

1 Dead, 6 Missing After Tugboat Sinks While Towing Container Ship Off Busan

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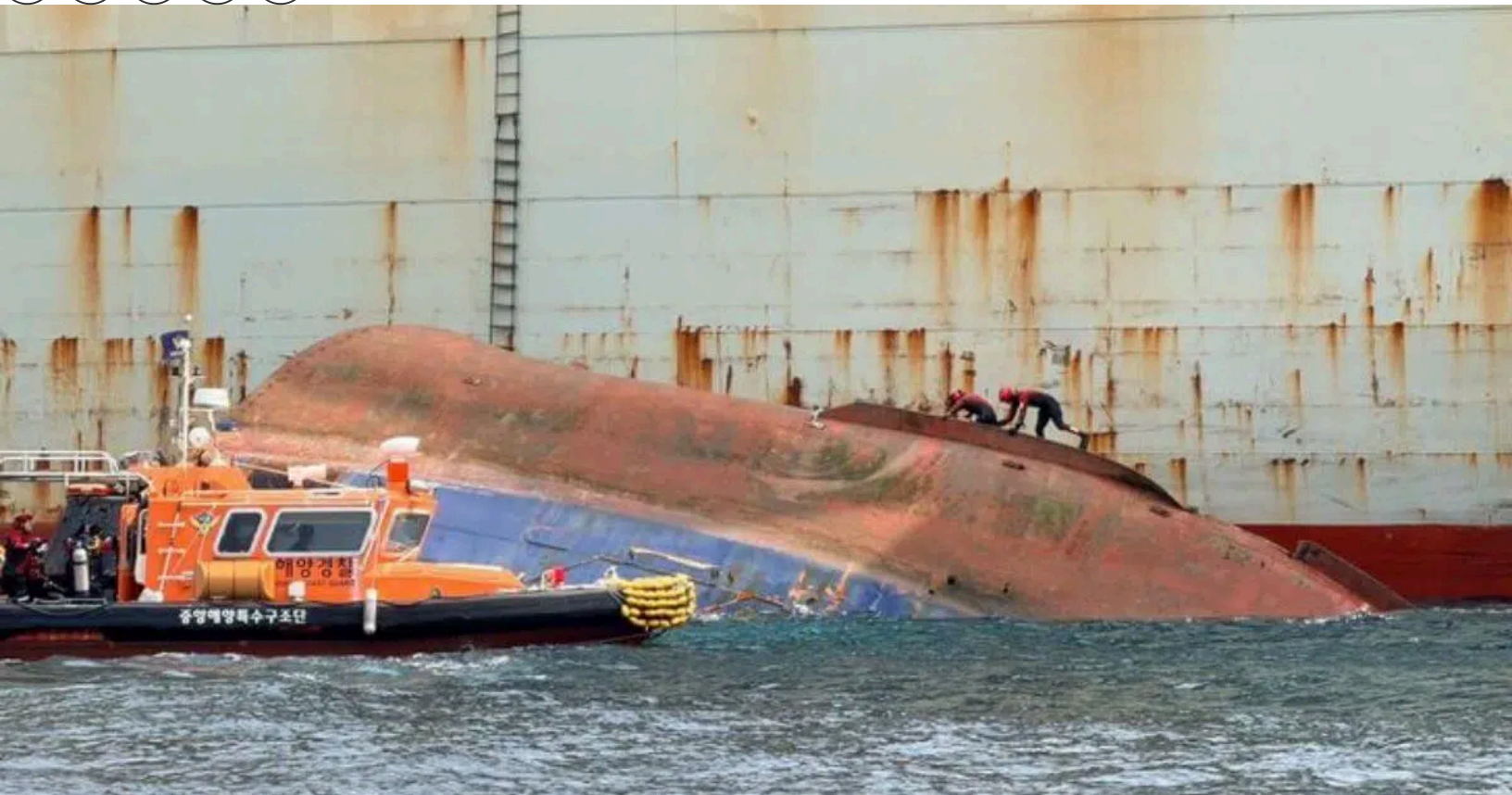


Image Credits: Busan Coast Guard

Six crew members are still missing after a tugboat capsized and sank off Busan on Sept. 2 while towing a large container ship.

The 286-tonne TNS Catcher capsized at about 1:29 p.m. in waters around 9 km east of Oryukdo Island. It sank completely at about 3:27 p.m., about two hours later.

The tug was later found on the seabed at a depth of about 87 metres. Eight people were on board the tug, six South Koreans and two Indonesians.

A 53-year-old Indonesian crew member was rescued by a nearby merchant ship at about 1:49 p.m., around 20 minutes after the accident. He was not in serious condition.

A 57-year-old South Korean crew member was found unconscious inside the capsized tug. He was taken to hospital on a Coast Guard rescue vessel but later died.

The other six crew members remain missing.

Search continues at sea

The operation involved 19 vessels, 11 Coast Guard ships, four Navy ships and four vessels from the Busan city government and fire authority. One Coast Guard aircraft and two Air Force aircraft also took part.

About 270 flares were used during the search. The Coast Guard used 30 and the Air Force used 240.

The Navy's Gwangyang used a remotely operated vehicle to search around the sunken tug. Visibility underwater was only about 30 cm.

Bad sea conditions made the operation harder. Waves reached up to 1.5 metres and winds reached 6 metres per second. Strong currents and poor visibility also affected the search.

The water temperature near Oryukdo was 25.1°C on the afternoon of Sept. 2.

The Coast Guard said international aeronautical and maritime search and rescue guidelines put the maximum survival time for a person missing at sea at more than 40 hours when the water temperature is 20°C or higher.

Tug turned before capsizing

The TNS Catcher had left a government vessel pier at Busan Port at 10:15 a.m. to tow a merchant vessel that had been involved in an earlier accident.

Three tugs were involved in the towing operation. Two were positioned on either side of the container ship's bow, while another pushed from the stern. The TNS Catcher was on the starboard side of the bow.

A Busan maritime police official said the tug is believed to have capsized while turning right, possibly involving the towline or hawser.

The official said the tug's speed and timing did not appear to match during the turn. It is still not clear whether the tug became caught on the towline.

CCTV footage from the container ship showed the TNS Catcher turning right before rolling to the left.

The Coast Guard said the tug did not collide with the [container ship](#).

The cause of the accident is not yet known.

Tug found on seabed

The TNS Catcher is believed to have moved about 4.5 km northeast from the accident site before sinking. It then moved about 0.8 km southwest.

At about 8 p.m. on Sept. 2, the Coast Guard found an object on the seabed about 6.5 km east of Songjeong Port. It was later confirmed to be the TNS Catcher, lying about 87 metres below the surface.

Due to the depth, the Coast Guard is considering diving operations. Navy ROVs are also being used in the underwater search.

Investigation underway

Investigators have obtained AIS data, voyage data recorder information and CCTV footage from the tug and container ship. They also plan to examine more CCTV footage, vessel tracking records and other ship documents.

President Lee Jae Myung ordered authorities to use all available resources for the search, rescue and recovery operation.

Busan city held an emergency meeting and activated its disaster response headquarters. Nam-gu and Haeundae-gu opened support centres at the scene, while Dong-gu, where the tug operator is based, set up its own response headquarters.

Teams are also providing counselling and support to the families. Emergency interpretation services have been arranged for affected foreign nationals.

References: koreatimes, yna

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