

Dali crew allowed to fly back home

Sam Chambers

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NTSB

Having been stuck on a ship at the centre of a media storm for months on end the stressed crew of the *Dali* containership have finally been allowed to head home to Asia.

Investigators in the US had barred the workers on the boxship from disembarking since March 26 when it was involved in this year's most high profile shipping accident, taking out Baltimore's largest bridge and killing six men in the process.

Under an agreement agreed at a court in Baltimore yesterday, the crew who work for Synergy Marine can return home to India and Sri Lanka but must be available for depositions.

The *Dali* is expected to be moved from Baltimore to Norfolk, Virginia soon, where it will receive extensive repairs while the legal cases surrounding the accident are expected to take many years to resolve.

Grace Ocean, the owner of the *Dali*, and shipmanager Synergy Marine filed a limitation of liability court petition on April 1 seeking to cap their liability to just \$43.6m, in a case that overall is expected to see pay-outs in the billions of dollars. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), which released a preliminary report last month, is investigating what caused *Dali* to lose power, then strike and topple the bridge. The FBI has opened a criminal investigation.

The vessel, on charter to Maersk, experienced electrical blackouts about 10 hours before leaving the Port of Baltimore and again shortly before it slammed into the Francis Key Bridge, according to the NTSB's preliminary report.

The first power outage occurred after a crewmember mistakenly closed an exhaust damper while conducting maintenance, causing one of the ship's diesel engines to stall, investigators said. Shortly after leaving Baltimore, the ship crashed into one of the bridge's supporting columns because another power outage, clearly captured in video footage, caused it to lose steering and propulsion.

The board said the fatal outage came about four minutes before the crash when electrical breakers unexpectedly tripped causing a loss of power to all shipboard lighting and most equipment when it was 1 km from the bridge.

The *Dali* crew restored power, but another blackout occurred about 320 m from the bridge, which stopped all three steering pumps. The crew was unable to move the rudder to steer.

Plans are being drawn up to get a replacement bridge up and running by 2028, while insurers have warned the *Dali* accident could be one of the largest marine claims in history.