

Ship sunk by Houthis a threat to Red Sea marine life

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ADEN: A United Kingdom-owned ship attacked by Houthi militants last month sank in the Red Sea, the United States military confirmed on Saturday, as it echoed a warning from Yemen's internationally recognised government that the vessel's cargo of hazardous fertiliser posed a risk to marine life.

The Belize-registered *Rubymar* is the first vessel lost since the Houthis began targeting commercial ships in November. Drone and missile assaults have forced shipping firms to use the longer route around southern Africa, disrupting global trade by delaying deliveries and sending costs higher.

The sinking bulk carrier "presents a subsurface impact risk to other ships transiting the busy shipping lanes of the waterway", US Central Command said on X.

The Iran-aligned Houthis said their campaign was a show of solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

The attacks have prompted strikes against their positions by the US and Britain and have led other navies to send vessels to the region to protect the Suez Canal.

The US military had said the Feb 18 missile attack had significantly damaged the bulk vessel and caused a 29km oil slick. The ship was carrying about 21,000 metric tonnes of fertiliser.

Yemen's Foreign Minister Ahmed Awad Mubarak said on X: "The sinking of the *Rubymar* is an environmental catastrophe that Yemen and the region have never experienced before."

The release of so much fertiliser poses a serious threat to marine life, said Ali Al-Sawalmih, director of the Marine Science Station at the University of Jordan.

The overload of nutrients can stimulate excessive growth of algae, using up so much oxygen that regular marine life cannot survive, he said describing a process called eutrophication.

Last year, the area avoided a potential disaster when the United Nations removed more than one million barrels of oil from a decaying supertanker. That type of operation may be more difficult in current circumstances. **Reuters**