



Friday, 20 January, 2012, 21:37 (19:37 GMT)

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Search of Costa Concordia Again Postponed as Ship Shifts in Heavy Seas

20/01/2012 14:16:00



The wreck of Costa Concordia stranded on the rock of Island of Giglio

The Costa Concordia, the ship that ran aground on January 13 off the Italian island of Giglio, has shifted once again. As a result, all searches for survivors have been suspended. Officials coordinating operations were due to meet today to decide how to proceed.

A plan to secure the ship has not been ruled out, and would involve tying the hull to rocks to avoid the ship sinking.

Initial information suggests that the briefing during which the intervention on the ship will be decided is to be attended by technicians from Smit Salvage, the company that will empty the wreck. The operation can only be carried out once the search operation has been definitively called off.

Meanwhile, the owners of the ship, Carnival Corp & plc, who have been chastised by public relations experts for being slow to address the disaster and vague about its response and efforts to prevent similar incidents in the future, said it was providing lodging, refunds and other support to people affected by the accident, even as some public relations executives criticised the company's handling of the situation.

Five days after the incident that left 11 people dead and 22 missing Carnival Chief Executive Micky Arison said in a statement on Wednesday: "I give my personal assurance that we will take care of each and every one of our guests, crew and their families affected by this tragic event."

Costa Cruise Lines, a unit of Miami-based Carnival and operator of the ship, has been arranging lodging and transportation for passengers and crew members to return home, and has offered assistance and counseling as needed. It has also begun refunding passengers their cruise fares and all costs incurred while on board.

The company - owned by Carnival, the world's largest cruise line operator - also said it was contacting every passenger and crew member or their family and will be addressing personal possessions lost on board.

For passengers that have tickets to sail on future Costa Concordia cruises, the company is offering a full refund plus a 30



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Women 4 Libya Say Draft Election Law

Risks Failing Libyan Women

At the end of the two-week consultation period on the draft election laws in Libya, the Women4Libya, W4L, group has called into question the so-called consultation by the Electoral Commission, and points out what it believes are shortcomings in the proposed laws that the commission says have been modified and ratified, to be published in Benghazi this coming Sunday, January 22.



Italy to Help Libya Recreate Police Force

Italy will help Libya to recreate a national police force and also urges its international partners to do the same, Italy's foreign minister told Italian parliament on Wednesday.



Training for Elections Begins in Central Tripoli

In a workshop entitled, "Elections and Effective Citizens", organised by the Libyan Society of Future and Strategic studies at the "Kabeer" hotel in central Tripoli, Libyan NGOs were given information about the electoral law and the election process so that they in turn can then go and pass on the same knowledge via similar workshops to their communities.

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Allyson Stewart-Allen, director of International Marketing Partners, a consulting firm accused Carnival's public relations strategy, saying: "It wasn't quick, it wasn't specific, it wasn't reassuring."

A statement on Wednesday from Costa Cruises, owned by Carnival, said the Italian company commissioned salvage experts in the hours after the accident to draw up a plan to recover the fuel reserves from the ship before they leak into the water.

The ship's captain is being accused of causing the accident by steering too close to shore and then abandoning the vessel before the evacuation was complete. He was charged with multiple manslaughter and placed under house arrest on Tuesday.

Regarding its safety procedures, a Carnival spokesman said the company is still waiting for further information from the investigation to understand the cause of the accident and that as the company finds out more, it will apply any lessons learned and update its procedures accordingly.

Still, Carnival's strategy could end up tarnishing its brand image, experts said, at a time that is crucial for the cruise industry, which is already grappling with a weak economy.

"This is the time, now through the end of March, when cruise bookings are at their highest. I would have thought you'd want to reassure travel agents, customers and partners (such as) airlines, hotels and car rentals agencies," said Stewart-Allen.

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