

# **HET ONGELUKSSCHIP COSTA CONCORDIA WORDT VERSCHROOT**



Italy's ill-fated **Costa Concordia** cruise ship floated for the first time Monday since it crashed in 2012, its rust-colored hull emerging from the waves off the Tuscan island of Giglio as an unprecedented salvage operation began. "The ship is floating and is well balanced. We're extremely pleased so far," Franco Porcellacchia, the chief engineer of the project, told reporters as the wrecked vessel — the length of three football fields — inched upwards. The 114,500-ton vessel rose around two meters (over six feet) off the artificial platform on which it has rested since it was righted in September. It was then towed slightly away from the coastline for the re-floating to continue.

Children in swimming costumes eating ice-cream pointed from the shore as water cascaded spectacularly out of the tanks attached to the ship like giant armbands to float the wreck. Divers who had worked to prepare the operation through the night could be seen returning to port on a dinghy, cheering.

Media crews from around the world crowded on to the port to watch the resurrection of the luxury liner, which sank after hitting rocks on Jan. 13, 2012 in a tragedy which left 32 people dead. South African salvage master Nick Sloane, dressed in his trademark blue jeans, had boarded the ship at dawn, telling journalists he was "nervous" about this delicate stage of the operation, which could see the battered ship break up. "Today we'll see whether our calculations were correct," the sandy-haired mariner said, before heading to oversee the operation from a control room on board the Costa Concordia itself.

The liner — twice as big as the Titanic — will be refloated over a six-to-seven day period and then be towed away for scrapping to a port in Genoa in northern Italy, where it is expected to arrive later this month. Michael Thamm, chief executive of ship owner Costa Crociere, told journalists the project had cost over 1.0 billion euros (\$1.36 billion) so far, which did not cover the refloating process, towing the liner to Genoa or the price of scrapping the ship. "I believe we will end up in the region of 1.5 billion euros when all's done," he said. Air slowly pumped into 30 tanks or "sponsons" attached

to both sides of the 290-meter Concordia expelled the water inside to raise the ship. Once it has been towed about 30 meters from the shore it will be moored using anchors and cables.

Thirty-six steel cables and 56 chains will hold the sponsons in place. "The risks are that the ship could bend as it is raised, or the chains underneath it could snap," Sloane told AFP before the operation. "There will be 42 people on board during the first manoeuvre. If disaster strikes we will evacuate through emergency escapes on the bow and stern," he said. If all goes well, all the sponsons would be lowered into position on Tuesday and Wednesday. "That will be the point of no-return," senior engineer Franco Porcellacchia told reporters on the island on the eve of the operation.

The main refloating operation is set to take place between Thursday and Saturday, when air will be pumped into the tanks to raise the ship and the emerging decks will be cleared of any debris and checked for structural damage. Final checks will then be carried out before the Concordia is dragged off on its final Mediterranean journey. **Source : Arabnews**