

Hijackers threatened to go after crew's families, navy chief reveals

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The hijackers of Malaysian vessel MT Orkim Harmony had threatened to harm the crew's family members if they alerted the authorities on the gang's escape plan to the Malaysian navy, Admiral Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Jaafar said.

The navy chief said the tanker's captain only notified navy vessel KD Terengganu at 12.55am, some five hours after all the hijackers left the tanker, for the sake of his crew and their families.

"All hijackers fled using the tanker's rescue boat at 8.30pm and had taken down the captain's Master Nor Fazli Sahar's personal details. They threatened to harm the captain's family if he leaked their plan to leave the tanker to the authorities," said Aziz in a press statement today.

He said the captain sounded scared during the communication with the navy vessel but informed them that the crew was safe and in good health, except for one injured during the hijacking on June 11.

The cook, an Indonesian, was shot in the leg in the incident.

"He has been flown to Universiti Sains Malaysia in Kubang Kerian, Kelantan, and arrived safely at the hospital at 10.15am," said Aziz.

He said the RM21 million worth of RON95 petrol (6,000 tonnes) cargo was also left untouched.

Aziz said that prior to their escape, the group leader had also told the vessels trailing the tanker to move five nautical miles away from it and threatened to harm the crew if their demand was not met.

The leader also told the Royal Malaysian Navy that they want to continue their "journey" to Natuna islands located in Indonesian waters.

In The Star today, Abdul Aziz said the eight pirates who took control of the tanker were "practically begging" for the Malaysian authorities to let them go.

"We asked for their demands and all they want is for us to give them a boat, water and food, and to let them leave. But we can't do that," he was quoted as saying.

The pirates, dubbed the "part-timers on a maiden voyage" by the navy chief, were armed with pistols and parang. They said they would not harm the 22-member crew if their demands were met.

Mt Orkim Harmony, escorted by KD Handalan, is now on its way to Kuantan port and

is scheduled to arrive at 2am tomorrow.

Aziz said all assets on sea and air have been deployed to track the perpetrators.

“We also have asked our counterpart in Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia to help in tracking the hijackers. The Indonesian navy has agreed to help search for them at Natuna islands.”

The tanker was spotted at 3.45pm on Wednesday, six days after it went missing by Australian’s anti-submarine and maritime surveillance aircraft P-3C Orion at the 210nm off Pulau Redang near the Gulf of Thailand.

There are 16 Malaysian crew members on board. The hijacking last Thursday is the fifth incident reported this year in Malaysian waters. – June 19, 2015.

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