

## **Letter to The Economist on ship crews**

Sir, your article “Global trade – invisible hand” (June 26) laments the plight of seafarers being stranded aboard ships during the COVID-19 crisis. Hong Kong has taken a global lead to alleviate this problem with practical arrangements to exempt ship crew from quarantine requirements.

As an international maritime centre, Hong Kong is always mindful of the need to support the global and local shipping community. We recognise the significance of cargo operations, and have exempted crew members of vessels entering Hong Kong to load and unload goods from compulsory quarantine since such a requirement was imposed in February. This arrangement was expanded on June 8 to cover all cargo vessels, including those entering Hong Kong purely for crew change. So far, about 8,000 crew members have been rotated in Hong Kong since early February, with some 2,700 signing on or off ships between June 8 and 21.

From June 27, Hong Kong has extended these arrangements to cover passenger ships, including cruise ships, to enter Hong Kong for crew change without requiring compulsory quarantine. The latest initiative further aids the shipping sector by allowing crew changes for more vessels, which provides relief for seafarers who have remained on board vessels for an excessively long time.

These measures, which address industry requests, are the outcome of our close communication with the maritime industry. They also reflect Hong Kong’s prompt and positive response to calls from the International Maritime Organisation, International Chamber of Shipping, seafarers’ unions and other industry bodies. As a global shipping centre, Hong Kong will continue to explore and devise ways to facilitate maritime trade operations and assist seafarers not just for Hong Kong but for the whole of the shipping world.

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