

Crew from sunken cargo ship saved as South Korean president steps in

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Keum Yang 6 sinking

All 11 seafarers on a general cargo ship were rescued by the Korea Coast Guard shortly before their vessel sank, in an event that saw the country's president intervening.

The 2017-built 3,562 dwt Keum Yang 6, owned by South Korean shipping company Keumyang Shipping, was sailing from Gwangyang, South Korea, carrying steel products to China when the vessel became flooded 61km southwest off Seogwipo, Jeju Island around 9.55 pm local time on 15 February.

Korea Coast Guard's Seogwipo branch said it sent eight patrol vessels and two helicopters to the scene.

At the time, there were strong winds blowing at over 20 metres/second, and waves were over 5 metres high, making the rescue attempt challenging. The winds made it unsafe for the helicopters to fly to the scene, and the Coast Guard could only rely on its patrol vessels.

South Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol, whose administration has been criticized for its slow response to the fatal Halloween crowd crush in Seoul in October 2022, became involved in the rescue of Keum Yang 6 crew after receiving a report at midnight on 15 February.

The president ordered the ministers of security and public administration and oceans and fisheries as well as the Coast Guard commissioner, to respond immediately.

President Yoon said, "Activate a public-private-military cooperation system, including the navy and fishing vessels, and make it a priority to mobilise all available manpower and equipment to save the seafarers' lives."

Besides the Coast Guard's deployment of rescuers, nearby ships were alerted to look out for the Keum Yang 6 crew.

Shortly after sending a distress call, Keum Yang 6 listed 25 degrees to its portside, prompting its crewmen to jump into the water after tying a rope to the stricken vessel.

By 1.30 am local time on 16 February, all 11 crewmen, comprising two South Koreans, three Indonesians and six Myanmar nationals, were rescued.

Water continued flooding the Keum Yang 6 and by then, its listing had worsened to 50 degrees. Early in the morning on 17 February, the Keum Yang 6 sank.

Martina Li
Asia Correspondent