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Torpedo room blast sank sub, says Russian navy chief

Russia's naval chief says a torpedo room explosion was the probable cause of the sinking of the nuclear submarine Kursk with 116 sailors on board.

The chances of rescuing the men look increasingly remote as 20ft waves and strong winds buffet ships in the Barents Sea where the submarine is lying 325 ft below the surface. Weather forecasters say there will be no improvement for the next three days.

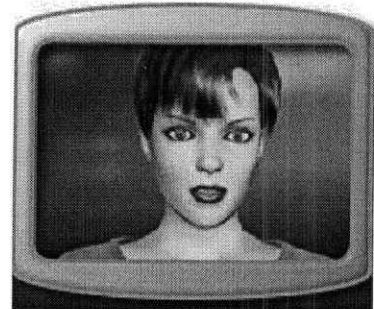
Efforts to connect air and power lines have not worked despite earlier reports of success and there is no communication with the submarine, says navy spokesman Captain Igor Babenko.

"The projection of possible consequences of the accident in the Kursk for the lives of its crew remains extremely grave," said Navy chief Admiral Vladimir Kuroyedov.

The 500 ft long, 14,000 ton, Kursk is one of the biggest and newest in the Russian navy.

There appears to have been an explosion in the torpedo compartment in the nose of the submarine, sending it crashing to the sea bottom, says Admiral Kuroyedov, backing away from earlier statements that it had collided with something.

An explosion inside the torpedo chamber, which contains warheads, would probably have caused extensive casualties, analysts said. Navy officials say casualties can not be ruled out,



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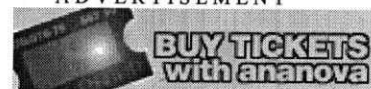
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the Interfax news agency reported.

The government has ruled out seeking foreign assistance to rescue the crew. The United States and Britain say they are willing to help if asked.

Navy officials insisted repeatedly yesterday that rescue efforts were going well and conditions aboard the submarine were not critical but they later admitted efforts to reach the submarine had failed.

Russian officials say the Kursk was not carrying nuclear weapons and its two nuclear reactors had been switched off, but the reports of serious damage raised concerns about a possible radioactive leak.

Last updated: 11:47 Tuesday 15th August 2000.

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