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# Finland Charges Russian Captain and Crew Member with Sabotaging Undersea Cables

By AFP

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The cargo vessel Fitburg. **Finnish Border Guard**

Finnish authorities on Monday charged the Russian captain and a senior crew member of a cargo ship suspected of severing two undersea telecommunications cables linking Finland and Estonia on New Year's Eve.

The Fitburg, a cargo vessel traveling from Russia to Israel, was boarded by Finnish authorities on December 31 after it was suspected of intentionally dropping its anchor to damage communications infrastructure in the Gulf of Finland.

The ship's Russian captain and another senior crew member, a citizen of Azerbaijan, were charged with "aggravated criminal mischief" and "aggravated interference with telecommunications," Finland's National Prosecution Authority said in a statement.

Investigators allege the defendants cut two telecommunications cables and attempted to destroy eight other undersea connections by dragging a damaged anchor across the seabed for at least 130 kilometers (80 miles) before Finnish authorities forced the vessel to stop.

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The National Prosecution Authority stated that it will decide whether to press charges against two other officers from the ship at a later date.

According to prosecutors, the incident caused "significant immediate damage" and posed "a serious risk to the functioning of telecommunications, electricity and gas networks in Finland."

The defendants have denied the charges. Because the disruptions occurred within Estonia's exclusive economic zone, the defense intends to argue that the Nordic nation lacks legal jurisdiction since the cables were damaged outside Finnish territorial waters.

Finland's National Bureau of Investigation officially concluded its criminal probe into the maritime incident in early June.

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