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MIFSUD TO QUIT BLUES?

Unmanned VMS device failed to raise the alarm



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GILBERT CALLEJA

Ray Bugeja, who coordinated the search for the Simshar crew with his boats, says there are unanswered questions as to how the AFM's sophisticated technology failed to find the missing five-man crew, which included a 11-year-old

MATTHEW VELLA

SIMON Bugeja and his son Theo, and the rest of the crew that were thrown overboard after the MV Simshar sunk in a ball of fire two weeks ago, might have been saved – it is believed – had the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) at the Fisheries Division been manned on Friday morning, the day after the incident.

It was an unfortunate circumstance for the five-man crew, because the only person who would have noticed that the Simshar had not sent its location to the Fisheries Monitoring Centre in over 12 hours, was out on leave, with nobody to replace him.

Ray Bugeja, the owner of the boat which found the sole survivor of the Simshar, now claims the alarm should have been raised at the Fisheries Division.

While the VMS is not a search-and-rescue system, it provides the location of a vessel every two hours by sending signals via satellite. According to EU regulations, when the monitoring centre has not received data transmissions for 12 hours, it must notify the master or the owner of the vessel or their representative as soon as possible.

While the last movement of the Simshar tracked by the **pg 2**

AFM deny accusations over Simshar search mission

THE Armed Forces of Malta yesterday issued a strong rebuttal of accusations made in its regard yesterday evening, saying search and recovery efforts for Theo Bugeja, the 11-year-old son of Simshar survivor Simon Bugeja.

The army issued a table indicating each outing by the Maltese, American and Italian aircraft during the SAR operation to date, which has been coordinated by Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) Malta and has included the participation of the Italian Military Mission in Mal-



The MV Simshar

ta, the Italian Navy and Guardia Di Finanza, and the US Navy 6th Fleet.

Over 85 hours have been spent on the search so far.

The army said that following the recovery of the corpse of Noel Carabott on Thursday 18 July, searches were focussed on much more concentrated areas with the aim of detecting possible persons in water.

"The quality of the searches executed is best judged by the fact that various sightings of small items such as jackets were

reported by the flight-crews involved. These were in some cases actually recovered and shown to close relatives and friends who stated that they did not belong to the missing fishing vessel," the AFM said.

The AFM categorically denied that it had tried to seize seacraft as a punitive measure for false or unnecessary distress alerts.

"The actions of RCC staff at Luqa Barracks were, throughout the case, based upon the information made available to them **pg 2**

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