

Iran denies hijacked vessel claims

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Iranian official sources reported that Iran has rejected reports that its vessel hijacked by Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden was carrying a dangerous consignment

The pirates were angry because when they opened the cargo of the Iranian ship, several Somalis died, while others lost hair and suffered skin burns, Reuters quoted Andrew Mwangura, of the Kenyan-based East African Seafarers' Assistance Program, as saying.

"It must have been a very dangerous chemical," he added, without identifying the substance.

Iran's shipping company, however, said on Monday that the report was a 'sheer lie', adding, "The ship - Iran Diyanat had no dangerous consignment on board."

It also dismissed allegations that the ship fetched a \$200,000 payment from its owners, saying, "Despite hopeful progress made in talks with the pirates, no ransom has yet been paid to them."

Mwangura claimed that the Iranian ship was supposed to be released, but now the pirates are saying the \$200,000 was for facilitation only. "They want more money for the ransom."

"Iran reserves the right to file a lawsuit against Andrew Mwangura at an authorized international court for spreading lies," Iran's shipping company said.

It added that all 29 crew members are in good health and that the company is doing its utmost to release the bulk carrier as early as possible.

The ship was carrying 42,500 tons of minerals and industrial products for a German firm at the time it was hijacked in the Gulf of Aden off the Somali coast on August 21.

Several international cargo ships have been hijacked near Somalia.

Somali gunmen reportedly hold more than 10 ships for ransom at Eyl, a lawless outpost, once a fishing village.

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