

U.S. moving to take Iranian oil tanker from UK



London, August 15 (RHC)-- Gibraltar says the U.S. is trying to seize an Iranian oil tanker, which is being held in the British overseas territory, on unknown grounds, after UK media reported that the vessel's release was imminent following a set of diplomatic exchanges between Tehran and London.

"The U.S. Department of Justice has applied to seize the Grace 1 on a number of allegations which are now being considered," the Gibraltar government said in a statement. It added that the case will return to the Supreme Court of Gibraltar in the coming hours.

Washington's request — which was initially reported by Gibraltar Chronicle newspaper — came just ahead of a court decision in the British territory on whether to extend the detention of Grace 1.

On Wednesday night, The Sun had reported that Gibraltar's Chief Minister Fabian Picardo would not ask the judge to extend the supertanker's detention during the court hearing on Thursday.

Gibraltar Chronicle cited the top court's chief justice, Anthony Dudley, as saying that were it not for the US request, "the ship would have sailed." It added that the captain and three officers of the Grace 1 have been released from arrest.

A diplomatic dispute broke out between Iran and the UK on July 4, when Britain's naval forces unlawfully seized Grace 1 and its cargo of 2.1 million barrels of oil in the Strait of Gibraltar under the pretext that the

supertanker had been suspected of carrying crude to Syria in violation of the European Union's unilateral sanctions against the Arab country.

However, reports show the confiscation took place upon a call by the United States. Tehran rejected London's claim that the tanker was heading to Syria, slamming the seizure a "maritime piracy."

Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization said Tuesday that Britain was expected to soon free Grace 1, after the two sides exchanged certain documents to pave the way for the supertanker's release.

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