



Special Report

on

The Hijacking of the *Asta*

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Hijacking of tug boat, *Asta* and barge, *Callista* on 6 February 2010

Name of ship : *Asta*
Type of ship : Tug boat
Flag of ship : Singapore
IMO number : 9522984
GT : 296



Photograph courtesy of IFC-MSTF

Name of barge : *Callista*
Type of ship : Flat top barge
Flag of ship : Singapore
GT : 5299

Background

1. A Singapore-registered tug boat, *Asta* towing barge *Callista* departed Singapore for Cambodia on 5 February 2010. At about 0130 hrs (local time) on 6 February 2010, the ship agent reported lost communications with the tug boat at position 02° 59.40' N, 104° 00.60' E, off Pulau Tioman, Malaysia. The tug boat had reportedly deviated from its planned course and was tracked to be heading northeasterly in the South China Sea.

2. There were 12 crew onboard *Asta* at the time of the incident, and there was no cargo onboard the barge. The *Asta* was scheduled to arrive at Cambodia on 9 February 2010. The ship owner suspected that *Asta* had been hijacked and reported the incident to the Singapore Port Operations Control Centre (POCC) who had issued a broadcast to all vessels to report sightings of *Asta* and *Callista* to POCC. It had also notified the MRCCs of Indonesia (BASARNAS), Malaysia (Putra Jaya), Vietnam, Thailand (Bangkok) and the Philippines.

Update on the Incident

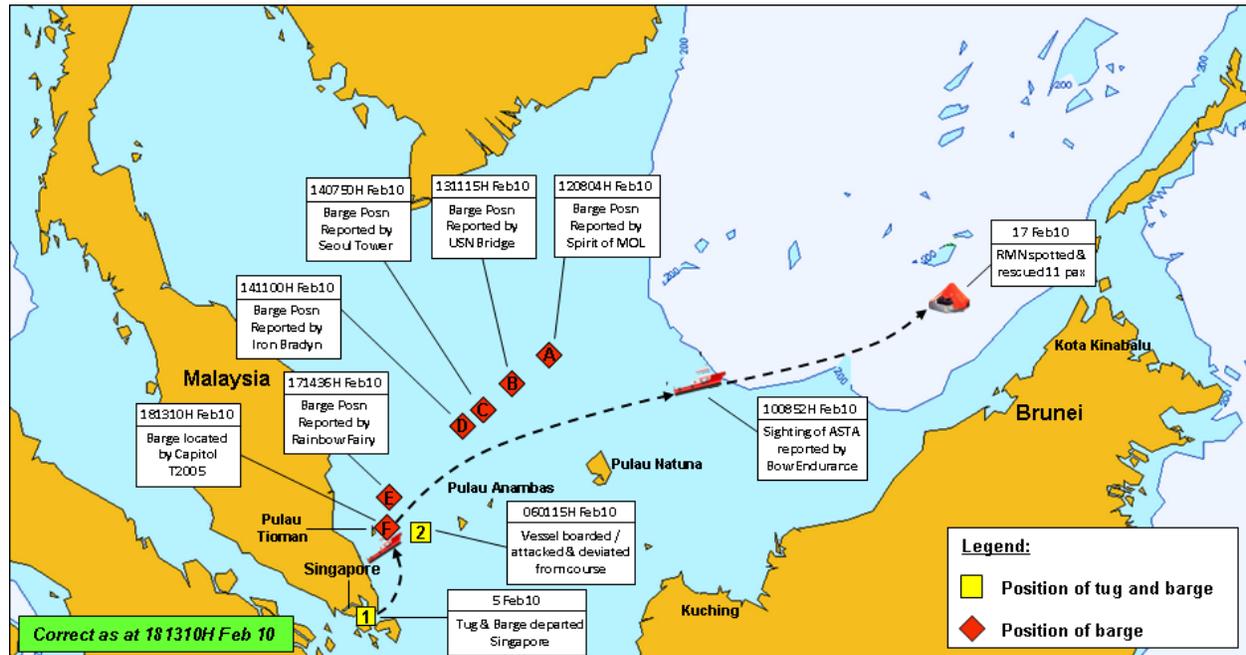
3. The maritime authorities in the region and all ReCAAP Focal Points were immediately alerted to the missing vessels. In particular, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines maritime authorities and the shipping community were alerted to be on the lookout for the tug boat and barge which are likely to be repainted and renamed.

4. Five sightings of the barge, *Callista* were subsequently received from passing ships from 10 to 14 February 2010. Through information exchange among the ReCAAP ISC, the Malaysia Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA), the Information Fusion Centre-Maritime Security Task Force (IFC-MSTF) and the ReCAAP Focal Point (Singapore), the *Callista* was located on 17 February 2010 at 1310 hrs (local time), and recovery was in progress at the time of this report. It was assessed that the tug boat, *Asta* was heading northeasterly towards the Natunas Island. The *Asta* is still missing at this juncture.

5. On 17 February 2010, the MMEA informed the ReCAAP ISC that a Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) vessel spotted a life raft off the Adraiser Reef and rescued 11 crew who are believed to be the crew of *Asta*. One of the crew, assessed to be the Chief Engineer was missing. Arrangement by the company to meet the rescued crew was underway.

6. According to the rescued crew, the barge was boarded by eight personnel dressed in dark clothes when their vessels were about 3 nm southeast of Pulau Tioman at about 0115 hrs (local time) on 6 February 2010. The personnel armed with rifles and parangs blindfolded the crew and locked them in the cabins of the Master and Chief Engineer. On 10 February 2010 at about 2100 hrs (local time), the crew was set adrift in a life raft.

7. Further analysis of the incident will be carried out pending investigation after interviewing the rescued crew. Please see map below on the chronological of events of the incident.



Map showing approximate locations of *Asta* and *Callista*

Observation by the ReCAAP ISC

8. The modus operandi of this incident is similar to the incident involving tug boat *Prospaq T1* also towing an empty barge, the *Prospaq B1*. While underway in the South China Sea on 7 April 2009, 12 pirates boarded the tug boat, tied and blindfolded the crew. Similarly, the crew onboard the tug boat was set adrift in a life raft on 13 April 2009. The tug boat, *Prospaq T1* and the barge, *Prospaq B1* are still missing.

Sharing of Best Practices

9. The cooperation and good information exchange among the ReCAAP ISC, the MMEA, the IFC-MSTF, the ReCAAP Focal Point (Singapore) and the maritime community had enabled the maritime enforcement agencies to narrow down their search area for the missing barge, *Callista*, and its eventual recovery.

10. Worth commending is the support from the maritime community in reporting visual sightings of *Callista* to Singapore's POCC who is also the ReCAAP Focal Point (Singapore). The sharing of information with all the agencies had enabled the charting of probable scenario of the missing vessels, and provided updates of the possible whereabouts of the missing barge.

11. This incident demonstrated the value and benefits of information sharing and cooperation among governmental agencies, the commercial maritime entity, the ReCAAP ISC and the enforcement agencies which lead to the recovery of the *Callista* and rescue of the crew.

Recommendation

12. Ongoing efforts by the regional maritime authorities are underway to locate the missing tug boat, *Asta*. The maritime community are requested to report sighting of the missing tug boat to the nearest coastal states and port authorities.