LNG Unlimited

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Middle East conflict - a shifting European LNG market

With *force majeure* declarations affecting LNG supply, the fallout from the escalating Middle East war added further uncertainty, pushing European traders to re-evaluate sourcing and pricing strategies.

The large Qatar LNG loading facility at Ras Laffan is at a standstill

On 4th March, QatarEnergy declared *force majeure* on LNG supplies to affected buyers, following the LNG production halt a couple of days earlier amid military attacks.

Qatar exported around 9.12 mill tonnes, involving 111 cargoes, to Europe last year, according to S&P Global CERA data, down just over 18% year-on- year, it accounted for around 7% of all Europe's LNG imports.

"You've got a few companies like RWE, Enel, Total, Naturgy, OMV, EDF, ENI who have contracts with Qatar... Some players in Europe will have to bid to replace these lost volumes.

"You already had Qatar give the FM to Orlen and Edison, so that's some extra cargoes of demand per month needed into Europe," an LNG trader said, talking with S&P Global.

The *force majeure* has put upward pressure on European spot prices, as importers, faced with uncertain supply volumes, were willing to pay higher premiums to secure cargoes.

Given that DES NWE prices were trading either at a premium to or close to parity with TTF, many regasification slots in Europe remained out of the money on a marginal basis, a much narrower discount to TTF eroded the incentive to buy LNG and sell as gas to Europe.

A day before the war broke out, DES NWE was at a $1.115 per MMBtu discount to TTF, according to Platts data. It switched to a 50 cents per MMBtu premium on 2nd March, and stood at a discount of 20 cents per MMBtu for April deliveries, as of 11th March.

"The [LNG/TTF] spreads are tight though, so depending on your terminal with the regas costs, it could be out of the money. It'd make more sense to backfill with pipeline than a cargo right now," a second LNG trader said.

Cargo swaps

As a result, traders said portfolio players were increasingly exploring cargo swaps or diversions toward higher-priced markets where margins were more attractive, since in many cases it was not economical to take the cargo and pay regasification costs with the current narrower NEW/TTF discounts.

Another trader added: "if you can buy pipeline and not use your slot to backfill the volumes, it'd make more sense, a lot of us are in a wait and see mode, the gas-LNG spreads are super narrow, some of our slots aren't in the money but then you have some companies in the Atlantic buying up cheaper US FOB on spot to try help replenish the lost cargoes."

Should the LNG/TTF spreads narrow further, players with capacity will look to divert cargoes to Asia and potentially backfill their positions in Europe with pipeline gas, as current LNG/TTF spreads may see pipeline procurement as more economical in some hubs across Europe, traders said.

While the US LNG market is poised to help provide a buffer to the cut in supply from Middle East, producers in the US are running near capacity, analysts added.

The US has exported around 373 cargoes up to 13th March, versus 308 cargoes in 2025 during the same period, S&P Global CERA data showed.

CERA data forecast that the US will see exports increase by 18.43 mill tonnes in 2026 versus 2025, a 16.51% year-on-year increase.

However, with plants running at near capacity, traders saw few candidates able to ramp up exports.

"Venture Global has the most extra capacity to sell on spot, if they get rates where they requested to, they can have another 7 mill tonnes added to their capacity of 27 mill tonnes per year from Plaquemines," a European-based trader said.

"You look at this year so far, around 30% of exports were from VG and they've still got a lot of volumes to sell on spot. There have been buyers in the Atlantic bidding strongly to secure those extra cargoes to backfill any positions," the trader added.

As Europe enters the end of the winter withdrawal cycle and prepares for the summer injection season, companies are waiting to see how prices will react and how long global LNG supply outages will last. ■

UNLIMITED AGENDA

Qatar and UAE LNGC loadings stop

Drewry Maritime Research's AIS showed that Qatar only loaded seven LNGCs in the week ending 6th March, due to heightened tensions in the Middle East following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

On average, Qatar loads 18-20 LNGCs every week.

The sharp drop was attributed to the 4th March declaration of *force majeure,* caused by Qatar's halt in LNG production and to continued transit risks in the strait.

Despite this, some loading activity was recorded in that week, while UAE loadings were stable and Oman's loadings saw a surge.

According to Drewry AIS' trade estimates, the large supply losses are expected over the coming weeks and months, if Qatar's and the UAE's LNG production remain stopped.

The impact on loadings started from the end of February. On average, 85 loadings will be affected each month if the blockade continues, resulting in a monthly supply loss of 7 mill tonnes from Qatar and UAE.

Even if a few loadings are managed at Qatar or the UAE, the blockade will leave cargoes stuck to the west of the Strait, preventing any LNGCs from transiting.

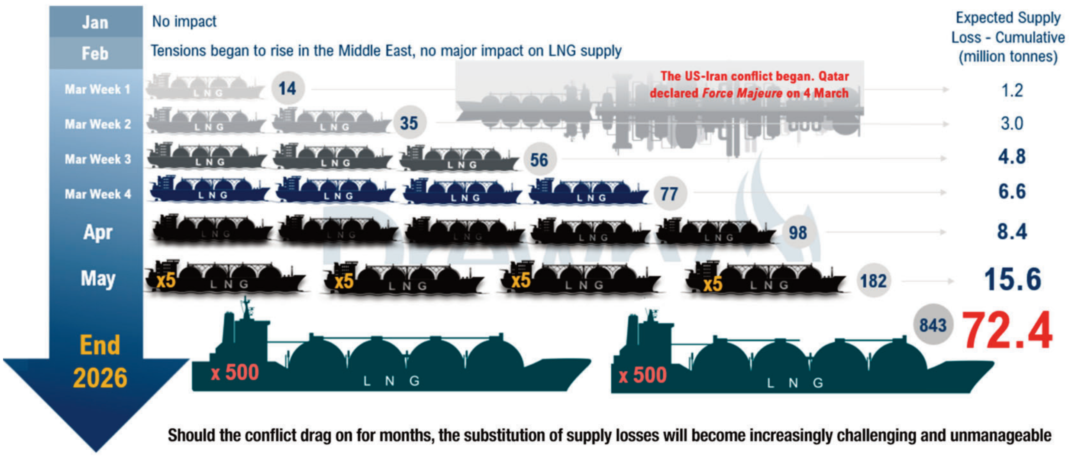
Assuming a complete supply shutdown in Qatar, weekly losses will rise to 12 bill tonne/miles, translating to 45 bill tonne/miles if the supply cut lasts for a month, and over 490 bill tonne/miles if it lasts for a year.

Over 840 LNGC loadings will be disrupted, leaving many carriers idle, even though some have been diverted away from the area.

While Qatar and the UAE's supply losses could be managed in the near-to-short term, with alternative supplies reaching Asia from other exporting countries, such as the US, Russia, Australia, Canada and Africa, a complete substitution of over 70 mill tonnes for the remainder of the year, will be impossible, Drewry said.

Should the Middle East conflict continue, LNG shipping would be severely disrupted, with the impact worsening with each passing month. ■

The longer the conflict, the greater the strain on LNG supply



Source: Drewry Maritime Research

Japan looks to Australia to fill LNG shortfall

Japan's industry minister has asked Australia, the country's largest supplier of LNG, to boost output in light of the Middle East crisis.

The Asian powerhouse relies on the Middle East for 11% of its LNG imports, with 6% shipped via the Strait of Hormuz, which is effectively closed, due to the US/Israeli war on Iran.

Japan also depends on the region for about 95% of its crude oil supplies.

It could take months to return to normal deliveries, Qatari Energy Minister Saad al-Kaabi said last week, referring to the closure of the giant Ras Laffan export facility.

"For this unprecedented situation, the affordable and stable LNG supply from Australia is the lifeline of energy security in Japan and this region," Japan's Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Ryosei Akazawa, told Australian Resources Minister, Madeleine King, during a meeting last Saturday.

"We would like to sincerely ask for your continued contribution to stable supply, including the possibility of increasing production as much as possible," Akazawa added.

Both ministers were at the Indo-Pacific Energy Security Ministerial and Business Forum held in Tokyo.

Australia supplies about 40% of Japan's LNG imports.

"Australia remains a trusted partner for Japan in supplying LNG to your community," King replied.

She said the Scarborough and Barossa fields will soon begin producing more gas, boosting output from Western Australia's gas fields, a major contribution to Australia's LNG exports, according to the Australian Associated Press. ■

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Alaska LNG to benefit from Middle East crisis

Glenfarne's $44 bill Alaska LNG project is seeing increased interest from Asian interests, due to the Middle East situation, company executives told Reuters on the sidelines of a Tokyo conference.

The developer aims to make final investment decisions (FIDs) this year and next, and start shipping LNG in 2031.

Final go-aheads for the project's pipeline and export terminal have been delayed, as Glenfarne has yet to reach its target of signing binding LNG offtake deals for 80% of the planned export capacity of 20 mill tonnes per year.

Thus far, the project has lined up commitments for 13 mill tonnes per year. Glenfarne needs agreements for another 3 mill tonnes and then turn them into binding deals in order to gain finance for the project.

"There's a real interest, particularly with everything happening in the Middle East right now. Everyone would like to get those (preliminary deals) turned into long-term agreements," Adam Prestidge, Glenfarne Alaska LNG's President, told Reuters.

He said the tasks of converting commitments into binding legal documents and putting in place financing "are all well underway".

Glenfarne, which owns 75% of Alaska LNG, aims to give a final go-ahead for the pipeline this year – delayed from an earlier target of late 2025 – and hopes to make a FID for the export terminal in early 2027, he revealed.

Talks are underway with two potential offtakers for 3 mill tonnes of LNG supply, Glenfarne CEO, Brendan Duval told the conference, adding that the agreements would "move very quickly".

"This is a reminder that Alaska LNG has the only LNG cargoes that can get to North Asia from anywhere in the world that doesn't have to go through a choke point," Duval said. "That's the reason Taiwan signed up, Thailand signed up, Japan and (South) Korea have all signed up for volumes."

Japan's two largest LNG importers, JERA and Tokyo Gas, have also reached preliminary deals to buy a combined 2 mill tonnes per year from Alaska LNG.

Duval also said that Greek shipowner, Danaos would aim to deliver newbuilding LNGCs around the same time that the project comes online in 2031.

"We don't need any special carriers at all. The ice floes there allow us to have regular LNG carriers. Any LNG carrier globally can come and go," he claimed. ■

A rendering of Alaska LNG's export terminal

Angolan gas field production starts

TotalEnergies has announced the start of production from the Quiluma field, in which it holds an 11.8% interest alongside partners, Azule Energy (37.4%, operator), Cabinda Gulf Oil Co (31%) and Sonangol E&P (19.8%).

This is the first development of an Angolan non-associated gas field. The gas produced will be a stable and important source of gas supply for the Angola LNG plant that is delivering LNG to both the European and Asian markets, the French energy major said.

At plateau, the project will produce around 330 mill cu ft of gas per day, equivalent to about 2 mill tonnes of LNG per year.

"By ensuring a sustainable long term gas supply for the Angola LNG plant, the project strengthens Angola's ability to supply LNG to international markets in the long run, including Europe and Asia" said Mike Sangster, TotalEnergies' Senior Vice-President Africa, Exploration & Production.

TotalEnergies had earlier revealed that it had shut down 15% of its total oil and gas production on the back of the Middle East war.

However, the company claimed that higher oil prices would more than compensate for the loss of its Middle East production.

An $8 per barrel increase in Brent is enough to offset the expected 2026 cash flow from operations from the Iraq, Qatar, and UAE offshore assets of $60 per barrel, TotalEnergies said. ■

India ups dialogue with Iran

The Indian Government has increased talks with Iran, as LNGCs and LPG carriers – holding roughly a month's supply for the country – await safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz (SoH).

The development follows a flurry of talks – led by India's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister – that helped clear the passage for two LPG carriers carrying a total of 92,712 tonnes through the Strait.

Rakesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary at the Indian Shipping Ministry, said that six LPG vessels and an LNGC are waiting to the west of SoH to be allowed safe transit.

Two Indian-flagged LPG carriers, 'Shivalik' and 'Nanda Devi', transited the SoH early on Saturday morning and are due at Mundra and Kandla on 16th and 17th March, respectively.

Each vessel is loaded with about 46,000 tonnes of LPG.

Commenting on India's efforts, Ministry of external affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, said "India has remained in close contact with key stakeholders, including GCC countries, Iran, the US and Israel at political and diplomatic levels.

"The Prime Minister, External Affairs Minister and Indian Missions have been actively engaging with counterparts to underline India's priorities, particularly energy security and safe maritime transit," the spokesperson said.

Several other India bound vessels remain stuck in the Gulf region and efforts are ongoing to ensure safe and uninterrupted passage, he added.

These were thought to be four tankers carrying crude oil, three containerships and two bulk carriers.

Indian sources said that the main buyers will play the spot market to procure more LNG. ■

JERA signs LNG MoU with KOGAS

Major Japanese LNG buyer JERA has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Korea Gas Corp (KOGAS) to enhance co-operation in LNG operations.

This is aimed at strengthening energy security in Japan and South Korea, the companies said.

JERA head Yukio Kani

Under the terms of the MoU, the two companies will establish a framework to optimise LNG shipping and terminal operations.

Areas of co-operation include discussing supply and demand trends and exploring cargo swaps to enhance portfolio flexibility and logistical efficiency across their LNG terminal networks.

As neighbouring energy importing economies with large LNG demand, Japan and South Korea share a strong interest in enhancing supply resilience and flexibility across the region, including through closer operational co-ordination among major LNG buyers, JERA said.

Amid rising geopolitical tensions and market uncertainties, global energy markets are becoming increasingly volatile. As energy demand across Asia continues to grow alongside ongoing de-carbonisation efforts, LNG is expected to play an important role in ensuring reliable electricity supply and complementing renewable energy sources.

"As two of the world's largest LNG importers, JERA and KOGAS share a strong commitment to ensuring reliable and efficient LNG supply across the region.

"In today's increasingly complex energy landscape, closer cross-border collaboration among LNG-importing economies will play an important role in strengthening supply resilience and supporting energy security across the region," said Yukio Kani, JERA's Global CEO and Chair.

By strengthening collaboration with global partners, including KOGAS, JERA will continue to enhance the LNG value chain and build a more flexible and responsive framework to adopt to fluctuations in supply and demand while supporting the stability of regional energy markets, the company said. ■

Venture Global takes FID on CP2 Phase 2 - gains Plaquemines export ramp up

Major US LNG exporter, Venture Global has taken a final investment decision (FID) and closed a $8.6 bill project financing for the second phase of the company's third project, CP2 LNG (CP2).

When combined with the Phase One financing for CP2 announced in July, last year, this milestone represents the largest standalone project financing in the US bank market, the company claimed.

Venture Global claimed that this transaction garnered enormous interest from the world's leading banks, resulting in over $19 bill of commitments for Phase Two in addition to the previous $34 bill of commitments for Phase One, and required no outside equity investment.

"We are extremely proud to have taken FID on the second phase of CP2, our third greenfield project, bringing Venture Global's executed capital markets transactions to more than $95 bill," said Venture Global CEO, Mike Sabel. "The tireless dedication of our team has enabled us to reach five final investment decisions (FIDs) in less than seven years, positioning us to become the largest US exporter of LNG once CP2 is fully online.

"With the Phase Two financing secured, we will build on the strong construction progress already underway and deliver reliable American LNG to customers around the world," he added.

CP2 will have a peak production capacity of 29 mill tonnes per annum and has contracted to sell nearly all of its nameplate capacity on a long-term basis with customers predominantly located in Europe and Asia.

Venture Global now has a total contracted capacity of over 49 mill tonnes per annum, or nearly all of its nameplate capacity, across all three of its projects in Louisiana.

The construction financing lender group included the world's leading banks, signalling significant demand for US LNG investment not only in the United States but also in Europe and Asia.

The banks included: Banco Santander, Bank of America, Bank of China, Barclays, CaixaBank, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Deutsche Bank, Goldman Sachs, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, Intesa Sanpaolo, JP Morgan Chase, Landesbank Baden-Wuttemberg, Mizuho, National Bank of Canada, National Westminster Bank, Natixis, PNC Bank, Regions Bank, Royal Bank of Canada, Standard Chartered, Sumitomo Mitsui, The Bank of Nova Scotia, The Huntington National Bank, Truist, US Bank National Association, and Wells Fargo.

Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA) and MUFG Bank (MUFG) served as lead arrangers for CP2 LNG Phase 2's construction term loan and working capital facility.

Latham & Watkins served as counsel to Venture Global and Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom served as counsel to lenders across all facilities.

Export increase

In another move, US.Secretary of Energy, Chris Wright has authorised an immediate 13% increase in exports from Venture Global's Plaquemines LNG terminal in Louisiana.

This allows additional LNG exports of up to 0.45 bill cu ft per day to non-free trade agreement (FTA) countries, thus Plaquemines LNG is now authorised to immediately export 3.85 bill cu ft per day to both FTA and non-FTA countries.

"At a time when Iran and its terrorist proxies attempt to disrupt the global energy supply, the Trump Administration remains

CEO Mike Sabel has taken FID on CP2 Phase 2

committed to strengthening American energy dominance," Secretary Wright said. "Thanks to President Trump and American innovators, the US is not only the largest producer and exporter of LNG but will more than double its LNG exports in the coming years.

"We will see meaningful additions to US LNG export capacity at Plaquemines immediately and other facilities commencing operations in future weeks and months," he said.

"Our mission to enable secure, reliable, and affordable energy has never been more important than now," said Kyle Haustveit, Assistant Secretary of the US Hydrocarbons and Geothermal Energy Office. "I am pleased that DOE can take this action to be able to make an immediate difference to help add to global supplies of LNG." ■

Shell remains bullish on LNG future

Global LNG demand is forecast to rise by 54-68% by 2040 and 45-85% by 2050 from 422 mill tonnes in 2025, boosted by growing Asian appetite, UK energy giant Shell said in its 2026 Outlook.

Last year, Shell said global demand was expected to rise to between 630 mill and 718 mill tonnes per year by 2040.

In its latest forecast, Shell narrowed the 2040 range to 650 mill tonnes and 710 mill tonnes per annum and extended its forecast to 2050 at an expected range of 610 mill to 780 mill tonnes per annum.

The company also said that it planned to grow its LNG sales by 4-5% a year.

Shell warned that the forecasts were not final, given the Iran war, which has upended oil and LNG trades.

In the face of questions over its 2026 Outlook, Shell said that LNG will be a vital balancing fuel for a future energy system and that its projects were competitive in terms of cost and emissions.

Global gas consumption may peak in the 2030s and has peaked in some regions, such as Europe and Japan, but LNG demand is still expected to grow, the energy major said.

LNG will make up more than half of overall natural gas demand growth to 2040, with Asia making up 70% of that growth, it added.

This year, Shell extended the range of its forecast by a decade to 2050 and claimed that the report's data was accurate to 16th March, 2026, but any final LNG outlook could vary "due to the evolving conflict in the Middle East". ■

ORLEN adds capacity to become a major LNG player

Polish energy company, ORLEN has expanded its LNG transport capacity.

A naming ceremony for two LNGCs was held at the Hanwha Ocean shipyard in Geoje, South Korea.

Both vessels will enhance the stability and flexibility of gas deliveries to Poland and strengthen the region's energy security, ORLEN said.

Each new ship can deliver enough gas in a single voyage to supply as many as 2 mill households, the company claimed.

"ORLEN is investing continuously in the energy security and independence of both Poland and the wider region. We are developing not only our own production, with successful exploration campaigns both domestically and on the Norwegian Continental Shelf, but also expanding our trading capabilities by growing our fleet.

"Each additional carrier enhances the flexibility of LNG transport to Poland and enables us to ensure stable supplies for Polish consumers and all our customers, while strengthening the energy security of the entire region," said Ireneusz Fąfara, President of the ORLEN Management Board.

They are claimed to be among the most advanced vessels of their kind in the world. Each has a capacity of 174,000 cu m of LNG and can transport about 70,000 tonnes of LNG per voyage, equivalent to around 100 mill cu m of natural gas after regasification – roughly the amount consumed by all Polish households in an average week.

The vessels – 'Danuta Siedzikówna-Inka' and 'Rotmistrz Witold Pilecki' – have been built to call at the majority of LNG terminals worldwide, which ensures a high degree of operational flexibility.

They have been chartered for 10 years, with an option for an extension.

Each carrier of this size can deliver the equivalent of close to 1 TWh of energy after regasification, which represents around 0.5/0.6% of Poland's annual natural gas demand.

In a single year, one vessel can make eight or nine voyages on the US/Europe route, providing transport capacity of 8/9 TWh of gas per annum.

Logistics expansion

With the addition of the new vessels, ORLEN's LNGC fleet numbers eight ships, a development that has significantly expanded the company's LNG transport logistics capabilities.

ORLEN's own fleet allows it to fulfil a substantial portion of contracted deliveries without relying on third-party tonnage, which translates into enhanced operational flexibility and efficiency, the company added.

LNG transport development is a key element of ORLEN's strategy, which is that natural gas is to serve as a transitional fuel in the energy transition, with consumption in Poland potentially rising to 27 bill cu m per year over the next decade.

Last year, the Świnoujście terminal set a record in receiving 81 LNG cargoes – 20 more than in the previous year. The total volume of LNG imported by sea came to nearly 6 mill tonnes, 30% higher than in 2024.

ORLEN is also expanding its presence on the global LNG market. The company has already made deliveries to Japan, China, Thailand, Egypt, and terminals in Western Europe.

These new carriers will enhance its logistics capabilities and enable even more active participation in global LNG trade.

The company is also strengthening its gas reception capacity in the region. ORLEN uses capacity at the Klaipeda FSRU terminal, from where regasified gas is transported to Poland via the Poland/Lithuania interconnector, with some volumes also directed to the Baltic states' markets.

In parallel, domestic infrastructure is being developed. ORLEN has booked the entire regasification capacity of the planned FLNG terminal in Gdańsk Bay, which amounts to 6.1 bill cu m of gas per year.

Once the facility is operational, the number of LNG cargoes received by the Group could increase by as many as 58 per year, ORLEN revealed. ■

Delivery of the new LNGCs

Dynagas explains Yamal connection

Answering accusations of sanctions busting by some NGOs, Dynagas LNG Partners has explained that one of its charterers, Singapore-based Yamal Trade, employs two LNGCs, 'Yenisei River' and 'Lena River', on long-term charters, which extend to 2033 and 2034, respectively.

These vessels, since the commencement of their charters, have been engaged in the transport of Russian produced LNG for discharge at destinations worldwide in compliance with applicable sanctions regulations.

However, under the new EU sanctions regulations, commencing 1st January, 2027, the vessels will be restricted from transporting LNG from Russia, which would affect the charterers' ability to continue to employ the vessels under the current terms.

Dynagas and the charterers are evaluating the potential impact of the new sanctions on the operation of the vessels, the company said during its results presentation.

The Partnership maintained that it believed the Yamal charters remained enforceable notwithstanding the new sanctions, however there can be no assurance that the charterers will share this interpretation, and any disagreement could result in disputes, non-performance, litigation, or early termination of the charters, among other things.

The loss of revenue under either or both of the Yamal charters would have a material adverse effect on Dynagas' business, results of operations, financial condition, and ability to make distributions to the unitholders, and could result in an event of default under the debt agreements, the company warned.

Applicable US, UK and EU sanctions regimes that are currently in effect do not materially affect the business, operations or financial condition and, to the company's knowledge, the counterparties are currently performing their obligations under their respective timecharters in compliance with the sanctions regulations.

Dynagas reported net income and earnings per common unit (basic and diluted) of $61.6 mill and $1.38, respectively for 2025.

Adjusted net income was $57.1 mill and adjusted EPS was $1.26, while adjusted EBITDA was $109.2 mill.

Dynagas' fleet utilisation was 99.3% for the year.

As for the fourth quarter of last year, net income and EPS were $15.7 mill and $0.38, respectively.

Adjusted net income was $14.1 mill and adjusted EPS was $0.34, while adjusted EBITDA was $26.9 mill with 98.8% fleet utilisation. ■

NEWS BRIEFS

GTT receives five more LNGC orders

GTT has received orders for the tank designs of another five LNGCs.

The latest involves an order from the Chinese shipyard Hudong-Zhonghua for the tank design of four new LNGCs contracted by a European shipowner.

GTT will design the vessels' membrane containment systems, each of which will have a capacity of 174,000 cu m.

This follows an order from HD Korea Shipbuilding & Offshore Engineering for the tank design of one LNGC.

This 174,000 cu m vessel will be built by HD Hyundai Samho for Angola's Sonangol.

Her cryogenic tanks will be fitted with GTT's Mark III Flex membrane containment system and she is due for delivery during the second quarter of 2028.

Woodfibre takes delivery of liquefaction module

Canadian export project, Woodfibre LNG recently took delivery of one of its most important modules.

This was a liquefaction module, which arrived on board the heavy-lift semi-submersible vessel, 'Red Zed 1'.

The liquefaction module was the 15th to arrive on site, as the project moves closer to construction completion.

Weighing 10,847 tonnes, this module was the heaviest delivered thus far. It was also among the largest.

"The liquefaction module is the beating heart of our facility. It's the core of how we will transform BC natural gas into LNG to be shipped around the world," said Luke Schauerte, Woodfibre LNG CEO, "As the world's first LNG export facility using renewable power for electric-drive liquefaction, this module represents the core of our commitment to net-zero operations and setting a new standard for LNG, both in Canada and around the world."

All of the facility's 19 modules are expected to be on site this spring. Construction is scheduled to be completed next year (see March issue of LNG Journal, page 12).

Japan looks to build LNGCs

Japan's public and private sectors are considering whether to co-operate to revive domestic LNGC construction for the first time since 2019, a seven-year hiatus, a source told Reuters.

The endeavour will be part of a key investment strategy that Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's administration is promoting to strengthen economic security, local media reported.

There have been talks for the country's top shipbuilder, Imabari Shipbuilding Co, to use part of the manufacturing facility of another major shipbuilder, Oshima Shipbuilding Co, in Nagasaki Prefecture, for the project.

Further discussions will be held on Thursday at a meeting hosted by Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism involving local experts.

As the project is directly tied to the country's energy policy, the panel will include experts on shipbuilding, maritime transportation and energy, the source said.

Japan lags far behind China and South Korea in shipbuilding volume, especially for LNGCs, which have not been built in the country since Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Kawasaki Heavy Industries each delivered a vessel in 2019.

Shipbuilding is one of the 17 areas the Takaichi administration has designated for key investment, with a target of Y1 trill ($6.3 bill) in public and private funding over 10 years.

Thailand to increase Cheniere LNG contract

Thailand's Energy Minister, Auttapol Rerkpiboon is negotiating with Cheniere Energy to increase LNG deliveries under an existing contract.

As a result, deliveries could increase from 1 mill to 1.3 mill tonnes annually for the remaining 15 years to 2041, and some cargoes would be brought forward to the second quarter of this year.

He said that senior officials from the Energy Ministry and Thai's state-owned energy company, PTT were in talks with Anatol Feygin, Cheniere Energy's CCO.

The aim was to strengthen energy security for the remaining 15 years of the contract through 2041, he said.

The discussions also covered bringing forward delivery schedules for some LNG cargoes from 3Q26 to 2Q26, to help reduce the impact from the Middle East situation if the hostilities continue. ■

Stolt-Nielsen and NYK to control Avenir LNG

Stolt-Nielsen's subsidiary, Stolt-Nielsen Gas has entered into a share purchase agreement to sell 50% of Avenir LNG to Nippon Yusen Kabushiki Kaisha (NYK Line).

Avenir LNG was founded in 2017 and has grown into a major player in the LNG bunkering sector, operating a global fleet of LNGBVs.

With this partnership, Stolt-Nielsen and NYK Line will expand their future small-scale LNG and LNG bunkering opportunities through the joint venture. This new joint venture underscores Stolt-Nielsen and NYK Line's commitment to sustainable energy solutions for the maritime industry.

Udo Lange, Stolt-Nielsen CEO, said: "By entering into this joint venture, we are developing our long-standing partnership with NYK Line and supporting Avenir LNG's position in small-scale LNG supply and bunkering.

"NYK's experience in shipping and logistics, together with potential market opportunities arising from the continued expansion of LNG-fueled vessels, is expected to add value to Avenir LNG, its customers, and our shareholders.

"This transaction also reflects Stolt-Nielsen's commitment to supporting sustainable energy solutions across global shipping supply chains by facilitating safe and reliable access to LNG fuel.

"I would like to thank and congratulate the Stolt-Nielsen, Avenir LNG and NYK Line teams for their contributions to this important transaction," he said.

Hironobu Watanabe, NYK Line's Energy Division CEO, added: "NYK has long built a strong relationship with Stolt Nielsen in the chemical tanker business.

"With this foundation of trust and proven partnership, we are very pleased to establish a new joint venture through Avenir LNG.

"As the maritime industry accelerates its efforts toward decarbonisation, LNG and bio-LNG fuel has become more essential and practical role in supporting a sustainable energy transition.

"Through this new partnership, we are confident that Avenir LNG will be well positioned to meet the growing demands of the market and deliver enhanced value to the supply-chain.

"We will continue to develop our partnership with Stolt-Nielsen, while advancing our initiatives in LNG and bio LNG bunkering, contributing to a more sustainable future for the maritime industry," he said.

Jonathan Quinn, Avenir LNG Managing Director, commented: "We are very pleased to welcome NYK Line as a strategic partner in Avenir LNG alongside Stolt-Nielsen.

"This joint venture brings together two highly respected shipping and logistics groups with complementary strengths and a shared long-term vision for LNG as a marine fuel.

Stolt-Nielsen CEO Udo Lange

"NYK Line's global reach and operational expertise will enhance our ability to develop the business, accelerate the development of LNG bunkering solutions, and support our customers' de-carbonisation strategies as the market continues to mature," he concluded.

Completion of the transaction is expected to occur in the middle of this year, subject to customary approvals, including regulatory approvals. ■