Eight Dead after Ship Carrying LNG Collides with Ferry

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JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — A passenger ferry collided with a ship believed to be carrying liquefied natural gas and sank west of Indonesia's main island early Wednesday morning, killing at least eight people, officials said.

More than 210 passengers and crew were rescued, said Heru Purwanto, an official at Bakauheni port on southern Sumatra island. More than 80 survivors have been hospitalized, including at least one who was in critical condition.

The search for survivors continued, though it was unclear how many might still be in the water.

There was no immediate word on the cause of the collision, or whether the South African-flagged vessel carrying the liquefied natural gas was damaged. An expert team has been deployed to check for gas leaks in the carrier, but there have so far been no reports.

The collision occurred about 4 miles (6 kilometers) from Bakaheuni port in Lampung province, said Bambang Ervan, a Transportation Ministry spokesman.

Ten nearby merchant ships quickly responded to the captain's distress signal, sailing in from the busy Sunda Straits to help rescue passengers and crew. Just 20 minutes after the distress signal was given, the ferry sank.

"The ferry went down so fast after the collision," Purwanto said.

Purwanto said eight bodies have been pulled from the waters, including that of a 10-year-old girl. They are believed to have drowned because they could not swim and jumped into the sea without life jackets, he said.

He said the official manifest showed the ferry was carrying 213 passengers and crew, as well as 78 vehicles. It has a capacity for 300 passengers and 70 vehicles.

Manifests, however, are often unreliable in Indonesia because tickets are sold onboard to passengers who are never registered.

Two helicopters and two warships were joined by a naval dive squad and several other search and rescue vessels in the search for survivors, said Gagah Prakoso, a spokesman for the National Search and Rescue Agency.

The Bahuga Jaya ferry links Java and southern Sumatra. It went down about 40 minutes into the 90-minute journey, after departing from Java's Merak port.

Ferries are a major source of transportation in Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago nation, with more than 17,000 islands and a population of 240 million. Sea accidents are common due to overcrowding and poor safety standards.

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