

The Province

Three seamen feared perished after jumping into English Bay; Union rep questions conditions aboard merchant vessel

Tue Oct 14 2008

Page: A3

Section: News

Byline: Frank Luba

Source: The Province; with a file from Kate Webb

Illustrations: Colour Photo: Jason Payne, The Province / Coast guard crews were searching yesterday for crew members missing from Tokyo Marine's Ginga Falcon (background).

The body of a Bangladeshi sailor, one of three who jumped from a tanker into English Bay, was found off Spanish Banks yesterday.

Searchers scoured the bay, the beaches and neighbourhoods from Kitsilano to the University of B.C., but failed to find the other two men.

The search was called off late yesterday afternoon.

"They were known to have left the ship by a rope hanging off the side," said Insp. Steve Rai.

The men were "obviously not prepared for weather in this part of the world, and the water," Rai said.

"I'm assuming they thought it was close enough to the shore to make it, not knowing the water right now is about 10 degrees Celsius.

"Our marine units were telling me they're fit and they're good swimmers and [yet] it would be a challenge for them to make it in the middle of the night," he said.

"Right now, it looks like it's just a real tragic incident."

No lifejackets or lifeboats were missing from the ship.

Police were alerted about 7 a.m. yesterday after the men, all from Bangladesh and aged 22 to 25, failed to show up for work at 6 a.m. on the Ginga Falcon.

The 152-metre ship, which is registered in Panama and owned by Tokyo Marine, arrived in Vancouver at about 9 p.m. Sunday and was to take on cargo and fuel in Port Moody before returning to Asia.

Sometime between then and 6 a.m., the men, wearing yellow rain gear, left the ship. It was moored a kilometre off Locarno Beach.

The body of the dead man was found about 500 metres from shore.

A coast guard cutter, hovercraft and police patrol boat searched unsuccessfully for the other two.

"We've come to the point that if they didn't make it ashore they won't have survived," said coast guard spokesman Wayne Bamford.

"There may very well be two survivors who have made it ashore and just haven't been located. The deceased was fairly close

inshore when they found him."

Peter Lahay, Canadian co-ordinator of the International Transport Workers Federation, said yesterday that crewmen on vessels owned by Tokyo Marine have complained in the past about onboard conditions.

"I suspect it's because they have a habit of hiring the cheapest of the cheap crews of the global labour supply," said Lahay.

"Well-paid and well-cared-for crew do not jump in the water on a cold day. There must have been something shocking going on aboard that vessel."

A spokesman for the ship's owners could not be reached.

Lahay said he knows of eight or 10 crewmen who have left Tokyo Marine ships. The last one The Province reported on was eight years ago.

fluba@theprovince.com

© 2008 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.