

Myanmar crew mutinies for pay, better facilities

African crew who were former hostages of Somali pirates, live on handouts in Colombo port

By Leon Berenger

A group of foreign sailors staged a mutiny onboard their vessel earlier this week, after the owning company had defaulted in the payment of wages and failed to address other issues such as basic facilities and safety measures onboard.

The 14 sailors from Myanmar, part of a 26-member crew on the Panama-flagged MV Goti Pride staged a lightning strike onboard the vessel, demanding full payment of back wages, if they are to call off their action, General Secretary- National Union of Seafarers Sri Lanka (NUSS), Palitha Atukorale said. He said that the South Indian owned company Goti Coast to Coast had a questionable reputation with regard to wages of the crew and other welfare issues.



Company Representative Kannath Vishvakumar (L) and Gen. Secretary- NUSS, Palitha Atukorale on signing the Agreement

“This is not the first time that we had received complaints from the crew of this vessel that sails between Colombo and Male on a regular basis”, Mr. Atukorale said.

He said the crew had resumed operations on the ship on Wednesday this week, after an agreement was signed between the NUSS on behalf of the crew and Kannath Vishvakumar, a representative of the company, who was rushed to Colombo from Chennai.

Mr. Vishvakumar told the Sunday Times that the company had agreed to promptly settle all dues, and that he would also look into the safety issues raised by the crew.

The remainder of the crew, including the captain, are Indian, and they have no issue, he said. The Chief Mate of the vessel Win-ko-ko Zau told the Sunday Times that the welfare benefits on the vessel was near zero, where even fresh water was scarce.



Members of the crew at the NUSS office

“Apart from the wages, time and again we even informed the company of the shortages related to the safety issues onboard the vessel, but they fell on deaf ears. That is why we decided to mutiny on reaching Colombo Port,” Mr. Zau said.

Meanwhile, in a related development, a group of eight African fishermen who have been stranded at the Colombo Port since February this year, are now forced to live on handouts inside the harbour, maritime officials said.

The group- six from Kenya and two from Mozambique, is refusing to leave until they receive their due wages, they said. Their issue is currently before court, after the boat owner based in Taiwan had directed the agent representative in Colombo to auction the vessel and settle the wages of the crew.

The Africans were part of a 23-member crew on the Yu Fa 227 that was hijacked on May 7 last year by Somali pirates, and held captive for some nine months before they were released. They later landed at the Colombo Port in the early hours of February 2.

The remaining crew- mixed bag of fishermen from the Philippines, China and Indonesia, have since returned to their respective countries.