

Thailand launches rescue operation for 33 missing sailors after navy ship sinks

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The HTMS Sukhothai reportedly suffered an engine malfunction before it sank. (AP: Royal Thai Navy)

Thailand's military has deployed warships and helicopters to search for 33 marines missing after a naval vessel sank overnight in choppy waters in the Gulf of Thailand.

Three navy vessels and two helicopters were sent to find the missing corvette HTMS Sukhothai off Prachuap Khiri Khan province, south of Bangkok.

The warship suffered an engine malfunction and went down just before midnight (local time) about 20 nautical miles off the coast.

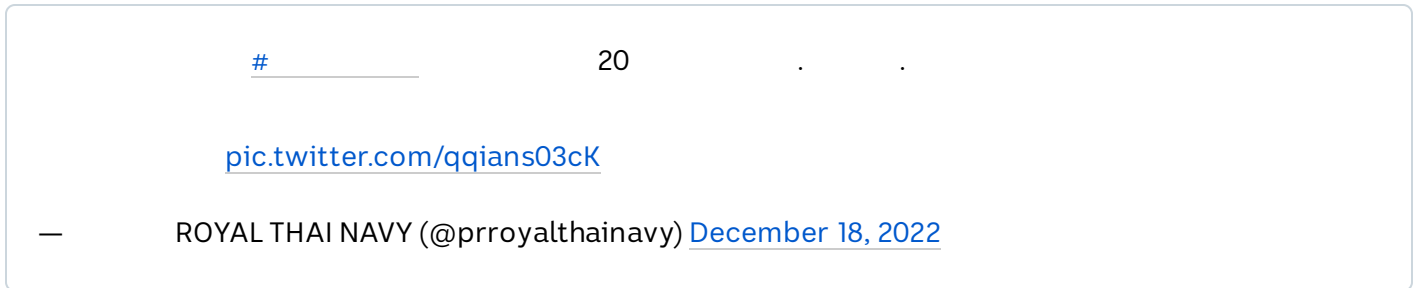
An overnight rescue mission in bad weather rescued 73 of the 106 people aboard, the navy said, with the remaining 33 forced to abandon ship.

Key points:

- The HTMS Sukhothai went down just before midnight (local time) about 20 nautical miles off the coast
- An overnight rescue mission in bad weather secured 73 of the 106 people aboard
- Some 33 other crew were forced to abandon ship, the navy said

The navy posted images and video footage on its Twitter account showing a group of personnel in orange vests in a black inflatable raft moving away from a ship in darkness as waves swelled around it.

It was not immediately clear how many rafts had been deployed.



The Sukhothai, a US-built corvette in use since 1987, was hit by strong waves on Sunday, forcing it to tilt to one side before becoming flooded with seawater, navy spokesperson Admiral Pogkrong Monthardpalin said.

A picture shared by the navy showed the grey vessel flipped over onto its side, while another image on a scanner screen showed the bow of the ship and a gun turret poking above the waterline as it sank.

Reuters