Tides begin to turn in ship recycling industry in Alang, India

Alang, a small town situated in the state of Gujarat on the west coast of India is considered to be the global capital of the ship recycling industry. In 2016, a total of 9.3 million tonnes of LDT of ships was recycled globally and just above a third of that was recycled in India. This trend has continued through 2017 as well. At present, there are about 120 active recycling yards dismantling end-of-life ships to extract various types of scraps and equipment for recycling and reusing. There were times when not many yards were considered operating in a safe and environmentally sound manner. However, the ground reality is now changing rapidly. Almost half of the active yards in Alang are now operating (or are in the process of operating) under the guidelines of the Hong Kong Convention for the Safe & Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships (HKC), having acquired Statements of Compliance (SOC) from reputed classification societies such as Class NK, RINA and IR Class. This shows the commitment of the Indian yards towards safe and environmentally friendly ship recycling.

The recycling process under HKC begins with the preparation of an Inventory of Hazardous Materials (IHM) of a ship as per IMO MEPC.269(68) followed by the preparation of a Ship Recycling Plan (SRP) as per IMO MEPC.196(62), which is specific to each ship. The SRP is prepared by referring to IHM and by evaluating the adequacy of the Ship Recycling Facility Plan (SRFP) to recycle a given type of ship as per IMO MEPC.210(63). During the recycling process, proper supervision to ensure safe and environmentally sound ship recycling is required. Besides following the guidelines laid down in the HKC, the newly certified yards in India are now confronted with a bigger challenge, which is, to maintain the improved standards achieved for certification. This challenge can be addressed by continuous development and training of the workforce at the HKC certified recycling yards.

We, at GMS believe in collective responsibility of stakeholders involved in the ship recycling industry to address such challenges. Therefore, we have developed a one-of-a-kind ‘train-the-trainer’ program in collaboration with the Indian Register of Shipping (IR Class) to train the safety officers of various recycling yards in Alang. With this program, we aim to reach out to thousands of workers working at yards in India as each safety officer can effectively train hundreds of workers after getting trained by the experienced surveyors leading our training program. Every month, we aim to provide worker training on a different topic. So far, we have dealt with topics such as confined space entry,
working at height, fire prevention & protection and first-aid.

In order to assist more yards in Alang towards becoming HKC-compliant, we have also been offering our services to the interested yards to improve their standards. Such collaboration starts with the conclusion of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between us and the interested recycling yard. This initiative of ours is in the best interest of all the stakeholders in the ship recycling industry and it assists in the development of the recycling yards in Alang towards full compliance with international regulatory regimes such as the HKC. Our aim is to create a paradigm shift of the ship recycling industry in India towards international regulatory compliance.

In order to support safe and environmentally friendly ship recycling, we have also developed a 'Responsible Ship Recycling Program' (RSRP) which caters to the needs of ship owners interested in green recycling while also, serves the requirements of stakeholders' CSR programs. Under this initiative, we engage with HKC-compliant yards for the recycling of end-of-life ships, monitor the entire process and provide detailed reports and a completion statement to the ship owner. We follow the guidelines laid down within the HKC, which also require an Inventory of Hazardous Material (IHM) of ships to be prepared before commencing recycling operations. The IHM for ships contracted for recycling under our RSRP is also produced by our GMS Green Team comprised of class-approved Hazmat Experts. In a first in the industry, for every ship recycled under RSRP, we also provide an estimation of the carbon dioxide emissions released during the recycling process.

The importance of developing R&D activities in an effort to improve an industry cannot be ignored. However, not many are willing to invest into research activities, especially in the ship recycling sector. Our commitment to develop and improve the global ship recycling industry has led us to collaborate with one of India's premier university, IIT Gandhinagar to develop Green Recycling Technologies. We are currently sponsoring a 1-year research project at a number of recycling yards in Alang for selected M.Tech. students. The research project aims at developing a safe and environmentally friendly paint removal technology. The research under this initiative has just been launched and supervised by Dr. Anand, Lead Coordinator of our Green Team, based in Bhavnagar, Alang.

It is important that several initiatives focusing at different aspects of the industry are undertaken to overcome the challenges faced by the industry. The initiatives towards the safe and environmentally sound ship recycling must focus on all aspects of the recycling process, i.e. preparation of ships for recycling, development of recycling yards, recycling operations and research and development of new techniques. At the same time, it is very important to appreciate and support the latest developments in the infrastructure of yards in India, in an effort to achieve the required green recycling capacity. Moreover, it is imperative to create awareness within the maritime industry regarding the availability of yards capable of recycling ships and offshore assets in accordance with the upcoming international regulations.