Outlawed ‘Asia Union’ may continue to trade

Chinese owners of the panamax bulk carrier Asia Union, which has been refused entry to Bangladesh for scrapping, may trade the ship again, it is being suggested.

The 70,900-dwt vessel (built 1982) has been anchored off Chittagong but was said to have left Bangladeshi territorial waters at the request of the Department of Environment.

Environmentalists claim it contains hazardous substances including asbestos, polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs) and chemical residues. The latter seems questionable in any quantity given it is a bulker and not a tanker.

Anil Sharma, boss of ship recycling cash buyer Global Marketing Systems (GMS), says ship was sold to “principals of GMS” but it was on a delivered basis and the sellers have been unable to secure a notice of readiness because of the government decision.

"Over the weekend they were telling us they may even trade the ship," said Sharma of the vessel’s Chinese owners, listed in Equasis as Asia Union Shipping of Hong Kong.

"I am not losing a penny on this because it isn’t my ship, it is a delivered vessel," said Sharma.

He questioned why the bulker had been targeted, indicating again that it may be industry insiders stirring up unjustified trouble (see story left).

A broker commented: "The ship has been singled out but there doesn’t seem to be a logical reason why, unless people know something we don’t."

He questioned, however, whether GMS could detach itself contractually from the Asia Union.

"We are not sure of its next port of call," Captain Nazmul Alam, deputy conservator of Chittagong port, told the BBC.

It is understood that no official inspection of the Asia Union was made off Bangladesh to determine what it contained.

Toxic Watch Alliance, which describes itself as a research and advocacy group, sent a letter dated 30 September 2011 to the Indian government drawing its attention to the bulker.

By Geoff Garfield London

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