

13 Criminals Involved In Hijacking MT Orkim Harmony – MMEA

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PUTRAJAYA, June 22 (Bernama) -- The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) intelligence found that 13 criminals were involved in the hijacking of the oil tanker, MT Orkim Harmony, on June 11.

The agency's deputy director-general (Operations), Vice-Admiral (Maritime) Datuk Ahmad Puzi Ab Kahar said five of them had used a tugboat to approach the tanker, while the other eight went up the vessel.

He said the Indonesian authorities had informed that the tugboat, believed to be used by the suspects to hijack MT Orkim Harmony, was found in Batam two days ago.

"We had contacted the Indonesian authorities on our hunt for the remaining five hijackers," he said at a press conference on developments involving the tanker, here, today.

Eight of the alleged hijackers of MT Orkim Harmony, which was carrying 6,000 tonnes of RON95 petrol worth RM21 million, were arrested by the Vietnamese authorities near Tho Chu Island, southern Vietnam, last Friday.

Ahmad Puzi had in a statement, yesterday, said the Vietnamese authorities had confirmed that the eight suspects had admitted to being involved in the hijacking of MT Orkim Harmony, and that the MMEA had started the extradition process for the eight men.

He said the investigation by the Vietnamese authorities also found the eight to be experienced in committing robbery at sea and in handling vessels.

Ahmad Puzi said various communication devices, including satellite communication equipment, were found when the eight were arrested, indicating they were "professional robbers" with a wide network.

"The MMEA investigation on the saved crew members of MT Orkim Harmony also found that one of the suspects known as Ruslan, believed to be the gang leader, was always making calls and speaking in English.

"From the crew's given statements, we can deduce what actually happened on the tanker," he said, adding that the interrogation on the 12 crew members had been completed.

On efforts to extradite the eight suspects to Malaysia, Ahmad Puzi said the process would take a bit of time as it involved other countries but he believed the close relations among ASEAN countries could ease it.

He also said that the MMEA planned to station members of the Special Task and Rescue Team (STAR) at random on merchant ships registered in this country in order to improve

security for these vessels.

MT Orkim Harmony which was hijacked on June 11, finally arrived at Kuantan Port, Pahang at 7.30am, last Saturday, after a five-hour delay due to engine trouble.

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