

Owners of Tragic Trawler Deny Knowledge of Foreigners on Board

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April 07, 2015



Rescued sailors from the wrecked Dalniy Vostok fishing vessel leave the Andromeda trawler at the port of Korsakov in Russia's Sakhalin region, April 7, 2015.

Despite official comments to the contrary, the company that owns the trawler that sunk last week in the Sea of Okhotsk, claiming at least 56 lives, denied any knowledge of foreign nationals having been on board the ill-fated vessel, the TASS news agency reported Tuesday.

Last week, the Emergency Situations Ministry published a list of the crew members on board the Dalny Vostok, which sunk 330 kilometers off Russia's far eastern coast on the night of April 1. Fifty-four foreign nationals — including 42 citizens of Myanmar — were among the 132 crew members, according to the ministry. The other foreign crew members hailed from Vanuatu, Ukraine and Latvia.

“I am not and was not aware of the presence of foreigners on the ship,” Alexei Vasin, a representative of Magellan, the trawler’s owner, said in comments carried by TASS. “Nobody

in our offices has any knowledge of this.”

The deputy director of Magellan, Alexander Kudritsky, was detained earlier this week in connection with the tragedy. A search warrant has also been issued for Yegor Gashchenko, the company's director.

As search and rescue efforts continued Tuesday, 13 crew members were reportedly still missing.

Yevgeny Vitrikus, a sailor rescued from the sinking ship, told Russian media that foreigners had bribed the ship's owners to be hired, TASS reported. He also claimed that the Burmese crew members, who reportedly boarded the vessel during a stopover in South Korea, were paid \$200 a month for their work, while Russian crew members received monthly salaries ranging from \$1,000 to \$1,500, TASS reported Tuesday.

The regional branch of the Federal Migration Service said it had not given foreign sailors permits to work in the Sakhalin region, the Interfax news agency reported Tuesday.

Vitrikus also maintained that the Dalny Vostok had been severely overloaded at the time of incident. The ship, which he claimed was meant to accommodate 96 people, did not have enough life jackets for all 132 crew members.

Eight of the 63 rescued sailors were admitted to a Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk hospital for observation on Tuesday. Their condition is stable, Interfax reported.

Russia's far eastern Sakhalin region declared Tuesday a day of mourning. In Moscow, State Duma deputies observed a minute of silence.

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Original url:

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