

Ship sinks off New Zealand coast; at least 8 missing

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — A Soviet cruise ship carrying more than 700 passengers and crew struck rocks and sank in stormy seas Sunday night in New Zealand's Cook Strait. Officials said eight

people were not accounted for and there could be more.

Earlier they said 34 people were missing.

Les Goss, the cruise manager, said many of the approximately 400 passengers — mostly

Australians and New Zealanders — were elderly. He also said there were no children on board, but a New Zealand official said there were 25.

Officials said today that 666 people who fled the sinking

Mikhail Lermontov in lifeboats were taken aboard rescue vessels and brought to Wellington, 35 miles across Cook Strait from Port Gore where the liner sank.

Six people were hurt, including one with a broken leg; they said. Passengers reported seeing a woman survivor who had a gashed head.

Rescue officials said they were checking the ship's manifest against known survivors, and 18 hours after the sinking it was still unclear how many people were missing.

"At the last count, we believe that there only eight people who are unaccounted for at this moment," Bruno Deliessie, board chairman of Marlborough Harbor, near where the ship went down, told Radio New Zealand this morning.

But he said that "cannot be taken as final because there were three ships involved in the passage of survivors to Wellington. There will be some difficulty getting a final count."

Australia's Macquarie national radio had said 35 people were unaccounted for.

"We have absolutely no record of any lives being lost

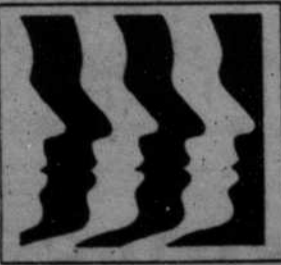
and we have no concern about fatalities," Barry James, head of the Wellington Rescue Coordination Center, was quoted as saying in Monday's Dominion newspaper.

Survivors said in Wellington that passengers and crew began fleeing the 20,000-ton liner in lifeboats about 1 1/2 hours after it began taking on water and hours before it sank just before 11 p.m. Sunday.

Efforts to rescue the people from the lifeboats were hampered by darkness, driving rain and 15 mph winds. A New Zealand air force reconnaissance plane and helicopter and police and navy patrol boats resumed the search for survivors Monday.

James estimated there were about 400 passengers and some 300 Soviet crew members. The Wellington Evening Post had reported Saturday, when the vessel was docked there on its 14-day cruise, that 340 crew and 400 passengers were aboard.

But Deliessie, the Marlboro Harbor official, said there were 841 crew and passengers aboard.



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Bhagwan leaves Nepal, might head for Europe

KATMANDU, Nepal (AP) — Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the controversial Indian guru ousted from the United States three months ago, secretly left Nepal for Thailand and is probably on his way to Europe, his disciples said Sunday.

Rajneesh, who arrived in this Himalayan kingdom Jan. 3, flew to Bangkok on Saturday with five Western aides, his Nepalese devotees said.

"We knew he would be going to visit his (disciples) in other countries but we did not know when," Swami Anand Arun said.

One Nepalese disciple, Swami Govinda Bharati, claimed there was a conspiracy behind Rajneesh's sudden departure. "We are anxious the way they carried away our Bhagwan," he said. "Even his life is in danger."

Thai Airways International officials said Rajneesh was booked only to Bangkok, but his disciples said he likely is headed for Europe.

"We expect him to go to Rome or Greece," Swami Anand Arun said. "Bangkok may be only a transit point."

Rajneesh returned to India on Nov. 17 after pleading guilty to charges of violating immigration laws in the United States, where he set up a controversial community in Oregon.

He left for Nepal after Indian authorities refused to extend the three-week tourist visas of his foreign aides.

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