

The Daily Star

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Monday, January 11, 2010 10:49 PM GMT+06:00

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Published On: 2010-01-01

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Ship-breaker ignored explosive warning

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Rahim Steel and Ship-breaking Yard violated the warning of the Department of Explosives while scrapping oil tanker MT AGATE in Sitakunda on Saturday, which caused an explosion killing six workers and injuring many others.

The Department of Explosives had issued a certificate, warning that some tanks of the ship were "not free from dangerous petroleum vapour" and not safe for human entry and heat-generating work.

Rahim Steel's dismantling work was also a violation of a High Court order.

"Cleaning [petroleum and flammable substances off a tanker before dismantling it] costs money. Shipyard owners do not want to spend that amount," said Khairul Bashar, chief inspector of the Department of Explosives, Dhaka.

The steel company's Manager Abdus Sattar Selim, however, claimed after the accident that they had cleaned the ship before dismantling.

On June 11, the High Court directed authorities to shut down all shipyards that do not have environmental clearance certificate. It also asked ship-breaking companies to clean toxic ships before bringing them into Bangladesh territory.

Later, following an appeal from the shipyard owners' association the Supreme Court stayed the High Court order on shutting down shipyards.

The apex court upheld the High Court directive for cleaning ships before dismantling them.

The Department of Explosives gave two certificates for MT AGATE, saying six tanks of the vessel were "not free from dangerous petroleum vapour" and not safe for human entry and heat-generating work.

Diamond Steel Products Co (Pvt) Ltd bought the ship from Bestrank Pte Ltd of Singapore and JF (Bangladesh) Ltd requested the Department of Explosives to test it.

The first certificate was issued on October 10 when the tanker was at the outer anchorage and the second one on October 19 when the ship arrived at Madambibirhat in Sitakunda.

The first certificate mentioned that all tanks and rooms on the ship should be cleaned, washed, freed from gas and tested by the Department of Explosives before

scrapping.

The second certificate, however, omitted the warning, just saying the six tanks are not safe for human entry.

Nazrul Islam, one of the injured workers undergoing treatment at the Burn Unit of Dhaka Medical College and Hospital, yesterday told The Daily Star, "I do not know the name of the tank that exploded. The operator was cutting the ship and suddenly I heard an explosion and found fire around me."