

VLCC latest target of Aden pirates

Attacks still rife despite bigger naval presence

Marcus Hand
Singapore

THE capture by the French military of six Somali pirates involved in the hijacking and kidnapping of the cruiseship *Le Ponant* has done little to deter attacks on shipping in the Gulf of Aden.

Pirate attacks off Somalia have continued unabated, with a Japanese very large crude carrier fired on and the crew of a Spanish trawler kidnapped.

A Japanese-owned 264,000 dwt *Takayama* was attacked by pirates in five speedboats in the Gulf of Aden at 0230 hrs yesterday. The pirates fired at the vessel in an attempt to board it.

Japan's Ministry of Land Transport said that the tanker sustained damage from what appeared to be a rocket, Kyodo News



Takayama: sustained rocket damage.

reported. It was able to escape the pirates and all 23 crew are reported to be safe. The vessel, owned by NYK, was bound for the Red Sea at the time of the attack.

In an email alert following the attack, the International Maritime Bureau's piracy reporting centre warned: "All vessels transiting the Gulf of Aden are advised to take additional precautionary measures and maintain a strict 24 hours anti-piracy visual and radar. Look out for small suspicious boats converging on vessel."

Coalition naval forces in the area are understood to have been alerted.

In a separate incident, the Spanish Foreign Ministry said on Sunday that a fishing trawler, *Playa de Bakio*, had been hijacked and 26 crew taken hostage by pirates off the coast of Somalia.

The vessel was reportedly boarded by four pirates armed with grenade launchers 250 miles from the coast.

Meanwhile, the International Maritime Organization has launched efforts to boost co-operation against piracy in the Indian Ocean from nations in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. IMO director of maritime safety Koji Sekimizu said at the end of a week-long meeting in Dar es Salaam that the plan would commit nations to step up law enforcement, boost information sharing and improve statistical reporting on piracy, Gulf News reported.

Question time Le Ponant six interrogated



Rescued: the crew of *Le Ponant* leave the hijacked ship. It has been claimed that some of the hostages were tourists. AP

Andrew Spurrier
Paris

THE French prosecution service has opened formal criminal proceedings against the six alleged pirates captured by French commandos in Somalia after the release of the cruiseship *Le Ponant* and its 30 crew members.

The six, aged between 25-40, were handed over to the prosecution service on Friday after 48 hours of interrogation by French gendarmes. The prosecution service was due to name an investigating magistrate to take charge of the case and formally charge the six suspects.

According to French reports, two of the six have been identified by members of the crew of the *Le Ponant* as having taken part in the vessel's capture in the Gulf of

Aden on April 4. Three others are suspected of having served as guards of the vessel and its crew while it was being held off the coast of the northern Somali province of Puntland. The fourth is understood to have been at the wheel of the four-wheel drive vehicle in which the six were travelling when they were arrested by French commandos.

The six co-operated with investigators during their interrogation, during which they revealed that they belonged to a militia group based in the village of Garaad-Ade in Puntland.

A French judicial source indicated that the pirates had already captured and occupied a Yemeni fishing vessel with a 27-strong crew but abandoned it after spotting the *Le Ponant*.

The source added that only \$200,000 of the original \$2m ransom was recovered

during the French commando raid and not \$1m as was originally suggested. Part of the ransom was paid to the villagers of Garaad-Ade, who provided supplies and served as guards of the *Le Ponant* and its crew. Each villager received \$50, while the pirates themselves were paid between \$11,000 and \$20,000 each.

French investigators also found aboard the *Le Ponant* a good conduct guide used by the pirates, which notably forbade sexual assault on woman hostages.

French magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur* has claimed, however, that some of the hostages aboard the vessel were not crew members, as was claimed, but tourists whose presence was kept secret so as to avoid inflating the ransom claim.

French armed forces spokesman Christophe Prazuck declined to confirm the report, however.

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Joint venture celebrations

THE annual CTM party exhibited no signs of strain in the market, with the Monaco-based commercial manager entertaining a few hundred close friends and shipbrokers on a typically glittering evening in Knightsbridge.

The FFA market might be sluggish at present but Last Word could find no-one prepared to say a bad word about physical prospects for 2008. Mention 2009 of course and the smiles freeze a little.

Celebrating the foundation of joint venture CTM Swire Bulk Logistics are, left to right, CTM commercial director, capesize, Hans Collot D'Escury; CTM chartering manager Alessandro Canzian; China Navigation commercial director William Davies; CTM chief executive Gary Weston; Logmarin executive director Mario Terenzio; China Navigation managing director Richard Kendall and CTM chief financial officer Luigi Pulcini.

Bid to sink Titanic play

AT LLOYD'S List we often call for more government support for the shipping industry. How different things were in 1947, when the BBC tried to air a radio play about the *Titanic*.

According to material released to commemorate the April 15 anniversary of the casualty, Cunard White Star and ship-builder Harland & Wolff put pressure on the BBC to delay or cancel the broadcast.

Titanic's builder and owner were concerned that the play would damage the image of the shipping industry as it tried to recover from the war.

Archive material includes a telegram from a Northern Ireland politician and a memo describing how a BBC executive was buttonholed him at his club by a permanent secretary. According to the

BBC, their moves had the backing of the government. Would that politicians cared that much about shipping today.

The programme was delayed by a week, but eventually aired to 8m listeners. The BBC's *Titanic* archive is at: www.bbc.co.uk/archive/titanic/

Memorable moment

THE great and the good of the passenger shipping fraternity met in Southampton this week to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Passenger Shipping Association on P&O Cruises' new ship, *Ventura*. This was also a chance to present Stena boss Dan Sten Olsson with the John Lancaster Smith lifetime achievement award. Olsson, who has just turned 60, told guests including Carnival boss Micky Arison and Lord Sterling of Plaistow that: "Thank you for remembering me before I retire."

While ferries had not been in a position to develop similar products to those offered by the cruise industry, Mr Olsson said "we are both in the business of providing quality". Delivering memorable moments, he said, was what it was all about.

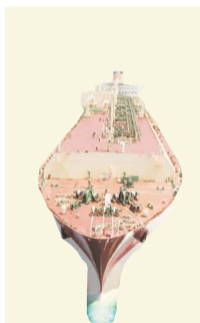
A Noble appointment

A FLURRY of salvage-related appointments as the industry gears up to do battle for environmental salvage awards.

Former Salvage Association chief executive John Noble has been appointed development adviser to the International Salvage Union. He is going to be supporting the union on a range of complex issues it now has to tackle, according to ISU president Arnold Witte.

Meanwhile casualty media response consultancy TRS, which does work for the ISU, has signed up former Sosrep Robin Middleton, who stepped down from the role last year after responding to over 700 casualties. Middleton, we gather, is enjoying the novel experience of not being on call 24 hours a day.

He is joined at TRS by former award winning BBC broadcast journalist James Herbert, who will assist in delivering training and responding to marine casualties.



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