

Dozens of nations sign treaty on shipbreaking

AFP, Hong Kong

Dozens of nations signed a new treaty yesterday to make ship recycling safer, but activists called it a step backwards for the environment and the labourers who carry out the dangerous work.

The UN's International Maritime Organisation (IMO) convention is the first-ever such agreement on shipbreaking, which often exposes workers to asbestos, mercury and other hazardous substances.

The deal requires shipowners to provide an inventory of hazardous materials aboard a ship before it is sent for recycling - work that is mostly carried out in China, Turkey and south Asia, often by unskilled migrants.

But activists say it fails to end the controversial practice of "beaching" when ships are dumped at high tide and then drift to beaches to be taken apart - a practice 107 environmental and rights groups have urged the IMO to ban.

"The new convention on ship recycling adopted today won't stop a single toxic ship from being broken on the beach of a developing country," said Ingvild Jenssen, director of NGO Platform on Shipbreaking, an umbrella group of non-governmental organisations.

"It legitimises the infamous breaking yards of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and actually rewards these exploitative operations while punishing those companies that have invested in safer and cleaner methods."

Much of the shipbreaking done in developing countries takes place on soft sand beaches, where access for heavy lifting equipment and emergency vehicles is difficult or impossible.

Workers, many of them children, face a high rate of accidents, including the loss of life and limb.

But the IMO defended the agreement without a ban on beaching and proclaimed the Hong Kong conference a success.

Mini bomb factory

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son and younger brother Chhotu, lived in the house till April 1. He moved his family from here on the pretext of sending them to village home so they did not have to suffer from water crisis."

"Only Chhotu stayed, and his brother would visit him from time to time," he continued. "Mizan appeared to be a punctual office-goer. He would go out by 8:00am and return by 5:00pm every day."

Razia Begum, who lives next door, said, "We often saw Mizan and the youth, but never a woman."

Talking to The Daily Star at DMCH, Sharmin said she knew all along that her husband was involved in JMB, and that the outfit was paying for the running of their family.

She said her husband taught her how to charge grenades and shoot a pistol.

Asked about the bombs, hand-made grenades and the pistol recovered from their

cess after 66 member states lined up to sign the treaty -- including Australia, Brazil, China and South Africa.

IMO spokesman Lee Adamson said the member states had to deal with reality in an important multi-million dollar industry.

There is nothing that can force a sovereign state to become party to an international convention should it consider it not in its interests to do so," he told AFP.

He said the treaty, which must now be ratified by individual member states, was "a tremendous step forward in terms of health and safety for workers in the industry and for protection of the environment from end-of-life ships -- it will set standards where none previously existed."

The IMO estimates that between 1990 and 2006, more than 10,000 ships that weighed over 500 gross tons were recycled worldwide.

Breakers pay ship owners by the ton and make their money from re-selling the recovered materials. According to the NGO Platform on Shipbreaking, 80 percent of recycling is done by ill-protected workers on beaches in poor nations.

Yards in less well-regulated parts of the world can pay much more to break up the ships, as they pay lower wages and have less rigorous health and safety laws.

"A ship owner will get more than 10 times the price by selling to a yard in Bangladesh than to a yard in the European Union," where regulations are much stricter, said Jenssen.

Presently, ship owners can expect to earn around 300 dollars per ton by selling to a South Asian shipbreaker, she said, down from around 700 dollars, as prices for raw materials have tumbled because of the global economic slowdown.

Beaches provide a poor environment to contain the pollutants released when ships are broken apart, said NGO Platform spokeswoman Helen Perrier.

Bhola power plant starts operation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The 34.5MW gas-based power plant of Venture Energy Resources at Purbo Charkhali Kheyaghat near Bhola town started trial generation yesterday afternoon.

On the first day the plant produced and supplied 4MW power to the Bhola 33KV substation.

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Tax net

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"If the political parties are brought under the tax net, not only will the national revenue increase but transparency will also be ensured and respect towards democracy would be established," he said.

"My husband told me that it's better to commit suicide than to surrender," she said adding, "I tried to commit suicide, along with my two kids. When I detonated the grenade, my daughter Tora was on my lap and my son Naim was also next to me. The grenade exploded in my right hand."

"I didn't throw it at the Rab men, the door was closed."

She said her husband left their belongings in previous residences thrice as they changed dwellings six times during their short stay in the capital.

Before their arrest on Thursday night, they had not faced any trouble, she added.

"Mizan is a son of a poor family and his father is deceased. I never met any of his family," Sharmin said.

Meanwhile, Rab intelligence sources said Mizan's estranged second wife Mariam Akther alias Mukti, daughter of Abdul Majid of Dighi Dampara under Shabiganj upazila in Bogra, left Mizan because she did not have an amiable relationship with his first wife Sharmin.

Mizan also married Mukti by hiding to his first marriage and his JMB connection," a senior official of Rab intelligence wing said adding, "Mukti's father took his daughter back from Mizan's residence."

Rab officials also said Mizan was maintaining several houses simultaneously in the capital.

Confession

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in arranging transport and equipment for the 10 truck-loads of firearms and ammunition hauled at Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Ltd Company (CUFL) jetty in the early hours of April 2, 2004.

He named a few former high officials of NSI and the then men in government as well as some foreigners, sources said.

The former NSI director was produced before the court for recording his confessional statement yesterday afternoon after his six-day remand ended Thursday.

He had been placed on remand for three days on May 4 as well. He was arrested at a house on Green Road in the capital on May 3.

His arrest was made after arrested NSI Field Officer Akbar Hossain Khan in a confessional statement on May 2 evening mentioned that Sahab had links to the sensational case.

However, CUFL President Zakir Hossain claimed that the BCL men attacked on ICS activists without any provocation and condition of Suhrawardy Hall President Mansur Alam Mazumder is critical.

Police raided Abdur Rab Hall and recovered some sticks and lethal weapons after the clash. Police also picked up ICS activist Masud Alam

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DHAKA SATURDAY MAY 16, 2009

Lanka vows

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was blocking a two-billion-dollar International Monetary Fund bailout package for Sri Lanka.

Tens of thousands of Tamil civilians are believed to be trapped inside a tiny patch of jungle on the northeast coast still held by the rebels.

Hundreds have been reported killed in indiscriminate shelling over the past week, adding to the thousands left dead since the rebels were pushed into a corner at the start of the year.

Sri Lankan government spokesman Anusha Palipita said the war against the remaining rebels would be over by Sunday morning.

"The president (Mahinda Rajapakse) assured that within the next 48 hours the thousands of Tamil civilians will be freed from the clutches of the Tamil Tigers," Palipita said. "All territory will be freed from Tiger control."

"We are closing in from all directions," military spokesman Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara added.

The pro-rebel Tamilnet.com said the rebel zone was being heavily shelled, with close-quarter battles also raging.

State media showed footage of fires sweeping through the tropical beach and lagoon battle zone, and said the guerrillas appeared to be retreating and destroying ammunition stockpiles.

Sri Lanka's ITN channel said some civilians were managing to escape. A fleeing Tamil woman told the channel that "there are people dead everywhere, on the streets and everywhere."

The government maintains that the Tigers are using civilians as human shields and they need to be rescued. Any civilian deaths inside Tiger territory have been blamed on the rebels.

The UN's human rights chief Navi Pillay, however, has said both sides may be guilty of war crimes.

The ICRC, the only aid organisation that the government allows to work in the conflict zone, said the situation was disastrous.

"Our staff are witnessing an unimaginable humanitarian

catastrophe," ICRC director of operations Pierre Krahnenbuhl said in Geneva, adding Red Cross staff had been unable to bring in food and pull out civilians for the past three days because of fierce fighting.

The UN has said as many as 50,000 people may be trapped -- huddled under plastic sheeting, in shallow dug-outs and with little or no food, water or medical facilities.

A top UN envoy, the secretary general's chief of staff Vijay Nambiar, was meanwhile due on the island on Saturday "to help resolve the humanitarian situation," officials in New York said.

Prior peace missions by top diplomats have ended in failure, and on Thursday the Sri Lankan government -- which finally has the upper hand against the LTTE after more than three decades -- repeated it would not cave in to pressure.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said this meant it was "not an appropriate time" to consider a massive IMF bailout loan for the island. Sri Lanka's central bank, however, brushed off the threat.

In Britain, junior foreign minister Bill Rammell called for a war crimes probe -- something already demanded by leading human rights groups.

"The UN's estimate, if it is accurate, of over 6,500 civilian deaths since January is truly shocking and appalling," he said, stressing a need for a probe "to determine whether war crimes have been committed."

Shootout

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Barisal.

The latest incidents of crossfire occurred although Local Government and Rural Development Minister Syed Ashraful Islam on May 5 said that the government would not allow any more extrajudicial killing in the name of crossfire'.

Rab sources said they started raiding vehicles in Khilgaon, Kamalapur and Sabujbagh areas yesterday night following a tip-off that terrorists might assemble there to commit crime.

Sources said a microbus tried to pass near Khilgaon flyover violating signal while checking was going on there at about 1:30am. Rab members then chased the microbus and the criminals opened fire from inside the motor vehicle.

Rab retaliated the fire resulting in a gunfight that lasted for 10-15 minutes and killed both the criminals.

The Rab team also recovered three revolvers and nine bullets from the microbus.

A Rab press release said the deceased were wanted in a number of cases including those of murder and extortion.

Locals, however, claimed that three persons including the two deceased were arrested from Mirpur-2 in the afternoon of May 13.

Meanwhile, a mugger was shot during a gunfight with Rab in the city's Banani last night.

Injured mugger Mokbul was admitted to a local hospital while another mugger Jahangir was arrested with a revolver.

Rab officials said one of their patrol teams chased a gang of muggers while they were snatching valuables from a pedestrian at Kakoli-Banani around 10:30pm.

At one stage, the gang opened fire on Rab men who also retaliated the fire triggering the gun battle, Rab said.

They said district convening committees will be assigned to reorganise the party from union level by holding council. Later, the party will hold central council after forming committees at district level.

AI director

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difficult to see how it can handle the events of the 1971 war which are a hundred times more complicated and at this point the evidence is much more questionable," he observes.

Sam Zarifi was speaking in an interview with The Daily Star last week during his maiden visit to Bangladesh to assess the work of the new government.

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Indigenous

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conference yesterday at the Young Women's Christian Association auditorium.

"The adivasi people have become the minorities in the hilly areas," said journalist Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul at the conference.

Besides, many of them migrated to other places in the country losing their land since the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Land Commission could not begin its activities.

"Bangalee people have their roots in adivasi people," said Prof Mejbah Kamal of Dhaka University.

Bangladesh Adivasi Forum also made a seven-point demand.

They are: constitutional recognition of the indigenous people, ensuring adivasi people's right to their land, full implementation of the CHT peace accord, ensuring adivasi representation in every development project, increasing the quota for adivasi people in educational institutions and during employment, exemplary punishment for human rights violators and formulation of development plan for ultra-poor adivasi people.

Fukuda said more meetings were needed to examine the technical process for manufacturers to ready themselves to go into mass production, which will "require several weeks."

The WHO announced it would shorten its world assembly, scheduled to start on Monday in Geneva, from nine to four days because of the outbreak.

According to WHO figures the number of laboratory-confirmed swine flu cases has increased from 6,497 in 33 countries on Thursday. New countries are being infected nearly everyday.

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Production of vaccines against the new virus could disrupt the production of seasonal flu vaccines, he added.

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