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Rescuers Find Empty Raft Near Amurskaya Wreck

By The Moscow Times

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Rescuers on Thursday found an empty life raft in the area where the Amurskaya cargo ship sunk off Russia's far eastern seaboard.

A search team found the 20-person raft at 10:12 a.m. local time near Feklistov Island in the Sea of Okhotsk, the Transportation Ministry said in a statement Thursday.

"The raft was practically deflated, torn in places, and was filled with pebbles and sand, but no people were found inside," the statement read.

That rescuers found the raft in such a sorry condition makes it even less likely that any of the Amurskaya's missing crew members, who last made contact with land on Oct. 28, will be found alive.

On Wednesday, divers discovered the wreck of the Amurskaya near the Shantar Islands at a

depth of 25 meters.

While inspecting the ship's deck, divers found that one of its life rafts was missing, leading the ministry to speculate that crew members had attempted to escape the sinking vessel.

News reports said that between nine and 11 people were on board the Amurskaya when it left port.

Investigators have said the freighter was carrying around 700 tons of gold ore and violated multiple safety rules. Police have interrogated 20 people and carried out searches at the Nikolayevsk-on-Amur Sea Port in connection with the ship's sinking, investigators said in a separate statement Thursday.

The ship's owner was arrested earlier this week on suspicion of negligence leading to multiple deaths, which carries a sentence of up to seven years imprisonment.

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