

Where the sun never sets

The Alang ship breakers' yards have made progress towards Hong Kong Convention compliance and there is a willingness to improve further

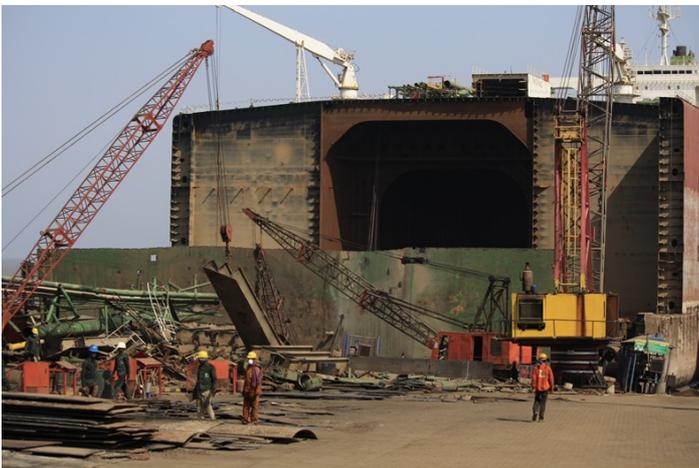
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Almost 98% of ship components are reused in India

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THERE ARE AROUND 120 ACTIVE RECYCLING YARDS AT ALANG, OF WHICH 61 HAVE ACHIEVED HONG KONG CONVENTION COMPLIANCE AND 23 ARE IN THE PROCESS OF GAINING IT.

THE tide is turning in Alang. The day is not too distant when all the ships destined for recycling in India will land up in a Hong Kong compliant yard.

The Hong Kong Convention matters for a number of important reasons, as it is only few years ago that the shipowners realised their responsibilities to ensure that ships be sent for recycling in a safer fashion and with better information about the hazardous substances they contain.

The industry's transitional measures represent pragmatic guidelines for responsible behaviour.

It is no small task living up to the guidelines set up by the regulations, but Alang has made progress and there is a willingness to improve further.

At present, there are around 120 active recycling yards dismantling end-of-life ships to extract various types of scrap and equipment for recycling, out of which 61 have achieved Hong Kong Convention compliance and 23 are in the process of gaining it.

Alang is the world's largest ship recycling destination, where old and decommissioned ships line the 10 km stretch along the coast of the Arabian sea.

What makes the small town interesting is the rows of shops dotting the roadside as you approach. What they sell is more intriguing — starting with furniture and refrigerators to wash basins and toilet fittings, from used crockery to oil pumps and marine engines — every item obtained from end-of-life vessels.

In South Asia there are large numbers of rerolling mills making steel products from ship scrap, such as reinforcing bars for the construction industry, by heating and reshaping semi-finished steel billets, or plates from recycled ships.

In the rerolling process the steel does not reach its melting point and, compared to making new steel, the process requires lower temperatures.

For appropriate applications rerolled steel products offer a good economic alternatives.

Gujarat Maritime Board head Sudhir Chadda urges the international shipping industry to physically inspect the yards in Alang before passing any judgement on the industry.

“In the Indian subcontinent, 98% of ship components get reused, which really is recycling and not scrapping,” Capt Chadda said.

“The sun never sets in Alang, and this is why it is the most preferred location for ship recycling.”