

Casualty Circular No. 11 of 2009

(Regulatory/Guidance/Information)

NO:11-NT(28)/2008

Dated: 17.07.2009

Subject: Missing General Cargo Ship over 25 years of age in Black Sea.

NARRATIVE

A General Cargo vessel, flag - foreign, GRT- 3009t, built in 1982, owned and managed by foreign shipping company completed loading of steel billets on 16.02. 2008 in one of the foreign ports in Black Sea for another port in the Black Sea. Prior to loading operations, the vessel underwent a Port State Control inspection and was detained for almost a month on account of serious deficiencies. The Port State Control authorities lifted the detention on 15.02.2008. This vessel was manned by 25 crew. The entire crew was supplied by an approved Manning Agency of another maritime state. The General Cargo ship sailed out from the load port in Black Sea around 0130 LT on 17.02.2008 after disembarking the pilot. The vessel's expected date of arrival in the discharge port was reported to be 18.02.2008 forenoon. After departure from the load port this vessel encountered strong gale with winds from North, poor visibility and snow. The weather conditions became quite severe to South Westerly wind force 7-8 Beaufort Scale (B.S), with snow. The Master of the vessel steered South Westerly course after dropping the pilot. There was another foreign flag vessel proceeding in the same direction. Both the vessels took heavy seas from astern. While approaching the Turkish coast, other foreign flag ship took shelter within the proximity of the Turkish coast, whereas the general cargo ship having 25 crew on board continued towards her destination along the northern coast of Turkey. The vessel's last reported position as per the shore based Automatic Identification system (AIS) Tracking station was on 18.02.2008 around 0333 LT. No distress alarm from the ship and Global Maritime Distress & Safety System (GMDSS) (Radio) equipments or Ship Security Alert System (SSAS) alarm was received by the shore stations. This vessel was lost with the crew of 25 persons in the Black Sea. Extensive SAR operations were carried out by the Turkish Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre (MRCC) using their surface and air crafts. The Merchant shipping in the vicinity were also participated in the Search & Rescue (SAR) operations. There was no trace of the vessel. However, the debris comprising of following items were recovered within the close proximity of last known position of the vessel which was about 6.3.NM from the northern Turkish coast in depth of 90 - 100 meters of water

1. Life Boat
2. Life buoys
3. Immersion suit
4. Fire extinguisher tube
5. EPIRB antenna cover etc.

OBSERVATIONS/ANALYSES

- As per the local people of Turkish coast heavy weather wind force 8-9 B.S. from North Easterly direction was the worst weather experienced in the last 50 years.
- The vessel sailed out from the Russian port in the Black sea was confirmed by the Port Authorities, the Master of another foreign flag ship which sailed out along with this vessel and the company that was tracking this vessel.
- The investigation by the Flag State and substantially interested state ruled out the possibility of hijacking and piracy after confirming with International Maritime Bureau (IMB).
- Port State Control (PSC) inspection at the load port revealed large number of detainable deficiencies in the area of life saving/fire safety appliances/stability/structural arrangements and propulsion system etc. These deficiencies were rectified to the satisfaction of Recognized Organization of the Flag State prior to her departure from the load port.
- The vessel was in possession of valid statutory and class certificates prior to departure.
- As per the information furnished by load port, the vessel sailed out with proper loading and lashing of cargo.
- The owner of the vessel changed the name of the vessel five times since 1982.
- The ownership and the Flag also were changed many times.
- The vessel was provided with sufficient equipments under GMDSS system to send distress signals.
- The Chief engineer and 2nd officer, did not have appropriate licenses issued by the Flag State.
- The 2nd officer did not have proper experience and was not holding valid GMDSS Certificate.
- The vessel was detained on two occasions under Port State Control (PSC) regime.
- The Master most probably underestimated the weather conditions and sailed out from the load port.
- The Master in his noon report stated that weather was very severe wind force 8-9 Beaufort Scale.
- The Master of the vessel did not pay much attention to the advice of another vessel following same courses which eventually took shelter in the safe haven of Turkish coast.

RECOMMENDATIONS/LESSONS LEARN

- The Master of the ships should take into account the impact of weather including sea/swell height and direction during the voyage, especially when the vessel is very old and carrying heavy density cargo on board.
- The chances of shift of cargo during the voyage to such conditions should not be underestimated.
- The securing arrangement of such cargo should be strictly in accordance with the provision of Cargo Securing Manual approved by the flag administration.
- The Master should use professional judgment and over riding authority prior to the commencement of voyage and during the voyage in the interest of safety of crew and the vessel.
- The harbor authorities should take photographs of vessel's securing arrangement specially when carrying density cargo, as part of evidence collection prior to departure of vessel.
- The Master of the vessel should participate in the local ship reporting system and other such system prevailing under the Provision of SOLAS 1974, chapter-V and SAR convention.
- The flag administration should exercise effective administrative, technical and social control over the activities of its registered ship to prevent similar kind of casualties.

Sd/-

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