India Lets in Exxon Valdez if Toxic Disposal Paid

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's Supreme Court has allowed the Exxon Valdez, which caused one of the worst U.S. oil spills, to be dismantled in the country but required the owner to pay for disposal of any toxic materials found on the ship.

The 26-year-old ship, now known as the Oriental Nicety, entered Indian waters in May to be broken down for valuable parts. But it was denied permission to anchor near Alang, the hub of India's shipbreaking industry, while the court examined an environmental activist's petition that said the vessel contained toxic substances.

Priya Blue Industries will abide by the ruling on the disposal of contaminated material, said Sanjay Mehta, director of the ship dismantling company based in Gujarat state.

Activist Gopal Krishna, who had petitioned the court, said he felt let down by Monday's decision.

"It's disappointing that the toxic-laden vessel has been given entry into Indian waters. The ship poses a grave environmental threat because a variety of hazardous materials are on board," Krishna said.

The court said Gujarat maritime authorities had certified that the ship did not contain any hazardous substances.

On March 24, 1989, the Exxon Valdez tanker dashed against rocks and split open in Alaska's ecologically sensitive Prince William Sound. Millions of gallons of crude oil spilled, coating the shoreline, killing hundreds of thousands of birds, causing incalculable environmental damage and demolishing the area's fishing industry.

Its ownership and name have been changed repeatedly in an apparent effort to keep using the ship while distancing it from the disaster. It was converted to an ore carrier a decade ago and suffered more damage in a collision in the South China Sea in 2010.

The current owner is Best Oasis, a Hong Kong-based subsidiary of Priya Blue that buys old ships solely to dismantle them, reuse salvageable material and discard the rest.

India has one of the world's largest industries for dismantling ships. However, environment activists say shipbreaking companies do not follow sufficient precautions, exposing workers and the environment to toxic materials.

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