

3 die, 46 hurt in refugee boat explosion

by UPI

BROOME, Australia -- An explosion on a boat carrying refugees killed at least three people and injured 46 others, with two reported missing, Western Australian police said.

The boat, believed to be carrying Afghan asylum-seekers, was being escorted to Christmas Island by the Royal Australian Navy when the explosion occurred Thursday, the Australian Broadcasting Corp. reported.

The Royal Flying Doctors Service said helicopters with medical personnel were using an offshore oil and gas facility to evacuate burn victims to hospitals in Broome and Darwin.

Carolyn Monaghan, a spokeswoman for the service said the explosion occurred in "an incredibly remote area" off northwest Australia's coast.

"The thing is, we haven't been able to look at the victims yet," Monaghan told ABC. "We've heard that there's an explosion and there's been a fire but we don't know what the extent of the burns are whether they are very serious or minor or anything."

The incident prompted the Federal Opposition to criticize the government's border security efforts, ABC reported. The opposition's immigration spokeswoman, Sharman Stone, said similar tragedies could be expected if the government doesn't stem the flow of asylum-seekers trying to reach Australia.

"I'm saying that this government ... has to look very carefully at the resources that it's putting into what we call our border security effort," she said.

Home Affairs Minister Bob Debus said Stone was politicizing the incident, adding, "This is certainly not the time to be making that kind of accusation, making that kind of speculation."

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