



The Viking Sky lost power and started drifting mid-afternoon Saturday

Hundreds airlifted



Passengers on board the Viking Sky, waiting to be evacuated, off the coast of Norway on Saturday (Courtesy of AccuWeather)



Stranded passenger that were rescued by helicopter from the cruise ship Viking Sky are pictured on March 23, 2019 on the west coast of Norway near Romsdal

Stricken Norway cruiseship restarted 3 of its 4 engines

AFP | Oslo, Norway

A cruise liner that ran into trouble in rough seas off Norway was being towed to port yesterday after hundreds of passengers were helicoptered to safety.

The Viking Sky lost power and started drifting mid-afternoon Saturday in perilous waters two kilometres (1.2 miles) off More og Romsdal, prompting the captain to send out a distress call.

The authorities launched an airlift in very difficult conditions rather than run the risk of leaving people on board.

"We would rather have the passengers on land rather than on board the ship," police chief Tor Andre Franck said.

By yesterday, the crew had managed to restart three of its four engines and two tugs arrived.

Authorities said 460 of the 1,373 people on board had been taken off by five helicopters

before the airlift was halted to allow the towing to start.

Police said 17 people had been taken to hospital, one in their 90s and two 70-year-olds suffered serious fractures.

"The evacuation has been put on pause for now", a spokesman for southern Norway's rescue centre said.

"The captain will weigh up the situation" before deciding if the airlift resumes, he added.

The vessel was heading for the port of Molde, with 60 kilometres (45 miles) still to go, and about 500 kilometres northwest of Oslo, officials said.

Dramatic footage of the passengers' ordeal showed furniture and plants sliding round the lurching vessel as parts of the ceiling came down.

Dozens of passengers wearing life jackets were seated around waiting to get off the vessel.

"I have never seen anything so frightening," said Janet Jacob, who was rescued.

"I started to pray. I prayed

for the safety of everyone on board," she told the NRK television channel.

"The helicopter trip was terrifying. The winds were like a tornado," she added.

"We were sitting down for breakfast when things started to shake... It was just chaos," said another passenger, American John Curry, as quoted in Norwegian by media.

Passenger Rodney Horgan said he had been reminded of the Titanic.

"The best word, I guess, is surreal," he said.

"Sea water 6-7 feet (about two metres) high just came rushing in, hit the tables, chairs, broken glass and 20-30 people just... went right in front of me.

"I was standing, my wife was sitting in front of me and all of a sudden, she was gone. And I thought this was the end," Horgan said.

But it all ended well for Ryan Flynn. "Here's my 83-year-old dad being airlifted from the #vikingsky," he said.

Yildirim squares up for Istanbul election battle

● The vote in Istanbul, with a population of 15 million out of Turkey's 80 million, will be a major test for Erdogan's party

● Turkish will cast their ballots for local elections on March 31, 2019

AFP | Istanbul, Turkey

If former Turkish prime minister Binali Yildirim wants a reminder of how much he needs to win as Istanbul mayor in this month's election, he just has to listen to his boss.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who started his own political career as Istanbul mayor, likes to tell his Justice and Development Party (AKP) that winning the country's economic hub is like winning Turkey itself.

Picking a well-known name and ruling party heavyweight like Yildirim for mayor shows how key Istanbul remains for Erdogan. The Turkish leader has been campaigning hard around Turkey, often in Istanbul, to drum up support for the AKP before the March 31 municipal election.

Even though Yildirim is the favourite, the stakes are high: Turkey's economy is in recession and a lira currency crisis and double-digit inflation are threatening to undermine some AKP support at the ballot box.

"We should not underestimate the Istanbul mayor office. Look at Mr Chirac," Yildirim told AFP referring to Jacques Chirac, the late French president who was mayor of Paris from 1977-95 in between two stints as prime minister.

The vote in Istanbul, with a population of 15 million

out of Turkey's 80 million, will be a major test for Erdogan's party to consolidate its power. Istanbul is seen as a political bellwether with its mixed population of secular and conservative Turks as well as Kurds.

In the 2017 referendum on the new executive presidential system that concentrated powers under the Turkish leader, Istanbul narrowly voted against Erdogan's plan.

"Istanbul is a country on its own," he said.

'Only one captain'

Erdogan is actively touring for the AKP even though he is not standing for election. In Istanbul alone, he has held over a dozen rallies in several neighbourhoods in the past few weeks.

On Sunday, Erdogan called a giant rally, with his right-wing ally Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahceli in Istanbul's Yenikapi district.

Fielding a younger candidate, the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) hopes a fresh approach will help them take the Istanbul mayor's office from Erdogan's ally.

Ekrem Imamoglu, 49, current mayor of Istanbul's Beyluku district on the outskirts of the city, worked in a family business and was a board member of a Turkish football team.

A loyalist to Erdogan since the 1990s, Yildirim holds no grudge over the disappearance of the prime minister office he held for two years. He even campaigned for "Yes" in the 2017 vote on reforms that handed Erdogan more authority.

"Two captains can sink a ship. There should be only one captain," he said at the time of the vote that abolished the premier's office.

Yildirim, born into a poor family in an eastern province, served as

transport minister between 2002 and 2014 and oversaw grandiose projects from new highways and high-speed trains to tunnels and bridges.

Erdogan often touts such projects as a symbol of Turkey's success during his time in power. But Yildirim has never shown any ambition to outshine the president.

Known for his slow-talking style, the AKP candidate says in the introduction of a rap tune prepared for his election: "I speak slow but I work fast like my surname." His surname means "lightning."

Yildirim never makes secret of his love for Istanbul.

"Istanbul is all my youth, a city that has given me everything, so to serve this city is a big honour for me," Yildirim said.

Asked if his boss Erdogan was giving him advice, Yildirim said: "Of course. We always benefit from his experiences."

Both candidates have shown an appetite to win over the other's side's supporters in the cosmopolitan city.

Imamoglu hopes his discreet profile could turn out to be an "advantage," against a popular AKP candidate.

"Society has recently built a resistance against all that is well known in politics," he said.

The CHP candidate lamented that conditions were not equal, especially with most Turkish media taking a pro-Erdogan line. But he was still in the fight.



Yildirim

Erdogan

Supporters of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan wave flags during a rally