

Japan says it has detected apparent Chinese ship breaking North Korea sanctions

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North Korean-flagged tanker JI SONG 6 is pictured in the East China Sea in this photo taken on May 19, 2018 and released on May 29, 2018 by Japan's Ministry of Defense. (Source:Defense Ministry of Japan/Handout via REUTERS)

Tokyo: Japan on Tuesday said it had detected what appeared to be a Chinese-flagged vessel, 350 km (218 miles) off Shanghai, conducting illegal transfers to a North Korean ship. "Following a comprehensive assessment, the government of Japan strongly suspects that they conducted ship-to-ship transfers banned by UNSCR," Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a press release, referring to UN Security Council resolutions.

A Japanese P-3 maritime patrol plane detected the vessels, which lay alongside each other connected by hoses, on May 19, with one of the ships flying what seemed like a Chinese flag, it said.

China has repeatedly said it is fully enforcing UN sanctions against North Korea and it would punish any Chinese company breaking them. Japan's decision to voice its suspicion comes as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and US President Donald Trump prepared for what may be a breakthrough summit as early as next month.

Japan is urging the United States and other countries to stick to a strict imposition of UN sanctions on North Korea until it abandons the development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. In April, the UN Security Council blacklisted dozens of ships and shipping companies over oil and coal smuggling by North Korea, including five based in China. The vessels are subject to a global port ban and must be deregistered.

- Reuters