

Force Majeure declared for Covid-hit container ship Ital Libera

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The Italian-flagged 5,090 teu containership **Ital Libera I** (IMO 9322475) was yesterday sailing back to Italy in order to repatriate the body of its deceased captain.

The vessel was due to reach the Suez Canal on June 11th, two months after the sad tale began. The 5,090 TEU containership had completed an apparently routine crew change in Durban, South Africa at the end of March, bringing aboard a new captain, Italian citizen Angelo Capurro, aged 61. Captain Capurro had made the journey with stops in Doha and Johannesburg was reported to have tested negative for Covid-19 before boarding the ship.

The vessel sailed on April 1st for a two-week voyage across the Indian Ocean, first stop Singapore. However, during that voyage a number of the crew reported feeling ill; some reports suggested that the captain began showing symptoms of Covid-19 as early as April 2nd. Before the ship reached Singapore, Captain Capurro died while still at sea, possibly from Covid-19 or from other factors that had been aggravated by the virus.

Ship's operator Italia Marittima, a division of Evergreen, informed the local authorities and the decision was made to divert the vessel to the anchorage off Jakarta, where the 20 crew aboard were to remain for two weeks as part of a quarantine.

The ship arrived on April 18th and the companies, working with the Italian authorities, began seeking permission and making the arrangements to have the captain's remains landed and flown home to his family in Italy.

Unfortunately, the authorities in Indonesia and elsewhere in Asia refused the requests of the Italian authorities on the grounds of Covid-19 quarantine.

Italy then ordered that an autopsy be performed to determine the cause of death and that his remains should be repatriated as quickly as possible.

Hapag Lloyd at this point said that “due to no Asian ports accepting the vessel, she has been diverted to call Italy first in order to repatriate the captain”.

The vessel departed the Jakarta anchorage on May 27th and made an overnight stop in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Hapag-Lloyd, Evergreen, and Italia Maritima have all expressed their condolences to the family and their regrets over the circumstances brought on by the ongoing restrictions due to Covid-19.

The Ital Libera is deployed on the Far East to South Africa Express (SA1) connecting ports in China and Taiwan with South Africa via Singapore. A May 6th update from Hapag-Lloyd said crew members on board tested positive for Covid-19 upon a recent departure from Durban.

Hapag-Lloyd's second advisory, issued on June 7th, said that “we have received further news from our partner Evergreen, and much to our regret, we must inform you that the captain of Ital Libera unfortunately passed away on the vessel. Hapag-Lloyd expresses our condolences to the captain's family. Force majeure has been declared and due to no Asian ports accepting the vessel, she has been diverted to call Italy first in order to repatriate the captain”.

The captain was believed to have died as early as April 13th.

Hapag-Lloyd said that the Ital Libera was eventually expected to return to the rotation in the Far East service, although arrival and cargo delivery dates were still to be determined.

As of the morning of June 9th the vessel was in the Red Sea heading for the Suez Canal.

2007-built, Italy-flagged, 54,152 gt Ital Liberia is owned by Verdi Shipping care of manager Niki Shipping Co SA of Athens, Greece. ISM manager is Italia Maritima SpA of Trieste, Italy. It is entered with Gard AS on behalf of Verdi Shipping Co Ltd.