Beat: News

26 dead, hundreds missing after ferry sinks off the Philippines

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USPA News - At least 26 people have been killed and more than 200 others remain missing after a ferry sank near the central Philippine port of Cebu after colliding with a cargo vessel on late Friday evening, local rescue authorities confirmed Saturday. The accident occurred at around 9:03 p.m. local time on Friday when the cargo vessel M/V Sulpicio Express 7 collided with the passenger vessel M/V St. Thomas Aquinas near Talisay City in central Cebu province.

The cargo vessel had 38 crew members on board while the ferry was carrying 841 people, including 723 passengers and 118 crew members. "Immediately after the collision, the crew of the M/V St. Thomas distributed life jackets to the passengers and carried out emergency abandon-ship procedures," the ferry`s owner, 2GO Shipping, said in a statement. "At the same time, the ship`s officers sent a distress signal to the nearest Philippine Coast Guard Station to alert them for immediate rescue operations." A rescue operation was continuing on late Saturday morning, involving vessels and a helicopter from both the Philippine Navy and the Philippine Coast Guard. Three vessels from 2GO Group, local fishing boats, and equipment from the cargo vessel`s owner, the Philippine Span Asia Carrier Corporation (PSACC), were also participating in the operation. The Philippine Coast Guard said 26 bodies had been recovered by noon local time, but 215 others remained missing, while 629 people had been rescued. "All the crew of M/V Sulpicio Express 7 are all safe and accounted-for," said Eduardo del Rosario, the Executive Director of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC). Del Rosario said injured victims were being treated at hospitals in Talisay and Cebu City, but it was not immediately clear how many of the survivors were injured or what their conditions are. "Management of 2GO Shipping Lines provided relief assistance to survivors," he said, explaining that the company provided temporary shelter and hot meals to more than 300 survivors who were taken to Cebu City. "Meal packs and dry clothes have been distributed to passengers. Those needing medical attention have been attended to by onsite medical personnel while others have already been brought to nearby hospitals," 2GO Shipping said in its statement. "The rest of the passengers have been offered accommodations at a nearby hotel." 2GO Shipping said its ferry was coming from Surigao and Nasipit port and was expected to arrive in Cebu City as a stopover port at 10 p.m. local time, before continuing to the capital Manila. It said the vessel had a maximum capacity of 1,010 passengers and crew and 160 units of 20 footer containers, although it was only carrying 104 such containers. Accidents at sea are common in the Philippines due to severe weather, poor maintenance of boats and weak enforcement of safety regulations. At least 690 people were killed in June 2008 when the ferry MV Princess of the Stars capsized and sank during a powerful typhoon off the coast of San Fernando in the central province of Romblon. The world`s worst ever peacetime maritime disaster also occurred in the Philippines. An estimated 4,341 people were killed in December 1987 when the passenger ferry MV Dona Paz collided with the oil tanker MT Vector in the Tablas Strait, not far from the central province of Marinduque.

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