

SUEZ CANAL

No timeline given for extracting wedged ship

BY SAMY MAGDY

Associated Press

SUEZ, Egypt — A giant container ship remained stuck sideways in Egypt's Suez Canal for a fifth day Saturday, as authorities made new attempts to free the vessel and reopen a crucial waterway whose blockage is disrupting global shipping and trade.

Meanwhile, the head of the Suez Canal Authority said strong winds were "not the only cause" for the Ever Given running aground on Tuesday, appearing to push back against conflicting assessments offered by others. Lt. Gen. Osama Rabei told a news conference Saturday that an investigation was ongoing but did not rule out human or technical error.

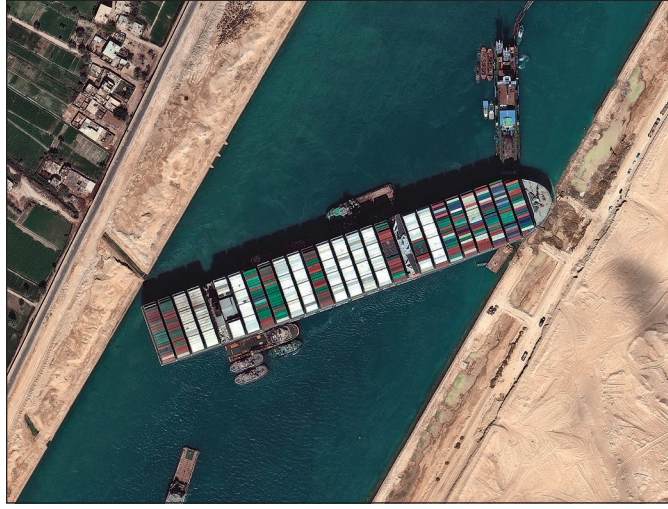
The massive Ever Given, a Panama-flagged ship that carries cargo between Asia and Europe, got stuck in a single-lane stretch of the canal, about 3.7 miles north of the southern entrance, near the city of Suez.

Rabei said he could not predict when the ship might be dislodged. A Dutch salvage firm is attempting to refloat the vessel with tugboats and dredgers, taking advantage of high tides.

Rabei said he remained hopeful that dredging could free the ship without having to resort to removing its cargo, but added that "we are in a difficult situation, it's a bad incident."

Asked about when they expected to free the vessel and reopen the canal, he said: "I can't say because I do not know."

Shoei Kisen, the company that owns the vessel, said it was considering removing containers if other refloating



This satellite image from Saturday shows the cargo ship MV Ever Given, which is stuck in the Suez Canal near Suez, Egypt.

Maxar Technologies

off the ship, he said.

The salvage mission was turning its focus to the ship's lodged bow, after some progress was made towards freeing the ship's stern, the canal service provider Leth Agencies said Saturday.

Egypt Prime Minister Mustafa Madbouly called the ship's predicament "a very extraordinary incident," in his first public comments on the blockage.

The Suez Canal Authority organized the first media trip Saturday to the site where the

vessel was stuck. From a distance, a flotilla of tugboats and other salvage equipment appeared minuscule compared to the vessel, mirroring the scale of mishap and efforts needed to reopen the canal.

Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement said Friday that its initial investigation showed the vessel ran aground due to strong winds and ruled out mechanical or engine failure. However, Rabei seemed to be pushing back against that assessment Saturday, saying that all possibilities, including human and technical errors, were being investigated.

A prolonged closure of the crucial waterway would cause delays in the global shipment

chain. Some 19,000 vessels passed through the canal last year, according to official figures. About 10% of world trade flows through the canal. The closure could affect oil and gas shipments to Europe from the Middle East.

Some vessels began changing course and dozens of ships were still en route to the waterway, according to the data firm Refinitiv.

It remained unclear how long the blockage would last. Even after reopening the canal that links factories in Asia to consumers in Europe, the waiting containers are likely to arrive at busy ports, forcing them to face additional delays before offloading.

efforts failed.

Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement, the Ever Given's technical manager, said "significant progress" was made late Friday at the ship's stern where its rudder was released from sediment, with another attempt to free the vessel to be made around midnight Saturday.

It said around a dozen tugboats were working Saturday alongside dredging operations that were removing sand and mud from around the left side of the vessel's bow.

Some 9,000 tons of ballast water had been already removed from the vessel, the canal chairman said.

Since the blockage began, a maritime traffic jam had grown to more than 320 vessels waiting on both ends of the Suez Canal and in the Great Bitter Lake in the middle of the waterway.

Peter Berdowski, CEO of Boskalis, the salvage firm hired to extract the Ever Given, said the company hoped to pull the container ship free within days using a combination of heavy tug-

boats, dredging and high tides.

He told the Dutch current affairs show Nieuwsuur on Friday night that the front of the ship is stuck in sandy clay, but the rear "has not been completely pushed into the clay and that is positive because you can use the rear end to pull it free."

Berdowski said two large tugboats were on their way to the canal and are expected to arrive over the weekend. He said the company aims to harness the power of the tugs, dredging and tides, which he said are expected to be up to 20 inches higher Saturday.

"The combination of the (tug) boats we will have there, more ground dredged away and the high tide, we hope that will be enough to get the ship free somewhere early next week," he said.

If that doesn't work, the company will remove hundreds of containers from the front of the ship to lighten it, effectively lifting the ship to make it easier to pull free, Berdowski said.

A crane was already on its way that can lift the containers

Cruises will remain banned as industry pressure to restart heats up

BY TAYLOR DOLVEN

Miami Herald

MIAMI — Despite increasing pressure from the cruise industry and its allies in government, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention plans to prevent cruises from U.S. ports for the foreseeable future.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and the cruise industry lobbying group CLIA are pressuring the CDC to allow U.S. cruises as soon as July 1. But the agency is not budging on its "conditional sail order," which gives cruise companies a long list of requirements they must meet before being allowed to restart.

The government officials say the conditional sail order, first issued by the CDC in October and in place until November 2021, is outdated and unnecessary now that several COVID-19 vaccines are available.

"I urge the CDC to immediately rescind this baseless no-sail order to allow Floridians in this industry to get back to work," said DeSantis at a press conference at Port Canaveral on Friday.

He joins Levine Cava, who sent a letter to CDC Director Rochelle Walensky last week, saying she would welcome guidance from the CDC allowing cruises by July for only vaccinated passengers and crew. Around 60,000 South Floridians work directly or indirectly for the cruise industry.

Earlier this month, CDC spokesperson Caitlin Shockey said a majority, but not all, of the six cruise companies with ships in U.S. waters had complied with the first phase of the order: Test all crew members for COVID-19 weekly and report results to the agency.

In response to Cruise Lines International Association's public demands Thursday that the conditional sail order be lifted, Shockey said the order remains in effect.

"On October 30, 2020, CDC issued Framework for Conditional Sailing Order (CSO) that remains in effect until November 1, 2021," she said in an

The CDC first banned cruises in U.S. waters in March 2020 amid COVID-19 outbreaks on multiple ships. After extensive lobbying from the industry, it lifted its no-sail order on Oct. 30, replacing it with the conditional sail order.

email. "Returning to passenger cruising is a phased approach to mitigate the risk of spreading COVID-19. Details for the next phase of the CSO are currently under interagency review."

The CDC first banned cruises in U.S. waters in March 2020 amid COVID-19 outbreaks on multiple ships. After extensive lobbying from the industry, it lifted its no-sail order on Oct. 30, replacing it with the conditional sail order. In November, the CDC added instructions for lab testing, and in December, it expanded the list of tests cruise companies can use.

Since then, crew members have continued to test positive for the virus at sea. Thirty-three cruise ships in U.S. waters have reported crew members testing positive for COVID-19 or having COVID-like illness (clinically compatible without laboratory confirmation) since the start of the year, according to CDC documents obtained by the Herald.

In a statement Thursday, CLIA, the cruise industry's lobbying group, urged the CDC to allow cruising by July, noting that cruises have long resumed in other parts of the world including Singapore, China and Italy, hosting nearly 400,000 passengers since the pandemic began with minimal COVID-19 outbreaks.

"This is a testament to the industry's unparalleled expertise, gained over more than half a century, in coordinating movements of guests and crew, efficiently organizing complex embarkations and excursions, and designing vessels that are more technologically advanced and operationally agile than any other mode of transportation," said Kelly Craighead, the group's CEO, in a statement.

Dr. Michael Callahan, director of the Clinical Translation, Vaccine and Immunotherapy Center at Massachusetts General Hospital, who worked with

Japanese health authorities to care for and evacuate sick passengers and crew on the Diamond Princess cruise ship last February, said in an interview Friday it is too soon to be resuming U.S. cruises.

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