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AIRLINES & AIRPORTS

Online retailer JD.com may set up cargo airline

Online retailer JD.com says inadequate domestic air cargo services could see the firm set up its own freighter fleet specializing in the delivery of computers, communications and consumer electronic goods. JD is the latest e-commerce company planning to build its own logistics network to overcome the shortcomings of China's distribution sector. Shanghai-based Shentong Express and YT Express applied for airline operating licenses earlier this year. “Chinese airlines refuse to receive shipments that include lithium batteries because of fire hazard concerns,” said Shi Tao, Vice President of JD, the largest e-retailer for electronic and computer products in China. Most of the computers and handsets it sells are powered by lithium batteries. JD has been approached by SF Express, a Shenzhen-based courier that is already running its own fleet, but the two have not come to an agreement on the charges. Alibaba, the largest e-commerce operator in the world, decided to invest at least CNY100 billion to build its own logistics network. JD received 6.8 million orders online on November 11, three times the average daily sales. That was dwarfed by Alibaba's 100 million transactions on that day. It took JD nearly a week to clear the backlog. “It's already a norm in the United States and Europe that logistics companies operate their own fleets,” said Kelvin Lau, Analyst at

Daiwa Capital Markets. He added that the new entrants, which focus on the domestic market, could capture the booming e-commerce business in the country. They could therefore distance themselves from the overcapacity problem in the current long-haul freighter market to North America and Europe. Existing freighter operators, however, are doubtful whether the newcomers will succeed. “For those who want to tap into the freighter service, I would urge them to have second thoughts,” said Zhong Wei, General Manager at China Eastern Express, the new express service unit of China Eastern Airlines. “They have to face challenges ranging from high fuel costs, and slot allocation for landing and air rights, just to name a few,” the South China Morning Post reports.

Henan aviation firm to take stake in Cargolux

Henan Civil Aviation Development and Investment Co (HCADI), a state-owned company in Henan province, has purchased a 35% stake in Cargolux Airlines International. The total value of the transaction is USD231 million, including the 35% stake in the company and a USD10 million expansion fund. Zhengzhou Xinzheng International Airport will become Cargolux's second hub globally after the transaction is completed, and the freight carrier will open new routes from Luxembourg to Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan province, with four flights weekly. HCADI will pay an additional USD15 million as a subsidy for the new routes. Cargolux, based in Luxembourg, said in its financial statements that its loss widened to USD35.13 million in 2012 from USD18 million in 2011. The 35% stake, which is now held by the Luxembourg government, was sold by Qatar Airways Co in December 2012. Generally speaking, it is not a good time to buy a stake in a cargo airline, as the global air cargo market has been sluggish in recent years, analysts said. But this deal is an exception. “Demand for international freight is huge in the province, as Foxconn Technology Group has facilities there,” said Li Lei, Civil Aviation Analyst with China Minzu Securities. Henan's total foreign trade rose 83% in 2011, when Foxconn's facilities in the province began operations, according to the local government. In the first three quarters of 2013, the province's export volume increased 19.3%, or 11.3 percentage points higher than the nation's average growth, the China Daily reports.

- Global logistics companies are now allowed to repack cargo on the apron at Pudong International Airport after the launch of China’s first cargo transshipment sorting service. Li Derun, President of the Shanghai Airport Authority, described the sorting service as “a milestone for the airport’s cargo transport development and a pilot policy within the free trade zone.”
- A Chinese Antonov AN-225, the world's largest cargo plane, transported two green-energy tram cars from Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, to Istanbul at the end of November, making it the first air transport of high-quality, domestically built-equipment of this scale to Europe. The occasion marked the seventh time the enormous cargo plane has landed at Shijiazhuang Zhengding International Airport since 2006. The airport is the only one in the country approved by the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) for the AN-225 to land.
- A Ural Airlines cargo plane departed from Harbin Taiping International Airport and arrived at Yekaterinburg, Russia, on November 26. This marked the official launch of the cargo-only route from Harbin to Russia. To date, about 20 Russian freight-forwarding and logistics enterprises have set up operations in Harbin. The Beijing Sino-Russian International Freight Forwarding Agent Co has registered a branch company in Harbin and announced that it will move its headquarters from Beijing to Harbin.

EXPRESS DELIVERY

Consumers complain about courier services

Three Chinese courier firms got the biggest number of complaints about late delivery of parcels in October. Around 40% of Hangzhou-based TTK Express’ customers lodged complaints about late parcel deliveries and bad manners of deliverymen, while Unitop and UC, both based in Guangzhou, received 39% and 38% respectively, the State Post Bureau of China said. The bureau has received 13,833 complaints about delivery services across the country in October, a drop of 1.2% from September. “Some 46% of the complaints are about delivery delays while another 30% of customers complained about the attitude of deliverymen,” a Bureau official said. There were also complaints about damaged parcels and being charged extra fees, he added. But customers did not face a long delay in courier services during Single's Day (November 11) this year unlike last year, the State Post Bureau said. Chinese courier firms received more than 346 million parcels between November 11 and November 16, a surge of 73% from last year. The peak period for courier services was on November 13, two days after Single's Day, when the courier firms delivered 65.17 million parcels, a jump of 85% from last year. About 80% of the orders were made on Taobao.com, said Huang Gang, Director of a logistics expert panel with the China E-Business Association.

LOGISTICS INDUSTRY

Logistics sector to introduce standards

China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) will promote the standardization of key logistics equipment and provide financial aid to companies whose costs rise because of the new standards, officials said. "In the next one to three years, we will introduce standards for some key equipment used in commercial logistics, such as pallets and bar codes," said Wang Xuanqing, Deputy Director General of the Department of Circulation Industry Development at the Ministry of Commerce. In 2012, the logistics costs of companies in China reached CNY9.4 trillion, equivalent to about 18% of GDP, compared with the world average of 11.2%, according to Wang. The low threshold for entering the industry has drawn many small and medium-sized enterprises, which account for more than 90% of the business, leading to low efficiency. Weak use of information technology and various fees and taxes are also to blame. "The logistics sector is falling behind the economy's development and the expansion of consumption. The problems of high costs and low efficiency are obvious," said Hu Suojin, Deputy Director General of MOFCOM's General Office. Minister Gao Hucheng said that logistics operations are fundamental to China's economic growth.

- China's largest e-commerce company Alibaba Group has made a strategic investment in home appliance maker Haier Electronics Group as it pushes into the logistics business to extend its services beyond online selling. Alibaba will invest HKD2.82 billion in Haier, including HKD1.86 billion to form a new joint venture with Haier's wholly-owned logistics unit Goodaymart, which owns 90 logistics centers and runs distribution sites in more than 2,800 areas in the country.

PORTS & SEA TRANSPORT

Shanghai eyes shipping insurance

Insurance companies aim to form a shipping insurance association by year-end in Shanghai, part of the city's master plan for becoming a global financial and logistics center. "It's very difficult to develop international trade without insurance. You have to insure the ship before it hits the water and navigates, and international cargo should be insured, too, before leaving," Pei Guang, Director of the Shanghai Bureau of the China Insurance Regulatory Commission (CIRC), told a forum. Pei said that although China's international trade has grown rapidly in recent years, its insurance sector has lagged and doesn't meet the needs of the world's second-largest economy. "We're pushing the development of shipping insurance by inviting more companies to set up centers in Shanghai. We are also pursuing the formation of a shipping insurance association by the end of the year," Pei said. "The association will attract more domestic insurance companies and international players to expand their footprint in Shanghai," said Gan Aiping, Professor at the Shanghai Maritime University. Pei said that a dozen shipping insurance centers have been set up in Shanghai recently, and they are considering opening facilities in the Shanghai pilot free trade zone (FTZ). Although Shanghai accounts for the lion's share of domestic shipping insurance, it handles few international business, the China Daily reports.

Cleaner marine fuel means higher costs in Hong Kong

Ships calling at Hong Kong will face higher costs when legislation requiring vessels to switch to cleaner marine fuel upon berthing is passed next year. Some carriers may, as a result, switch to neighboring ports in Shenzhen. To prevent this, shipowners said, the government should consider extending a scheme that subsidizes shipping lines – many of which are expected to suffer losses this year – for the extra cost of the clean fuel. However, a government official said, an extension is unlikely. The city has been in talks with the Shenzhen government to create a low-emissions zone in the waters around the Pearl River Delta, but steps taken by its mainland neighbor remain based upon voluntary action by carriers. Hong Kong is taking a tougher line and will require vessels to use extra-low-sulphur diesel upon arriving at berths at Kwai Chung Container Terminal from January 2015. It is estimated that the switch will add between USD600,000 and USD1.5 million to a shipping line's annual fuel bill. As the only Asian city to impose such a requirement, Hong Kong could find its declining port business, already plagued by fierce competition from cheaper rivals, placed at an even greater disadvantage, the lines said. "It is inevitable that the requirement would further put Hong Kong ports' competitiveness at stake," said Arthur Bowring, Managing Director of the Hong Kong Shipowners Association. "That's why the government should consider extending an incentive scheme that subsidizes carriers for the extra fuel costs." Hu Hua, General Manager of Global Sales at Cosco Container Lines, said the impact should be limited despite vigorous cost-cutting measures now adopted throughout the industry. Hong Kong has always been much more expensive than Shenzhen, anyway, he said. Only 12% of the 32,000-odd ocean-going vessels berthing in Hong Kong have voluntarily switched to the cleaner fuel, at their own cost. In 2011, ships accounted for 54% of total sulphur dioxide emissions in Hong Kong.

Shenzhen ports to lure container shipping lines from Hong Kong

Port authorities in Shenzhen are working aggressively to persuade foreign carriers to skip Hong Kong as a transit hub and do business directly with them. Shenzhen is well-placed to overtake Hong Kong as the world's third busiest container port this year and it could replace Hong Kong as the region's primary transshipment hub. Last year about 60% of Hong Kong's container throughput came from transshipments. Half of it was due to the Chinese regulation that bans foreign shipping companies from directly sending cargo from one mainland port to another. This regulation is designed to protect the monopoly of domestic shipping lines on the near-sea trade. Shenzhen customs offices are now advising international shipping lines how to use a loophole to skip Hong Kong and go directly to Shenzhen. Foreign shippers could simply name Hong Kong as the port of origin in the manifest they submit to Shenzhen customs without actually loading any goods there. Alan Lee, Chairman of the Hong Kong Container Terminal Operators Association, said they had raised the issue with the Transport and Housing Bureau, urging an investigation. "Transshipment is the last fort of Hong Kong's port business and if we lose that it will mark the end of our port," Lee said. Hong Kong handled 18.3 million TEU in the first 10 months this year – a drop of 5.4% from a year ago, compared with 19.31 million TEU by Shenzhen, a slight rise of 0.53%. Several cities including Guangzhou are already lobbying the central government to further open up the coastal sea trade following the setting up of the free trade zone in Shanghai. Authorities have relaxed the ban on foreign-flagged ships owned by mainland companies conducting domestic trade, and Shanghai's maritime and port regulators were fighting to extend the relaxation to cover foreign-owned vessels. 25 sailors went missing after two cargo ships sank off China's east coast in separate incidents in November, killing at least one crew member.

OECD says Hong Kong port set for steady decline

Hong Kong's deep-sea port is set to go into steady decline as mainland Chinese terminals catch up, a new OECD report says. The growth in tonnage handled at the city's port has slowed to an average of 4% a year in the past decade, compared with 16% a year in Shenzhen and 18% in both Guangzhou and Shanghai, according to the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Container throughput has seen a similar trend, with Hong Kong's growing 20% between 2002 and last year, against 570% in Guangzhou and 280% in Shanghai. The port's share of Hong Kong's gross domestic product (GDP) declined from 2.4% in 2001 to just 1.6% in 2011. Port-related jobs account for 3.2% of employment compared with 4% a decade ago. Olaf Merk, OECD Administrator for Governance and Regulation of Ports, said the mainland could take an even larger bite of the city's market share if its shipping regulations were amended. "Should China open its shipping laws to allow foreign-owned vessels, Hong Kong would lose some of its advantages," he said. The city currently benefits from a cabotage law that bans foreign shipping companies from directly sending cargo from one mainland port to another. Baptist University Economist Dr Mo Pak-hung said the industry's decline was "inevitable". "Our strength is not in logistics any more, he said. But Shippers' Council Chairman Willy Lin said that as long as both Hong Kong's and Shenzhen's ports worked together, throughput could grow. The OECD said Hong Kong's port still maintained a competitive edge in its comparatively higher efficiency and turnaround times, high value-added services and strong maritime law.

Rezoning at Hong Kong terminal sparks competition

A land rezoning exercise at Hong Kong's Kwai Chung Container Terminal is likely to spark competition for valuable sites among stakeholders and threatens to push out small operators. The five local port operators – including Hutchison Whampoa's Hongkong International Terminals (HIT) and Wharf's Modern Terminals – have stepped up their lobbying for more backup land at Tsing Yi in order to become more efficient. While more than 100,000 hectares of scattered land parcels around the port open for bidding periodically, port operators said the leasing periods of the sites – some as short as three years – had made it impossible for them to spend the millions of dollars needed to turn them into proper storage areas. “The surfacing works for an area of between eight and 10 hectares would cost HKD100 million. How is such an investment justified if we can only use the site for three years?” said Gerry Yim, Managing Director of HIT. The Hong Kong Container Terminal Operators' Association, which acts on behalf of the operators, has demanded the government extend the tenancy period of those plots to 10 years. But Mark Chan, who represents small operators of container depots that store empty or loaded boxes at a cheaper rate than the port, said that could jeopardize their livelihood. “We can't compete with these big players. We could be driven out of business if we can't find land to stack containers for our clients,” he said. Many such depots are located in places with cheaper rents like Lau Fau Shan and Hung Shui Kiu, but a government plan to develop Hung Shui Kiu means up to 140 hectares of storage area will be lost. Chan said the government had so far pledged to provide only 60 hectares in return. Small operators can survive on shorter leases because the preparation cost of their depot sites is at least 30% lower than that of port operators due to the different standards required, the South China Morning Post reports.

Shanghai wants to expand container port

Shanghai has applied to the central government for permission to build a multi-billion yuan container port facility to further develop its free trade zone (FTZ). The city plans to start the fourth phase of the expansion of Yangshan Port, and construction will begin once the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) gives the go-ahead. According to Xu Wei, Director of Logistics at Shanghai Tongsheng Investment, the city's investment arm in charge of development at the deep-water port, the new phase of expansion will begin “sooner rather than later”. The development of new berths would cost at least CNY10 billion, to add an annual handling capacity of 4 million TEU. Shanghai has been the world's busiest container port for the past three years, and the Yangshan deep-water port accounted for about 40% of the container volume the city handled last year. Last year, international transshipment represented 5.5% of the container throughput in Shanghai, but this is expected to rise with the development of the free trade zone. Shenyin Wanguo Securities said the free trade zone policies would help Shanghai handle an additional 900,000 TEU of international transshipment cargoes.

Consolidation of shipbuilding industry expected

Chinese shipbuilders will have a mixed outlook by 2020 with only one-third of them making a successful transformation and another third facing closure or mergers, according to Zhang Shengkun, President of the Shanghai Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers. According to data compiled by London-based market researcher Clarkson Research Services, Chinese shipbuilding companies garnered 11.68 million compensated gross tons in the first three quarters, an 83.4% surge from a year earlier and accounting for 38.6% of global new orders during the period. But all the orders have been awarded to 69 shipyards, implying that the remaining 80-plus shipbuilders are without work and many of them have stopped production, Zhang said. This complies with an earlier report that said only about 50% to 55% of the nation's shipbuilding capacity was used in the first three quarters of this year, down about 20 percentage points from 2012. Bao Zhangjing, Director of the China Shipbuilding Industry Research Center, estimated up to 30% capacity will be cut by 2015 compared with 2011.

China to subsidize scrapping of old cargo ships

China unveiled a new cash-subsidy program to encourage the scrapping of older cargo ships and tankers, part of fresh measures to support the struggling shipping sector. Chinese shipping operators will receive a CNY1,500 subsidy per gross ton to replace older ships registered in the nation with new, more environmentally-friendly vessels, according to a joint statement by several government departments. This means a shipper hoping to scrap and replace an aging Panamax dry-bulk ship will receive roughly CNY52.5 million in subsidies from the state. Ships must be within 10 years of their mandatory retirement age to be eligible for the offer, and for dry-bulk ships, which carry commodities like grain and coal, retirement is 33 years of service, according to Zhang Shouguo, Executive Vice President at the China Shipowners' Association. Ship owners will get half of the cash subsidy when they complete the scrapping of an older ship and will receive the remainder once a new ship is built, the government statement said, noting the measure will be valid through the end of 2015. Analysts expect more measures to be announced soon to help the sector, including tax breaks to ship operators and shipbuilders. The value of the subsidy program is estimated at CNY7 billion, the Wall Street Journal reports. Industry experts fear that requiring shipowners to replace ships to receive the full amount of scrapping subsidies could continue to exacerbate the industry's overcapacity problems.

- A tenth Hong Kong container terminal costing close to HKD100 billion is unlikely to be financially viable, according to a consultancy report. With only modest growth expected in the cargo business for the decade from 2020, it says the government should make better use of the 100,000 hectares of land at the Kwai Chung Container Terminal in Tsing Yi in the short-term. The Hong Kong government first considered building the proposed new terminal, known as CT10, about 10 years ago. But that was when the cargo business was growing by an average of about 5% annually. With growth expected to drop to between 1% and 3% from 2020, and with the final bill for CT10 likely to be close to HKD100 billion, the project may not be able to attract private investors.
- Wang Jing, a Chinese investor who has a concession to build a waterway in Nicaragua to rival the Panama Canal, announced that he was also spearheading a USD3 billion project to build a deepwater port in Ukraine. The 300 hectare port project is to be located about 60 kilometers north of Sevastopol on the Black Sea. A memorandum of understanding was signed between Wang's Beijing Interoceanic Canal Investment Management Co and Kievgidroinvest. Ukraine already has more than a dozen big ports.
- China Rongsheng Heavy Industries Group lost a record CNY572.6 million last year, and lost CNY1.3 billion in the first half of this year. The company – whose market value has slumped more than 90% to about USD1 billion since its Hong Kong listing in 2010 – is in talks with bankers to restructure its debt. The local community, on the outskirts of the eastern city of Nantong, has mirrored Rongsheng's fall. A purpose-built town near the shipyard's main gate, with thousands of flats, supermarkets and restaurants, is largely deserted. A Spokesman said the shipyard had no confirmed new orders in the second half of the year.

RAIL TRANSPORT

Xian-Almaty cargo train service inaugurated

A cargo train route linking Xian, capital of Shaanxi province, and the city of Almaty in Kazakhstan started operation. The Chang'an Train will pass through Xinjiang and take six days to travel the 3,866-kilometer route, cutting the journey time between the two cities by more than 20 days, according to Qiang Xiao'an, Director of the Xian International Trade and Logistics Park. The train will operate twice a month between November 2013 and June 2014 and will run three times a month from July 2014. On its first run, the train, which departed the logistics park on November 28, was hauling 90 cars of goods, including mechanical components, barite powder, industrial salt and glass tubes. Authorities have also planned to open a 9,850-km Xian-Rotterdam route and a 7,251-km Xian-Moscow route in the future after gaining experience from the operation of the Xian-Almaty route, said Qiang. The cargo service is expected to further boost bilateral trade between China's western regions along the Silk Road belt and central Asian countries.

ROAD TRANSPORT

New Asia-Europe road to boost regional growth

China, Russia and Kazakhstan are counting on a new road corridor stretching from Jiangsu province to St. Petersburg in Russia to help stimulate regional trade. After nine years of negotiations, the three countries recently reached an agreement on a construction plan for the Asia-Europe road. The length of the new corridor will be 8,445 kilometers – 2,233 km of it will be in Russia, 2,787 km in Kazakhstan and 3,425 km in China. The corridor is expected to be completed by 2017, according to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Transporting goods from China to Europe takes between 15 and 45 days, either through the Suez Canal or the Trans-Siberian Railway. Commodities are usually distributed in containers and first routed through international logistics centers such as Rotterdam, Hamburg or Frankfurt. From these European transportation hubs, Chinese commodities travel a long distance before arriving at their final destinations in Russia or Kazakhstan. The new corridor will become Central Asia's most important freight artery, with transit times shortened by 10 to 14 days. Freight volume passing through the Kazakhstan portion of the corridor is expected to increase from the current 1 million tons to 3.5 million tons, according to an estimate from Kazakhstan's Transportation and Communication Ministry. “Building roads can be a tempting package to develop the service industry, logistics, hotels and infrastructure-related businesses. It will also create jobs for small and medium-sized enterprises and large joint ventures such as cement and steel plants in Kazakhstan,” said Hou Hanping, Professor of Logistics Management at Beijing Jiaotong University. About 2,450 km of the existing road in Kazakhstan, built during the Soviet era, will be rebuilt. Half of the new highway in Kazakhstan will have two lanes; the other half, which is near urban, populated areas, will have four. “From a long-term perspective, we are certain that many new towns will be built along the new Asia-Europe transport corridor,” said Lu Chuan, Vice President of XCMG Construction Machinery.

WAREHOUSING

Kerry Logistics planning Hong Kong IPO

Kerry Logistics Network, the logistics unit of Kerry Properties, is planning an initial pubic offering (IPO) that could raise up to HKD2.2 billion. Established in 1981, the Hong Kong-based third-party logistics service provider plans to use the freshly raised capital to develop logistics facilities on the mainland and in Southeast Asian markets. The company plans to strengthen its presence in China, which represents about 45% of its overall revenue, and to expand into mainland cities by building a 1.3 million square foot logistics center, which is set to commence construction next year. Trading of the company’s shares is due to start on December 19. About 27% of Kerry Logistics’ 30 million sq ft of logistics space is on the mainland. It has expanded its automotive parts distribution center in Kunshan with the 360,000 sq ft center set to open next year. It also aims to build an 878,000 sq ft logistics center in Thailand. Revenue from the mainland rose 8.4% to HKD4.2 billion in the first half of the year, while that from Southeast Asia expanded 20.1% to HKD1.4 billion from newly acquired business in Vietnam last year and the start of a regional logistics hub in Singapore in the first quarter. The logistics operator's operating margin, a measure of profitability, rose to 12.4% in June up from 8.2% in December last year. Kerry Properties is part of the Kerry Group. Kerry manages 39 million square feet of warehouses and logistics centers in China and Asean countries, of which over 11 million sq ft is in the mainland.

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