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Casualty Circular No. 9/2013

Case of missing AB from a Dredger

1. What happened?

On 05th Jan 2013 at 2330 hrs, an AB, 26 years of age, was reported missing from a Dredger when working inside accommodation. Vessel was engaged in dredging operations off a port, at the time of the incident. The mortal remains of the missing AB were later found and autopsy indicated the death due to drowning.

2. How it happened?

2.1 The dredger had commenced dredging around 2235hrs, at outer anchorage area. At around 2300hrs, dredging was completed and the AB was called on the walkie-talkie by the Chief Officer to collect a sample from the hopper. However, on repeated calling, there was no reply from the AB. After stowing the pipes on deck, the duty Pipe Operator was sent by the Chief Officer to the accommodation, to look for the AB as he was expected to be engaged in accommodation cleaning. When the AB could not be located, the Junior Officer was informed at 2315 hrs and soon after, the Master was informed. General alarm was sounded and the crew mustered for a head count. The Pipe Operator reported that the AB was last seen around 2210 hrs on the main deck aft, near the shackle store. Thereafter the AB was to go to the accommodation area for cleaning duties. A search was carried out on board from 2330 hrs and a man overboard signal sounded at 2336hrs.

2.2 The dredger was turned around at 2340 hrs, for surface search. From 0315 hrs onwards, the search was also assisted by the pilot boat, survey boat and the port tugs. Search operations were also carried out by the Coast Guard from 0900 hrs on the 6th. The mortal remains of the AB were later found and retrieved from the water at 1506 hrs on 06th January 2013, using the dredger's lifeboat. Autopsy indicated the death due to drowning.

2.3 The investigation did not reveal any foul play. Neither did the search of the vessel and the belongings of the AB, reveal any inclination to suicide.

3. Why it happened?

3.1 The results of the investigation are largely inconclusive but considering the sequence of events, it would appear that the AB most probably fell into the water, inadvertently, while on deck and drowned.

3.2 It is also possible that the AB fell overboard because of stumbling on an obstruction while walking close to the ship side. Several other causes can be speculated because of which crew members can fall overboard, such as fishing while alongside or at anchor, checking for over side discharges, slips/trips on decks etc.

4. Lessons learnt.

4.1 Hazards of moving carelessly on open decks should be highlighted to crew members on board, at regular intervals. Senior staff should be cautioned not to be complacent and overconfident.

4.2 Ship owners/managers/operators should carry out risk assessments and identify potential hazards that exist on board due to which crew members are likely to fall overboard. Appropriate control measures should be implemented to mitigate the consequences of identified hazards by way of procedures, physical barriers, highlighting of obstructions or design changes as appropriate.



(Capt. Harish Khatri)
Dy. Director General of Shipping [Tech]