Fate of toxic waste controversy vessel under dispute

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- by Hal Brown
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Greenpeace activists blockade the Probo Koala in Paldiski Port, Estonia, Tuesday, September 26, 2006. AP / Christian Aslund / Greenpeace

US cash buyer GMS denies Gulf Nash has been sold for scrap

COMBINED bulk and oil carrier Gulf Jash, which achieved notoriety in 2006 after becoming embroiled in an international storm over the dumping of toxic waste off West Africa, is once again stirring up controversy amid conflicting reports over its sale for demolition and its continuation as a trading vessel.

Paris-based human rights group Robin des Bois said over the weekend that Bangladesh’s Ministry of Environment had decided to deny entry to the 1986-built, 48,977 dwt Gulf Jash, formerly Probo Koala, which was on its way to be scrapped at a Chittagong yard.

Bangladesh turned the ship away due to fears that toxic residue may still be on board, according to Robin des Bois.

The French lobby group added that the vessel had been sold to a Chittagong demolition yard with two sisterships, Gulf Ahmad (ex-Probo Bison) and Gulf Shangra (ex-Probo Panda).

However, US cash buyer GMS, which Robin des Bois linked to the Gulf Jash demolition deal, has firmly denied that the vessel was sold for scrap, and claimed it is still trading.

"The vessel has not been sold for demolition, it is going there [to Bangladesh] commercially to discharge a cargo of cement clinker, as simple as that," GMS employee Philip Bush told Lloyd’s List from Dubai.

The vessel had just left Vietnam with its cargo bound for Bangladesh, he said.

Lloyd’s List Intelligence vessel movements database Apex confirmed that the vessel was last seen at Hongay port, Vietnam.

Mr Bush said he did not know what will happen to the vessel after it has discharged its cargo in Bangladesh.

Despite GMS’ protestations otherwise, Robin des Bois president Jacky Bonnemain remains adamant that the vessel had been sold to Bangladeshi breakers for $528 per Idt, about $7.7m, along with the two sisterships for the same price.

It was quite possible that the vessel was on its way to Bangladesh with a cargo, he said, but demolition would follow unloading of the cargo.

"When GMS said the vessel will unload concrete clinker in Chittagong, yes it is not unrealistic, but we are sure that the plan is to destroy [the ship] in Chittagong,"

"Nothing could be further from the truth," said Mr Bush. "They’ve got their drum to bang but it’s sad that they have to make such incorrect statements. It’s a mountain out of a molehill."

The Probo Koala was sold by Greek shipowner Prime Marine Management to UAE-based Gulf Navigation in December 2006 and was subsequently renamed Gulf Jash.

In 2006, the vessel was chartered by Trafigura for loading and unloading gasoline and related cargoes and, on calling at the Ivory Coast port of Abidjan, was accused of illegally dumping slops.

Trafigura maintained it was local agent Compagnie Tommy that dumped the slops without its knowledge.

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