

Four seafarers missing after ship hits bridge in China

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Four crewmen of a Chinese domestic cargo ship are missing after the vessel hit Jiujiang Bridge in Foshan in China's Guangdong province on 22 April.

The ship, whose name was not released, was carrying 4,900 tonnes of rolled steel along the Yangtze River from Fuzhou in Fujian province to Heshan in

Guangdong province, when at 9.20 pm local time, it hit the base of one of the bridge pillars.

Built in 1988, Jiujiang Bridge forms part of the G240 National Highway connecting Foshan and Heshan.

Water started entering the cargo hold of the vessel, causing it to capsize. Seven of the 11 crew members were rescued, while the other four are missing.

After the incident, Foshan Municipal Party Committee Secretary Zheng Ke, Foshan Mayor Bai Tao, Guangdong Maritime Safety Administration Deputy Director Guo Weibin, among others, went to the scene to direct the rescue work.

At 6 am local time on 23 April, more than 300 police officers and maritime rescue personnel were deployed to search for the missing seafarers, without success. The search and rescue operations are still ongoing, and to facilitate the search, other ships are prohibited from entering the waters 3km upstream and downstream from Jiujiang Bridge.

Civil engineering experts examined the bridge and found no serious damage to its main structure but the base of the pillar, designed to withstand allisions, had scratches, and further appraisal of the bridge's structural safety was required.

In June 2007, a sand carrier hit Jiujiang Bridge, causing a 200m stretch of the bridge to collapse. Four cars on the highway, along with two construction workers, fell into the river below, killing eight persons.

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