

REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA



**DECISION OF THE COMMISSIONER OF MARITIME AFFAIRS
LIBERIA MARITIME AUTHORITY**

And the

The Report of the Investigation

**Into the Matter of Missing Electrician
Mr. Tandel Hemendrakumar Sukkarbhai onboard the
M/T ALEXIA (IMO No. 9389966) on
7 September 2017**

PUBLISHED BY THE LIBERIA MARITIME AUTHORITY

**14 May 2018
Monrovia, Liberia**

The Flag Administration has a mandate to promote safety of life and property at sea, and the prevention of marine pollution. This is achieved in part by conducting investigations of marine casualties involving vessels in the registry for remedial purpose in accordance with the Republic of Liberia Maritime Law and Regulations. Marine investigations, which are administrative in nature, determine the root cause of casualties, recommend means of avoiding them in the future, possible violations of law, and any faults or failures on the part of personnel, shipowners or operators, which might require action in respect to any relevant licenses, certificates or documents.

It is not the purpose of the investigation nor function of the Administration, to assign fault or determine civil or criminal liability with respect to enhancing the litigation posture of any party. The Administration must report, or cause to be reported, the circumstances and proximate cause or causes of a marine casualty and any contributory factors. However, where it is determined that there exists evidence of criminal conduct under the Laws of the Republic of Liberia on the part of any seafarer holding a Liberian Certificate of Competency or other official document, the matter would be referred to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Liberia for appropriate action.

Disclaimer:

This Report and any appended Commissioner's Decision, sets forth certain findings, which have been ascertained or determined up to the time of its issuance, and is published to alert the shipping industry and the public of the general circumstances of the incident. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this Report, this Administration and its representatives can accept no liability for any error or omission alleged to be contained herein.

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**Decision of the Commissioner of Maritime Affairs
Republic of Liberia**

**Report of Investigation
Into the Matter of Missing Electrician
Mr. Tandel Hemendrakumar Sukkarbhai onboard the
M/T ALEXIA (IMO No. 9389966) on 7 September 2017**

AUTHORITY

This Decision is rendered pursuant to Section 258 of Liberian Maritime Law and Maritime Regulation 9.258(7).

COMMENT

On September 07, 2017, about 2024 LT, while the vessel was on her passage from Malta to Novorossiysk, Russia, Electrician, Mr. TANDEL HEMENDRAKUMAR SUKKARBHAI, was declared missing from the vessel in approximate position: Lat. 36-22N; Long. 022-43.9E. Mr. SUKKARBHAI was on sick leave due to back pain since September 05. At about 1800 LT, C/Trainee, who was responsible for bringing food to Mr. SUKKARBHAI, reported that he was not in his cabin and last saw him on September 07 at 1230.

The search for Mr. SUKKARBHAI was carried out as per Master's orders. At about 2015 LT, a pair of slippers was found by the 2nd Engineer near the portside deck railing, aft of the Rescue boat. At 2024 LT, the Master declared that Mr. SUKKARBHAI was missing and reported to Hellenic Coast Guard Joint Rescue Coordination Center (JRCC). The vessel engaged Search and Rescue operation under JRCC instructions until the 8th of September. However, Mr. TANDEL HEMENDRAKUMAR SUKKARBHAI was nowhere to be found.

ACTION

A copy of this report should be provided to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) for their continuing study of deaths and injuries onboard, particularly with man overboard incidents. A copy should also be provided to the owners/operators of the vessel, with an urging to seriously consider the recommendations included in the report.

Done at Dulles, Virginia, USA

This 14th day of May, A.D. 2018



Deputy Commissioner of Maritime Affairs, R.L.

**Report of Investigation
Into the Matter of Missing Electrician
Mr. Tandel Hemendrakumar Sukkarbhai onboard the
M/T ALEXIA (IMO No. 9389966) on 7 September 2017**

INTRODUCTION

On September 7, 2017, about 2024 LT, while the vessel on her passage from Malta to Novorossiysk, Russia, Electrician Mr. TANDEL HEMENDRAKUMAR SUKKARBHAI, was declared missing from the vessel at approximate position: Lat. 36-22N; Long. 022-43.9E.

Mr. TANDEL HEMENDRAKUMAR SUKKARBHAI was on sick leave due to back pain since September 05, 2017. At about 1800 LT, C/Trainee who was responsible for bringing food to Mr. TANDEL HEMENDRAKUMAR SUKKARBHAI, reported that he was not in his cabin and stated that the electrician was last seen about 1230 LT on September 07, 2017, when the Electrician was brought his lunch.

The search was carried out as per Master's orders. The search was prompted after a pair of slippers was found near portside deck railing aft of the rescue boat by 2nd Engineer at about 2018 LT. At 2024 LT, the Master declared that Mr. SUKKARBHAI was missing and reported to Hellenic Coast Guard Joint rescue Coordination Center (JRCC). The vessel engaged Search and Rescue operation under JRCC instructions until September 8, 2018. However, Mr. SUKKARBHAI was nowhere to be found.

AUTHORITY

This report is prepared in accordance with Liberian Maritime Regulation, 9.258(6), IMO Resolution MSC.255(84), adopted on May 16, 2008, *Adoption of the Code of the International Standards and Recommended Practices for a Safety Investigation into a Marine Casualty or Marine Incident* ('Casualty Investigation Code') as amended (effective January 1, 2010), the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and the International Conventions to which Liberia is a Party.

VESSEL PARTICULARS

IMO NUMBER	9389966
VESSEL NAME	ALEXIA
TYPE OF SHIP	CRUDE OIL TANKER
LENGTH	243.8 METERS
BREADTH	42.00 METERS
DEPTH	21.30 METERS
GRT/NRT	60,205 / 32,143

CALL SIGN	A8TR8
MANAGER/ OWNER	MARINE TRUST LTD MAGDALENA NAVIGATION CORPORATION
YEAR BUILT	2009
BUILDER	TSUNEISHI SHIPBUILDING Co. JAPAN.
CLASS	AMERICAN BUREAU OF SHIPPING
DEADWEIGHT	107,574 MT



INVESTIGATION

A local Liberian representative was appointed as Casualty Investigator and conducted the investigation into the missing Electrician at Algieras Port, Spain, on September 26, 2017.

FINDINGS OF FACT

I. NARRATIVE

On September 07, 2017, about 2024 LT, while the vessel sailed on her passage from Malta to Novorossiysk, Russia, Electrician Mr. TANDEE. HEMENDRAKUMAR SIKKARBHAI, was declared missing while the vessel was at approximate position; Lat. 36-22N; Long. 022-43.9E.

On September 04, 2017, few days before the Electrician's disappearance, he was assisting other members of the engine department to overhaul an electrical motor of the condenser cooling seawater pump. The following morning, at about 0800 LT, the Electrician informed the 2nd Engineer that he

was experiencing back pains. His condition was communicated to the Chief Engineer and the Duty Officer on the bridge. The Chief Engineer then advised the Electrician to rest in his cabin and not carry out any work until he felt better. The 2nd Officer sent pain medicine and spray/gel to the Electrician's cabin for his back pain. From September 5-7, the Chief Engineer did not personally visit the sick Electrician; he only made a phone call around noon to inquire about the Electrician's wellbeing. The Chief Engineer also told the Electrician that he would be sent ashore if his pain worsened.

The 2nd Officer, who is in charge of onboard medical care, came to follow up on the Electrician's condition before and after his bridge watches. The 2nd Officer mentioned that until his last follow up visit on the 7th of September (about 1140 LT), the Electrician stated that his condition had not improved. The Master was informed about this situation; the Master then informed the Electrician about the possibility of medical treatment and repatriation at next port of call.

The C/Trainee reported that the last time he saw the Electrician was on the 7th of September at 1250 LT. The C/Trainee had gone to the Electrician's cabin to deliver dinner at 1800, but the Electrician was not in his cabin. The C/Trainee immediately reported to the Chief Officer that the Electrician was missing. No actions were taken to search for the Electrician until at about 2018 when the 2nd Engineer came up from aft of accommodation through a ladder on B deck towards the poop deck, who noticed a pair of slippers near the portside deck railing that belonged to the Electrician (See Figure 1 and Figure 2).

The 2nd Engineer then proceeded immediately to Electrician's cabin to check on him. He knocked on the door and when he heard no response, he opened the cabin door – the Electrician was not in the cabin. The 2nd Engineer then went up to the bridge and reported to the Duty Officer that the Electrician was missing from his cabin. The Duty Officer informed the Master, who then ordered to raise general alarm and organize a full shipboard search of the Electrician.

At about 2030 LT, the Master went to the bridge to coordinate the shipboard search, and it was reported to him that search teams went into the Electrician's cabin and found a note apparently written in Gujarati language. At about 2036 LT, the Master contacted Olympia Radio to report a suspected 'man overboard' incident. Backtracking the time it was first reported to the Chief Officer earlier at 1800 LT when the vessel was at position: Lat. 36-20N; Long. 022-13E, and the Master then decided to turn the vessel back to follow her previous track.

At 2105 LT, JRC in Piraeus contacted the vessel via satellite phone to gather more information about the incident. JRC instructed the vessel to broadcast via VHF channel 16 the suspected 'man overboard' incident and the approximate position where it may have occurred. Shipboard search was called off at 2143 LT, with the Electrician still missing.

At about 0745 LT on September 08, 2017, JRC instructed the vessel to head towards position: Lat. 36-18N Long: Long. 022-51E, and was asked to cease VHF broadcast as Olympia radio would make the broadcast instead. At 0300 LT, VDR data was stopped, and at 0715 LT, the vessel arrived at the position advised by JRC to stop and search. At about 1002 LT, Piraeus JRC instructed the vessel to continue with her passage, as another vessel will arrive to continue with the search.



Figure 1: Electrician's Slippers on deck. Photo taken by crew at the time of incident



Figure 2: Location where 2nd Engineer saw the slippers

2. THE VICTIM AND WITNESSES

Mr. SUKKARBHAI was a 55-year old Indian national with extensive experience as a professional electrician. The crewmembers onboard the ALELIA describe him as professional, hardworking and very committed to his job. He did not need to be monitored in his daily work; he initiated maintenance and repair of electro-mechanical equipment onboard the vessel.

All the witnesses interviewed agree and described the Electrician as a calm person, who carried their activity aboard efficiently, and who normally was polite; however, he did not mingle at times with the rest of the crew. The conversations he kept with the staff of his department were related to work onboard. There were times when the Electrician spoke of his private life and of his family, friends and plans of the future, without any type of reservation. No one suspected that the Electrician could have some type of mental, psychological, personal or family problems, and his behavior toward his fellow vessel mates was good at all times. Mostly he kept himself.

Mr. TANDEI, HEMENDRAKUMAR SUKKARBHAI joined the vessel at Algeciras (Port of Spain) on June 09, 2017. The 2nd Engineer joined the vessel on the same date and at the same Port.

A few days prior to the disappearance of the Electrician, both the 2nd Officer and the C/Trainee followed up and visited the Electrician in his cabin. During their interviews, they both consistently described the condition of the Electrician as lying on the floor instead of the sofa or bed, to try to reduce the back pain. The C/Trainee noticed that he was eating small portions of food. The C/Trainee was also the last person who physically saw the Electrician prior to his disappearance. During the course of the investigation, the investigating officer interviewed the following witnesses:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Company</i>	<i>Function</i>
Capt. Hassan Md Moïn Huldin	Marine Trust Ltd (Greece)	Master
Mr. Mathur Anoop Kumar	Marine Trust Ltd (Greece)	C/E
Mr. Usha Sankar Sahoo	Marine Trust Ltd (Greece)	2/OFF
Mr. Adeesh Goyal	Marine Trust Ltd (Greece)	2/Eng
Mr. Ian Gawaran	Marine Trust Ltd (Greece)	C/Trainee
Mr. Yannis Papageorgiou	Marine Trust Ltd (Greece)	Superintendent
Mr. Jose Manuel Molina	Marinsur	P&I Surveyor
Mr. Sebastian Diaz	Diaz y Asociados	P&I Lawyer
Mr. Jose Bolaños	LISCR	MID 6042

3. THE SEARCH

Based on the statement of facts provided by the Master and other witnesses, the disappearance of the Electrician was first reported at about 1800 LT on September 7, 2017 by the C/Trainee who usually brought food to the Electrician. It was not until about 2018 LT that the 2nd Engineer found the Electrician's slippers by the portside deck railing and notified the Duty Officer, who then informed the Master about the Electrician.

Under the instructions of the Master, the Duty Officer raised the ship's general alarm and organized the shipboard search teams at about 2030 LT. Shipboard search continued until 2143 when the search teams reported to the Master that the search yielded no results. The Master then ordered the teams to abort the search.

During the shipboard search of the missing Electrician, search teams went to various decks of the vessel including inside the Electrician's cabin. While searching inside the Electrician's cabin, the search crew found a note, which was later determined to have been written in his local Gujarati language. (See Figure 3 and Figure 4).

Both the vessel's operator later translated the letter into English, and by the Investigation Department of the vessel's flag State; they both provided same translations.

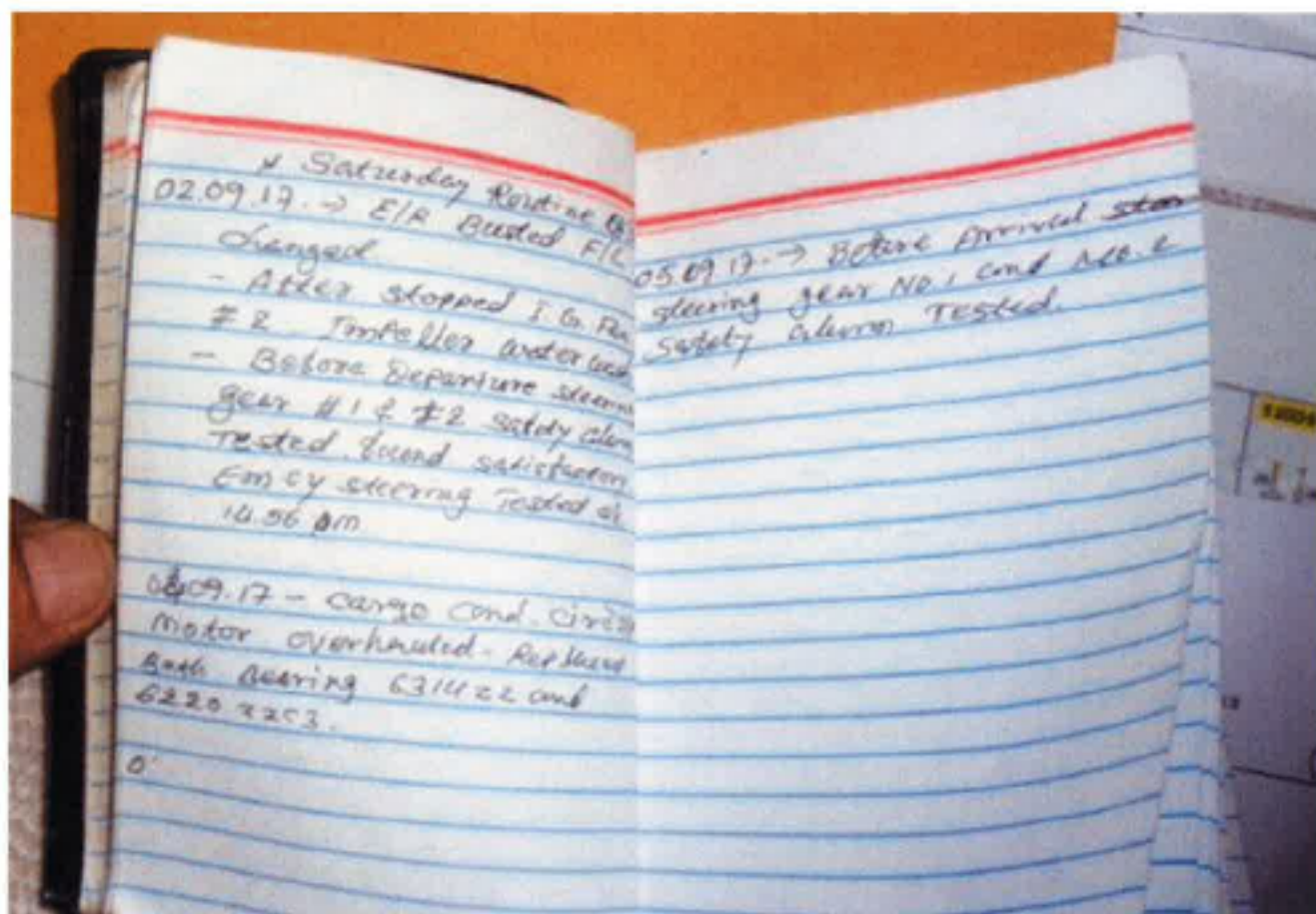


Figure 3. Detail of Electrician's Work Note Book. Last Page written on September 5, 2017

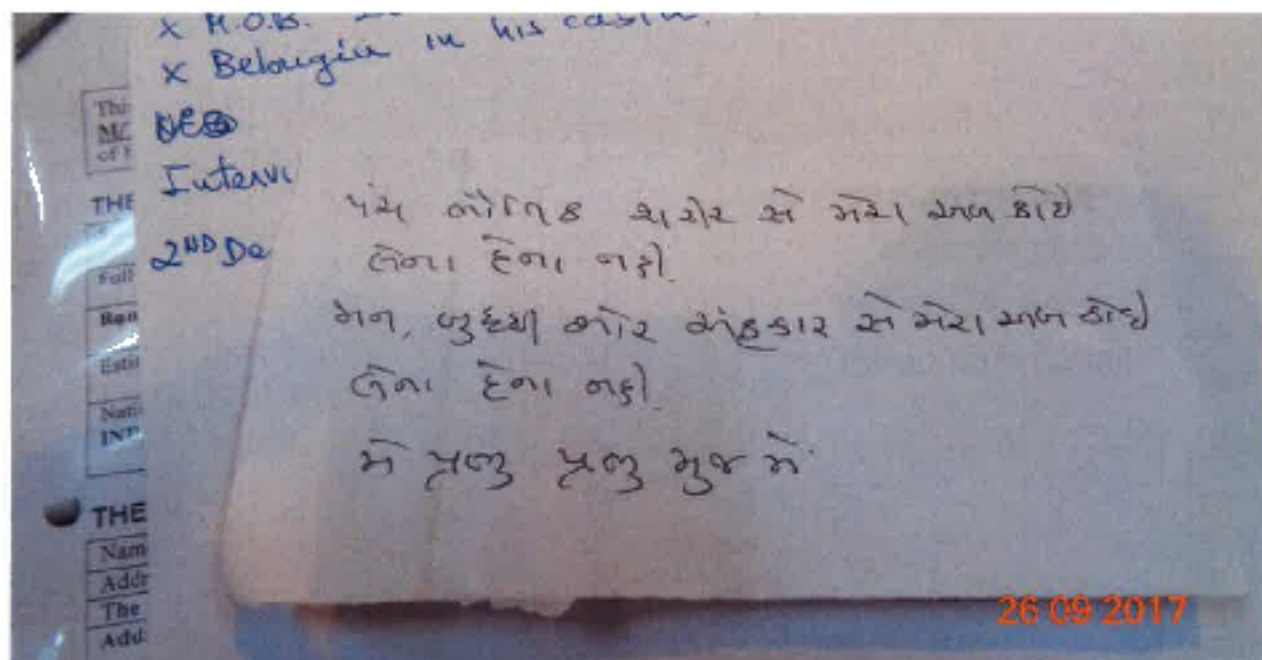


Figure 4: A handwritten note found in Electrician cabin

The Master declared the Electrician missing after the 2nd Engineer found slippers belonging to the Electrician. He also reported to Hellenic Coast Guard Joint Rescue Coordination Center (JRCC). At 2036 LT, the Master contacted Olympia Radio to report a suspected 'man overboard', back tracking the time it was first reported to the Chief Officer.

At about 0145 LT on September 8, JRCC instructed the vessel to head towards position: Lat. 36-18N; Long. 022-51E, and was asked to cease VHF broadcast as Olympia radio would make the broadcast instead. At 0715 LT, vessel arrived at the position advised by JRCC to stop and search. At about 1002 LT, Piraeus JRCC instructed the vessel to continue with her passage, as another vessel will arrive to continue with the search.

4. WORK PLANNING/WHAT LEAD TO EVENT

The following timeline of events are details collected, which point out activities of the Electrician prior to his disappearance:

- On September 4, 2017, two days before his disappearance, Electrician was carrying out overhauling of the electrical motor of the condenser cooling seawater pump, with Engine Department crews.
- On September 5 at 0800 LT, Electrician reported to 2nd Engineer that he has a back pain. This circumstance was conveyed to the Chief Engineer and the officer on duty on the bridge. As per Chief Engineer advised, the Electrician was permitted to take rest in his cabin and not to carry out any work.
- Duty officer sent suitable pain medicine, spray and gel to his cabin for Electrician's use to ease his pain.

- Between September 5-7, the Chief Engineer did not personally visit the Electrician, but only made calls to inquire about the Electrician's wellbeing and informed him of the possibility of being sent ashore for medical treatment, and subsequently repatriated home.
- The 2nd Officer followed up before and after his bridge watches, proceeding to the Electrician's cabin to check his condition. However until last visited on September 7, the Electrician's condition had not improved. The Master was informed accordingly.
- During the 2nd Officer and C/Trainee's visit to Electrician's cabin, Electrician was lying on the floor instead of the sofa or bed, as the latter may have been trying to reduce the back pain he had been suffering.
- The C/Trainee also noticed that the Electrician was eating smaller portion of food.
- On September 7 at 2018, the 2nd Engineer noticed a pair of slippers that belonged to the Electrician at Aft main deck Port quarter near railings. He went to check Electrician in his cabin and noticed that Electrician was missing, then he informed bridge immediately.
- At 2030, alarm raised, crew mustered and searched all over the vessel.
- At 2033 suspicious note, written in Gujarati language was found in his cabin.
- At 2036 contacted to Olympia Radio and reported, suspected man over board around 1800Lt at Lat. 36-19.7N; Long. 022-12.4E. Turned vessel to previous track and searched.
- Master notified to Hellenic Coast Guard Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) and vessel engaged in Search and Rescue operation from September 7-8 under the instruction of JRCC SAR Center.
- On September 8, 1020, JRCC relieved vessel from SAR operation to resume her voyage. SAR operation continued with Seaborn (over 25 other nearby ships). Airborne (by Helicopter and airplane) and land under instruction of JRCC Piraeus.
- On September 10 at 1800, the Search and Rescue Operation was aborted.

5. CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS

The Electrician was suffering from back pain and there had been no improvement in his condition. As per C/Trainee statement, he was not eating well and would sleep on the floor to ease his back pain. The 2nd Officer and Chief Engineer noted that his back pain did not improve despite the pain medication given to the Electrician.

The note found inside the Electrician's cabin (*see Figure 4*) was determined to be written in a local Gujarati language, which is one of the known dialects in India and spoken by the natives of the Indian State of Gujarat. The Gujarati dialect is considered as only written and spoken by at least 4.48% of the Indian population (Wikipedia). Mr. TANDEL HEMENDRAKUMAR SUKKARBHAI hailed from Kotak Valsad, Gujarat, and he was the only member of the vessel's crew to have originated from the Indian State of Gujarat (*see Appendix 2 – Crew List*).

The note was later translated into English by the vessel's operator (*see Appendix 1*) and from the message implied a religious commitment of a person to their God. The note was more likely than not, interpreted as a possible suicide note as per operator based on its content and context.

6. PROBABLE CAUSE

As the cause of the disappearance is not clearly known, or the victim's physical body was not recovered, it cannot be determined as to what may have led to the disappearance of the Electrician. After the reported disappearance, both shipboard and sea searches were conducted, but the Electrician was never found. It is safe to conclude that since the Electrician was neither found onboard, nor at sea, he most likely fell or jumped overboard.

The note found inside the Electrician's cabin, which was written in Indian Gujarati dialect, suggested that the Electrician personally wrote it. He was the only crewmember who hailed from the Indian State of Gujarat. However, without forensic analysis of the note, it cannot firmly be established by this investigation whether the Electrician indeed wrote the letter.

At this time, despite the facts gathered in this investigation, it is quite difficult to rule out that the incident involving the disappearance of the Electrician was self-inflicted, nor caused by another person/s, particularly in the absence of any eyewitnesses who personally saw how the incident happened. However, considering the context of the note found written in Gujarati language, it is in the opinion of this investigation that there may be a circumstantial possibility that the Electrician may have committed suicide.

CONCLUSION

All documents reviewed, including witness statements collected, indicated no evidence that foul play, was a factor into the disappearance of the Electrician. Neither fatigue, drugs, nor alcohol were considered as factors, which could have contributed to this incident. The Electrician was neither isolated nor had any known quarrel with other members of the crew, based on witness statements.

There were also no signs of personnel and work related issues onboard the ALEXIA. Most of the statements of witnesses were consistent and same comments were given by the interviewed crews. The crewmembers were all surprised at the disappearance of the Electrician; they did not expect this incident to occur since the Electrician was observed to be friendly and had a good working relationship with other crewmembers.

This report was prepared based on the report and findings from the investigations conducted by the local flag State investigator, as supplemented by documented evidences of results and reports compiled during attendance on board the vessel ALEXIA.

All the evidence collected from this investigation were gathered on board the ALEXIA, and also provided by her operators, which includes but not limited to documents, photographs, and crew interviews which were all used as materials to develop the Commissioner's Decision and this report to the investigation of this incident. The content contained therein was reported without prejudice and with regard to all known facts provide



Mr. Alphard V. T. Romero

Director, Marine Investigation

APPENDIX 1

Letter found in Electrician cabin. (Translation)

General meaning: This note implies the spiritual quest of shedding the physical body and merging with GOD in spirit.

Quote:

Dear Lord in peace and in happiness, I shed the earthly/physical body composed of five elements of nature. Neither do I dwell in mind/thoughts, intellect and vanity/ego. Hence I merge wholly with ONE (GOD) who is unique, revered and loved by all. In thee I seek solace and peace of mind & spirit.

I detach myself completely from the physical body, mind intellect vanity: I renounce all intellect, mind and vanity, cause I merge with Lord who dwells in me.

U:quote

APPENDIX 2

1. Name of Ship		2. Port of Arrival				3. Date ETA
M/T ALEXIA		ISTANBUL				09-Sep-17
4. Nationality of Ship		5. Port Departed				6. Nature & No. of
TIBERIA						
7. Sr.	8. Given	9. Rank	10. Nationality	11. Date & Place of Birth		PASSPORT
1	HASSAN MD MOIN UDDIN	MASTER		18-	CHITTAGONG	BE0575236
2	KUMAR SANJEEV	COFF	INDIAN	02-	PATNA, BIHAR	Z1725625
3	SAHOO UMASANKAR	2OFF	INDIAN	14-Sep-	PURUSHI COMPIUR SOUTH 24	C9059173
4	GARG LALU	3OFF	INDIAN	05-	SHEKHASAR, RAJASTHAN	I3171267
5	SINGH VEER ABHIMANYU	TNO	INDIAN	05-	BIHAGAWANPUR, BIHAR	N7952459
6	MATHURANOOPIKUMAR	CHENG	INDIAN	01-	NEW DELHI, DELHI	Z3420720
7	ADEESH GOYEL	2/ENG	INDIAN	29-	CHENNAI, TAMILNADU	I.6194528
8	JOSEPH DERKISABAYA	3/ENG	INDIAN	11-	TIRUAIYVILLAL, TAMILNADU	V6300561
9	SELVAM JAGANATHAN	4/ENG	INDIAN	12-	CHENNAI, TAMILNADU	K2225877
10		EOFF	INDIAN	02-	KOLAK VALSAD, GUJARAT	L2436346
11	MYLAPALLI	PEMAN	INDIAN	20-	VISAKHAPATNAM AP	JH854726
12	SIBULO ERIC CARPIO	BSN	FILIPINO	12-	MUNTLINLUPA MM	EC11P7437H
13	AMIN VENE TRIBANO	ASD	FILIPINO	21-	PIPIGAN ABRA	PU629692A
14	JAYRACO ELIGIO TAN JR	ASD	FILIPINO	22-	INITAO MIS OR	EC6779854
15	JAVINRS NOLAN	ASD	FILIPINO	21-	LABASON ZAM DN	EC2954010
16	MANAGAT WIDDY	ASD	FILIPINO	20-	LINGAYEN PGN	EC0794780
17	BAGAFORO SHERWIN	ASD	FILIPINO	25-	AJUY ILOILO	EC7876676
18	BULAY RICKY JAKE LAPE	ASR	FILIPINO	11-	CEBU CITY	EB9856237
19	BARAN ROCKY ASISTIDO	AST	FILIPINO	11-	B VIEJO ILOLO	EB9451321
20	YAP ROBERT ESTRADA	ASE	FILIPINO	14-	MANILA	EC1461717
21	CAMPO OLIVER TAPAQAN	C/COOK	FILIPINO	01-	STA ANA CAGAYAN	EC5414554
22	LIMOTAN GLENN	A/COOK	FILIPINO	15-	CEBU CITY	EC1144377
23	CAWARAN TAN KEITH SAN	C/TRAINEE	FILIPINO	16-	BACOOD, CAVITE	EC6875635
24	ANANYA KAMAKHYA	CS	INDIAN	02-	ORALUTTIAR PRADESH	M0556191