

Pirates likely cause of missing petrol tanker, says maritime authority
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The missing of Malaysian-registered tanker, MT Orkim Harmony, laden with 6,000 metric tonnes of RON95 petrol worth RM21million is likely a case of piracy.

Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) deputy director-general Vice-Admiral Maritime Datuk Ahmad Puzi Ab Kahar said no emergency call was received from the tanker and there was no sign that it had met with an accident since it went missing at 8.57pm last Thursday.

He also refuted the possibility that the tanker was hijacked and the crew had been held hostage as no ransom demands had been made as at 3.30pm today.

"If the tanker leaked, the crew members should have managed to make an emergency call. If it capsized or met with an accident, there must be some oil spills

"However, there are no such signs. So, the highest possibility right now is that the tanker was robbed by pirates," he told a press conference on the search and rescue (SAR) operation for the tanker in Putrajaya today.

MT Orkim Harmony was sailing from Malacca to Kuantan when it went missing.

On board the tanker were 22 crewmen comprising 16 Malaysians, five Indonesians and a Myanmar.

Ahmad Puzi said MT Orkim Harmony belonged to Magna Meridian Sdn Bhd and the RON95 petrol belonged to Petronas.

He said based on the modus operandi of previous earlier maritime robbery cases, the oil would be transferred to another tanker at sea and the crewmen would be released to steered the tanker to the nearest port.

However, he said it was too risky for the RON95 petrol carried by MT Orkim Harmony to be transferred to another vessel as it was highly flammable.

"We believe that the robbers are still looking for the logistics to transfer the oil to their client," Ahmad Puzi said, adding that the tanker's fuel could last 22 days.

Ahmad Puzi said the tanker was equipped with various communication tools and positioning system, but somehow, it had remained undetectable so far.

The massive SAR operation for the tanker involved 10 vessels, three boats and an aircraft belonging to MMEA and the Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) with 1,500 personnel covering a search area of 50,000 sq km.

"If the weather is good and the tanker sails at consistent speed heading north, it is

expected to reach the waters of Vietnam, if it heads east, it will be on Sabah waters.

"If it makes a right turn before reaching the waters of Sarawak, it will head to Pontianak (Kalimantan) or further down to Tanjung Priok near Jakarta."

Ahmad Puzi did not dismiss the possibility that the tanker would be hidden on waters of Anambas and Natuna islands in Indonesia.

He said the MMEA and the RMN had also blocked all cut-off points on national waters and had contacted all maritime authorities in Asean member countries, besides seeking cooperation from the US and Australia, in a bid to find the missing tanker.

Ahmad Puzi said the missing of MT Orkim Harmony was the fourth case involving maritime robberies in the South China Sea this year.

He said the MMEA would investigate the case from all aspects, including its regular routes and the background of each of its crewmen. – Bernama, June 15, 2015.

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