

What exactly led to Benoi Road blast?

Two men died in a blast on a tugboat moored near Benoi Road last April. -TNP
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SINGAPORE - At first, the tugboat's chief engineer said another man could have caused the fire.

He said the man, one of two who died in the blaze, was using a flint striker (a fire-starting tool) inside the engine room.

Mr Masnawi, 33, who was working onboard the Saichon 39, then claimed in his statement to the authorities that the sparks from the striker could have ignited some flammable vapours, causing a flash fire.

But he later changed his statement and admitted he did not know what caused the explosion onboard the boat moored near Benoi Road.

This was revealed in the coroner inquiry into the deaths of Indonesians Jon Hendri, 26, and Sabtoni, 35, on April 20 last year.

The court heard that before the blast, Mr Masnawi was performing hot work on the exhaust system inside the engine room with the use of an oxy-acetylene torch, which he was not supposed to do.

To make matters worse, he added that there was a possibility that he had not fully turned off the nozzle of the torch when he was not using it.

Investigation officer Staff Sergeant Vijay Kumar told State Coroner Imran Abdul Hamid that Mr Sabtoni and Mr Hendri were sitting inside the engine room and "were not doing anything in particular" when disaster struck.

Flammable vapours

He said the flammable vapours which ignited could have come from some tins of thinner on the main deck of the boat.

The vapours could have accumulated in the engine room before the explosion.

The blast was so strong that the roof of the engine room was flung into the water.

It also created a bulge on the main deck of the tugboat.

This was the second reported fatal blast that had taken place at the same venue in recent years.

Mr Hendri and Mr Sabtoni were rushed to the National University Hospital but the pair, who suffered more than 85 per cent burns on their bodies, later succumbed to their injuries. Mr Hendri was pronounced dead about two hours after the explosion, while his friend died three days later.

Mr Masnawi and Mr Bagus Cahyono, 23, both Indonesian crew members of Saichon 39, suffered burns. They were discharged from the Singapore General Hospital after their injuries were treated.

But the question remains: How exactly were the flammable vapours ignited?

Coroner Imran, who did not give his findings on Wednesday, asked Staff Sgt Vijay to approach the Singapore Civil Defence Force for an answer before adjourning the case to April 18.

RECENT CASES

March 26, 2013

One man died and another two went missing following a fire that broke out at the Tanoto Shipyard in Jurong last Tuesday.

The blaze engulfed four tugboats but only one, the Chumphon, sank. Remains, believed to be human, were later found on the vessel after it was raised from the seabed on Saturday.

The New Paper understands that the remains contained two sets of human bones, presumed to be those of the two missing people.

One body was found last week.

The Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore said it was found a few metres off the shipyard.

May 12, 2011

Two men - a Malaysian and a Bangladeshi - were killed in an accident at a Benoi Road shipyard on May 12, 2011.

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) said that it involved a barge that was undergoing lengthening works. MOM added that the barge has 14 tanks and four of the tanks ruptured during the blast.

Flammable vapour was present in the remaining tanks of the barge after the blast, which ripped apart the front portion of the vessel.

The Malaysian worker, Mr Zainudin Wan Jusoh, 43, who was working on top of the barge, was thrown off when the explosion occurred.

The Bangladeshi, Mr Hassan Mainul, 20, happened to be near the barge when the incident happened.

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