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THE INDEPENDENT

## 10 die in mishap on French nuclear sub

PARIS — An accident on board a French nuclear-powered submarine killed 10 sailors as it was diving in the Mediterranean off Toulon yesterday, according to the French Defence Ministry, writes *Julian Nundy*.

The ministry said the accident on the *Emeraude*, which carried only conventional arms, did not damage its nuclear installations. The vessel had since surfaced and was expected back under its own power in its home port of Toulon yesterday evening, the ministry said.

All the casualties were in the compartment containing the submarine's two turbo-alternators, where electricity is generated by steam, sources in the Mediterranean port said. The precise nature of the accident was not clear. A naval officer said one of the alternators had exploded but "we don't know why".

"This accident does not in any way put in doubt the nuclear security of the vessel," the Defence Ministry said in a statement. It added that two inquiries, one naval and one judicial, would be held into the circumstances of the acci-

dent. Francois Léotard, the Defence Minister, and Admiral Alain Coataneá, the naval chief of staff, were flying to Toulon from Paris to meet the survivors, the ministry added.

The *Emeraude*, a nuclear attack submarine of the Rubis class, is one of six, all of which are based in Toulon. The 2,670-ton vessel, with a crew of 66, has been in service in the French navy since September 1988. Between two and four of them are constantly on patrol. The French navy also has nuclear-powered submarines with missiles carrying nuclear warheads.

While the accident, whatever its nature, will inevitably raise questions about nuclear security, it will probably have little serious impact in France because of a cross-party consensus — largely followed by public opinion — that, to maintain its independence, France needs modern defence forces to compete with those of the superpowers.

It was the third accident involving a Rubis class submarine in less than a year. The two earlier incidents caused no injuries.

## Ten killed in nuclear sub accident

TEN sailors were killed by a steam leak aboard a French nuclear-propelled submarine off Toulon today.

Rear Admiral Philippe Roy said a pipe had broken on the submarine *Emeraude* and steam gushed out into a turbine compartment, killing all 10 sailors who were carrying out routine monitoring work. The vessel's captain was among the dead.

Admiral Roy said the accident, the first of its kind on a French nuclear submarine, caused no radioactive contamination.

The accident happened as the 2400-tonne Rubis class attack submarine, with a crew of 66, was on a routine exercise 45 miles off Toulon.

The vessel, which was not carrying nuclear missiles, surfaced and made its way to Toulon unassisted.

Admiral Roy said France was recalling three other nuclear-powered submarines — two are in the Mediterranean and one is in the Atlantic — because of doubts raised by the accident.

The admiral said the *Emeraude* sailors had died from burns or asphyxiation.

The defence ministry said a high command investigation and a judicial inquiry had been opened to establish the cause of the accident. — Reuter.

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