

## Bangladesh recycling on notice

A HIGH court ruling to close Bangladesh's shipbreaking yards for environmental breaches has been branded "a very unfortunate decision that will lead to the loss of thousands of jobs."

Robert Evans, a British member of the European Parliament (MEP) and prominent recycling campaigner, told Fairplay that shutting down the country's 36 shipyards would be "highly premature" as it would take six months to two years – let alone two weeks – for the yards to clean up their acts and sort out their problems.

The court gave the yards two weeks, or until 1 April, to get environmental clearance in lieu of closure.

The court ruling was made after a petition by the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) that the yards operate illegally as they handle toxic ships on the Greenpeace blacklist and scrap vessels that have not been pre-cleaned of hazardous materials.

BELA's Rizwana Hasan said the ruling was long overdue. "There are ways to import and recycle steel without having to accept the gross pollution of our fragile coastal zone, nor the exploitation and extremely dangerous working conditions that have killed so many of our young men," she said.

"The problem the Bangladesh Ship Breakers Association (BSBA) has got is they don't know what documents the court is referring to. The court was approached by a group of environmentalists and shipbreaking platforms who are trying to exploit loopholes in the law," said **Anil Sharma**, president and CEO of **GMS**, which buys and sells a third of the world's scrapped ships.

"This is a very important industry and a major provider of steel and jobs in Bangladesh. To say shipbreaking is suddenly illegal is both insane and impossible as recycling deals are still being struck, ships are being delivered for recycling while others are in the middle of being scrapped," **Sharma** told Fairplay. Shipbroker Harry Malandriotis, managing director of London-based Headway which buys and sells recycled vessels, told Fairplay: "If the court is saying no ships with hazardous materials on board can enter the country, then it is virtually banning all end-of-life ships from being scrapped, as they all have some bad or hazardous materials on board."

An estimated 200,000 people in this densely-populated delta nation work directly or indirectly in the industry and an estimated 100 ocean-going vessels and tankers a year are dismantled on its 20km of recycling beaches. That figure is likely to double, or possibly treble, as recession-hit owners discard, instead of preserving, older vessels.

Sharma recently forecast that 1,000-plus ships-a-year would be broken up in 2009-2010. MEP Robert Evans said the Chittagong-based owners and workers didn't really understand the environmental laws. "We need to raise EU funds to educate these people in health and safety issues so they understand the rules and supply them with personal protective gear and first aid kits – a process that will take six months to two years, not two weeks," he said. At time of press, the BSBA won a three week stay from the High Court to appeal its ruling.