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# Special Report on Abducting of Crew from Tug Boats in Waters off East Sabah and South Philippines

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## Abducting of Crew from Tug Boats in Waters off East Sabah and South Philippines

Following the spate of incidents involving the abducting of crew from tug boats in the waters of East Sabah and South Philippines, the shipping industry are advised to adopt the following measures:

- Stringent watch-keeping while the ships are anchored.
- Keep vessel's surroundings well-lit and switched on the flood lights.
- Enhance vigilance, increase security watch rotations and sound the alarm when unknown people are sighted in the vicinity or on board the ships.
- Maintain a continuous watch to the advisories being issued on NAVTEX.
- Report all incidents in accordance with the IMO MSC circular of 1334.
- Reroute/Avoid area if feasible.
- Maintain continuous communications with enforcement agencies/company.

### Background

1. Within a period of three weeks (26 March 2016 – 15 April 2016), the ReCAAP Focal Point (Philippines) reported to the ReCAAP ISC about three incidents of abducting of crew from tug boats in the waters off East Sabah and South Philippines. The incidents occurred on board tug boat *Brahma 12* on 26 March 2016, tug boat *Massive 6* on 1 April 2016 and tug boat *Henry* towing barge, *Christi* on 15 April 2016.

### Incident on board *Brahma 12*

2. Indonesian-registered tug boat *Brahma 12* towing barge, *Anand 12* loaded with 7,000 metric tons of coal departed Kalimantan, Indonesia for a power plant in Batangas, Philippines when 17 perpetrators armed with firearms boarded the tug boat from one grey speed boat powered by three outboard engines and one wooden-type motorised pump boat propelled by double built-in engine. The perpetrators forcibly abducted all its 10 Indonesian crew, and abandoned the tug boat. The exact date, time and location of the boarding have yet to be determined.

3. A passing motor launch, *Ashonar II* discovered *Brahma 12* with no crew on board drifting in the vicinity waters of Languyan, Tawi-tawi on 26 March 2016. The crew of *Ashonar II* boarded the tug boat and towed the boat to a wharf in Marang, Languyan and

subsequently turned over to the local police for custody. Two days after the tug boat was found, Mr. Joey Mirasole, Operations Manager of World Mariners Philippines who is also the Manila-based agent of *Brahma 12* was informed by the owner of *Brahma 12* that the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) claimed responsibility over the incident and allegedly demanding 50 million pesos (S\$1.45 million) in ransom for the release of the crew. A media article<sup>1</sup> mentioned that the owner of *Brahma 12* has reportedly agreed to pay ransom for the release of the 10 crew.

4. The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) elements in Bongao, Tawi-tawi conducted Port State Control Inspection of *Brahma 12* at Languyan Municipal Police Station on 30 March 2016 and reported that several navigational equipment were missing, including the Global Positioning System (GPS), radar apparatus, radio communication and firefighting equipment. The PCG is working closely with the Philippine Armed Forces, Philippine National Police and other enforcement agencies to gather relevant information and updates about the whereabouts of the abducted crew.

### **Incident on board *Massive 6***

5. On 1 April 2016, Malaysian-registered tug boat *Massive 6* with nine crew on board was underway from Manila, Philippines towards Tawau for bunkering. Between 1815 and 1840 hrs in the vicinity about 27 nm southeast of Semporna, Sabah, East Malaysia, eight perpetrators armed with firearms approached and boarded the tug boat. The perpetrators, allegedly spoke Tagalog-English, took with them four Malaysian crew in their speed boat, along with their mobile phones and laptops.

6. The shipping company managed to establish contact with the remaining crew on or at about 2000 hrs on 1 April 2016, and reported the incident to the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA), Philippines authorities based in Zamboanga City, Philippines, and the ReCAAP ISC. The remaining five crew continued their voyage to Tawau, Sabah escorted by a MMEA ship. The Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) and Malaysia Marine Police vessels had reportedly stepped up maritime and security patrols in vicinity.

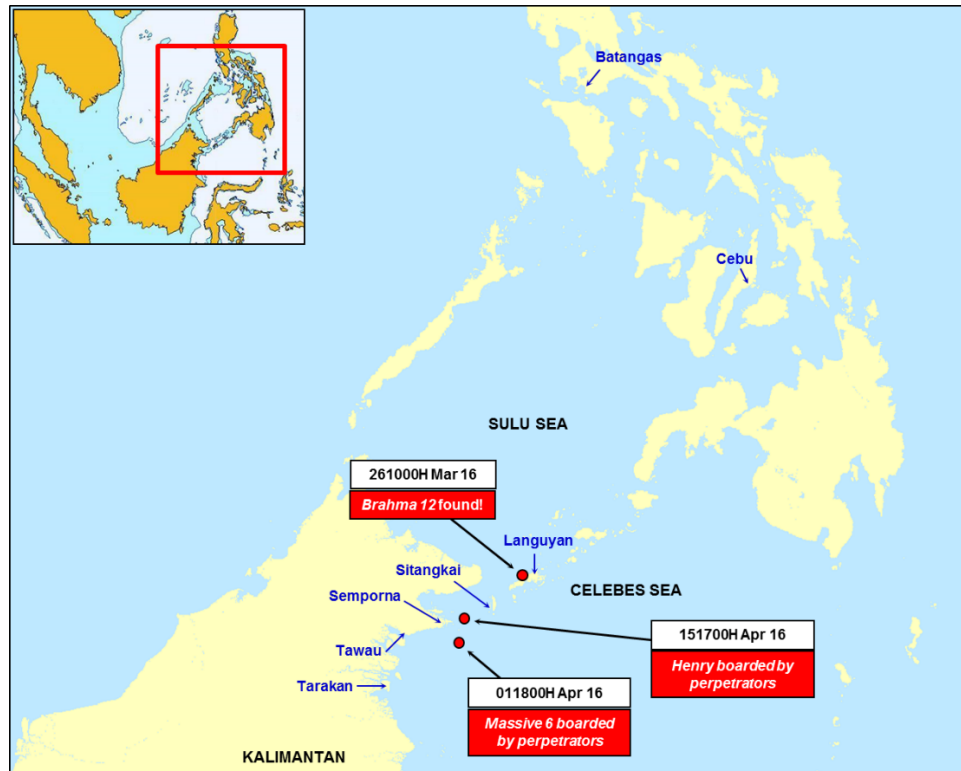
### **Incident on board *Henry***

7. On 15 April 2016, an Indonesian-registered tug boat *Henry*, towing barge, *Christi* while underway from Cebu, Philippines to Tarakan, Indonesia was boarded by armed perpetrators from a speedboat at approximately 25 nm southwest off Sitangkai Island, Tawi-tawi. The tug boat was fired at, and one of the crew was injured and four others

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<sup>1</sup> The Strait Times dated 20 April 2016 on "Indonesia firm agrees to pay ransom for crew".

abducted<sup>2</sup>. The Malaysian Maritime Police in Sabah assisted in bringing the wounded crew to a hospital for treatment.



Map 1: Reported locations of *Brahma 12*, *Massive 6* and *Henry*

## Action by the littoral States

8. As a measure to prevent recurring of such incidents, the Malaysian Government has imposed a temporary ban on the trade route between Sabah and southern Philippines until a comprehensive plan is formulated to ensure the safety and security of crew. In addition, the Malaysian Marine Police had deployed boats along with ships from the MMEA and the RMN to enforce the ban<sup>3</sup>. It was also reported that the Philippines and Malaysian authorities will meet to discuss measures to address these recent incidents occurring at the border<sup>4</sup>. The Indonesian military had called for joint maritime patrols with the Philippines and Malaysia; and Indonesia had reportedly dispatched two warships to the area<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> The Philippine Star Global dated 17 April 2016 on "4 Indonesians seized off Tawi-Tawi".

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The Maritime Executive dated 19 April 2016 on "Third Tug Attacked by Pirates in Sulu Sea".

9. At the higher level, the President of Indonesia, Mr. Joko Widodo called upon Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines to look into possible joint patrols to secure their maritime routes in the seas around southern Philippines and Sabah. Separately in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's Defence Minister, Mr. Hishammuddin Hussein had said that other States could be roped in as 'observers' in patrolling the Sulu Sea area while Malaysia, Philippines, Brunei and Indonesia work on trying to resolve the new piracy menace<sup>6</sup>.

## Conclusion

10. The ReCAAP ISC encourages the port authorities, littoral States' enforcement agencies to continuously beef up their surveillance, intensify patrols; and the shipping industry to exercise strict vigilance when operating in the areas of concern. Due to several information gaps that pending verification, the PCG is continuously coordinating with local intelligence units to monitor and gather information about the developments of the situation and the abducted crew.

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<sup>6</sup> The Strait Times dated 19 April 2016 on "KL, Jakarta call for joint maritime patrols".