

Call to Indian government: send back the Blue Lady!

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4 December 2006 - There is still hope for the SS Blue Lady case! Today the Indian Supreme Court provisional ruled that the former ocean liner is not allowed to be dismantled at Alang shipbreaking yards. The Court has asked the Gujarat Pollution Control Board (GPCB) to explore the possibilities of sending the vessel back.

Basel obligations

The Supreme Court pointed out that the beaching of the SS Blue Lady possibly constitutes a breach of national and international law: the Basel Convention, the Environment Protection Act and a 2003 Supreme Court order. It restated that under the Basel Convention, there is an obligation cast on the State of import – India in this case - to ensure that ships are free of hazardous substances prior to import.

Illegal entry

This implies that the asbestos-laden ship Blue Lady entered Indian territorial waters illegally. The NGO Platform on Shipbreaking therefore calls on the Indian government to echo the Bangladeshi authorities' refusal of the vessel in February this year. However, the Indian Ministry of Environment falsely interprets the Basel Convention as not applying to the materials in the structure of a ship.

Asbestosis

On 30 August 2006 a special committee established by the Supreme Court published its alarming findings on shipbreaking workers suffering from asbestosis. India is a Party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and bound to key ILO guidelines that protect the human rights and health of workers. Yet none of these guidelines are currently complied with at the shipbreaking yards of Alang.

German responsibility

The NGO Platform further calls upon Germany, the exporting state, to re-call the vessel. German authorities should hold ship owner Star Cruises Ltd accountable for claiming the vessel only left the port of Bremerhaven to be re-used. Under the Basel Convention, re-usage is not a refusal ground for importing countries. Yet Germany has chosen to not act, despite a long campaign by environmental organisations to prevent the scrapping of the asbestos-laden ship.

Over 2,000 ships

In the coming years over 2,000 End of Life ships will have to be decontaminated in OECD countries before export, due to a global ban on single hull oil tankers. The NGO Platform calls for an immediate follow-up by the European Commission, consistent with Commissioner Dimas stating: 'Now is the time to act.' Shipowners should be obliged to take full responsibility for their waste by completely decontaminating their vessels before sending them to Asian shipbreaking yards.