

Indonesia, Malaysia search for missing tanker with 10 crew

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Jakarta: A massive search by the Malaysian and Indonesian maritime authorities is ongoing for the hijacked tanker with 900,000 litres of diesel and 10 crew members.

Malaysia's Maritime Enforcement Agency chief Ahmad Puzi Kahar said Wednesday that the MT Vier Harmoni was suspected to have been hijacked after leaving a port in Malaysia's southern Johor state and taken to waters off the Indonesian island of Batam, which is south of Singapore.

Indonesia's western naval command and its coast guard said they also were searching for the tanker but there was no indication so far it had entered Batam.

Vier Abdul Jamal, chief executive of the ship's owner Vierlines Asia Group, said the Indonesian-flagged vessel has 10 Indonesian crew on board and is currently chartered by another company.

The charterer and the harbor master where the vessel was loaded lost contact with Vier Harmoni on Tuesday evening and its tracking device is not active, he said.

The vessel, which has an experienced captain, could be hijacked, sunk or suffering engine problems, he said.

The Malaysian maritime agency said the tanker was carrying 900,000 litres of diesel and left from Tanjung Pelepas port in Johor.

Ahmad Puzi, the agency's chief, said "internal problems" might be behind the disappearance.

The 53-meter (175 foot) long Vier Harmoni was built in 2014.

Indonesia has suffered a series of kidnappings of its seamen this year by Abu Sayyaf militants based in the southern Philippines. Those incidents, which occurred off Borneo in waters that border Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, involved the militants abandoning the vessels and demanding ransoms for the kidnapped men.

- (With inputs from AP)