 35,000 units to 1,00,000 units. The total number of cranes will increase to 100, including 30 ship-to-shore cranes.

Highlighting early operational success, the minister noted that Vizhinjam has already handled over 15 lakh TEUs from 710 vessels and established direct services to ports in Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia.

Originally planned for completion by 2045, the port's full development is now targeted for 2028 following a supplementary concessionaire agreement signed in 2023.

"With Phase-2, Vizhinjam moves from promise to scale," Minister Vasavan said, adding that the expansion would catalyse logistics, employment and trade across southern India.

Karaikal Port welcomes MT Grace, 1st vessel under Tvarur Oils

Karaikal Port has berthed MT Grace, a 6,000-metric-tonne vessel carrying crude palm oil, marking the first vessel call under its newly established partnership with Tvarur Oils. The call underscores the port's growing role as a key gateway for liquid bulk cargo on India's eastern coast.

Port officials said the operation highlights Karaikal Port's focus on operational efficiency, safety and sustainable practices, while strengthening its liquid bulk handling capabilities through the collaboration with Tvarur Oils. The partnership is expected to support the increasing requirements of regional trade and industrial customers dependent on edible oil and related imports.

Backed by ongoing investments in infrastructure and process optimisation, Karaikal Port remains committed to enabling seamless cargo movement and supporting supply chain resilience for its users. The successful berthing of MT Grace is seen as an important milestone in the port's efforts to attract more specialised bulk and liquid cargo calls in the coming months.



PM Modi to Inaugurate ₹11,000 Crore Projects in West Bengal and Assam

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit West Bengal and Assam on January 17 and 18 to inaugurate, lay foundation stones and flag off rail, road, port and inland water transport projects worth more than ₹11,000 crore, the Prime Minister's Office said on Friday.

The visit includes the launch of India's first Vande Bharat Sleeper Train, new Amrit Bharat Express services, highway projects, rail electrification works and logistics infrastructure, along with cultural programmes in both states. On January 17, the Prime Minister will visit Malda, where he will flag off the Vande Bharat Sleeper Train between Howrah and Guwahati (Kamakhya) from Malda Town Railway Station.

The fully air-conditioned train is expected to reduce travel time on the route by around 2.5 hours and improve long-distance connectivity between eastern India and the Northeast.

Maersk revises dry port surcharge for export cargo from Indian ICDs

Maersk has announced a revision to its Dry Port Surcharge – Export (DPS) applicable on cargo moving from select Inland Container Depots (ICDs) in India to global destinations via the ports of Jawaharlal Nehru (JNPA), Mundra and Pipavav.

The revised surcharge will come into effect from 25 January 2026 for shipments destined to non-regulated countries, and from 11 February 2026 for regulated countries, the company said.

According to Maersk, the adjustment is part of its ongoing efforts to maintain a wide-ranging service portfolio, competitive transit times and high levels of schedule reliability across its inland and ocean networks. The company noted that the revision will support continued investment in reliable and efficient end-to-end logistics solutions for customers using inland connections.

Details of the updated DPS rates for the affected ICDs have been outlined in a tariff table issued by Maersk. Customers can also access applicable inland rates and mandatory surcharges through Maersk's online inland price look-up tool on Maersk.com, where charges included under existing contracts and tariff rates can be reviewed.

Maersk said it remains committed to delivering innovative logistics solutions and thanked customers for their continued support, reaffirming its focus on strengthening long-term partnerships.



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A P started Light House Tourism



The 3rd edition of **Indian Lighthouse Festival** was inaugurated by **Venkaiah Naidu**, former Vice President of India, who graced the occasion as the Chief Guest, along with the Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways (MoPSW), **Sarbananda Sonowal** at the MGM park in Visakhapatnam today

Speaking at the inaugural event of the Lighthouse Festival, **M Venkaiah Naidu, former Vice President of India**, said, "This Festival will not only prove to be a shot in the arm for lighthouse tourism, but also deepen collaboration & partnership with all stakeholders of the tourism industry. I am pleased to note that this Lighthouse Festival includes features like a mega carnival highlighting regional cultural performances, art & craft markets & night illumination of lighthouses, among other things. This lends an interesting dimension to tourism because it promotes local coastal culture & provides an impetus to economic development."

A standout moment of the opening day was the presence of over 40 self-help group (SHG) stalls from across Andhra Pradesh, offering everything from handcrafted artefacts and indigenous products to the rich flavours of coastal cuisine—an inspiring showcase of community spirit and women-led entrepreneurship woven into the lighthouse tourism experience. " I am glad to note therefore, that out of the 17 lighthouses in AP, 10 have been developed for the promotion of tourism," **Naidu** further added.

The Indian Lighthouse Festival has emerged as a key platform to showcase this transformation. The first edition, Bharatiya Prakash Stambh Utsav, was held at Fort Aguada in Goa in September 2023, marking the formal launch of lighthouse tourism as a national initiative.

The second edition, held in October 2024 at Puri in Odisha, expanded the outreach with new lighthouse dedications and a stronger focus on community participation and heritage-led tourism. Building on this journey, the third edition at Visakhapatnam continues to celebrate India's maritime legacy while positioning lighthouses as dynamic hubs of culture, tourism and coastal development. The festival is organised by the Directorate General of Lighthouses and Lightships (DGLL) under MoPSW. (Source: PIB-New Delhi)



India's Foreign Trade

India's All Customs Duties Should Be Consolidated Into Fewer Transparent Slabs: GTRI Chief

New Delhi, Jan 21 (KNN) India should simplify its customs duty framework by reducing the actual number of duty slabs rather than merely tweaking Basic Customs Duty (BCD) rates, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said on Tuesday.

The move, it argued, is essential to improve ease of doing business and support the country's manufacturing and export ambitions.

Current Challenges in Customs Tariffs

In its pre-Budget recommendations, GTRI noted that the last Budget reduced ad valorem BCD rates to eight slabs. However, this reform excluded numerous specific duties, mixed duties, and conditional rates, which continue to create hundreds of effective tariff slabs in practice, reported PTI.

Additionally, part of the BCD was shifted to the Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess (AIDC), keeping total import duties unchanged while lowering the apparent number of slabs on paper.

GTRI highlighted that importers also pay AIDC, Social Welfare Surcharge, and health cesses, making the real tariff structure highly complex and opaque.

Need for Consolidation and Transparency

"India should consolidate all duties into a small number of transparent slabs based on total import duty, not just BCD," said Ajay Srivastava, founder, GTRI.

He stressed that as India pursues deeper manufacturing, export diversification, and supply-chain integration amid rising global protectionism, an outdated tariff structure and process-heavy customs system risk undermining these objectives.

Economic Impact

Srivastava noted that nearly 29 per cent of India's GDP flows through Customs, with merchandise trade exceeding USD 1.16 trillion. Even minor inefficiencies in customs procedures now impose high economy-wide costs, raising input prices, delaying shipments, weakening export competitiveness, and deterring investment.

Recommended Reforms

GTRI recommended modernising India's customs system by reducing the number of duty slabs across all import duty components, consolidating duties into a single clear schedule, and using simple, transparent language in customs notifications.

It also suggested creating a searchable online database of customs tribunal decisions and conducting a zero-base audit of all customs rules, procedures, and notifications.

Srivastava emphasised that customs duties today contribute only 6 per cent of India's gross tax revenue and 3.9 per cent of import value, indicating that tariffs have largely lost relevance as a revenue instrument.

A comprehensive, product-by-product overhaul of tariffs, he argued, is needed to align trade policy with manufacturing growth and export competitiveness.

Pak Supreme Court reserves verdict on ban on imports from India



ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) on Wednesday reserved its ruling on the federal government's challenge to a set of directions issued by the Lahore High Court (LHC) concerning the prohibition on imports from India.

Headed by Justice Aamer Farooq, a three-judge FCC bench, also comprising Justice Ali Baqar Najafi and Justice Rozi Khan Barrech, took up an appeal filed by the commerce ministry against the Jan 26, 2024 LHC judgement.

The petition was earlier filed before the Supreme Court but after the passage of the 27th [Amendment](#), the case was transferred to the FCC for hearing.

Issued by the federal government under its constitutional and statutory authority, the import ban was imposed through statutory regulatory orders (SROs) Nos 927 and 928(I)/2019, reflecting considerations of foreign policy, national security and sovereign discretion.

Through these SROs, imports from and exports to India were banned for all kinds of goods, including books and journals.

The controversy arose when the SROs were challenged before the LHC with the contention that these regulatory orders, to the extent of banning the import of books from India, were ultra vires the Constitution.

Validity of SROs upheld

Although the LHC upheld the validity of the SROs by declaring them intra vires the Constitution and the relevant statutory framework, it nonetheless issued certain directions to the federal government.

The LHC directed the federal government to appoint an officer to consider a review or revision of the policy. It also ordered the federal government to ensure that it considered and decided the officer's recommendations.

One of the directions suggested that the officer should be appointed within the next two months by the commerce ministry and that the appointment should be posted on its website. The petitioners, if so advised, were to file their reviews thereafter.

These directions, despite affirming the legality of the policy, were challenged before the FCC as being beyond the permissible scope of judicial review.

In its petition, the federal government pleaded before the FCC that it was competent to ban one or all goods, or a class of goods, from any one country or from worldwide sources.

It also argued that India was neither an authority in any field of knowledge nor enjoyed a monopoly over wisdom.

It added that as such, banning imports from India, including books or journals, did not infringe any fundamental rights of the respondents.

The petition also stated that the suspension of trade with India was taken in the context of Pakistan's national interest and its longstanding stance on Kashmir.

'Judicial overreach'

Appearing on behalf of the revenue division secretary, Advocate Hafiz Ahsaan Ahmad Khokhar argued that the Jan 26, 2024 LHC judgement was legally unsustainable to the extent that it issued directions after upholding the validity of the SROs.

He contended that once the policy decision embodied in the SROs had been affirmed, any further directions amounted to judicial overreach and encroachment upon the executive domain.

The counsel argued that matters relating to trade restrictions, import prohibitions and regulation of commerce with hostile or adversarial foreign states fell squarely within the exclusive domain of the executive under the constitutional scheme.

He emphasised that issues touching upon foreign policy and external relations were traditionally regarded as non-justiciable, and that courts were required to exercise judicial restraint unless a clear violation of the Constitution or fundamental rights was established.

The counsel further contended that constitutional courts were mandated to adjudicate legality and constitutionality, not to issue directions requiring the federal government to revisit, reconsider or reformulate policy decisions.

Such directions, he argued, violated the doctrine of separation of powers enshrined in the Constitution and blurred the constitutionally demarcated boundaries between the judiciary and the executive.

Additionally, Additional Attorney General Chaudhry Aamir Rehman, appearing on behalf of the federation, submitted that the impugned judgement was not legally sustainable. He stated that the LHC had gone beyond its jurisdiction by interfering in policy matters, which courts were constitutionally barred from doing so.

He added that allowing such directions would amount to judicial encroachment into the executive domain, rendering the judgement legally unsustainable.

After hearing arguments from both sides, the FCC reserved its judgement.

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