

# U.S. chases third oil tanker near Venezuela in escalating campaign

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The U.S. Coast Guard tried Saturday to intercept an oil tanker linked to Venezuela that is now fleeing away from the Caribbean Sea, according to three U.S. officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive operation, days after President Donald Trump said he would crack down on sanctioned vessels involved in the country’s oil trade.

The tanker, called the Bella 1, was en route to pick up oil in Venezuela and was not carrying cargo, according to one of the officials and ship-tracking data, and fled northeast into the Atlantic Ocean. The tanker has been under U.S. sanctions since last year for transporting Iranian oil, which federal authorities say is sold to finance terrorism.

When U.S. forces approached the Bella 1 late Saturday, it was not flying a valid national flag, the officials said, making it a stateless vessel liable to be boarded at sea under international law.

U.S. authorities had obtained a seizure warrant from a federal magistrate judge, which would allow them to take possession of the ship, two of the officials said.

VENEZUELA, A6

# Thalidomide survivors raise concerns over proposed change to fund

ERIN ANDERSEN

The private company managing the federal government’s support program for thalidomide survivors is exploring changes that include dividing an existing medical assistance fund equally among recipients, no matter how severely they were affected by the drug.

Thalidomide, approved for prescription use in Canada in 1961 as a sedative, but prescribed to pregnant women for morning sickness, was later found to cause birth defects, including absent or stunted arms, missing legs and fingers, and deformed organs.

To Lianne Powell, who was born with one leg missing up to her hip and only one lung, the proposed option to split medical assistance funds equally, reducing the amount she can access, feels like another attempt by the government to shirk its responsibility to the Canadians who were harmed by one of the worst cases of drug negligence in the country’s history.

“They are supposed to be helping us stay in our homes,” said Ms. Powell, 64, who lives on her own in London, Ont., and walks with a crutch or uses a mobility scooter.

She has used the medical fund over the years to cover costs for housekeeping, snow removal and lawn care; to upgrade airplane seating when she travels with oxygen; and to make accessibility modifications to her home.

THALIDOMIDE, A4

[ CELEBRATION ]



HERE COMES THE SUN

Revellers gather on Sunday at Stonehenge on England’s Salisbury Plain to observe the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. The prehistoric monument aligns with the movement of the sun on the solstices – key dates in the calendar for ancient farmers. ANTHONY UPTON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

## POISONED

# How online sellers in China and India are complicating North America’s fight against fentanyl

JAMES GRIFFITHS  
KATHRYN BLAZE BAUM

The company in Moradabad, a city in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, about 150 kilometres east of New Delhi, describes itself as a “leading manufacturer of premium singing bowls,” which are used in sound therapy and religious practices.

On IndiaMART, the country’s largest business-to-business marketplace, connecting manufacturers in India with customers around the world, a company with the same name and business ID appears to offer a very different set of products: chemical precursors used in the manufacture of fentanyl and other illegal narcot-

ics. Listings promise delivery to Canada, the United States and Mexico within two to three days in “factory-sealed” packages.

The Globe and Mail investigated the availability of chemicals used in the production of fentanyl for sale on Indian and Chinese online marketplaces as part of Poisoned, a continuing series examining the opioid crisis and the impact it has had on Canada. This reporting found numerous fentanyl precursors and their analogues being sold, both openly and apparently masquerading as other products (often with a slight typo in the name or using a known alias for the chemical).

Precursors are chemicals that can be mixed to create fentanyl, and have largely replaced the finished drug in seizures by law enforcement, as production shifts

from Asia to North America. Experts interviewed agreed that what is available on public platforms is likely only a small fraction of offerings on the dark web and in encrypted chat groups.

Some of the chemicals offered for sale are subject to strict international controls, while others are criminalized or tightly regulated in Canada, but less so in India and China. As no purchases were made by The Globe, it is unclear whether roadblocks would have arisen further along the process, or if some of the alleged sellers may have been scammers.

In the past, both Ottawa and Washington have warned of fentanyl precursors making their way from India and China to North America.

FENTANYL, A8

# Spreading the cheer: For Filipino Canadians, Christmas is a holiday months in the making

MIKE HAGER VANCOUVER

By the time Christmas Day arrives, Hilda Baybay will have been celebrating the holiday in one way or another for nearly four months.

Every year, her tree goes up on Sept. 1. In October, she gives the counterfeit conifer a spooky makeover befitting the Halloween vibe of her East Vancouver neighbourhood. Then, at dawn on Nov. 1, Christmas returns.

Her daughter, Hilani Baybay Daniel, waits until after Nov. 11 to put up her tree and decorate the one-bedroom place in the city that she shares with her husband, a South Asian man who is an ardent observer of Remembrance Day.

The mother-daughter duo are among the roughly 960,000 Filipino Canadians in

the country, many of whom follow the Philippine tradition of starting Christmas celebrations in September and continuing them throughout the “ber” months of October, November and December.

The festivities crescendo with Noche Buena, on Christmas Eve, which is when they have a late-night dinner and open most of their presents. Trees are often kept up until Three Kings Day, in the new year.

Spanish colonizers pushed Christianity and Christmas on the tropical archipelago more than 300 years ago, and, nowadays, the months leading up to the big holiday are spent stocking up on gifts, beautifying neighbourhoods with festive crafts, having kids carol for cash, lighting off small fireworks, feasting with family and going to church.

Two years ago, Mariah Carey, the pop star

whose *All I Want for Christmas Is You* becomes omnipresent throughout much of North America in December, shouted out this festive phenomenon.

She told her followers in a social-media post, “Not yet!” when informed there was a massive jump in streams of her seasonal hit on Sept. 1, before cheekily saying she would allow it for her Filipino fans.

Whereas older members of the Filipino diaspora tamped down their enthusiasm for assembling adornments in order to assimilate into Canadian culture, younger generations are increasingly embracing the much-longer season enjoyed by relatives across the Pacific, according to Catholic priest Mario Marin, who moved to Edmonton as a teen in 1976 and now lives in the eastern Vancouver suburb of Abbotsford.

CHRISTMAS, A4

## CRIME

Welland, Ont., church member says leader’s standoff with police was a long time coming ■ A3

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DRAWS ON TUESDAYS AND FRIDAYS

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