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Ship carrying auto parts sinks off Japan coast

3 crew members missing after MV Byakko collision with chemical tanker



Kim Link-Wills, Senior Editor • Friday, May 28, 2021 2 minutes read



Built just last year, the roll-on/roll-off vessel Byakko sank off the coast of Japan on Friday. (Photo: Prince Kaiun)

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A search is ongoing for three crew members reported missing from a roll-on/roll-off (ro/ro) vessel that sank off the coast of Japan early Friday morning.

The MV Byakko sank at about 2:40 a.m. local time after colliding with the chemical tanker Ulsan Pioneer just before midnight in the Seto Inland Sea, Reuters reported. The Byakko reportedly sank about 2.5 miles off the coast of Imabari.

Nine of the Byakko’s 12 crew members were said to have been rescued by the Japanese coast guard and nearby ships.

Kyodo News reported that the ship's captain, 66-year-old Tamotsu Sato, was among the missing. Responders also are searching for two of the Byakko's engineers, Japanese men in their 20s.

The 557-foot-long Byakko is operated by Kobe, Japan-based Prince Kaiun Co. According to Kyodo News, the Byakko was carrying auto parts and left Kobe at 4:30 p.m. Thursday bound for Kanda, Japan. The Ulsan Pioneer reportedly departed a port in China on Tuesday and was scheduled to arrive in Osaka, Japan, on Friday afternoon.

There was no word on what types of auto parts the Byakko was carrying. Denso is the largest automotive parts manufacturer in Japan and specializes in electronic systems and powertrain control modules, according to [Japan Industry News](#), which lists the other major suppliers in the country as Aisin Seiki, Yazaki, JTEKT and Hitachi Automotive Systems.

[Sebastian Blanco](#), who follows the automotive industry for FreightWaves, said Toyota has a plant in Kanda and Nissan has one in the region.

On its website, [Prince Kaiun](#) lists its primary clients as Nissan Motor Co., Mitsubishi Logistics, Vantec Corp., Sea Link, Tatsumi Shokai, Zero Co. and Koshin Shoun.

The website says the 11,454-ton Byakko was built just last year and that it can carry "809 commercial vehicles, 113 trailer chassis." Byakko is the Japanese word for white tiger.

The Ulsan Pioneer, which flies under the flag of the Marshall Islands, was built in 2016.

A cause of the collision has not been reported. According to FreightWaves meteorologist [Nick Austin](#), there were no indications of unusual weather at the time of the accident.

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