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Ship Carrying Gold Ore Goes Missing in Far East

By The Moscow Times

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The Amurskaya freighter, carrying 700 tons of gold ore and up to nine crew members, has gone missing in the Sea of Okhotsk in the Far East, officials said Monday.

The ship triggered an emergency beacon around 2:50 p.m. Sunday then disappeared from radars, far eastern transportation prosecutors said in a statement.

The ship was bound for the Khabarovsk region port of Okhotsk and was traveling near the Shantar Islands when it vanished.

The freighter's cargo, which belonged to Russian gold producer Polymetal, was worth more than $230,000, the Prime news agency reported.

Authorities have set up a hotline for the relatives of the crew members on board: +7 (42135) 2-24-84.

It is still unclear how many people were on board. Local emergency officials say there were eight crew members, while the prosecutors say there were nine. In earlier reports, the ship was misidentified as a motorboat with 11 crew members.

On Monday, a tanker and two trawlers were searching for the ship along with a special Emergency Situations Ministry plane. But the search was hampered by rain, gales, low-hanging clouds and waves, the news agency said, citing the local branch of the ministry.

A Be-200 plane with rescue workers was on standby in Khabarovsk, while a Mi-8 helicopter belonging to a local airline was also ready to join the rescue operation when the weather improved.

"The search operation continues with the help of three ships. Besides that, the inspection of 15 kilometers of shoreline is planned," the ministry said in a statement carried by Interfax.

"It's not clear whether the ship has sunk. In fall, storms and mist are frequent, and the vessel could have docked at some small bay on its way," a Khabarovsk region government spokesman told the Prime agency.

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