

'Appalling' raid on HK trawler cited in report calling for action to protect shipping

Alarm at ferocity of pirate attacks

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5.19

A violent attack by pirates on a Hong Kong fisherman has been singled out for its ferocity in an influential report calling for more action in preventing the growing number of assaults on shipping in the region.

The report also identifies an increase in the number of attacks in the Hong Kong-China-Macau area, and a dramatic surge in piracy in the waters off Thailand for the first time in several years.

Issued by the International Maritime Bureau Regional Piracy Centre, the report details 87 attacks in the first six months of the year, one more than for the same period last year and almost twice the number in 1994.

"No statistical analysis can adequately describe the appalling ferocity so far this year," said John Martin, the bureau's regional manager.

Of the six incidents in the Hong Kong area, an attack on fisherman Lai Chi-wah, his wife and a 17-year-old crew member on May 1 was the worst.

Four pirates in a motorised sampan boarded his trawler near Dan Gan Island in Chinese waters.

Mr Lai's wife and the crewmember were tied up.

When they attempted to tie up Mr Lai, he struggled and was shot in the leg by one of the pirates.

The Aberdeen-based vessel was then ransacked and the pirates escaped with \$10,000 in cash, two gold

necklaces worth \$10,000 and the crew's identity cards.

Mr Lai freed himself when the pirates left, radioed for help and sailed back to Hong Kong.

He was met by Marine Police and taken to hospital.

Mr Martin said this incident was one of three particularly vicious attacks around the world this year.

However, he expressed concern that when authorities succeeded in capturing pirates they sometimes did not act against them.

In particular, the report criticised the handling of the apprehension of 14 pirates involved in hijacking the Anna Sierra, a Cyprus-registered cargo vessel.

The freighter, which was carrying sugar to Manila, was

boarded off Vietnam last September, repainted and re-named, and the crew was set adrift.

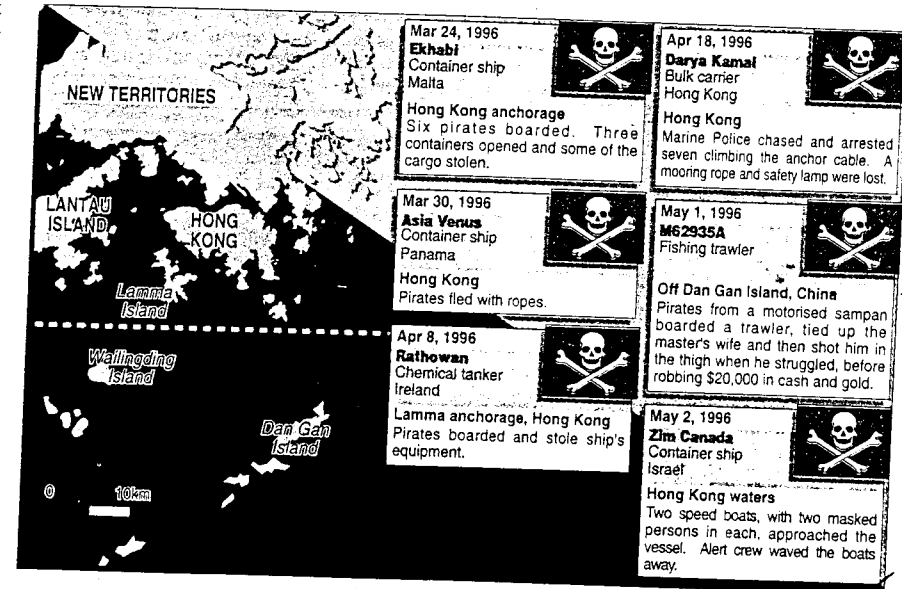
Chinese authorities detained the vessel in Beihai, Guangxi, where the sugar was sold to legitimate Chinese importers.

So far no action has been taken against the hijackers.

The Kuala Lumpur-based International Maritime Bureau accused China of "sitting on their hands" over the incident.

The report also highlighted thefts from boats anchored in Hong Kong waters.

Director of the Hong Kong Shipowners' Association Michael Farlie said more incidents were being reported to the piracy centre as confidence in its work grew.



SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST
27 JUL 1996