

SOUTH ASIA QUARTERLY UPDATE

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VISION & MISSION

Vessels are recycled in facilities that ensure clean, safe, and just practices that provide workers with decent jobs. Vessels will be toxic-free and no longer cause harm to workers, local communities, or the environment at end-of-life.

To act as a catalyst for change by effectively advocating for clean, safe, and just ship recycling globally. This necessitates denouncing dirty and dangerous practices, such as the dumping of end-of-life vessels on the beaches of developing countries. Our commitment to finding sustainable global solutions is based on the respect of human and workers' rights and the principles of environmental justice, producer responsibility, 'polluter pays', and clean production.

JANUARY 2026
SAQU#44

In this quarterly publication, we inform about the shipbreaking practices in South Asia, providing an overview of accidents that took place on the beaches of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, relevant press media as well as research. We aim to raise public awareness about the many negative impacts of shipbreaking in South Asia as well as developments aimed at the protection of workers' rights and the environment.

*workers suffered an accident
on a South Asian*

shipbreaking beaches

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*workers suffered an accident
while scrapping ships on
South Asian beaches*



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ACCIDENTS

Improving safety and transparency in the shipbreaking sector is crucial to prevent accidents and protect workers' well-being. Currently, accidents are reported by the Platform based on local sources and media reports. However, as the sector suffers from a serious lack of transparency, many incidents likely go unreported, particularly in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, where authorities and industry fail to publish data. Moreover, the absence of data on occupational diseases, including cancer, further exacerbates the lack of accountability as workers are exposed to toxics unknowingly on a daily basis.

BANGLADESH

On 8 October, Habibur Rahman (31), working as a fitter man inside a beached ship, got injured when an iron plate fell on his head at S.N. Corporation (Madambibir unit).

On 7 November, Harun (60) suffered a small injury on his hand while cutting an iron plate at Mahinur Ship Recycling yard.

On 24 November, Azim Uddin (60), a cutter helper, was struck by an iron plate at Jamuna shipbreaking. He sustained critical injuries that led to his death. While the yard owners claim the worker died of illness, autopsy and the police affirms that Azim Uddin fell from height during dismantling operations. The accident occurred at one of the already 17 yards that have received a Statement of Compliance (SoC) with the Hong Kong Convention (HKC), raising concerns about the safety standards and lack of transparency supported by the International Maritime Organisation's Convention. Jamuna is owned by Layekot Ali Chowdhury, brother of Sawkat Ali Chowdhury, owner of shipbreaking yard S.N. Corporation, where a massive explosion on 7 September 2024 killed six workers and injured six more. The police said that the shipbreaking owners often try to cover up workplace accidents, and that the workers are not even allowed to bring their mobile phones. Fazlul Mintu, member of the Chattogram Trade Union Centre and coordinator at Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, demanded compensation for the victim's family, stricter enforcement of workplace safety, and added: "*When a worker is injured or killed in a facility that has secured a [so-called] green certificate, it raises questions about whether those standards are truly being followed. It also shows gaps in monitoring by authorities responsible for enforcing these standards.*".

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DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH ASIA

GENERAL DECLINE IN THE SHIPBREAKING INDUSTRY IN SOUTH ASIA

The shipbreaking industry in South Asia is experiencing a significant downturn, with a sharp decline in vessels arriving for demolition. This slowdown is largely driven by currency depreciation, weak domestic steel prices, and changing global shipping dynamics, especially the surge in global freight rates caused by disruptions to key maritime trade routes, including the ongoing war in Gaza and subsequent attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea.

In India, due to the extremely low availability of scrap vessels, yard owners have started purchasing sanctioned or “shadow fleet” vessels—ships with questionable legal and operational status. These tankers often come with extended payment terms and complex ownership structures designed to obscure the identity of their beneficial owners. Industry sources expect a further influx of sanctioned vessels into Alang in 2026. It is estimated that more than 40% of Alang’s future business could originate from sanctioned or shadow fleet vessels. At its peak, Alang employed more than 60,000 workers; today, employment has fallen to fewer than 15,000, according to trade union sources. Of the 153 plots in Alang, only about 20 are currently operational, and even these are functioning at roughly 25% capacity.

In Bangladesh, only 25 to 30 yards out of the about 150 yards in the country are operational. New regulatory requirements delayed clearances, and procedural complications are considered the reasons for a drop in activity. No Objection Certificates (NoCs) have not been issued since March 2025, effectively halting vessel imports. Moreover, the government has yet to finalise the criteria for issuing the Document of Authorization for Ship Recycling (DASR), leaving yards unable to legally import ships for scrapping.

In Pakistan, unfavourable economic conditions have discouraged ship owners from recycling vessels in the region.

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DEVELOPMENTS IN BANGLADESH

CALLS FOR AN INCREASE OF THE MINIMUM WAGE FOR SHIPBREAKING WORKERS

Shipbreaking workers have demanded a minimum wage of 36.000 taka (around 250 euros). Tapan Dutta, convener of the Shipbreaking Workers' Trade Union Forum, raised the demand at a press conference to draw the attention of the government, wage board authorities, and shipbreakers. The minimum wage of 16.000 taka (around 110 euros), already announced in 2018, for eight hours of daily work has not been implemented yet. Dutta continues saying that the yard owners force workers to work 12 hours daily while claiming compliance with the minimum wage, which he describes as a "violation of labour law". The trade unionist further mentioned five additional demands: effective labour inspections, establishment of a 50-bed hospital and workers' housing in industrial areas, mandatory appointment and ID cards, annual wage revision in line with inflation, and compulsory wage payment through banks or mobile financial services.

DEVELOPMENTS IN PAKISTAN

NEW LOCATION FOR SHIP RECYCLING IN PAKISTAN HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED

In November, during the Pakistan Maritime Week, the Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs has announced the establishment of “the first Green Ship Repair and Recycling Yard” at Port Qasim under the “Sea to Steel Integrated Maritime Industrial Complex”. The project was presented announcing the support of Chinese company Shandong Xinxu Group, designed to combine port operations with shipbuilding, ship repair, and recycling facilities. The Minister highlighted the vision of Pakistan’s Maritime Century 2047-2147, a \$100 billion blue economy plan aimed at positioning Pakistan as a leading player in the global blue economy while strengthening its maritime independence and sustainability. The minister further outlined a five-pillar strategy for the sector’s growth focused on expanding port capacity, modernising the shipping fleet, developing shipbuilding and recycling facilities, promoting green maritime technology, and investing in human resource development. *“This is not just a plan for today, but a commitment to the next hundred years of maritime excellence,”* he said. The project includes the developing of three new deep-sea ports, expanding the national shipping fleet, and building AI-enabled Maritime Industrial Complexes for shipbuilding and recycling. Yet, such an innovative vision may be undermined by a Rs12 billion investment to “modernise” the Gadani beaching yards, without any provisions to move the activities to industrial platforms that can ensure full containment.

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**INTERVIEW WITH SATISH SINHA,
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF TOXICS LINK**

Toxics Link is a NGO based in Delhi, India, and one of the 17 members of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform. The organisation emerged from the critical need to address knowledge gaps relating to toxicity and waste and their impacts on the environment and human health, particularly among vulnerable and marginalised communities. Toxics Link's work focuses on waste and chemical issues to help formulate and implement socially just, environmentally safe, and sustainable solutions. These priorities include safer and more responsible waste management and reduction practices within circular resource flows, as well as the substitution, reduction, and elimination of hazardous chemicals.

Toxics Link's work has evolved over time to address a wide range of waste streams. It began with a focus on biomedical waste and later expanded to include municipal and hazardous waste. In 2003, the organisation became a pioneer in addressing electronic waste in India. Over the years, plastic waste and other emerging waste challenges were also incorporated into its programme areas.

Satish Sinha is the Associate Director of Toxics Link, and talks to us about waste-management issues in India, including the shipbreaking industry.

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Satish, how did your journey at Toxics Link begin?

My journey at Toxics Link has been very interesting and challenging in many ways. It has been a continuous learning experience. Before joining Toxics Link, I served in the Indian Air Force for over 20 years, where I developed strong management and leadership skills while working in demanding and complex situations. After my service, I led a large relief and rehabilitation programme in Gujarat following the 2001 earthquake, which further shaped my understanding of field-level implementation and stakeholder coordination. I joined Toxics Link in 2003, at a time when the organisation was growing and needed to strengthen its internal systems. Initially, I worked on organisational development, and over the years I have grown with the organisation, leading teams and driving campaigns on waste management and chemical safety. This journey has reinforced my commitment to evidence-based advocacy and building strong institutions for environmental and public health protection.

What do you see as the main waste management challenges faced by India today?

Waste has become a major economic driver over the past two decades, with large volumes moving from the Global North to the Global South to avoid the high costs of waste management. This practice, often referred to as waste dumping, has serious environmental and human health impacts in recipient countries, highlighting the need for effective regulation of hazardous waste under the Basel Convention. Even non-hazardous waste can cause significant harm when oversight is weak. India receives substantial imports of plastic, textile, electronic, and other waste streams, driven by cheap labour, weak enforcement, and regulatory loopholes that allow traders to cut corners for profit. Government efforts to regulate or curb these imports have had positive impacts, although waste traders are constantly looking out to exploit gaps in the system.

Which type of hazardous waste is the most problematic to handle in India?

All kinds of hazardous waste can be problematic if not handled with adequate care using appropriate technology. Most hazardous wastes contain varying quantities of toxic and hazardous elements and chemicals, and there is a significant risk of their release into the environment if they are handled without adequate safeguards. Even wastes such as plastics and textiles pose varying degrees of risk during handling, treatment, and disposal.

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And when we think about the role of civil society and organisations like Toxics Link in India today? How do you see the current situation? Organisations such as Toxics Link have made significant contributions to improving the waste and chemicals management landscape in India. This has been achieved through generating credible data, raising public awareness, and engaging with multiple stakeholders to help shape regulations, standards, and guidelines. We develop models and pilot initiatives, document best practices, and conduct training and capacity-building programmes for waste generators and regulators across the country. Through sustained engagement and consultations with government, industry, academia, and communities, Toxics Link works to identify practical and sustainable solutions. Our constant effort is to drive meaningful change by strengthening compliance and improving the effectiveness of environmental laws and regulations.

Was the relationship with the government closer previously?

We have enjoyed a close working relationship with all stakeholders, and have always found enough space to provide inputs and share research findings. These have always been taken seriously by the industry, academia and policy makers. The data presented by Toxics Link has always been of interest to all stakeholders and on several occasions our reports have been quoted in the parliament, also the judiciary. We continue to provide data from the ground, identify new issues and reduce implementation challenges, however, the opportunities and scope for consultations have reduced, yet we are busy identifying policy and implementation gaps and providing solutions.

And, could you say that this has changed the approach of Toxics Link in general?

We remain clear in how we address many of these issues and continue to have our presence on the ground, collect data and inform stakeholders. Our focus stays on scientific research, the generation of credible and robust data, and the transparent presentation of evidence to all stakeholders. Our reports receive positive response both in the print and on social media space resulting in fairly good outreach. I feel that the current strategy has worked well, providing us good opportunities to operate in the existing space.

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How do you see shipbreaking integrated in the waste and toxicity issues Toxics Link works on?

Shipbreaking is an industrial activity that involves the dismantling of end-of-life vessels and the handling and disposal of large volumes of hazardous materials contained within ships. These materials are often released or discharged during the breaking process, posing significant environmental risks. In India, this represents one of the major challenges associated with the shipbreaking industry, alongside serious occupational safety and social concerns typical of a poorly regulated sector. India is the largest shipbreaking nation in the world, with over 175 yards concentrated in Alang, Gujarat. The industry primarily follows the “*beaching*” method, where ships are run aground in intertidal zones and dismantled largely on the shoreline and in shallow waters. This practice carries a high risk of contaminating coastal ecosystems and waterfronts with hazardous substances. At the same time, shipbreaking provides a valuable source of high-quality steel, which helps meet India’s steel demand and reduces dependence on primary steel produced through mining. The challenge, therefore, is to balance environmental protection with economic benefits.

Do you see it happening? Do you think there is a possibility of ship recycling in India shifting to contained platforms?

At the moment, I do not see it happening in near future, though there have been some discussions in this context and we hear of some proposal being initiated by interested parties, which are looking at improving options for India. The government is also interested in improving and scaling up this industry, thus creating more scope for secondary raw materials in India. In an increasingly competitive environment, India will need to substantially improve its infrastructure to attract and secure business, and also align with its own Maritime Vision of moving the sector to industrial platforms.

From a Toxics Link perspective, what are still the main environmental and occupational health concerns that still exist in Alang?

From the perspective of Toxics Link, several important issues need to be addressed. These include improving the handling and disposal of hazardous wastes contained in ships, mechanising processes that pose a high risk of accidents while maintaining a judicious balance between labour and machinery, and reducing the burden of hazardous waste brought into India through strengthened pre-inspection norms at the point of origin. Greater transparency in documentation and regulatory processes is also essential, along with opening the industry to third-party audits.

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In addition, accidents and incidents must be reduced through the adoption of best available technologies and processes, workers' working and living conditions—such as contracts, insurance, and wages—need to be improved, and, finally, there should be a transition towards contained industrial platforms to avoid pollution of fragile coastal ecosystems.

Do all workers have working contracts?

They do have contracts, but these can vary from individual to individual and from yard to yard. It is very diverse, and difficult to say what is a standardised contract for workers in shipbreaking yards. There is a workers' association that works to protect workers' interests and provides training and capacity-building support to improve their working conditions. It would be beneficial if the association made data and information on the status of workers and ongoing developments publicly available. Additionally, shipbreaking yards remain closed to visitors, creating a sense of operational opacity, which is a legitimate cause for concern.

Do you consider current reforms (e.g., Hong Kong Convention, national regulations) are sufficient to address persisting problems?

India has signed the Basel Convention but not the Basel Ban Amendment. Most yards claim compliance with the Hong Kong Convention. In my opinion, the HKC is not competent regarding hazardous-waste issues. These should primarily be addressed under the Basel Convention, which is specialised for waste and should take precedence in this regard. Better enforcement of the Basel Convention is hence needed, including from the states that own the ships.

What future outlook would you like to see for ship recycling in India and globally?

Within a circular economy framework that is gaining prominence, many countries will begin to value the resources that are recovered from ship recycling. The sector will continue to attract more players and will offer competition. More competition will demand process and operational efficiency as more countries will seek stake in the same pie. The space needs to be keenly watched as circularity will be a more effective policy tool across the world. I also foresee that there will be more scrutiny on waste management in such a circular approach – in that regard, the Indian shipbreaking sector still has a long way to go before being able to qualify as safe and environmentally sound.

READINGS AND INTERVIEWS

July/August 2025 - Edition of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) Magazine

The IOSH Magazine article argues that global risk reduction—especially in hazardous industries like shipbreaking—must focus on reducing harm rather than simply shifting dangerous work to countries with weaker regulations. It highlights that the dismantling of end-of-life vessels remains one of the world's most hazardous occupations, particularly in South Asian beaching yards where ships are cut apart with minimal safety protections and workers are exposed to toxic materials and frequent accidents. IOSH stresses that transferring risk to lower-cost regions without effective enforcement undermines worker safety and environmental standards, and calls for stronger global Occupational Safety and Health leadership to ensure that hazardous activities are managed where high safety standards can protect human health rather than merely relocate danger. The article reinforces the need for international cooperation, transparent supply chains, and the implementation of best practice standards so that industries like shipbreaking do not externalise risks to vulnerable workers around the world.

How can we reduce risk, not shift it around the world?

October 2025

The Swiss channel RTS published a documentary investigating India's shipbreaking industry, focusing on the Alang yards where hundreds of end-of-life cargo ships and tankers are dismantled on the beach. The report shows how vessels from around the world are sent to India to reduce costs, while workers dismantle ships in dangerous conditions, often exposed to toxic materials and serious accidents. Despite recent regulatory reforms, the documentary highlights ongoing concerns over worker safety, environmental pollution, and the ethical responsibility of global shipping companies that outsource ship disposal to South Asia.

Plongée dans le cimetière interdit des cargos du monde entier

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October 2025

A Reporters United's investigation into the illegal end-of-life sale of TRADER III – a tanker linked to companies of Greek ship owner and media magnate Vangelis Marinakis – denounces how Europe's most powerful shipping interests still allow toxic end-of-life ships to be beached on Bangladesh's tidal beaches. It also records, in the words of a senior Greek official, a policy of deliberate indifference that lets these illegal exports occur.

Vangelis Marinakis' waste tanker and profit at the expense of the lives of (Bangladeshi) others (summary in English [here](#))

December 2025

The Lawless Planet podcast with Zach Goldbaum invited Ingvild Jenssen, Executive Director of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform, and Julia Bleckner of Human Rights Watch to explore the hazardous world of shipbreaking on the beaches of India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. They discuss the human and environmental impacts of the industry, accidents and pollution, flags of convenience, and the ways ship owners circumvent international laws. In the wake of a deadly explosion in Pakistan and a risky investigation in Bangladesh, this episode asks: are real reforms finally on the horizon?

Shipbreaking: Inside the World's Most Dangerous Job

OUR REPORTS

NGO Shipbreaking Platform

Scrap steel at sea: How ship recycling can help decarbonise European steel production?(2025)

Ship Recycling in Turkey: Challenges and Future Direction (2024)

“Trading Lives for Profit: How the Shipping Industry Circumvents Regulations to Scrap Toxic Ships on Bangladesh’s Beaches” - In collaboration with Human Rights Watch (2023)

Breaking Out: Anchoring Circular Innovation for ship recycling. (2022)

The Toxic Tide - Data and figures (2022)

Contradiction in terms: European Union must align its waste ship exports with international law and green deal (2020)

Study Report on Child Labour in the Shipbreaking Sector in Bangladesh (2019)

Behind the Hypocrisy of Better Beaches (2019)

Recycling Outlook. Decommissioning of North Sea Floating Oil & Gas Units. (2019)



Since 2009, around 8221 ships were scrapped in South Asia, causing at least 480 deaths and 575 injuries. The figures on accidents are likely to be much higher. Occupational diseases are not even registered in these statistics and are not officially monitored.

WE ARE NOW CALLING FOR YOUR SUPPORT TO HELP INJURED WORKERS AND ASBESTOS VICTIMS IN BANGLADESH. CHECK OUT OUR FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN FOR MORE INFORMATION BY CLICKING [HERE](#) OR ON THE IMAGE BELOW.

FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN

HELP PROVIDING TREATMENT TO
INJURED WORKERS AND ASBESTOS VICTIMS
IN BANGLADESH



DONATE NOW





To ensure that safe and clean ship recycling becomes the norm, and not the exception, the Platform will continue to inform policy makers, financial and corporate leaders, as well as researchers and journalists. With a broad base of support both in orientation and geographically, including membership in ship owning as well as shipbreaking countries, the Platform plays an important role in promoting solutions that encompass the respect of human rights, corporate responsibility and environmental justice.

WILL YOU JOIN US?

**IF YOU SHARE OUR VISION PLEASE MAKE A DONATION
TO SUPPORT OUR WORK OR CONTACT US TO FIND OUT
HOW WE CAN WORK TOGETHER!**

**SUPPORT
OUR WORK**



ABOUT THIS REPORT

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Edited by:

Ingvild Jenssen, Nicola Mulinaris, Sara Costa, Benedetta Mantoan, Ekin Sakin, Dominik Kulczynski and Philippine Bernard

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