

Singapore bans crew changes for seafarers with recent travel to India

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More crackdowns by other maritime hubs to impact shipping, say industry insiders

Singapore has halted crew change for seafarers with recent travel history to India, amid surge in Covid-19 infections in one of the world's top supplier of crew to the shipping industry.

The ban will come into effect from Saturday midnight, said the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) in a circular on Thursday.

The MPA said that the crew change will not be allowed for seafarers with recent travel history to India within the last 14 days preceding arrival to Singapore. This includes sign-on crew travelling to Singapore by flight as well as sign-off crew from vessels that have

called at India and also sign-on crew transiting India on their connecting flights to Singapore.

Shipping companies are concerned over the worsening Covid-19 infections in India.

'Control measures'

"With these border control measures, the authorities in Singapore are stepping up efforts to prevent a wider outbreak, which to me is a responsible stance to take in the short term," said Captain Rajesh Unni, Founder & Chief Executive Officer at Singapore-based ship management company, Synergy Group.

The closure in Singapore, viewed from a wider context, shows the vital role the island nation plays in global supply chains and seafarer changeovers. "Singapore is a global maritime hub and has been critical in alleviating the acute crew changeover crisis which the shipping sector has endured over the last 12 months," Unni said.

It resolved the crew change crisis by drafting the 'Singapore Crew Change Guidebook', last year. Since March 2020, the MPA has facilitated over 1,20,000 crew changes on some 7,500 ships. According to Unni, the global picture on crew changes is "deteriorating".

"We are also seeing other crew change centres such as Dubai following Singapore's lead, as well as tighter restrictions on crew in Australia. According to the latest estimates, some 2,00,000 seafarers are currently affected by the crew change crisis, down by about half from the height of the crisis in July last year, when more than 4,00,000 were overrunning their contracts. But if we see more crackdowns on crew changes then of course these numbers could worsen once more," he said.

Unni said that he was "hopeful the actions of Dubai, Singapore and others are short-term responses because seafarers really need to be able to return home".