04-16-2014 South Korea – Sinking of the Sewol -304 -2 PSDs Lost

More than 270 missing as ferry sinks off the coast of South Korea
April 16, 2014 Justin McCurry in Tokyo

At least six reported dead and 55 injured as ships and helicopters race to save passengers, including children bound for holiday island.

More than 270 people are still unaccounted for as efforts continue to rescue passengers aboard a South Korean ferry that sank off the country’s south-west coast on Wednesday morning.

Officials said six of the ship’s 462 passengers had died, at least 55 are injured and 179 have been rescued. Many passengers - of which 300 are children - may have been trapped inside the vessel as it listed and sank.

A total of 277 people remained missing.

Dozens of coastguard and navy vessels were battling to rescue passengers, including 325 high school pupils and their teachers. A major rescue operation is now underway involving more than 30 coastguard and military ships, as well as about a dozen helicopters. Authorities said the dead included a female crew member in her early 20 and two male high school students. A coast guard officer confirmed a fourth fatality but had no immediate details about it.
South Korean coastguards on the rescue operation around the stricken passenger ferry Sewol on Wednesday. Photograph: Yonhap/EPA

There were conflicting reports throughout the morning of the number of people who had been rescued. Four hours after the accident, Yonhap said 368 people had been confirmed as safe, including 13 injured, with a further 107 unaccounted for.

The Sewol, a car and passenger ferry, sent out a distress signal shortly before 9am local time. The 6,852-tonne vessel had been en route from the western port of Incheon to the southern resort island of Jeju, located about 100 kilometres (60 miles) off the mainland, when it reportedly hit rocks and began listing severely.
Early reports by some South Korean media indicated that all 338 high school pupils and their teachers were safe following a huge rescue operation involving civilian and military vessels, and helicopters.

But as reports emerged that two people were dead, YTN, a major TV network, withdrew the report and said it had yet to confirm the safety of all of the members of the school party.

The area had been shrouded in fog overnight, leading to the cancellation of many ferry services to islands. But news reports said visibility in the area was fair on Wednesday morning.

Passenger testimony indicated that the ship had struck rocks about 20 km off the coast of Byungpoong island.

"We heard a big thumping sound and the boat stopped," one passenger told the YTN by telephone. "The boat is tilting and we have to hold on to something to stay seated."

Another told the network that at least one helicopter had reached the vessel, adding that other passengers had remained in their cabins soon after the accident but were having trouble keeping their balance.
Other reports said passengers had been told to put on lifejackets and jump into the sea amid fears that the vessel was on the verge of sinking. News footage showed that at least one lifeboat aboard the ferry had been deployed.

"The ship is taking in water and sinking," a coastguard spokesman told AFP by phone as the rescue operation got under way. "There are around 450 people on board and we have coastguard vessels, commercial ships in the area, as well as helicopters all engaged in the rescue operation," the spokesman added.

A total of 18 helicopters and 34 rescue boats have been sent to the area, Lee Gyeong-og, a government vice minister, told a televised news conference. He added that the South Korean president, Park Geun-hye had urged rescue teams to do their utmost to save everyone on board.
The pupils, from Danwon high school in Ansan city near Seoul, were on their way to Jeju, a popular tourist destination, for a four-day study trip. The ship left Incheon port on Tuesday evening, according to local maritime officials, and was due to arrive at Jeju later on Wednesday.

Dramatic images on South Korean TV showed the capsized ship tilted 45 degrees on its port side. Later, the vessel appeared to have inverted and was almost completely submerged.

**Ferry sinks off coast of South Korea - in pictures**


16 April 2014  Joanna Ruck

Nearly 300 hundred people are still missing after a ferry sank off the coast of South Korea. The coastguard and navy are battling to rescue passengers including a school party

*South Korean rescue helicopters fly over a passenger ship as it sinks off the country's southern coast. Photograph: AP*
Passengers are rescued by the coastguard. Photograph: AP

South Korean coastguard officers try to rescue passengers. Photograph: Hyung Min woo/AP
Rescue team boats and fishing boats try to save passengers from the rapidly sinking ferry. Photograph: AP
Passengers are rescued by the South Korean coastguard. Photograph: Getty Images

Passengers are rescued by a South Korean coastguard helicopter. Photograph: AP
An injured passenger is treated after being rescued by South Korean maritime police. Photograph: Yonhap/Reuters

A rescued girl being brought on to land in Jindo. Photograph: Yonhap/AFP/Getty Images
The mother of a passenger on the ferry reacts as she finds her son’s name on the list of survivors. Photograph: Kim Hong ji/Reuters

Rescued passengers at a gym in Jindo. Photograph: Kim Hong ji/Reuters
Relatives wait for news of the missing people at a harbor in Jindo. Photograph: Jung Yeon Je/AFP/Getty Images

Parents and relatives check the rescued passengers lists at a gymnasium in Jindo. Photograph: AP
Maritime police search for missing passengers as night begins to fall. Photograph: Kim Hong Ji/Reuters

Relatives of missing people wait at a Jindo port for news. Photograph: Chung Sung Jun/Getty Images
South Korea ferry disaster survivors describe chaotic scenes
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/16/south-korea-ferry-sewol-disaster-chaotic-scenes-boat
April 16, 2014 Justin McCurry in Tokyo

Some petrified passengers jumped into sea before Sewol sank but many more were thought to be trapped on board.

Survivors of Wednesday's ferry accident off the coast of South Korea have described chaotic scenes after the vessel listed and started to sink, possibly after running aground, forcing petrified passengers to jump into the sea before it disappeared beneath the water.

As dozens of boats, helicopters and a team of South Korean navy personnel frantically tried to locate as many as 295 missing passengers before darkness set in, survivors recalled their dramatic escape bids.

Lim Hyung-min, one of a group of 325 high school pupils aboard the Sewol, told the YTN network that he had put on a life jacket and jumped into the sea with other pupils, before swimming to a nearby rescue boat.

"As the ferry was shaking and tilting, we all tripped and bumped into each another," Lim said from a gymnasium on a nearby island, where he and other survivors were being treated.

Lim described the sea as "so cold ... I was hurrying, thinking that I wanted to live." Some of the other passengers were bleeding, he added.

Photographs from the scene showed soaked pupils, some wrapped in blankets, being treated by emergency workers on the island.

Other survivors said they feared the death toll would rise significantly as they believed dozens of people were still trapped inside the ferry after it listed and then sank into the sea about 20km (12 miles) from the coast of Byungpoong island about two hours after issuing a distress signal.

Kim Seong-mok told YTN he was certain people were trapped inside the ship as water levels quickly rose inside. The vessel's severe tilt prevented many from
reaching exits from where they might have been able to leap into the sea to be picked up by rescue boats.

Some people yelled at those who couldn't get out, urging them to break windows, said Kim, who had just eaten breakfast when he felt the ferry tilt and then crash into something.

The ferry operator reportedly asked passengers to stay inside their cabins, Kim said, adding that he had not heard an announcement urging people to leave the ship before it sank.

"There was a bang and then the ship suddenly tilted over," Yonhap quoted a 57-year-old survivor as saying. "Downstairs were restaurants, shops and entertainment rooms, and those who were there are feared to have failed to escape."

The chances of surviving for long in the sea were slim. The temperature in the sea separating the South Korean mainland from a string of islands off its south-west coast was about 12C on Wednesday – cold enough to bring on symptoms of hypothermia after 90 minutes to two hours, according to a rescue worker quoted by Associated Press.

Navy divers trying to locate people still trapped inside the ship were frustrated by poor visibility created by mud stirred up from the seabed.

The pupils and their teachers, from Danwon high school in the Seoul suburb of Ansan, were travelling to Jeju island for a four-day study trip, along with about 150 other passengers, when the accident occurred.

The Sewol sent out a distress signal shortly before 9am local time. The 6,825-ton vessel had been en route from the western port of Incheon to Jeju, located about 100km (60 miles) off the mainland, when it reportedly hit rocks and began listing severely.

Pupils at the school were sent home early as distraught parents arrived seeking information about their children. Others rushed to ports in the country's south-west after receiving calls from their children confirming they were safe. One pupil said she saw several parents in tears as she left the school. Children who had not joined the trip started crying as news of the accident came through on their mobile phones, reports said.

**Hundreds feared dead in sunken ferry**

Apr 17, 2014 BY KANG JIN-KYU
With 247 high school students unaccounted for, nation fears worst maritime disaster in decades

A ferry carrying 475 people, mostly high school students on a four-day school trip to Jeju Island, sank off the southwestern coast, killing at least nine people. The final death toll could be in the hundreds and the worst maritime disaster in Korea in decades.

Rescuers saved 179 people but 287 were unaccounted for, including 244 students, as of 12:00 p.m. today, 27 hours after the ferry first sent a distress signal.

According to broadcaster YTN, families of at least two missing students received resigned text messages directly after the accident. One message sent by a son to his mother at 9:27 a.m. read: “Mom, I’m sending this because I may not be able to say this again. I love you.”

The 6,825-ton Sewol, in the charge of Captain Lee Joon-seok, hit an object that may have been an underwater rock at 8:40 a.m. yesterday when it was passing through waters three kilometers (1.86 miles) south of Gwanmae Island in Jindo County, South Jeolla, and began listing to the port side.

It took the crew 18 minutes to notify the Coast Guard of the ship’s distress, which specialists said was a crucial period of time. During the 18 minutes, the crew made repeated announcements via speakers, urging passengers to stay calm but not to prepare for evacuation.
And the water soon burst in.

“Many of my friends could not don life vests because the sea water burst in too rapidly,” said Lee Da-woon, a junior from Danwon High School in Ansan, Gyeonggi, who was rescued by the Coast Guard.

Among the passengers were 325 students from the school, who were accompanied by 15 teachers. The ferry carried a total of 429 passengers and 30 crew.

Kang Jae-kyung, head of the Gyeonggi Sea Rescue Team, said he suspected that an iron plate on the port side of the ferry was torn by an underwater rock, which allowed water to swamp the vessel.

At around 9:20 a.m., ships and helicopters dispatched by the maritime police arrived at the scene, followed by 40 Navy ships and six helicopters. But just over two hours after the first distress call, the ship sunk completely. As of 7 p.m., only 164 of the passengers were rescued, including just 78 students, said Security and Public Administration Minister Kang Byung-kyu at a press briefing.
Kang said strong currents hampered efforts to enter the ship and save anyone who was trapped. The passengers who haven’t been accounted for are feared to be stuck inside the sunken ship.

“The scene became chaotic as passengers on the lower floors rushed to the deck with the water coming in and the ship listing,” said Kim Seong-mok, a passenger who was rescued. Passengers down below begged someone to break windows so they could get out.

The ferry departed from Incheon Port at 10 p.m. Tuesday. The ferry sent a distress call at 8:58 a.m. yesterday after it began listing to the side for unknown reasons 20 kilometers off the island of Byeongpung in Jindo County, South Jeolla. That is about 160 kilometers north of Jeju.

Besides the 475 passengers, there were 150 vehicles on board, the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures Headquarters said.

The Coast Guard reported that a 27-year-old woman named Park Ji-yeong, who worked for the ferry company, and 11th grader Jung Cha-woong died in the accident. Park was found floating in waters, and Jung died while he was receiving treatment for injuries. A third fatality was a male student, although his identity could not be confirmed. A fourth fatality was also thought to be a student.

Around two hours after the ship sent its distress call, it sank completely, according to the Coast Guard. TV footage showed the vessel slowly sinking into the water with rescue helicopters flying overhead and dropping down a stretcher to rescue a passenger. It also showed a dramatic scene in which Navy and maritime police tried getting into the ship by cracking through windows before it totally sank.

The rescue operations were hampered by strong currents and low visibility at the scene, according to Lee Gyeong-og, a vice minister of the Security Ministry who is in charge of leading the emergency response team.

When asked at a press conference at 4:30 p.m. yesterday whether it was likely that the missing were trapped inside the sunken ship, Lee said, ”We are conducting an
exploration operation to see whether the missing are floating in or under the waters, or are inside the ship at this moment.”

The ferry Sewol lists to its port side as water filled its lower parts while rescue helicopters fly overhead. Just over two hours after the crew made the first distress call to authorities after realizing the ship was in trouble, the 6,825-ton vessel sank completely. [NEWS1]

The Ministry of Security and Public Administration said a total of 160 divers were dispatched to the scene as well as 18 aerial vehicles for rescue operations. The Navy sent more than a dozen vessels, its special forces and members of an underwater demolition team in a bid to get inside the ship.

The authorities initially reported inaccurately that they had rescued almost all the students, the rest of the passengers and the crew, but they later backtracked, saying a significant number was still missing, increasing the anguish of the families of the passengers and crew onboard.

Criticism of the management of the Incheon-based Chonghaejin Marine Company also arose after reports that the ferry changed its course to speed up the journey. The company denied the reports and said the ferry was on a regular route.

“There is a possibility that the ship changed its course to opt for an alternate one because its departure from Incheon was delayed [due to bad weather],” said Lee Gyeong-og of the response team.

People on board told the local media there were no strong sea waves or thick fog.

A Coast Guard report that Captain Lee Joon-seok was a substitute for a chief captain who was on vacation also added to suspicions.

Questions about the condition of the ship also arose after it was reported that it had been used by a Japanese company for 18 years before it was purchased by Chonghaejin in 2012.

To offer help in the rescue operation, the U.S. Navy sent the USS Bonhomme Richard to the scene yesterday.
President Park Geun-hye made a rushed visit to the response team set up in the government complex in Sejongno, central Seoul, to be briefed on the unfolding tragedy.

She gave a desperate-sounding request to the rescue authorities: “We don’t have much time left before sunset,” she pleaded. “Please do your best!”

The sinking of the Sewol is expected to be the worst maritime disaster Korea has experienced in more than two decades.

In 1993, 292 passengers died when an overloaded ferry sank off the country’s west coast, which sailed despite warnings of bad weather.

‘Mom, I love you’: The heartwrenching text messages sent from South Korea’s sinking ferry
Apr 17th 2014  Reporting by AFP

About 287 people are still missing

“SENDING THIS IN case I may not be able to say this again. Mom, I love you.” That was just one of many text messages sent by passengers on a sinking ferry in South Korea yesterday.

Shin Young-Jin was one of the lucky ones though. He escaped the tilted vessel and was reunited with his mother, who had texted him back to say, “Oh, I love you too son.”

Shin was one of 179 survivors rescued before the boat capsized and was submerged totally underwater.

There are fears for the lives of 287 people, including 244 students who were on a school trip to a nearby holiday island.

Kim Woong-Ki, who has not been found, sent a message to his older brother.
“My room is tilting about 45 degrees. My mobile is not working very well.”

His brother replied, telling him that help was on the way:

“So don’t panic and just do whatever you’re told to do. Then you’ll be fine.”

There was no further communication from Kim.

Another young student, identified by her surname Shin in local media reports, was trying to reassure her father about her own safety.

“Dad, don’t worry. I’m wearing a life vest and am with other girls. We’re inside the ship, still in the hallway.”

He did not like the sound of that plan, though, and urged her get out. It was too late.

“Dad, I can’t. The ship is too tilted. The hallway is crowded with so many people.”

The crew has been criticised for ordering passengers to stay put when the ship first foundered.

The JoongAng Ilbo also published excerpts from a chatroom conversation between several students on the ferry.

“Hey guys, let’s make sure we meet up alive,” messaged one. ”I love you all,” responded another.

It was not clear if the students were among those rescued.

**South Korea ferry disaster: School vice-principal rescued from doomed ship found hanged**

HTTP://WWW.MIRROR.CO.UK/NEWS/WORLD-NEWS/SOUTH-KOREA-FERRY-DISASTER-SCHOOL-3427247
18 APR 2014 BY DON MACKAY

Kang Min-Kyu was in charge of more than 300 pupils who were on the ferry as part of a school field trip. Many of the students are still missing.
The deputy head of the school feared to have lost nearly 300 pupils in the South Korean ferry disaster hanged himself.

Guilt preyed on the mind of Kang Min-Kyu following his rescue from the bowels of sinking ship Sewol.

The 52-year-old, in charge of Danwon High School’s four-day trip, was found hanging from a tree on Jindo island, where families of the missing had been staying.

Police discovered in the vice-principal’s wallet a suicide note, which said: “Surviving alone is too painful while 200 remain unaccounted for. I take full responsibility.

“I pushed ahead with the school trip. I will again become a teacher in the afterlife.”

Captain Lee Joon-seok, 69, was last night charged with five offences – negligence leading to the sinking of the ship, abandoning the ship, causing injury resulting in death, not seeking rescue from nearby ships and violating “seamen’s law”.

He is said to have been off the bridge as the ferry – carrying 475 people – started to list. Prosecutors also want two other officers arrested. It has been revealed only the junior third officer was on the Sewol’s bridge at the time of Wednesday’s disaster.

Captain Lee, who was remanded in custody, said at the court in Mokpo, south of Seoul, the passengers were told to stay put because help had not arrived.

As the ferry had started to capsize, he was photographed being lowered by rope into a boat – and he was accused of being one of the first to abandon ship.

The rescue bid has now turned into a recovery operation after divers scoured below decks on the submerged vessel. All hope has been given up that any of the missing 268 have survived. Twenty-eight people are known to have died, while 179 were rescued.

Tiny Kwon Ji-yeon has become the face of the tragedy. The six-year-old was pictured being passed from hand-to-hand by pupils before being lowered into a boat.

Survivor Yu Ho-sil said: “Somebody shouted to take the baby and other students passed the baby outside.”

Hospital staff have traced her grandparents but still face the heartbreak of telling her she is an orphan.
South Korea ferry: divers recover more bodies after entering ship

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/20/south-korea-ferry-divers-recover-10-more-bodies

April 19, 2014 Associated Press in Mokpo, South Korea

Confirmed death toll now at 52, as investigators unravel events on the bridge before the ship sank

Divers have begun to recover bodies from inside the ferry that sank off South Korea, pushing the confirmed death toll past 50, officials said on Sunday.

After more than three days of frustration and failure, divers finally found a way into the ferry, discovering more than a dozen bodies inside the ship.

About 250 people are still missing, most of them high school students on a holiday trip, and anguished families are furious with the pace of rescue efforts.

Divers had previously failed to enter the ferry, officials said, because of extremely strong currents and bad visibility due to poor weather. They have yet to find any survivors in the ship.

Beginning late on Saturday, when divers broke a window, and continuing into Sunday, multiple teams of divers have found various routes into the ferry, discovering bodies in different spots, coast guard official Koh Myung-seok said at a briefing. Thirteen bodies had been found in the ship, and six others were found floating outside, bringing the confirmed total to 52, said coastguard official Kim Jin-cheol.

A 21-year-old South Korean sailor also died from injuries he sustained on Wednesday while working on a warship going to help rescue the ferry passengers, the South Korean navy said.

On an island near the submerged ferry, about 200 police blocked about 100 relatives of missing passengers who had been walking on a main road in an effort,
they said, to travel to the presidential Blue House in Seoul to voice their complaints to the president.

"The government is the killer," they shouted as they pushed against a police barricade.

"We want an answer from the person in charge about why orders are not going through and nothing is being done," Lee Woon-geun, father of missing passenger Lee Jung-in, 17, said. "They are clearly lying and kicking the responsibility to others."

More than 300 people are missing or dead, and the captain of the ferry has been arrested on suspicion of negligence and abandoning people in need.

Two crew members have also been taken into custody, including a rookie third mate who a prosecutor said was steering in challenging waters unfamiliar to her when the accident occurred.

The ferry's captain, Lee Joon-seok, 68, was arrested along with one of the Sewol's three helmsmen and the 25-year-old third mate, prosecutors said.

"I am sorry to the people of South Korea for causing a disturbance and I bow my head in apology to the families of the victims," Lee told reporters on Saturday morning as he left the Mokpo branch of Gwangju district court to be jailed.

Senior prosecutor Yang Jung-jin told reporters the third mate was steering the ship on Wednesday morning as it passed through an area with lots of islands clustered close together and fast currents. According to investigators, the accident came at a point where the ship had to make a turn.

Prosecutor Park Jae-eok said investigators were looking at whether the third mate ordered a turn so sharp that it caused the vessel to list.

Yang said the third mate had six months of experience, and had not steered in the area before because another mate usually handled those duties. She took the wheel this time because heavy fog caused a departure delay, Yang said, adding that investigators did not know whether the ship was going faster than usual.

Helmsman Park Kyung-nam identified the third mate as Park Han-kyul.

The helmsman who was arrested, 55-year-old Cho Joon-ki, spoke to reporters outside court and accepted some responsibility.

"There was a mistake on my part as well, but the steering had been turned much more than usual," Cho said.
Lee has four decades of experience at sea. He had been captaining ferries for 10 years by the time he was interviewed by the Jeju Today website in 2004, and said he had sailed on ocean freighters for 20 years before that.

But he was not the Sewol's main captain, and worked on the ship about 10 days a month, helmsman Oh Yong-seok said.

Lee was not on the bridge when the ship began to list. "I gave instructions on the route, then briefly went to the bedroom when it happened," he told reporters.

According to the court, Lee faces five charges, including negligence of duty and violation of maritime law. Two other crew members each face three related charges.

Lee was required by law to be on the bridge helping his crew when the ferry passed through tricky navigational areas, Yang said.

Yang said Lee also abandoned people in need of help and rescue, saying, "The captain escaped before the passengers."

Video aired by Yonhap news agency showed Lee among the first people to reach the shore by rescue boat.

Yang said the two crew members arrested failed to reduce speed near the islands and failed to carry out necessary measures to save lives.

It was not clear why the two crew members made the sharp turn, Yang said.

He said prosecutors would continue to look into whether something other than the turn could have made the ferry sink, but said there were no strong waves that could have knocked down the ferry at the time.

Prosecutors will have 10 days to decide whether to indict the captain and crew, but can request a 10-day extension from the court.

On Saturday angry relatives of missing passengers expressed outrage at officials who were holding a briefing on the disaster in a gymnasium on Jindo island, where hundreds of family members are waiting for word about their loved ones. A few dozen relatives surged toward the stage, hurling questions at the officials. One man tried to choke a coastguard lieutenant and punch a maritime policeman.

"The government should have hurried up and done something, but they just wasted four days, which led to this point. I think this is more like a man-made disaster," said Lee Jong-eui, a businessman whose 17-year-old nephew, Nam Hyun-chul, is among the missing.

Three vessels with cranes are at the accident site to prepare to salvage the ferry, but they will not hoist the ship before getting approval from family members of
those still believed inside, because the lifting could endanger any survivors, said a coastguard officer, speaking on condition of anonymity.

**Divers in South Korea bring first bodies from ferry and captain defends his actions**


April 20, 2014  AFP
People sleep at the gymnasium used as a gathering point for relatives.

South Korean divers prepare to search for passengers.

Ferry captain Lee Joon seok, centre, leaves a court that issued his arrest warrant in Mokpo, south of Seoul.

Divers of the South Korean Navy search for missing passengers.

Cranes wait near the buoys installed to mark the location of the sunken ferry Sewol in the water off the southern coast near Jindo South Korea.
DIVERS began to retrieve bodies last night from inside the submerged South Korean ferry as the detained captain defended his decision to delay evacuation of the ship when it capsized nearly four days ago with 476 people on board.

Investigators arrested Captain Lee Joon-Seok and two of his crew early yesterday morning. All three have been criticised for abandoning hundreds of passengers trapped in the ferry, as they made their own escape.

Lee was charged with negligence and failing to secure the safety of passengers in violation of maritime law.

Divers retrieved the first three bodies from inside the ferry, which capsized nearly four days ago, marking a grim new stage in the search and recovery process. “Divers broke through the window of a passenger cabin just before midnight and pulled out three bodies,” a coastguard official told AFP early today.

All three were wearing lifejackets, the official said, adding that two were male while the gender of the third was not immediately confirmed.

They were the same three bodies that had been spotted, but not retrieved, during an earlier dive.

The confirmed death toll from the disaster now stands at 36 with 266 people still unaccounted for and 174 rescued.

More than 350 of those on board the 6825-tonne Sewol when it capsized and sank on Wednesday morning were students from the same high school in Ansan city just south of Seoul.

The age of the victims pulled from the ferry was not immediately known.

Their recovery followed days of fruitless efforts by more than 500 divers to access the submerged ship in the face of powerful currents and near-zero visibility.

Relatives of the missing gathered in the southern island of Jindo – not far from the disaster site – have been clinging to the slimmest of hopes that some may have survived in trapped air pockets.

The BBC reported that Shin Won-Nam, the head of the Emergency Management Centre, had told reporters the recovery operation could take weeks, if not months. “We are not sure about it. But according to the experts, the rescue may last one or two months,” he said.

As the arrests were being made, the dive teams who had spent two days vainly battling powerful currents and near zero visibility, finally penetrated the passenger decks.
The relatives, who have been sleeping in a gymnasium on Jindo, were shown video footage from one dive.

Even with a powerful underwater flashlight, visibility was measured in centimetres as the diver was seen groping his way blindly along the side of the ship with the help of a pre-attached rope.

Additional ropes were being attached ahead of a major push to get more rescuers inside.

“Instead of dispatching two divers at a time, we’re going to send up to 10,” senior coastguard officer Choi Sang-Hwan said.

Earlier yesterday Lee and the two crew members were paraded before TV cameras at their arraignment, dressed in dark raincoats with their hoods pulled up and their heads bowed.

Questioned as to why passengers had been ordered not to move for more than 40 minutes after the ship first foundered, Lee insisted it was a safety measure.

“At the time a rescue ship had not arrived. There were also no fishing boats or other ships around to help,” Lee said.

“The currents were very strong and the water was cold at that time in the area. “I thought that passengers would be swept far away and fall into trouble if they evacuated thoughtlessly,” he said.

Experts have suggested many more people might have escaped if they had moved to reach evacuation points before the ship listed sharply and water started flooding in.

The relatives camped out in the Jindo gym – most of them parents of high-school students – have sharply criticised the pace of the rescue operation, accusing officials of incompetence and indifference.

Only 174 people were rescued when the ferry sank and no new survivors have been found since Wednesday.

Nam Sung-Won, whose 17-year-old nephew was among the missing, said the clock was fast running down on the hope that some may have survived.

“We don’t have much time. Many people here believe this (Saturday) is the last possible day for finding trapped passengers alive. After today, hope will be gone.”

For those relatives ready to accept the worst outcome, the coastguard had set up a tent near the gym to take DNA tests to facilitate eventual identification of recovered bodies.
“Up until yesterday, I was still hanging on to some hope,” said Han Mi-Ok, whose teenage son was listed as missing.

“But today I’m bracing myself for the worst,” she told AFP Saturday before entering the tent to provide a sample.

More than 350 of those on board were students from Danwon High School in Ansan city just south of Seoul.

The unfolding tragedy was compounded by the apparent suicide on Friday of the school’s vice-principal, Kang Min-Kyu, who was seemingly overcome by guilt at having survived the sinking.

Initial questioning of the captain has focused on what actually caused the ferry to sink.

Tracking data from the Maritime Ministry showed the vessel made a sharp turn just before sending its first distress signal.

Some experts believe a tight turn could have dislodged the heavy cargo manifest – including more than 150 vehicles – and destabilised the vessel, causing it to list heavily and then capsize.

Lee confirmed he was not at the helm when the ship ran into trouble. The ship was being steered by a 55-year-old helmsman identified by his surname Jo, under the supervision of the female third officer.

“It may have partly been my fault,” Jo said at the arraignment. “But the steering gear rotated unusually fast.”

Lee, 69, explained yesterday why he was not at the helm of the ferry when it first ran into trouble.

“It happened as I was coming back after a quick visit to the bedroom for personal reasons,” he said, denying any suggesting that he had been intoxicated.

“I did not drink,” he said.

His comments offered no fresh insight into the chain of events.

Three days after the sinking, relatives were clinging to increasingly slim hopes that some may have survived in air pockets.

After several attempts, two divers managed to pry open a door and enter the cargo section on Friday afternoon, a senior coastguard official said.

Hours later another two-man team accessed one of the cabins, but found nothing.
The Sewol and the Costa Concordia

THE causes may be very different and the toll far heavier but Italian media have pointed to similarities between the ferry disaster of the Sewol in South Korea and the Costa Concordia cruise ship crash in 2012.

“A case of Schettino in Korea” has been the recurring headline in Italian newspapers in the past few days – a reference to the Italian liner’s captain now on trial for an accident in which 32 people lost their lives.

Italian media have focused on the role played by the ferry’s captain Lee Joon-Seok, who was arrested yesterday along with two of his crew.

Here are five similarities between the disasters:

Captain in charge?: Captain Francesco Schettino was partying with friends until minutes before the Costa Concordia crash but was back on the bridge when it happened, although witnesses at his trial have said he appeared distracted and reported confusion about whether he was in control.

The Italian captain’s defence has claimed that the Indonesian helmsman twice misunderstood steering orders, although experts say the ship was travelling at such a speed that the crash may have been unavoidable.

In the South Korean case, Lee has confirmed that he was not the helm when the Sewol ran into trouble, and was returning to the bridge from his cabin.

Prosecutors have said that the third officer was in command when the accident took place.

Delayed evacuation: When the Costa Concordia crashed into rocks off the Tuscan island of Giglio and began listing badly near the coastline, panicked passengers were initially told to put on their life jackets and wait inside their cabins.

The order to abandon ship finally came more than an hour after the initial crash and when the ship was almost entirely keeled over, hugely complicating the evacuation because it was difficult or impossible to lower the lifeboats.

In the case of the South Korean ferry disaster, Lee was asked by reporters at a police station during his arrest why the passengers had been ordered not to move for more than 40 minutes after the ship first foundered.

He said that it was a safety measure because there were no other ships in the area that could come to the rescue, adding: “I thought that passengers would be swept far away and fall into trouble if they evacuated thoughtlessly”.


Captain leaves?: One of the charges against Schettino in his ongoing trial is that he abandoned the ship early. He has defended himself saying that he fell onto a lifeboat and was then better able to co-ordinate the evacuation from the shore. Lee and his 28 crew, most of whom survived the disaster, have been heavily criticised after reports they were among the first to abandon ship.

Capsized ship: The sight of the Sewol keeled over off the peninsula’s southwest coast before it sank have brought back memories of the Costa Concordia. Survivors from both disasters reported the same types of difficulties moving in a ship at a 90-degree tilt, with objects falling over, walls becoming floors and corridors quickly turning into perilous flooded wells.

Some of the people rescued in South Korea were seen sliding down the steeply inclined side into the water.

Three years ago in Italy dozens of passengers jumped into the sea or clambered across the exposed hull.

Difficult rescue: Divers in Italy and South Korea both had to break into the respective ships to access them and reported problems with low visibility in the water.

South Korean divers have finally entered the ship more than 48 hours after it went down, with one of them saying after turning to the harbour: “You can hardly see your hand in front of you face.”

In the Costa Concordia disaster, divers entering the ship used ropes to find their way back out of the vessel with one describing it at the time as a “labyrinth” with visibility as low as just 10 centimetres.

Police block angry demonstrations by parents of children who died in South Korea ferry disaster
http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/south-korea-ferry-disaster-police-3437180
April 20, 2014 BYDAVID COLLINS

Lee Joon-Seok, captain of the Sewol, was yesterday arrested by police officers investigating the sinking of the ship.

Angry parents of children lost on the sunken Korean ferry clashed with police who stopped them staging a protest march today.

Officers blocked a bridge to prevent 100 people leaving Jindo island, where families are waiting for news.
One weeping mother wailed from the bridge: “Bring me the body.”

As the official death toll rose to 58 with another 244 missing presumed dead, the captain of the ferry Sewol, Lee Joon-seok, 69, was kept in custody last night.

Female third mate Park Han-gyeol, 26, said to have been steering for the first time when disaster struck in a treacherous channel, was one of two other crew members detained.

Hundreds of children were on board the ship as part of a high school outing when the ferry went down.

A clearer picture started to emerge of the time around the capsize after coastguards released a transcript of a conversation between vessel controllers and the ship.

Witnesses have said the ferry turned sharply before it began listing, however it is not yet clear why the ship would have turned.

It took more than two hours for it to capsize completely but passengers were ordered to stay put in their cabins.
According to the transcript, at 9.25 am the controllers at the shore told 69-year old Captain Lee Joon-seok to “decide how best to evacuate the passengers” and that he should “make the final decision on whether or not to evacuate”.

Lee was not on the bridge when the ship turned.

Navigation was in the hands of a 26-year-old third mate who was in charge for the first time in the passage, according to crew members.

The transcript shows crew on the ship worried there were not enough rescue boats at the scene to take on all the passengers.

Witnesses said the captain and some crew members took to rescue boats before the passengers.
One crew member asks: “If this ferry evacuates passengers, will they be rescued right away?”
Lee said earlier he feared that passengers would be swept away by the ferocious currents if they leapt into the sea, but he has not explained why he left the vessel.

Prosecutor Yang Joong-jin told a news conference in Mokpo, one of the centres for the investigation, that some of the crew said they had not received any safety training.

He said: “We are trying to find out if there is additional negligence.”
Yang said prosecutors had also summoned 10 other people to give evidence, including other crew from the Sewol and officials from the ferry’s owner, Chonghaejin Marine Co Ltd.

More divers managed to gain access to the stricken ship today as guide ropes were installed to help them through the tricky and fast currents in the area, although for many of those waiting in Jindo the recovery was still not quick enough.

Relatives of those listed as missing, but who are now presumed to be dead, clashed briefly with police when about 100 of them tried to leave the island by a road bridge to the mainland to take their protest to the capital city of Seoul.

Police blocked them and they later turned back.

One weeping mother cried: “Bring me the body” as she was comforted by two policemen at the bridge.

When the captain and two crew were arrested on Saturday, they were detained by police for 10 days and prosecutors for a further 10.

If the new extension request is granted they could be detained for 30 days.

**South Korea ferry disaster: transcript shows crew crippled by indecision**

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/20/south-korea-ferry-disaster-transcript-crew-indecision

April 20, 2014  Justin McCurry in Tokyo

Messages between officers on vessel and traffic officials reveal miscommunication and hesitation at crucial phase

Officers manning the stricken South Korean ferry that sank last week were hamstrung by indecision and communication problems at the critical moment when deciding whether to evacuate passengers, according to the full communications transcript.

As divers continued to pull bodies from the submerged vessel on Monday, the calls between the crew of the Sewol and traffic officials on the nearby island of Jindo reveal hesitation and uncertainty during a crucial phase in the disaster.

The transcript is certain to add to the anger felt by the relatives of the approximately 240 missing passengers, most of them teenagers who were on a school trip.

"If this ferry evacuates passengers, will they be rescued right away?" an unnamed crew member asked officials at Jindo vessel traffic services centre at 9:24 am on Wednesday, about 30 minutes after the ship began listing, apparently after making
a sharp turn in a stretch of water peppered with tiny islands and known for its strong currents.

The initial delay in getting all 476 passengers, including 350 high school pupils and their teachers, off the ship made the task far harder. Officers on the bridge of the Sewol, which lies submerged in water off the south-west coast of South Korea, had already indicated that once the vessel was tilting heavily to one side, passengers increasingly found themselves unable to move.

In another message, the bridge told officials on Jindo that it was "impossible" to broadcast instructions to passengers.

"Even if it's impossible to broadcast, please go out and let the passengers wear life jackets and put on more clothing," an unidentified traffic official said in response.

The bridge then asked about the prospects of an immediate rescue effort.

The unnamed official on Jindo replied: "The rescue of human lives on the Sewol ferry ... the captain should make [his] own decision and evacuate them.

"We are not fully aware of the situation, so the captain should make the final decision on whether you're going to evacuate passengers or not."

The crew member replied: "No, I'm not talking about that. I'm asking, if they evacuate now, can they be rescued right away?"

At this point there appears to have been a confused response from the traffic official, who said rescue boats would arrive in 10 minutes, but failed to mention that a nearby civilian ship had already offered to help 10 minutes earlier.

More evidence that human error may have been a key factor in the disaster – the worst in South Korea for 20 years – came as divers continued to pull bodies from the wreck on Monday after finding a way into the ship on Sunday. The number of confirmed dead now stands at 64.
After days of frustration because of strong currents, divers have now found several ways into the submerged ferry. That includes a new entryway into the dining hall made early Monday morning, Koh Myung-seok, a government spokesman, said.

On Wednesday, 174 passengers, including 20 of the 30 crew members, were rescued in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

The parents of missing children directed their anger towards the government and the police on Sunday after they were prevented from travelling to the presidential Blue House in Seoul to make a personal appeal to the South Korean leader, Park Geun-hye, for more action.

Hundreds of relatives who have been camped out in a gymnasium on Jindo have denounced what they describe as the slow, and at times chaotic, official response to the disaster. Many cannot comprehend how those responsible for safety were unable to save their children given that it took almost two hours for the ferry to sink.

On Sunday, police blocked about 100 relatives from walking more than 400 kilometres north to Seoul, where they planned to take their grievances directly to Park.

Scuffles broke out after police prevented them from crossing a bridge connecting Jindo to the mainland. The parents, who yelled accusations that the government had killed their children, staged a sit-in but turned back after being promised a meeting with the prime minister, Chung Hong-won.

"We want an answer from the person in charge about why orders are not going through and nothing is being done," Lee Woon-geun, the father of missing passenger Lee Jung-in, 17, said. "They are clearly lying and passing responsibility on to others."

Chung Hye-sook, whose child is among the missing pupils from Danwon high school in the Seoul suburb of Ansan, was furious that she had been asked to provide a DNA sample to help identify bodies before the search of the ferry had been completed.

"What are those people thinking?" she asked, referring to officials who had asked for the sample. "We are asking them to save our children's lives. We can't even think about DNA testing. I want to save my child first."

The families have also directed their anger towards the crew. On Saturday it was revealed that third mate Park Han-kyul, who was steering the vessel when disaster struck, was navigating the stretch of water for the first time, while the captain, Lee Joon-seok, was absent from the bridge.
Lee, Park and helmsman Cho Joon-ki, 55, were arrested on Saturday as investigators examined why they had delayed issuing an evacuation order for 30 minutes after the ferry began to list. Some survivors said they never heard orders to leave the ship over the public address system.

Lee, 69, faces five charges, including negligence and violations of maritime law, amid accusations that he abandoned the stricken vessel while hundreds of passengers were still on board.

Park, 25, was at the controls when the ship took a sharp right turn just before sending its first distress signal, according to tracking data. Yang Jung-jin, a senior prosecutor, said Park had just six months' experience, adding that investigators did not yet know if the ship had been sailing too fast when she apparently executed the turn.

After divers reported no visible damage to the vessel's hull, speculation is mounting that the turn could have dislodged heavy cargo, causing it to list and sink.

Five days after the accident, and with the chances of finding anyone alive looking increasingly slim, it now appears that the hundreds of divers initially brought in to rescue passengers are now involved in a grim recovery operation.

Three vessels with cranes capable of hoisting the Sewol have arrived at the scene but will not be used without the parents' permissions and until rescue workers are certain that there are no survivors, the South Korean coast guard said.

South Korea Ferry Disaster / First Thoughts

The South Korea ferry disaster is truly awful, but it is not murder

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/21/president-park-ferry-disaster-murder-south-korea
April 21, 2014  Mary Dejevsky

Almost everything about the aftermath of the South Korean ferry disaster – except, tragically, the initial response – has seemed heightened, intense, on the very edge.

And how could it not be? Of the 476 people on board, only 174 were rescued. Of the more than 300 remaining, most were children, many from the same school near Seoul; they were trapped inside the ship as it first listed and then tipped over. The odds on finding many, if any, alive, were always slim.

Today, day six, the country's head of state, President Park Geun-hye, finally issued her own statement, in which she condemned the conduct of some of the ferry's crew as "akin to murder". Those found to blame would, she told assembled officials – but not, it seems, the parents directly or the South Korean public at large – have to take "criminal and civil" responsibility for their actions. It is perhaps doubtful whether, in the western world, any national leader would have survived such a
delay in responding to what is undoubtedly a national tragedy, with their ratings, perhaps even their position, intact.

But what her statement lacked in timeliness it made up for in force. Even granting the possible complexities of translation and cultural difference that word "murder" stands out. In one way, it is of a piece with the highly emotive nature of this disaster. There were the last texted messages from teenagers to their parents, showing an awareness of mortality that seemed far beyond their years. There were – and are – the desperate parents gathered on the quayside, grieving, angry, at their wits' end, still not fully accepting that their children are lost. There was the assistant school principal who killed himself, and who said in a note that he could not live with his survival after so many of his charges had died.

The potent mix of anger and grief is common to disasters everywhere, especially those where many children have perished. In the UK, you have only to think back to the tragedy at Aberfan, the Welsh mining village where more than 100 children died when a landslip engulfed their school. That was in 1966; the emotional scars remain to this day. The same raw grief still suffuses Beslan, the town in southern Russia where nearly 200 children died 10 years ago either at the hands of their Chechen hostage-takers or in a bungled rescue. Think, too, of the anger – in defiance of all political constraints – that gripped the parents of children who died in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, where it transpired that school buildings were substandard because of local corruption.
But, to return to President Park's accusation of "murder". How many of these children were murdered? Those who died at Beslan were indisputably killed as a result, directly or indirectly, of a terrorist act. In the UK, no one was prosecuted for the negligence that was found to have led directly to the landslide at Aberfan. In 1987, after the Herald of Free Enterprise ferry sank at Zeebrugge, with the loss of 193 lives, the head of the company was eventually shamed into resigning, but there was a reluctance to pin all the blame directly on the crew member who failed to close the ship's bow door. There was a preference for blaming processes rather than people.

This, it appears, will not be the course that events take in South Korea, even though the transcripts of communications that have so far been made public suggest panic, incompetence and fear dictated the response of the captain and senior crew. The desire of parents and public for retribution will be hard to resist, yet it will raise yet again the universal question about responsibility and intent. Is it just to label someone a killer if a death occurs as the result of an oversight, or of fear? Cultural difference may determine, in part, where that line is drawn, but it is nowhere as clear – not in the east, still less in the west – as where President Park seemed to place it when she spoke of "murder".

**South Korea ferry passengers recall moments of bravery from crew**

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/22/south-korea-ferry-disaster-passengers-bravery-crew

April 22, 2014 Associated Press in Mokpo

Public verdict against Sewol crew has been savage and quick but accounts of individual acts of heroism have also emerged

As the ferry sank, some crew members gave their lifejackets to passengers. One refused to leave until she shepherded students off the ship, and was later found dead. Others worked from rescue boats to break windows with hammers and pull people trapped in cabins to safety.

Nearly a week after the sinking of the South Korean ferry – with rising outrage over a death count that could eventually top 300 – the public verdict against the crew of the Sewol has been savage and quick. "Cowards!" social media users howled. "Unforgivable, murderous," South Korea's president, Park Geun-hye, said on Monday of the captain and some crew.

Some fled the ferry, including the captain, but not all. At least seven of the 29 crew members are missing or dead, and several of those who survived stayed on or near the ship to help passengers.

"His last words were: 'I'm on my way to save the kids,'" Ahn So-hyun told reporters of what her husband, missing crew member Yang Dae-hong, told her by
cellphone as the ship began to sink. He was referring to the 323 high school students on the ferry, which was carrying a total of 476 people.

More than 100 people are **confirmed dead** and nearly 200 more are still missing. Relatives, as well as many other South Koreans, are enraged, lashing out at what they see as a botched rescue operation and, most vehemently, at the captain. He and two crew members have been arrested, accused of negligence and abandoning people in need. Six other crew members have been detained – two of them on Tuesday – though prosecutors have yet to obtain arrest warrants for them.

Captain Lee Joon-seok told passengers to stay in their cabins as the ferry listed and filled with water, then took at least half an hour to order an evacuation and apparently escaped on one of the first rescue boats.

But passengers recall moments of quiet bravery from the crew. Passenger Koo Bon-hee, 36, told the Associated Press that there were not enough lifejackets for everyone in the area on the third floor where he and others waited. So crew members – two men and two women – didn't wear any so that all the passengers could have one.

One of the first bodies recovered after the ferry sank was 22-year-old crew member Park Ji-young, who helped students evacuate until the last minute, even though she wasn't wearing a life vest, South Korean media reported. Witnesses told Yonhap news agency that she told students that crew members must stay on the ship until everyone else leaves, and that she would follow them after helping passengers.
Crew members describe a terrible dilemma as the ship went down – should they flee the sinking ship or risk their lives to save others trapped below. The late evacuation order meant that by the time the crew got off the bridge, the tilt of the ship was so great they could barely walk, let alone rescue passengers.

Oh Yong-seok, a 57-year-old helmsman, said he and four crew members worked from nearby boats to smash windows on the sinking ferry, dragging six passengers stuck in cabins to safety.

Oh said that a first mate – who is detained – used his knowledge of the ship's layout to help direct rescuers as they worked to pull passengers on to rescue boats. He said he and his colleagues remained at sea trying to help until an official who appeared to be from the coastguard asked them to head to land.

His eyes welling with tears, Oh said it breaks his heart to watch news of rescue attempts from a hospital room, where he's being treated for an injury to his foot. He's tormented over the likely deaths of children who are about the same age as his own.

"We did hard work, but no media are talking about that," he said. "Instead, they say all crew members fled."

Yang, the missing crew member, was dedicated to his job, said friend Lee Joung-hwa, a celebrity manager who met Yang six years ago on the ferry during an event she had organised there.

"He was the type of guy who cared for the customers of the ferries from the moment they stepped on board," Lee said in an interview at the gymnasium in Jindo. She travelled there out of concern for her friend.

Some crew members said they feel they cannot discuss their efforts to help because the public is so enraged.

One crew member under investigation, an engineer, locked himself in a hotel room in Mokpo late on Sunday night after telling fellow crew members that he would kill himself, senior prosecutor Ahn Sang-don said. Police found a rope when they entered the room, but the engineer appeared to be unhurt, Ahn said.

The engineer was among the two crew members detained on Tuesday, prosecutor Yang Jung-jin said. He had been held by the coastguard on Monday, but Ahn said then it was for his own safety.

Crew members are also struggling to understand why the captain, whom some called kind-hearted, didn't stay on the ship longer or help oversee rescue operations.
Oh said the captain tripped while the ship was listing and crashed into an iron door. Oh said he thought Lee might have left the ferry when he did because he was badly injured. He was surprised then to see in television footage that the captain was walking without much problem.

"The captain should have stayed there, even if it meant his death," Oh said.

'Save us!' First distress call from stricken South Korean ferry was made by BOY who phoned fire service
http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/south-korea-ferry-disaster-first-3441212
22 APR 2014  BY STEVE ROBSON

His call was followed by about another 20 from children on board the ship before it sank, the fire service says

A young boy was the first to make a distress call from the stricken South Korean ferry - three minutes after the vessel made its fateful last turn.

The child - who has been named only as Choi - dialled the emergency 119 number which put him through to the fire service, and then the coastguard two minutes later.

The fires service has said it received around 20 other calls from children on board the ship pleading to be saved.

The Sewol ferry sank last Wednesday on a routine trip south from the port of Incheon to the traditional honeymoon island of Jeju.

Of the 476 passengers and crew on board, 339 were children and teachers on a high school outing.

Only 174 people have been rescued and the remainder are all presumed to have drowned.

The boy who made the first call is among the missing. His voice was shaking and sounded urgent, a fire officer told MBC TV.

"Save us! We're on a ship and I think it's sinking," Yonhap news agency quoted him as saying.

The fire service official asked him to switch the phone to the captain, and the boy replied: "Do you mean teacher?"

The pronunciation of the words for "captain" and "teacher" is similar in Korean.
The captain of the ship, Lee Joon-seok, 69, and other crew members have been arrested on negligence charges.

Lee was also charged with undertaking an "excessive change of course without slowing down".

Several crew members, including the captain, left the ferry as it was sinking, witnesses have said, after passengers were told to stay in their cabins.

President Park Geun-hye said on Monday that instruction was tantamount to an "act of murder".

Many of the children did not question their elders, as is customary in hierarchical Korean society.

They paid for their obedience with their lives.

Four crew members appeared in court on Tuesday and were briefly questioned by reporters before being taken back into custody.

One unidentified second mate said they had tried to reach the lifeboats, but were unable to because of the tilt.

Only two of the vessel's 46 lifeboats were deployed.

Two first mates, one second mate and the chief engineer stood with their heads lowered and it was impossible to tell who was speaking.

One said there had been a mistake as the boat made a turn.

Another said there was an eventual order to abandon ship.

He said the crew gathered on the bridge and tried to restore balance, but could not. "Maybe the steering gear was broken," one said.

Media said the ship lost power for 36 seconds, which could have been a factor.

Public broadcaster KBS, quoting transcripts of the conversation between the crew and sea traffic control, the Jindo Vessel Traffic Services Centre, said the passengers were told repeatedly to stay put.

For half an hour, the crew on the third deck kept asking the bridge by walkie-talkie whether or not they should make the order to abandon ship, KBS said. No one answered.

"At the time, we could not confirm what the situation was on the bridge," KBS quoted a crew member as saying.
"We kept trying to find out but ... since there was no instruction coming from the bridge, the crew on the third floor followed the instructions on the manual and kept making 'stay where you are' announcements. At least three times."

Lee was not on the bridge when the ship turned. Navigation was in the hands of a 26-year old third mate who was in charge for the first time on that part of the journey, according to crew members.

In a confused exchange between the sinking Sewol and maritime traffic control released by the government, the crew said the ship was listing to port.

"Make passengers wear life jackets and get ready in case you need to abandon ship," traffic control said.

The Sewol answered: "It's difficult for the passengers to move now."

**South Korean ferry sinking death toll exceeds 100 as criticism of crew mounts**


April 22, 2014 Justin McCurry in Tokyo and agencies

President Park Geun-hye says acts 'tantamount to murder' were committed in botched evacuation that left schoolchildren to die

The death toll in the South Korean ferry disaster rose to more than 100 on Tuesday as the country’s president launched a scathing attack on the ship’s crew, while the parents of hundreds of missing children conceded that the rescue operation had become a quest to simply recover and identify the dead as quickly as possible.

The number of confirmed dead stood at 104 almost a week after the Sewol, with 476 passengers on board, listed and sank in waters off the south-west coast of South Korea in what has become one of the country’s worst peacetime disasters.

With a further 198 people still missing – most of them teenagers who were on their way to the resort island of Jeju when disaster struck – the final death toll is expected to be much higher.
Evidence of confusion among officers on the bridge and the failure to rescue a single passenger after the ship began sinking has sparked anger among relatives of the missing and prompted a nationwide debate on maritime safety and the government’s ability to respond to disasters.

On Tuesday media published a transcript of communications between the Sewol and maritime traffic officials on Jeju revealing the full extent of the confusion that gripped the bridge in the first few minutes of the disaster.

In an apparent attempt to deflect criticism from the bungled official response, the South Korean president, Park Geun-hye, described the actions of the captain, Lee Joon-seok, and senior crew members as tantamount to murder. Park accused them of committing “unforgiveable, murderous acts” by refusing to order an evacuation until the ship was listing so severely that most passengers were trapped.

"The actions of the captain and some crew members were utterly incomprehensible, unacceptable and tantamount to murder," South Korean media quoted Park as telling senior aides.

"My heart and the hearts of all South Koreans have been broken and filled with shock and anger.

"Above all the conduct of the captain and some crew members is unfathomable from the viewpoint of common sense. It was like an act of murder that cannot and should not be tolerated."

Park noted that the crew had told passengers to stay put "but they themselves became the first to escape, deserting their passengers. This is utterly unimaginable, legally and ethically."

Hundreds of relatives of those still unaccounted for have continued to wait at the quayside in Jindo, an island near the accident site where divers have been bringing bodies ashore in two and threes for identification.

They will have to explain why they were among the first to leave the ship, and why an evacuation order was issued only when it was already listing at a precarious angle.

Lee, 69, who was absent from the bridge when the accident occurred, said he had waited to issue an evacuation order because he was concerned that passengers would be swept away by strong currents had they jumped into the sea before rescue boats arrived.
Investigators are examining evidence that an inexperienced third mate executed a sharp turn just before the ferry started listing, as well as claims from survivors that the bridge did not issue an evacuation order.

South Korean media said the ferry’s first mate may have failed to relay Lee’s evacuation order to the passengers.

“The captain gave the order to abandon ship to the first mate as the ship was going down. The first mate had the duty to lead the passenger evacuation,” Oh Yong-seok, a helmsman aboard the Sewol, was quoted as saying by the Herald Business.

“The first mate was holding a mobile phone but I did not see him call other crew members or take action [to relay the order].”

Lee Byung-soo, a truck driver, was among those parents for whom the slim hope of good news quickly turned to despair.

"Stop sleeping!" he yelled as he hugged his son, Lee Seok-joon, whose body was among those to have been brought up from the wreck. "Why are you sleeping so much? Daddy will save you!"

With the chances of finding anyone alive five days after the accident practically nil, grief-stricken parents said they wanted divers to retrieve bodies as quickly as possible.

"At first I was just very sad, but now it's like an endless wait," said Woo Dong-suk, the uncle of one of 339 pupils and teachers from a high school near Seoul who were on their way to Jeju for a pre-exam trip excursion when the accident occurred last Wednesday morning.

"It's been too long already. The bodies must be decayed. The parents' only wish right now is to find them before they are badly decomposed."

Reports said the rescue operation would probably end on Thursday after parents gave their permission for the ship to be hoisted from the seabed if no one is found alive in the next two days.

The search effort involves more than 200 rescue boats, 35 aircraft, 13 fishing boats and more than 600 personnel, including navy and civilian divers.

Conditions in the area were good on Tuesday morning – but even in calm seas and weak currents, divers searching the third and fourth floor cabins of the ship, where most of the passengers are presumed to be, can only spend short periods underwater.

"I cannot see anything in front ... and the current underwater is too fast," said Choi Jin-ho, a professional diver who searched the ferry on Monday. "Then your breathing gets faster and you start to panic.”
The divers are being helped by a remote-controlled camera unit that can stay underwater for two to three hours.

South Korea ferry disaster infographic, courtesy of AFP
South Korea ferry disaster: What we know about Sewol's sinking
23 Apr 2014

Authorities in South Korea are searching for what caused a ferry to sink off the south-west coast of Korea with more than 460 passengers and crew onboard.

The ferry, Sewol, was sailing from the western port of Incheon to Jeju island - known as South Korea's Hawaii - and was carrying 339 teenage students and their teachers, among other passengers.

The cause of the incident is unknown and authorities are seeking to find out why the ship listed and flipped over entirely, leaving only a small section of its hull above water.

South Korean navy and coast guard vessels are still searching for the bodies of missing passengers, who are now presumed dead. Here is what we know so far about the incident.

Survivors said they heard a loud thump. They said the ship came to a sudden halt and started rapidly sinking.

The ship, built in Japan 20 years ago, was following a well-travelled route.

Although the wider area has rock hazards and shallow waters, they were not in the immediate vicinity of the ship's usual path.

State broadcaster YTN quoted investigation officials as saying the ship was off its usual course and had been hit by a veering wind, which caused containers stacked on deck to shift.
Witnesses have said the ferry turned sharply before it began listing. However, it is not clear why the vessel turned.

Marine salvage expert John Noble said the ship was travelling at about 18 knots and may have hit the seabed or a shipping container.

"There is a lot of evidence... that the ship hit something," he said.

"There was a thump or a thud and this would suggest that she came into contact either with the seabed or a submerged object like perhaps a container."

It took more than two hours for the ferry to capsize completely. Some passengers wearing life jackets scrambled into the sea and waiting rescue boats.

Students on the ferry were reportedly trapped in passageways by rapidly rising water.

Other passengers claim they were told to stay put by ferry crews who said it was too dangerous to move.

"The announcement told us we should stay still," one survivor told reporters. "The ship was already sinking. There were a lot of students who didn't get out of the ship."

One student sent a text message to his mother as the ship went down saying, "Mum, this may be the last chance to tell you I love you".

Witnesses told Korean media that the captain of the vessel was one of the first to leave the stricken vessel.
According to a coastguard official in Jindo, the waters where the ferry capsized have some of the strongest tides off South Korea's coast, meaning divers were prevented from entering the mostly submerged ship for several hours.

On April 18, the captain, Lee Joon-seok, was arrested and charged with five offences, including negligence of duty and violation of maritime law. Arrest warrants were also issued for two other crew members.

Officials have warned that the recovery operation could take as long as two months to complete.

Three giant floating cranes are alongside the sunken ship, but officials say they will not be used until it is certain there are no more survivors to be rescued.

On April 21, another four crew members - three officers and an engineer - were also arrested on charges ranging from criminal negligence to violation of maritime law, according to prosecutors cited by Yonhap news agency.

Prosecutors on April 23 raided the home of Yoo Byung-un, the head of a family that owns the company which operated the Sewol ferry, in connection with the sinking. 

**ABC/wires**

**South Korea ferry disaster: Corpses reveal desperate attempts to escape doomed ferry**


23 Apr 2014

**Many of the bodies pulled from the wreck of a South Korean ferry have broken fingers, indicating the desperate final moments of the mostly young victims, according to South Korean media.**

So far 150 bodies have been pulled from the wreck of the Sewol ferry, which hit rocks off South Korea's south coast last week.

Of the 476 passengers and crew on board, 339 were children and teachers on a high school outing. Only 174 people have been rescued and the remainder are presumed to have drowned.

Divers sent into the wreck are having to feel for the bodies with their hands in a maze of cabins, corridors and upturned decks.

The divers, with oxygen and communications lines trailing, can only see a few inches in front of them.

Local media reports say many of the bodies found in the last two days have broken fingers, presumably from the children frantically trying to climb the walls or floors to escape in their last moments.
"We are trained for hostile environments, but it's hard to be brave when we meet bodies in dark water," diver Hwang Dae-sik told Reuters, as the funerals of 25 students were held near the capital, Seoul.

Mr Hwang said his team had retrieved 14 bodies so far.

"We have to touch everything with our hands. This is the most gruelling and heartbreaking job of my career," he said.

In a rare move, the disaster prompted reclusive North Korea - which is still technically at war with the South and routinely threatens the South with destruction - to send a message of sympathy.

"We express condolences for the missing and dead, including young students, from the sinking of the Sewol," a South Korean Unification Ministry spokeswoman quoted the message as saying.

**Fresh raids over business links to capsized ferry**

Prosecutors investigating the disaster raided the home of Yoo Byung-un, the head of a family that owns the Chonghaejin Marine Co Ltd, the company that operated the Sewol ferry.

They also raided his son's home and the office of a church with which Mr Yoo has been associated, said a prosecutor who did not want to be identified.

The finances of Chonghaejin and its complex share structure have come into the spotlight in recent days. Mr Yoo was jailed for fraud for four years in the early 1990s.

But it was not immediately clear how big a development this was. Korean police and prosecutors often make dramatic raids to show that progress is being made in a high-profile case.

Underwater, at the site of the sunken Sewol, divers are able to work for nearly an hour at a time as long as their oxygen lines do not snag on sharp corners of the ship's internal structure.

When they use cumbersome oxygen tanks on their backs instead, they can work for about 20 minutes before an alarm bell sounds.

Most of those who survived made it out on deck and jumped into rescue boats, but many of the children did not leave their cabins, after being told to stay put as the ship began to sink.

“Lee was someone comfortable and extremely calm. He said Captain Lee was like no other: he didn’t drink much, although he did smoke. “

~ Wife of ferry crew member
Captain Lee Joon-seok, 69, and other crew members have been arrested on negligence charges. Lee was also charged with undertaking an "excessive change of course without slowing down".

Lee was not on the bridge when the ship turned. Navigation was in the hands of a 26-year-old third mate, who was in charge for the first time on that part of the journey, according to crew members.

The wife of one crew member under investigation who did not wish to be identified quoted her husband as saying: "I should have died out there."

"He told me that he was taking some rest as he had finished his shift. He fell from his bed and struggled to open the room door to get out. He said he didn't go to the steering house to meet up with rest of the crew. Rather he was found by coastguards and was rescued.

"My husband didn't get along with other crewmen, but he told me that Captain Lee was someone comfortable and extremely calm. He said Captain Lee was like no other: he didn't drink much, although he did smoke."

_Reuters_

**South Korean ferry disaster company targeted in raids**


April 23, 2014

Authorities investigate head of Yoo family, which ran Sewol service, as recovery of bodies enters second week

South Korean prosecutors investigating the fatal sinking of the Sewol ferry have raided the home of Yoo Byung-un, the head of a family behind the vessel's parent company, as the undersea search for victims entered its second week.

The Yonhap news agency reported that Yoo's home and a church in which he is believed to have an interest were raided on Wednesday.

The finances of the Yoo family's Chonghaejin Marine Co have come into the spotlight after it emerged that Yoo spent four years in jail for fraud during the early 1990s. Kim Hoe-Jong, a prosecutor on the case, said the raid was part of a probe into "overall corruption in management".
News of the raid came as the death toll rose above 140 on Wednesday in what looks to be South Korea's worst maritime disaster in 21 years in terms of loss of life.

The Sewol sank on a routine trip from the port of Incheon, near Seoul, to the southern island of Jeju. Of the 476 passengers and crew on board, 339 were children and teachers on a high school outing. Only 174 people have been rescued and the remainder are all presumed to have drowned.

The Sewol's captain, Lee Joon-Seok, and six crew members are under arrest with two other crew taken into police custody on Tuesday. Lee and his surviving crew members have been accused of delaying the evacuation until it was too late and then abandoning the ship while hundreds of passengers remained trapped inside.

The South Korean president, Park Geun-Hye, earlier in the week described their actions as being “tantamount to murder”. But the criticism has been partly countered by accounts of bravery from rescued passengers.

More than 70 executives and other people connected with Chonghaejin and its affiliates have been issued 30-day travel bans while they are investigated on possible charges ranging from criminal negligence to embezzlement.

South Korea ferry disaster: Divers tell of underwater horror as high school victims are remembered by their classmates
http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/south-korea-ferry-disaster-divers-3452299
24 APR 2014  BY DON MACKAY

Students returning to Danwon High School today tied rows of yellow ribbons to the school gates in memory of friends who perished

A diver broke down in tears as he told today of finding the bodies of two young school children tied together in the bowels of the sunken South Korean ferry.

As dozens of divers carried out fingertip searches throughout the flooded cabins they were faced with grim sites - caught in eerie underwater footage - set to haunt them the rest of their lives.

One said he was forced to recover the bodies of a boy and girl who had tied their lifejackets together by cord.

He wept as he said: “They didn’t want to be alone. They didn’t want to float apart. “I started to cry thinking they didn’t want to leave each other.”

Most of the 300 dead who were trapped beneath decks as they followed orders from the Sewol ferry’s bridge to “stay where you are” all came from the same Danwon High School in a suburb of capital Seoul.
As pupils returned to the school today, they tied rows of yellow ribbons, as well as chrysanthemums and photos of lost classmates and teachers, on the school gates. But 75 students who survived the horror were still being treated in hospital - many suffering from the mental shock.

Flowers had already been placed on the desks of those who never returned from the school trip to the holiday island of Jeju - including that of 52-year-old vice-principal Kang Min-Kyu, who hanged himself in grief after he was rescued.

And the body of the young boy who made the first emergency call to coastguards pleading: “Save us! We’re on a ship and I think it is sinking” had also been found.

His parents say they recognised his body and clothes, but he has yet to be formally identified as the official death toll rose to 171.

But angry relatives on Jindo island, being used as a rescue centre, crowded round government officials amid accusations not enough was being done.

Oceans and Fisheries Minister Lee Ju-young, regional coast guard chief Kim Seok-kyun and deputy chief Choi Sang-hwan were surrounded as families demanded to know why more than 340 volunteer divers were not being used - and only 16 had gone underwater.

Mr Kim insisted: “We are doing our work and we, too, feel the way you do. We are trying to bring all the equipment that we can.”

But they claimed the civilian divers were only slowing down the process - and some had left after barely 10-minutes dive time and taking photographs.

Prosecutors raided the homes and offices of the ferry owners as tried to discover what went wrong.

One trade union executive claimed the ship was carrying far more cargo than the captain admitted.

Moon Ki-han, a vice president at Union Transport Co, which loaded the Sewol’s cargo, said it was carrying an estimated 3,608 tons of cargo - far more than what arrested Captain Lee Joon-seok reported to the coastguard and in paperwork to the Korea Shipping Association.

One South Korean opposition MP claimed he had documents proving the Sewol was carrying more than three and a half times more than regulations allowed.
South Korea admits ferry disaster dead bodies given to wrong families


April 25, 2014  Associated Press in Seoul

Seoul government says some victims' remains 'wrongly transferred' after families discover mix-up at funeral homes.

The South Korean government has conceded that some bodies recovered from the sunken ferry Sewol have been misidentified and announced changes to prevent such mistakes from happening again.

South Korean media reports this week revealed bodies were going to the wrong families, with the error sometimes caught only after the remains were taken to a funeral home.

An "action plan" released by the government-wide emergency taskforce acknowledged "there have been cases where the victims were wrongly transferred".

Remains will be transferred to families when there is a match using DNA testing or fingerprint or dental records, the taskforce said.

The transfer will be temporary when a body is matched though identification or physical description, and authorities will wait for more evidence before making the transfer permanent.

Divers have recovered 183 bodies so far, but 119 people missing and are feared dead in the dark rooms of the submerged vessel.

The ferry capsized on 16 April while on its way from Incheon to the southern tourist island of Jeju. More than 80% of the 302 dead and missing are students from a high school in Ansan, south of Seoul.

Eleven crew members, including the captain, have been arrested on suspicion of negligence and abandoning people in need. Prosecutor Yang Jung-jin, of the joint investigation team, said on Friday excessive veering, improper stowage of cargo,
modifications made to the ship and tidal influence could have caused the Sewol to capsize. He said investigators will determine the cause by consulting with experts and simulations.

Angry relatives of capsized South Korean ferry victims face overnight stand-off with officials
http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/south-korea-ferry-disaster-relatives-3456051

The death toll now officially stands at 181 but there are still more than 120 missing as relatives camp out to wait for news of their loved ones.

Relatives of passengers on the South Korean ship which sank last week have reacted with anger at the pace of search efforts.

Frustrations poured out at they met with South Korea's fisheries minister and the coastguard chief following an overnight stand-off.

The death toll from the disaster is now 181 following the sinking of the capsized ferry Sewol.
Many of the relatives have camped out under a tent where details about the recovered dead are posted, setting up mattresses and blankets.

Dozens crowded around the grim-faced officials, who sat on the ground and tried to explain the search efforts. One man threatened to punch reporters gathered near the tent.

Relatives occasionally shouted, accusing the officials of lying about the operation and asking why hundreds of civilian divers have not been allowed to join coastguard and navy efforts in searching for bodies.

Some of the relatives cried through the early hours of the tense scene, but as morning came the mood of the discussion mellowed.

It was the latest expression of fury and desperation in a disaster filled with signs that the government did too little to protect passengers. An opposition politician said he has a document showing that the ferry was carrying far more cargo than it should have been.

Relatives of the missing passengers surrounded oceans and fisheries minister Lee Ju-young, coastguard chief Kim Seok-kyun and deputy chief Choi Sang-hwan. "We are doing our work and we, too, feel the way you do," Mr Kim said. "We are trying to bring all the equipment that we can."

About 700 divers were working at the site of the April 16 wreck, said Koh Myung-seok, spokesman for the government-wide emergency task force. He said more than 340 volunteer divers visited, but only 16 had gone underwater.

Responding to complaints that the volunteers have been underutilised, Mr Koh said some were allowed to dive but "left after taking photos or have come out of the water in less than 10 minutes. As a result, we have decided that civilian divers are slowing down the rescue process" and will not be allowed to participate.

The government has said the search is becoming more difficult because divers must now break through cabin walls to find more bodies. Many of the bodies already retrieved were in a larger lounge area.

Eleven crew members, including the captain, have been arrested on suspicion of negligence and abandoning people in need as the ferry sank on its way from Incheon port to the southern island of Jeju.
The cause of the disaster is not yet known, but prosecutors are considering factors including a turn made around the time the ship began listing, wind, ocean currents, modifications made to the ship and the freight it was carrying.

Moon Ki-han, a vice president at Union Transport, which loaded the Sewol's cargo, said it was carrying an estimated 3,608 tons of cargo, far more than Captain Lee Joon-seok is said to have reported in paperwork submitted to the Korea Shipping Association - 150 cars and 657 tons of other cargo. Motor vehicles typically weigh about a ton each.

MP Kim Yung-rok of the New Politics Alliance for Democracy, an opposition party, said he had documents from the Korean Register of Shipping that show the Sewol was carrying more than three and a half times more cargo than regulators allowed.

Mr Kim said a register inspector, examining the ship as it was being modified to carry more passengers, found that its centre of gravity had been raised 51 centimeters (20ins), and its cargo limit would have to be reduced by more than half, from 2,437 tons to 987 tons. The modifications were made in late 2012 and early 2013.

Shipowner Chonghaejin Marine reported a capacity of 3,963 tons, according to a coastguard official in Incheon who had access to the documentation. That is the same maximum tonnage the ferry had under its previous Japanese owner, "A" Line Ferry, before Chonghaejin modified the vessel, according to Takaharu Miyazono of "A" Line.

It was unclear why the earlier maximum tonnage noted in the register document was lower than that provided by either Chonghaejin or the previous owner.

Officials with South Korea's maritime ministry and coastguard each said they were not even aware of the Sewol's cargo capacity, saying it was the shipping association's job to oversee it. The shipping association is private and is partly funded by the industry it regulates.

Even the report by the inspector reflects "a problem in the system", said Lee Gwee Bok, president of Incheon Port Development Association and a former captain. He said the Sewol never should have been cleared for operation because the register should have known the shipowner would never meet the conditions.

"The ship's operator aims to make money and instinctively tries to add more freight," Mr Lee said.

More than 80% of the dead and missing were junior pupils at Danwon High School in Anwan, south of Seoul, where seniors yesterday returned to a campus strewn with yellow ribbons, chrysanthemums and photos of lost classmates and teachers.
Younger grades, including the 13 juniors who did not go on the ferry, will return to school next week. It is not clear when the 75 students who survived will return. Most remain in hospital, many for mental stress.

**South Korea ferry disaster: Rescuers race to recover bodies before storm**


25 Apr 2014

Teams of divers are trying to remove more than 100 bodies from a sunken South Korean ferry as storm clouds loom and the victims' angry families pressure officials to complete the recovery effort.

The confirmed death toll remains at 181, but 121 people are still unaccounted for.

Their bodies are believed to still be trapped in the submerged vessel that capsized on April 16 with 476 people on board.

"We know that weather conditions will worsen considerably and currents will become stronger from Saturday," a coastguard spokesman told reporters on Friday.

An earlier coastguard statement said storm warnings could be issued on Saturday or Sunday for the area around the rescue site.

The ferry sank on a routine trip from the port of Incheon, near Seoul, to the southern holiday island of Jeju. Investigations are focusing on human error and mechanical failure.

Rescuers have not found a single survivor since 174 people were pulled to safety on the day of the accident.

Although all hope of finding survivors has gone, there is still anger and deep frustration among the relatives over the pace of the recovery operation off the southern island of Jindo.

Good weather and gentle tides have helped the dive teams in recent days, but the search conditions inside the ferry are still challenging and rescuers are only managing to retrieve about 30 bodies a day.
There were 325 high school students on the Sewol ferry when it sank - about 250 are either confirmed or presumed dead.

**Relatives of ferry victims confront officials**
On Thursday evening, a group of irate parents stormed into the local office of the deputy head of the South Korean coastguard and roughly manhandled him down to the island harbour.

He was kept there most of the night, sitting on the ground, along with coastguard chief Kim Seok-Kyun and marine minister Lee Ju-Young, while the relatives accused them of lying about the recovery operation and demanded they bring in more resources.

Police made no move to intervene and the three made no attempt to get away, reflecting a reluctance to antagonise the relatives at a time of widespread public anger over the official response to the disaster.

The bereaved families want all the remaining bodies removed from the ferry before the weekend - a demand that is unlikely to be met, especially with bad weather moving in.

**Some relatives ask for autopsies to confirm time of death**
It took divers working in difficult and dangerous conditions more than two days to get into the sunken ferry and two more days to retrieve the first bodies.

Many relatives believe some of the victims may have survived for several days in trapped air pockets, but perished in the cold water after no rescue came.

As a result some have asked for autopsies to be performed, to see if it would be possible to determine the precise cause and time of death.

The ferry captain Lee Joon-Seok and 10 crew members have been arrested on charges ranging from criminal negligence to abandoning passengers.

The captain has been particularly criticised for delaying the evacuation order until the ferry was listing so sharply that escape was almost impossible.
Prosecutors have raided a host of businesses affiliated with the ferry operator, the Chonghaejin Marine Company, as part of an overall probe into corrupt management.

Investigators also seized a second ferry owned by the company.

They say life rafts and escape chutes on the sunken ferry's sister ship have not been working properly.

Divers find 48 bodies crammed into cabins of sunken South Korean ferry


APRIL 25, 2014, BY CNN WIRE,

SOUTH KOREA — Divers searching the wreck of the sunken South Korean ferry are finding cabins overfilled with people, but they are encountering major obstacles in recovering bodies, South Korean officials said Friday.

Searchers discovered the bodies of 48 girls wearing life vests in a cabin with a capacity of 30, indicating many passengers ran into the same room when the ship tilted.

The ferry Sewol is on the sea floor and resting with its right side up, said Capt. Kim Jin-hwang, a South Korean navy officer commanding the rescue operation.

Searchers are now trying to reach a dormitory-style cabin where they believe as many as 50 girls may be, he said.

Officials said conditions remained challenging inside the submerged vessel. The visibility is very poor and lots of floating objects are blocking the way, the officials said. Some doors can’t be opened because of the water pressure, and divers are having to break windows to gain access to certain parts of the ship.

Most of the bodies being found are wearing life vests, which probably made it harder for them to escape when the ship tilted because the exits would have been underwater below them. Divers have had to take life vests off the bodies to carry them out, Kim said.

Meanwhile, strong currents are pulling hoses supplying air to the divers, making it hard for them to stay underwater for long.

The divers have already searched all the easily accessible places, Kim said. They are expecting the search to become harder because of strengthening currents and harsher weather conditions.

Safety concerns about sister ship
A sister ship of the sunken ferry operated by the same company was found to have multiple safety concerns, investigators told CNN.

The prosecutor’s office leading the investigation in the southern city of Mokpo said that authorities have been looking at the passenger ferry Ohamana, a ship owned by Chonghaejin Marine. That company also owns the Sewol, which sank off the country’s southwestern coast on April 16 with 476 people on board.

The Mokpo Joint Investigation Force Headquarters examined the Ohamana because of its similarities to the Sewol and to get an idea of how the Sewol may have been operating.

Investigators inspected the ship and took away documents from the ship’s offices Friday. They studied the emergency escape plans and found the following issues:

- Of the life rafts on board, 40 did not work.
- The emergency slides did not work.
- There was no equipment to tie down cars.
- The equipment for tying down containers didn’t work very well.

Like the Sewol, the Ohamana had been modified to add more passengers, the prosecutor’s office said.

The Ohamana usually operates between Incheon and Jeju three times a week. According to the ship tracking website MarineTraffic.com, the Ohamana arrived in the port of Incheon on April 16, the day the Sewol sank, and has not left since. The South Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries said that the Ohamana ceased operating right after the sinking.

Families confront officials
The revelations about the sister ship came Friday, the day after angry relatives of missing ferry passengers cursed government and police officials for failing to do enough to save the lives of their loved ones as hopes of finding survivors dimmed.

The relatives berated Fisheries Minister Lee Ju-young and two coast guard officials, accusing them of misleading the public about the operation and of wasting time. “How can you fool us into believing you were out there trying to save our children?” one mother yelled at the officials.

Also, officials at the South Korean headquarters for the task force coordinating the search told CNN that they believe the body of a boy who reportedly made the first emergency call from the ship after it began to list sharply has been recovered. DNA tests will help officially identify the remains, officials said early Friday.

Investigators urge patience
On Friday, an official involved in the investigation in Mokpo asked for patience. “I know a lot of people are curious as to the cause of the accident, but we don’t have the information yet,” said Heo Yong-beom, a maritime safety judge. “We will try our best to satisfy and answer questions.”
The ferry Sewol lurched on its side and capsized last week. Among the passengers were 325 high school students on a field trip to the resort island of Jeju.

The number of confirmed dead rose to 185 on Friday, with 117 still missing, according to the South Korean coast guard.

Hopes of finding any survivors in the sunken ferry have all but evaporated after news that divers have found no air pockets on the third and fourth levels of the ship, where many passengers were thought to have been trapped.

Rescuers saved 174 people on the day the ferry sank, including 75 high school students, but no survivors have been found since.

**Modifications investigated**

Authorities do not yet know what caused the sinking, but a widening criminal investigation has ensnared the ship’s captain and more than a dozen other crew members and led prosecutors to search the offices of the company that owns the ship.

Officials also searched the offices of 20 affiliated companies and the home of Yoo Byung-un, the man whose family is believed to be behind the company, looking for any evidence of wrongdoing that could have led to the ship’s sinking.

Among other things, investigators have said they will look into whether modifications to the ship in 2013 could have altered the ship’s balance and contributed to what happened.

Kim Yong-rok, an opposition lawmaker who represents Jindo, an island near where the ship sank, told CNN that modifications to add 117 more passenger cabins to the ship raised the ferry’s center of gravity.

Kim said the work on the ferry took place in 2013 after the Sewol was purchased from a Japanese company. The ferry’s passenger capacity was expanded from 804 to 921, he said.

South Korean prosecutors were unable to confirm those details for CNN. But they are investigating the private organization responsible for inspecting and certifying ships for the South Korean government, which signed off on the work.

Authorities said it didn’t appear that the ferry was overloaded, according to figures provided by the company and the South Korean coast guard. But coast guard officials said investigators won’t know for sure how much cargo the ship was carrying until it is raised from the waters of the Yellow Sea.

**Offering sympathies**

U.S. President Barack Obama offered America’s sympathies to South Korea on Friday during a diplomatic visit there.
He presented South Korean President Park Geun-hye with a framed American flag that was flown over the White House the same day the ferry sank as a symbol of condolence.

“I’m very mindful that my visit comes at a time of mourning for the people of this nation,” he told the U.S. and the South Korean delegations.

“As allies but also friends, we join you in mourning the missing, and especially the young people.”

“President Park, I thought it would be appropriate and fitting today to honor the dead and missing if our delegation held a moment of silence,” he said.

The two delegations then bowed their heads.

Speaking through a translator, Park thanked him for the gesture, and said, “The Korean people draw great strength from your kindness.”

Divers battle darkness, fear to find bodies in sunken ferry
April 25, 2014

JINDO, South Korea (AP) — Divers grope their way slowly through the dark corridors and cabins of the sunken Sewol ferry. Bodies appear suddenly, floating by in the murky water, buoyed by life-jackets or the bloat of decomposition, their faces etched with fear or shock.

Some are still locked together in embraces, a freeze-frame of panic as the water rushed in and the ship sank. The hair of female corpses ripples in the current, framing pale faces.

At times, heavy sediment in the water can make flashlights useless and it is almost total darkness inside the South Korean ferry, which has flipped upside down on the seafloor. Divers must stretch their hands into the void to search for bodies. There's constant worry their lifeline to the surface, a 100-meter oxygen hose, will get snagged or cut as they swim deeper through the wreck's maze-like hallways.

For nearly a week now, dozens of divers have battled fast currents and cold waters — as well as exhaustion and fear — to pull out a steady stream of corpses. As they go deeper into what’s become a huge underwater tomb, they’re getting a glimpse of the ship’s final moments April 16 before it capsized. More than 300 — most of them high school students — are feared dead.

"They can see the people's expressions at the instant" the ship sank, Hwang Dae-sik said of the team of 30 divers he supervises for the Marine Rescue and Salvage Association, a private group of professional divers who've joined Korean navy and
coast guard divers in the search and rescue effort. "From the bodies' expressions, you can see they were facing danger and death."

Divers descend about 30 meters (100 feet) down and enter the ship through windows they've broken with hammers.

Han Yong Duk, a 33-year-old diver, said that visibility was often so poor that divers had to feel their way along the outside of the ship to find windows they could smash. One diver tried to hit the ferry with a hammer but only connected with steel, not glass.

Another civilian diver said that sometimes it was pitch black; other times there was less than 20 centimeters (a foot) of visibility.

"I got around by fumbling in the darkness to try to find things with my hands," said Cha Soon-cheol, who spent five days helping with searches. Swimming against the strong currents exhausted him.

Once inside the ship, divers have to dodge floating debris — passengers' belongings, cargo, ropes, chairs — but also bodies.

The ship turned upside down as it sank, so "just imagine a room that is flipped," said Hwang, who doesn't participate in dives himself but is closely involved in every other part of the operation. "Everything is floating around, and it's hard to know exactly where they are."

It is a delicate operation. Divers must move quickly to find decomposing corpses, but they must also be cautious to protect themselves from injury and keep their air supply hoses from getting cut off. The divers can often work for about an hour when they're hooked up to the hoses, Hwang said.

Some divers use oxygen tanks, but that typically allows for only about 20 minutes under water.

As they explore the hallways of the ship, bodies in lifejackets often float above them, near what used to be the floor, and divers must reach up to grab the bodies and pull them close so they can hold them while notifying colleagues above. They then carefully push the body through an open window cleared of broken glass and debris and let it float up to the boats.

Hwang says divers take special care with decaying bodies to make sure they don't damage them further. When a body without a life jacket is found one diver wraps his arms around the body and another diver pulls his colleague and the body to the surface with a rope.

The work is dangerous.
Air supply problems recently forced two members of Hwang's team to make risky, rapid ascents from about 30 meters (120 meters) underwater to the surface. Rising too quickly puts divers at risk of decompression sickness, also known as the bends, which in severe cases can be fatal. The two divers, he said, were treated in decompression chambers. They're now resting, with one suffering from back pain.

It's also emotionally exhausting, and divers often find themselves thinking of the lives lost.

Hwang said his divers try to avoid looking at the eyes of the bodies they retrieve to minimize the shock. It's not always possible. "Even though they have a lot of diving experience, they get really frightened when they first face the bodies," he said. Many of the students are found hugging each other.

"How hard it must have been for the kids, with the cold water rushing in and darkness coming over them," Hwang said. "Yesterday, I had a lump in my throat talking about this. I thought to myself: Why did I tell them that I can help with rescues and have a lot of experience when I can't even save one life here?"

**Rescuers paint harrowing portrait of search aboard sunken ferry**


April 25, 2014  By Michael Pearson and Steven Jiang, CNN

**Story highlights**

- Rescuers describe finding 48 girls in one room meant for 30 people
- Divers trying to reach room where another 50 girls believed to have been, commander says
- Search effort now expected to slow, says commander of the rescue operation
- Prosecutors investigate Sewol's sister ship, find numerous safety problems

In the final, chaotic moments before the South Korean ferry Sewol rolled over and sank into the chilly waters of the Yellow Sea, 48 girls obeyed the orders of crew members and put on their life vests.

Perhaps afraid, they all crammed into a single room meant for 30. None of them survived.

The account of the recovery of the girls' bodies, offered Friday by rescue officials, offers a glimpse of the final moments aboard the sinking ferry, which went down on April 16 with 476 people aboard.
It also illuminates the daunting task facing divers trying to retrieve bodies while maintaining a fading glimmer of hope that perhaps, somewhere aboard the ferry, someone remains alive.

Rescue officials spoke of a forest of floating objects, doors forced shut by enormous water pressure, and of currents that tug at the breathing tubes that keep them alive as they look for the dead.

Civilian diver Chun Kwan-geung, one of the many rescuers working in the murky waters, spoke of having to break out windows to get to the lower decks of the ship, which now lies on its right side on the seafloor some 73 meters (240 feet) below the surface.

"The rescue effort is getting slower," said South Korean navy Capt. Kim Jin-hwang, commander of the rescue operation. "The divers already searched all the places easily accessible. They are expecting the search to become harder because of increasing currents and harsher weather. But the navy will not stop until the last body is found."

As if highlighting the point, Kim's divers are trying to find their way into another dormitory-style room where 50 girls were believed to be as the ship began to sink. So far, rescuers have retrieved 187 bodies. Another 115 people remain missing, although no one has been rescued since 174 were plucked from ship and sea the day the ferry sank.

As the effort inside the ship continues, South Korean authorities are pressing a criminal investigation into the sinking. It's resulted in the arrests of the ship's captain and 14 other members, searches of the company that owned the ferry and the home of the man whose family controls it, and a wide-ranging probe into the country's marine industry.

**Safety concerns about sister ship**
Prosecutors in Mopko, South Korea, who are leading the ferry investigation told CNN's Nic Robertson on Friday that authorities have yet to determine what caused the sinking.

Leading theories include changes made to increase the ferry's passenger capacity and shifting cargo.

On Friday, investigators checked out the Sewol's sister ship, the Ohamana, and said they found 40 of its life rafts weren't working, emergency slides to help evacuate passengers were inoperable, and equipment to tie down cars and cargo either was nonexistent or didn't work very well.

Like the Sewol, the Ohamana had been modified to add more passengers, the prosecutor's office said.

The ship arrived in Incheon on April 16, the same day the Sewol sank, and has not left yet, officials said. Investigators are looking into whether those modifications could have contributed to the Sewol's fate.

Kim Yong-rok, an opposition lawmaker who represents Jindo, an island near where the ship sank, told CNN that modifications to add 117 more passenger cabins to the ship raised the ferry's center of gravity.

On Friday, the South Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries announced it would ask lawmakers to consider legislation prohibiting modifications to ships to increase passenger capacity.

Government investigators are also probing the private organization that conducts ship safety inspections on behalf of the government to determine if any wrongdoing was involved in the certification of the Sewol after its 2013 modifications.

Families confront officials
The revelations about the sister ship came the day after angry relatives of missing ferry passengers cursed government and police officials for failing to do enough to save the lives of their loved ones as hopes of finding survivors dimmed.

The relatives berated Fisheries Minister Lee Ju-young and two coast guard officials, accusing them of misleading the public about the operation and of wasting time.

"How can you fool us into believing you were out there trying to save our children?" one mother yelled at the officials.

Also, officials at the South Korean headquarters for the task force coordinating the search told CNN that they believe the body of a boy who reportedly made the first emergency call from the ship after it began to list sharply has been recovered. DNA tests will help officially identify the remains, officials said early Friday.
Also on Friday, an official involved in the investigation in Mokpo asked for patience. "I know a lot of people are curious as to the cause of the accident, but we don't have the information yet," said Heo Yong-beom, a maritime safety judge. "We will try our best to satisfy and answer questions."

'We join you in mourning'
Meanwhile, U.S. President Barack Obama, in South Korea for a previously scheduled trip, presented South Korean President Park Geun-hye with an American flag that flew over the White House the day the ferry sank.

"I'm very mindful that my visit comes at a time of mourning for the people of this nation," he told the U.S. and the South Korean delegations. "As allies but also friends, we join you in mourning the missing, and especially the young people." The delegations held a moment of silence, then Park thanked Obama for the gesture.

"The Korean people draw great strength from your kindness," she said.

Ferry victims' bodies found in 'freeze-frame of panic'
April 25, 2014By Associated Press
JINDO, South Korea — Divers grope their way slowly through the dark corridors and cabins of the sunken Sewol ferry. Bodies appear suddenly, floating by in the murky water, buoyed by life-jackets or the bloat of decomposition, their faces etched with fear or shock.

Some are still locked together in embraces, a freeze-frame of panic as the water rushed in and the ship sank. The hair of female corpses ripples in the current, framing pale faces.

At times, heavy sediment in the water can make flashlights useless, and it is almost total darkness inside the South Korean ferry, which has flipped upside down on the sea floor. Divers must stretch their hands into the void to search for bodies. There’s constant worry that their lifeline to the surface, a 100-meter oxygen hose, will get snagged or cut as they swim deeper through the wreck’s maze-like hallways.

For nearly a week now, dozens of divers have battled fast currents and cold waters — as well as exhaustion and fear — to pull out a steady stream of corpses. As they go deeper into what’s become a huge underwater tomb, they’re getting a glimpse of the ship’s final moments April 16 before it capsized. More than 300 people — most of them high school students — are feared dead.

“They can see the people’s expressions at the instant” the ship sank, Hwang Dae-sik said of the team of 30 divers he supervises for the Marine Rescue and Salvage Association, a private group of professional divers who’ve joined Korean navy and coast guard divers in the search and rescue effort. “From the bodies’ expressions, you can see they were facing danger and death.”

Divers descend about 100 feet (30 meters) and enter the ship through windows they’ve broken with hammers.

Han Yong Duk, a 33-year-old diver, said visibility was often so poor that divers had to feel their way along the outside of the ship to find windows they could smash.

One diver tried to hit the ferry with a hammer but only connected with steel, not glass.

Another civilian diver said that sometimes it was pitch black; other times, there was less than 1 foot (20 centimeters) of visibility.

“I got around by fumbling in the darkness to try to find things with my hands,” said Cha Soon-cheol, who spent five days helping with searches. Swimming against the strong currents exhausted him.

Once inside the ship, divers have to dodge floating debris — passengers’ belongings, cargo, ropes, chairs — but also bodies.

The ship turned upside down as it sank, so “just imagine a room that is flipped,” said Hwang, who doesn’t participate in dives himself but is closely involved in every
other part of the operation. “Everything is floating around, and it’s hard to know exactly where they are.”

It is a delicate operation. Divers must move quickly to find decomposing corpses, but they must also be cautious to protect themselves from injury and keep their air supply hoses from getting cut off. The divers can often work for about an hour when they’re hooked up to the hoses, Hwang said.

Some divers use oxygen tanks, but that typically allows for only about 20 minutes under water.

As they explore the hallways of the ship, bodies in life jackets often float above them, near what used to be the floor, and divers must reach up to grab the bodies and pull them close so they can hold them while notifying colleagues above. They then carefully push the body through an open window cleared of broken glass and debris and let it float up to the boats.

Hwang says divers take special care with decaying bodies to make sure they don’t damage them further. When a body without a life jacket is found, one diver wraps his arms around the body and another diver pulls his colleague and the body to the surface with a rope.
The work is dangerous.

Air supply problems recently forced two members of Hwang’s team to make risky, rapid ascents from about 100 feet (30 meters) underwater to the surface. Rising too quickly puts divers at risk of decompression sickness, also known as the bends, which in severe cases can be fatal. The two divers, he said, were treated in decompression chambers. They’re now resting, with one suffering from back pain.

It’s also emotionally exhausting, and divers often find themselves thinking of the lives lost.

Hwang said his divers try to avoid looking at the eyes of the bodies they retrieve to minimize the shock. It’s not always possible. “Even though they have a lot of diving experience, they get really frightened when they first face the bodies,” he said. Many of the students are found hugging each other.

“How hard it must have been for the kids, with the cold water rushing in and darkness coming over them,” Hwang said. “Yesterday, I had a lump in my throat talking about this. I thought to myself: Why did I tell them that I can help with rescues and have a lot of experience when I can’t even save one life here?”

All 15 crew members of South Korean ferry in custody
Apr 26th 2014

All are accused of negligence and of failing to help passengers in need as the ferry Sewol sank on 16 April.

ALL FIFTEEN PEOPLE involved in navigating the South Korean ferry that sank and left more than 300 people dead or missing are now in custody after authorities today detained four more crew members, a prosecutor said.
Yang Jung-jin of the joint investigation team said two helmsmen and two members of the steering crew were taken in on preliminary arrest warrants issued late Friday. Eleven other crew members, including the captain, had been formally arrested earlier.

**Negligence**

All are accused of negligence and of failing to help passengers in need as the ferry Sewol sank April 16. The captain initially told passengers to stay in their rooms and took half an hour to issue an evacuation order, by which time the ship was tilting too severely for many people to get out.

Recovered and 115 people are believed to be missing, though the government-wide emergency task force has said the ship’s passengers list could be inaccurate.

Only 174 people survived, including 22 of the 29 crew members.

**Crew**

The seven surviving crew members who have not been arrested or detained held non-marine jobs such as chef or steward, Yang said in a telephone interview from Mokpo, the southern city near the wreck site where prosecutors are based.

A court hearing was held today to determine whether formal arrest warrants will be issued against the four newly detained crew members.

South Korean television aired video of the police escorting the four men to court. All four wore baseball caps that hid their faces, and at least one was limping.
Capt. Lee Joon-seok told reporters after his arrest that he withheld the evacuation order because rescuers had yet to arrive and he feared for passengers’ safety in the cold water. Crew members have also defended their actions.

Helmsman Oh Yong-seok, one of those arrested today, has said he and several crew members did their best to save people.

**Passengers**
He said that he and four crew members worked from nearby boats to smash windows on the sinking ferry, dragging six passengers stuck in cabins to safety. Officials in charge of the search effort said Saturday that divers have reached two large rooms where many of the lost may lie dead, but the search had to be suspended because of bad weather. Currents were already strong this morning, as they were in the first several days of the search, when divers struggled in vain even to get inside the submerged vessel.

“This morning (the divers) did a primary dive, but because of the strong current they were losing their masks, so we have stopped the dive for now,” Kim Jin-hwang, a South Korean navy official in charge of commanding the dive search, said in a briefing at Jindo. He said the search would resume once conditions improve, but it was unclear when that would happen.

The two rooms where searchers hope to find more of the missing soon are sleeping units designed for many people — one in the stern and one in the bow.

Fifty students from Danwon High School in Ansan were booked into one of them. Students from the city near Seoul make up more than 80 percent of the dead and missing; they had been on their way to the southern tourist island of Jeju.

**Divers**
Large objects that toppled when the ferry tipped over and sank are believed to be keeping divers from reaching bodies in at least one of the rooms.

“Many structures … all fell down as the ship listed, and now are all buried on the left side. Because of the weighty objects it was impossible to entirely search the room,” Kim said.
Also today, the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries said it would soon change ferry systems so that passenger, vehicle and cargo information is processed electronically.

There is not only uncertainty about how many people were on the Sewol, but a huge discrepancy regarding the amount of cargo it was carrying when it sank. The ministry said in an email that starting June 1, passengers’ names, genders, birthdates and contact information will be electronically entered when they get their boarding passes. Vehicles and cargo will be electronically processed beginning July 1, the ministry said.

The Sewol was carrying an estimated 3,608 tons of cargo, according to an executive of the company that loaded it. That far exceeds what the captain claimed in paperwork — 150 cars and 657 tons of other cargo, according to the coast guard — and is more than three times what an inspector who examined the vessel during a redesign last year said it could safely carry.

Lee Kyu Yeul, professor emeritus in ship and offshore plant design at Seoul National University’s Department of Naval Architecture and Ocean Engineering, said the reported load could have set the ship tipping over with a significant turn.

Sinking
Tracking data show the ship turned 45 degrees before sinking, and crew members have reportedly said that they had tried to make a much less severe turn.

Yang, the prosecutor, said that the cause of the sinking could be due to excessive veering, improper stowage of cargo, modifications made to the ship and tidal influence. He said investigators would determine the cause by consulting with experts and using simulations.

Prosecutors have conducted several raids to seize documents and have ordered a few dozen people not to leave the country.

The Korean Register of Shipping and the Korea Shipping Association, which regulates and oversees departures and arrivals of domestic passenger ships, both
were raided, according to officials at both organizations who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak about matters under investigation.

The shipping association issued a statement Friday saying that its chief director, Joo Sung-ho, intends to resign. Joo expressed his regrets over the accident and hoped that with lessons learned from the sinking, “our country will become a safe place without accidents,” the statement said.

President Barack Obama arrived Friday at the Blue House, South Korea’s presidential residence, and presented President Park Geun-hye with an American flag that flew over the White House the day the ship sank.

Obama’s first South Korean visit since Park took office last year was aimed at issues including North Korea, but he noted that his trip comes at a time of “great sorrow.”

“So many were young students with their entire lives ahead of them,” Obama said, invoking his two daughters, both close in age to many of the ferry victims. “I can only imagine what the parents are going through at this point, the incredible heartache.”

Obama also said he was donating a magnolia tree from the White House lawn to Danwon High School in honor of the lives lost, and as a symbol of friendship between the U.S. and South Korea.

South Korean prime minister resigns over ferry sinking


April 27, 2014  Associated Press in Jindo

Chung Hong-won steps down amid rising anger over claims by relatives that government did not do enough to help loved ones.

South Korea's prime minister has resigned over the government's handling of a ferry sinking that has left more than 300 people dead or missing and resulted in widespread shame, fury and finger-pointing, blaming "deep-rooted evils" in society for the tragedy.
South Korean executive power is largely concentrated in the president, so Chung Hong-won's resignation appears to be symbolic. Presidential spokesman Min Kyung-wook said President Park Geun-hye would accept the resignation, but did not say when Chung would leave office.

Chung's resignation came amid rising indignation over claims by the victims' relatives that the government did not do enough to protect or rescue their loved ones. Most of the dead and missing were high school students on a school trip.

Officials have taken into custody all 15 people involved in navigating the ferry Sewol, which sank on 16 April. A prosecutor revealed that investigators were also looking into communications made as the ship sank between a crew member and the company that owns the ferry.

Chung was heckled by victims' relatives and his car was blocked when he visited a shelter on an island near the site of the sinking last week. On Sunday, he gave his reasoning for the resignation to reporters in Seoul.

"As I saw grieving families suffering with the pain of losing their loved ones and the sadness and resentment of the public, I thought I should take all responsibility as prime minister," Chung said. "There have been so many varieties of irregularities that have continued in every corner of our society and practices that have gone wrong. I hope these deep-rooted evils get corrected this time and this kind of accident never happens again."

Meanwhile, senior prosecutor Yang Jung-jin said two helmsmen and two members of the steering crew who were detained on Saturday had been formally arrested. Eleven other crew members, including the captain, had been arrested earlier.

Yang also said that a crew member called the ship's owner, Chonhaejin Marine Co Ltd., as the ferry was listing, but declined to disclose whether the caller was the captain. Local media reported that the captain called for company approval of an evacuation. Prosecutors said they were analysing the content of communications between the ship and the company.
The arrested crew members are accused of negligence and of failing to help passengers in need. Captain Lee Joon-seok initially told passengers to stay in their rooms and took half an hour to issue an evacuation order, by which time the ship was tilting too severely for many people to get out.

Divers have recovered 188 bodies and 114 people are believed to be missing, though the government-wide emergency task force has said the ship's passengers list could be inaccurate. Only 174 people survived, including 22 of the 29 crew members.

The seven surviving crew members who have not been arrested or detained held non-marine jobs such as chef or steward, according to Yang.

Lee told reporters after his arrest that he withheld the evacuation order because rescuers had yet to arrive and he feared for passengers' safety in the cold water. Crew members have also defended their actions.

Helmsman Oh Yong-seok, one of those arrested on Saturday, has said he and several crew members did their best to save people. He said that he and four crew members worked from nearby boats to smash windows on the sinking ferry, dragging six passengers stuck in cabins to safety.

The ministry of oceans and fisheries said it would soon change ferry systems so that passenger, vehicle and cargo information is processed electronically. There is not only uncertainty about how many people were on the Sewol, but a huge discrepancy regarding the amount of cargo it was carrying when it sank.

The ferry was carrying an estimated 3,608 tons of cargo, according to an executive of the company that loaded it. That far exceeds what the captain claimed in paperwork – 150 cars and 657 tons of other cargo, according to the coast guard – and is more than three times what an inspector who examined the vessel during a redesign last year said it could safely carry.

Yang, the prosecutor, said the cause of the sinking could be due to excessive veering, improper stowage of cargo, modifications made to the ship and tidal influence. He said investigators would determine the cause by consulting with experts and using simulations.

Prosecutors have also seized documents from Jindo Vessel Traffic Services Center and Jeju Vessel Traffic Services Center, Yang said, and are analyzing communication messages, vessel tracking data and security camera recordings and others. The centres communicated with Sewol crew members as the ship listed and filled with water. The communications revealed confusion and indecision on the evacuation.

Despite bad weather, dozens of divers planned to continue underwater searches on Sunday for the missing, said Ko Myung-seok, a spokesman for the emergency task
force. Ko said the weather was worsening on Sunday, with a high-seas advisory and rapid ocean currents.

Officials said on Saturday that divers had reached two large sleeping units in the ferry where many of the lost may lie dead. Large objects that toppled when the vessel tipped over and sank are believed to be keeping divers from reaching bodies in at least one of the two rooms.

Fifty students from Danwon High School in Ansan, a city near Seoul, were booked into one of the rooms. Danwon students make up more than 80% of the dead and missing; they had been on their way to the southern tourist island of Jeju.

"I just want to find my son's corpse. I want to see him one last time and hold a funeral for him," said Lim Hee-bin, as he exhaled cigarette smoke near his tent at Paengmok port in Jindo. "But the government search operation is too slow. It's total nonsense."

Lim said his son, Lim Hyun-jin, called him as the ship sank but the call was cut off. His son also sent him blurry and shaky photos showing his friends wearing orange life jackets and seated in a cabin.

"There are the last photos he sent me," Lim said. "These show they were in a dangerous situation."

**South Korea ferry disaster: footage shows crew being rescued**


April 28, 2014 Associated Press in Jindo, South Korea

Captain is seen leaping on to rescue boat in video released as divers continue search for victims.

Footage of the captain and crew being hauled to safety from the sinking ferry Sewol was released on Monday as South Korean investigators expanded their inquiries into the rescue operation.

In the video clips released by the South Korean coastguard, the captain, wearing only a sweater and underpants, is shown leaping on to a rescue boat from the sinking ferry, which is tilting at about 45 degrees.

Others, who appear to be crew members, slide down from the bridge to the coastguard boat holding ropes. The video also shows about half a dozen people, apparently passengers, wearing lifejackets in the water near the stern of the ship.
According to Kim Kyung-il, a coastguard official, the ship's crew members did not tell rescuers that they were crew and those on the first rescue boat to arrive said the situation was so urgent that they could not check.

Victims' relatives have claimed that the government did not do enough to protect or rescue their loved ones and South Korea's prime minister on Sunday resigned over the handling of the disaster, blaming "deep-rooted evils" in society. Most of the dead and missing were secondary school students on a school trip.

The senior prosecutor Ahn Sang-don told reporters on Monday that documents and recordings were seized from a coastguard office in Mokpo, and the same would be done at an emergency call centre that received a call from a student on the ship reporting the sinking. The emergency service centre official connected a coastguard official with the student, who local media reports said was later found dead.

Prosecutors have questioned the captain, third mate and helmsman, who were on the bridge when the ship began listing, as well as another captain of the ferry who was on holiday on the day of the accident.

Ahn said that while all 15 crew members responsible for the ship's navigation had been arrested, they have not been formally charged. The seven surviving crew members who have not been arrested held non-marine jobs, such as chef or steward.

The arrested crew members are accused of negligence and of failing to help passengers in need. Captain Lee Joon-seok initially told passengers to stay in their rooms and took half an hour to issue an evacuation order, by which time the ship was tilting too severely for many people to get out. Lee told reporters after his arrest that he withheld the evacuation order because rescuers had yet to arrive and he feared for passengers' safety in the cold water.
The number of dead from the 16 April sinking is 188, with 114 people believed missing. Only 174 people survived, including 22 of the 29 crew members.

Divers on Monday renewed their search for more than 100 bodies still trapped after weekend recovery efforts were hindered by bad weather, strong currents and floating debris. Divers recovered only one body on Sunday.

Ko Myung-seok, an official with the emergency taskforce, said the government was planning to salvage the ferry once search efforts ended but that details would not be available until officials had talked to families of the victims.

The ferry was carrying an estimated 3,608 tons of cargo, according to an executive of the company that loaded it. That far exceeds what the captain claimed in paperwork – 150 cars and 657 tons of other cargo, according to the coastguard – and is more than three times what an inspector who examined the vessel during a redesign last year said it could safely carry.

Senior prosecutor Yang Jung-jin said the cause of the sinking could be due to excessive veering, improper stowage of cargo, modifications made to the ship and tidal influence. He said investigators would determine the cause by consulting with experts and using simulations.

Ferry disaster: South Korea's president apologises for official failings
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/29/ferry-disaster-south-koreas-president-apologises-for-official-failings
April 29, 2014

Park Geun-Hye, whose PM resigned over sinking, says government should have fixed 'long-running evils' that caused it.

South Korea's president has apologised for her government's failure to prevent a ferry disaster that left some 300 people dead or missing.

Two days after her prime minister resigned over the tragedy, Park Geun-Hye voiced profound regret at the systemic and regulatory failings that contributed to the capsize of the 6,825-tonne Sewol on 16 April.
"I feel so regretful for having been unable to correct such long-running evils and letting an accident like this take place," she said in a statement to her cabinet that was broadcast on national television.

Park’s government has been widely criticised over perceived corruption and lax safety standards that may have led to the disaster, with claims that the ferry was overloaded and the passenger list inaccurate and incomplete.

Relatives of the more than 100 passengers still missing have blasted the response to the sinking, saying delays in launching the rescue cost lives.

"I don’t know how to apologise for the failure to prevent this accident and for the insufficient first response," Park said.

"I am sorry to the people and heavy-hearted that many precious lives were lost." Earlier on Tuesday the president had travelled to Ansan, south of Seoul, where she paid her respects to a memorial for the hundreds of schoolchildren who died in the disaster.

Of the 476 people on board the Sewol, 325 were students from the same high school in Ansan. Only 75 of the students were rescued.

**Fears that South Korea ferry victims may never be recovered**

http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/598668/fears-that-south-korea-ferry-victims-may-never-be-recovered

May 01, 2014 Agence France-Presse

SEOUL—The recovery of a body from South Korea’s ferry disaster some distance from the submerged vessel fuelled concerns Thursday that many among the scores still missing may never be found.

More than two weeks after the 6,825-tonne Sewol capsized and sank, 213 people have been confirmed dead but 89 remain unaccounted for, much to the frustration and anger of the victims’ families.

On Wednesday, a fishing boat pulled a body from the sea about two kilometers (1.2 miles) away from the main recovery site off the southern island of Jindo.
“This made us even more aware of the importance of preventing the loss of victims’ bodies,” Park Seung-Ki, spokesman for the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, told reporters.

Recovery workers put a ring of netting around the site days ago, but there are concerns that powerful currents in the area may have pulled some bodies into the open sea.

The relatives of those still missing are insisting that all the bodies are recovered before efforts begin to raise the sunken ferry. But the dive teams, working in challenging and sometimes hazardous conditions, have yet to access 22 of the ship’s 66 passenger cabins in their grim search.

The Sewol capsized on April 16 with 476 people on board—more than 300 of them from the same high school in Ansan city, just south of Seoul.

A group of 160 relatives whose children’s bodies have been recovered left Ansan for Jindo on Thursday, to show support for those still waiting for their loved ones’ remains to be retrieved.

It has become one of South Korea’s worst peacetime disasters, and the tragic death of so many young students has fuelled the need to apportion blame and hold those responsible to account.

The captain and 14 of his crew have been arrested, and the ferry owners have become the focus of an ever-widening probe, but much of the public criticism has been directed at the government.

The general consensus is that lax safety standards and collusion between industry and regulators were partly to blame for the scale of the disaster, while officials have also been blamed for the initially slow rescue response.

The Sewol’s regular captain, who was off duty on the day of the accident, has told prosecutors that the ferry operator—Chonghaejin Marine Co—“brushed aside” repeated warnings that the 20-year-old ship had stability issues following a renovation in 2012.

The precise cause of the accident is still under investigation, but experts have suggested a sharp turn may have caused its cargo to shift, and the ferry to list irretrievably to one side before capsizing.

Senior prosecutor Yang Jong-Jin said two Chonghaejin Marine officials had been questioned extensively Wednesday over allegations that the Sewol was carrying three times its recommended cargo weight.

President Park Geun-Hye apologized on Tuesday for her government’s failure to combat systemic and regulatory “evils” that may have contributed to the accident and for the “insufficient first response”.

Some victims’ families rejected her apology and the president was heckled when she visited a memorial to the dead students in Ansan.

Her spokesman was forced to deny reports that a much-published photo of Park comforting an elderly woman at the memorial was staged, after it emerged that the woman was just a visitor, and not a relative.

**South Korea ferry was routinely overloaded**
http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/599470/south-korea-ferry-was-routinely-overloaded
May 04, 2014  Associated Press

INCHEON, South Korea—The doomed ferry Sewol exceeded its cargo limit on 246 trips—nearly every voyage it made in which it reported cargo—in the 13 months before it sank, according to documents that reveal the regulatory failures that allowed passengers by the hundreds to set off on an unsafe vessel. And it may have been more overloaded than ever on its final journey.

One private, industry-connected entity recorded the weights. Another set the weight limit. Neither appears to have had any idea what the other was doing. And they are but two parts of a maritime system that failed passengers April 16 when the ferry sank, leaving more than 300 people missing or dead.

The disaster has exposed enormous safety gaps in South Korea’s monitoring of domestic passenger ships, which is in some ways less rigorous than its rules for ships that handle only cargo. Collectively, the country’s regulators held more than
enough information to conclude that the Sewol was routinely overloaded, but because they did not share that data and were not required to do so, it was practically useless.

The Korean Register of Shipping examined the Sewol early last year as it was being redesigned to handle more passengers. The register slashed the ship’s cargo capacity by more than half, to 987 tons, and said the vessel needed to carry more than 2,000 tons of water to stay balanced.

But the register gave its report only to the ship owner, Chonghaejin Marine Co. Ltd. Neither the coast guard nor the Korean Shipping Association, which regulates and oversees departures and arrivals of domestic passenger ships, appear to have had any knowledge of the new limit before the disaster.

“That’s a blind spot in the law,” said Lee Kyu-Yeul, professor emeritus at Seoul National University’s Department of Naval Architecture and Ocean Engineering. Chonghaejin reported much greater cargo capacity to the shipping association: 3,963 tons, according to a coast guard official in Incheon who had access to the documentation but declined to release it.

Since the redesigned ferry began operating in March 2013, it made nearly 200 round trips—394 individual voyages—from Incheon port near Seoul to the southern island of Jeju. On 246 of those voyages, the Sewol exceeded the 987-ton limit, according to documents from Incheon port.

The limit may have been exceeded even more frequently than that. In all but one of the other 148 trips, zero cargo was recorded. It is not mandatory for passenger ferries to report cargo to the port operator, which gathers the information to compile statistics and not for safety purposes.

More than 2,000 tons of cargo was reported on 136 of the Sewol’s trips, and it topped 3,000 tons 12 times. But the records indicate it never carried as much as it did on its final disastrous voyage: Moon Ki-han, a vice president at Union Transport Co, the company that loaded the ship, has said it was carrying an estimated 3,608 tons of cargo.

The port operator has no record of the cargo from the Sewol’s last voyage. Ferry operators submit that information only after trips are completed. In that respect, the rules for domestic passenger ships are looser than those for cargo-only vessels, which must report cargo before they depart.

Details from the port documents were first reported by the South Korean newspaper Kukmin Daily.

In paperwork filed before the Sewol’s last voyage, Capt. Lee Joon-seok reported a much smaller final load than the one Moon described, according to a Coast Guard official who had access to the report but refused to provide a copy to the Associated
Press. The paperwork said the Sewol was loaded with 150 cars and 657 tons of cargo.

That would fall within the 987-ton limit, but it’s clearly inaccurate: The coast guard has found 180 cars in the water.

An official with the Korea Shipping Association’s safety team said it is beyond the association’s capacity to determine whether a ship is carrying too much cargo. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn’t allowed to discuss the Sewol case as it is being investigated.

“What we can do is to see the load line is not submerged,” he said. The load line, a marking on the outside of a vessel, indicates whether a ship is overloaded, but it does not show whether it has the sort of balance between cargo and ballast that the register report said was necessary.

“The only person on any vessel who knows the exact cargo safety limit, excluding ballast water, fuel, passengers and others, is the first mate,” the official said.

All 15 surviving crew members involved in the ferry’s navigation have been arrested, accused of negligence and failing to protect passengers. Prosecutors also detained three employees of the ferry owner who handled cargo, and have raided the offices of the ship owner, the shipping association and the register. Heads of the shipping association and the register offered to resign in the wake of the disaster.

The cause of the sinking remains under investigation, but experts have said that if the ship were severely overloaded, even a small turn could cause it to lose its balance. Tracking data show the ship made a 45-degree turn around the time it began sinking; crew members have reportedly said that something went wrong with the steering as they attempted a much less severe turn.

Some experts say the Sewol never should have been cleared to operate after last year’s redesign because the owner would not be able to make money under the register’s new cargo limits.

The ferry operator “was trying to make a profit by overloading cargos,” said Kim Gil-soo, a professor at Korea Maritime and Ocean University in Busan, “and public agencies that should have monitored did not monitor that.”

According to South Korean law, the association may report violations to either the coast guard or the state-run port operator, but both entities said they were never told of excessive cargo on the Sewol. The shipping association has refused to say how often it has reported violations.

A coast guard official said the shipping association should have reported any excessive cargo to the operator of Incheon port, where the Sewol last departed. An official with the port operator says it is the coast guard that should have been
alerted. The coast guard official spoke on condition of anonymity, saying he was not authorized to speak about matters under investigation; the port official refused to provide his name.

South Korea, unlike many other countries, relies on a private industry-affiliated body to determine whether a ship is safe to sail. The shipping association, whose members are shipping companies and ship operators, took on that responsibility in 1973, following a 1970 sinking in which about 320 people died.

Captains submit paperwork to the association indicating how much cargo is on board as well as crew and passengers.

The shipping association, which also oversees crew education, is partly government-funded, but its biggest business is selling insurance to its members. Its website says about 75 percent of its 110 billion won ($107 million) budget for 2014 was allocated to its insurance department. The budget for the department dealing with domestic passenger ship safety was 7.4 billion won ($7.2 million). The association has 71 safety inspectors at 13 South Korean ports and its headquarters.

Many of the association’s high-level officials come from the Ministry of Ocean and Fisheries, which some say makes it tough for the ministry to scrutinize the group. Ministry officials may be reluctant to question association officials who are former senior public servants, or even their former bosses.

The register, which made the cargo limit evaluation, also is a private entity. In Europe, North America and Japan, regulation is generally done by public bodies such as the United States Coast Guard and the United Kingdom’s Maritime and Coastal Agency. In Japan, the government checks ships once a year, and conducts unannounced inspections of crew qualification and emergency training.

At the same time, it’s common for governments to rely on ship captains to report their loads accurately. It would be virtually impossible to check every boat, experts say.

Since the Sewol disaster, the oceans ministry has been considering taking the job of overseeing passenger-ship safety away from the shipping association, ministry official Kwon Jun-young said. Kwon said they are discussing which agency or agencies should take up on the job.

**South Korea's president meets relatives of those missing after ferry disaster**

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/04/south-korea-ferry-disaster-south-korea
May 4, 2014  Associated Press in Seoul
The South Korean president, Park Geun-hye, has told families of those missing in a sunken ferry that her heart breaks knowing what they are going through.

Park met with some 50 relatives in Paengmok port on Jindo, an island near where the ferry sank on 16 April with 476 people aboard, most of them students from a single high school. With eight bodies recovered on Sunday, the death toll reached 244 with 58 still missing while 174 survived, including 22 of the 29 crew members.

"I've gone through the grief of losing family, so I understand it well," Park told relatives, referring to the violent deaths of both parents, one of whom was a South Korean dictator. She added, "My heart breaks to think about how you must feel."

She added: "Anyone responsible for the accident and criminally at fault will be sternly punished."

It was her second visit to the families of the ferry victims. She has previously apologised for the government's inept initial response to the disaster.

Emergency task force spokesman Ko Myung-seok said that 60 out of 64 rooms on the ferry Sewol have been searched so far.

After visiting the families, Park boarded a coastguard vessel and arrived at the site where the ferry sank. Stepping on the barge, Park encouraged the divers, saying they were "the last hope" for the families.

Meanwhile, documents showed the Sewol exceeded its cargo limit on 246 trips in the past 13 months before it sank.

FERRY DISASTER: Rescue Diver Dies Searching
HTTP://WHOTV.COM/2014/05/05/FERRY-DISASTER-RESCUE-DIVER-DIES-SEARCHING/
MAY 5, 2014, BY STAFF WRITER, UPDATED AT 09:37PM, MAY 5, 2014

JINDO, South Korea (CNN) — A diver searching the sunken Sewol ferry died Tuesday, according to South Korea’s Government Rescue Headquarters.

“A civilian diver, Lee, lost the communication line at 25 meters under the sea five minutes into his first dive,” spokesman Koh Myung-suk said.
“By the time his colleagues went to save him, Lee was unconscious and unable to breathe by himself,” Koh said.

Lee, whose full name was not provided, was helicoptered to a hospital where he was pronounced dead, the spokesman added.

Park In-ho, head of the hospital where Lee died, said the diver’s blood was tested and appeared normal except for high potassium.

His chest X-ray also showed no sign of irregularity.

Not including the diver, the death toll in the ferry disaster has risen to 263, with 39 people still missing, the government reported.

Over the weekend, South Korean President Park Geun-hye visited the port where the rescue operation is based to console families and encourage divers.

Nearly 130 divers are combing the ship, looking for the remaining missing bodies. The search-and-rescue operation has turned into a grueling recovery of corpses. No one has been found alive since the ferry sank April 16 with a passenger load largely made up of high school students on a field trip.

The work has become even more difficult because divers have faced closed cabin doors blocked by debris.

Corralling the debris has been difficult for search teams.
Mattresses and clothing from the ship have been found up to 9 miles (15 km) away from the accident site, said Park Seung-ki, a spokesman for the rescue operation.

Large stow and trawler nets will be set up around the sunken ship to catch items that may float away, he said. At the same time, some three dozen ships will be clearing an oil spill from the ferry, which is threatening the livelihood of the local fishermen.

The ferry sank en route from Incheon to the resort island of Jeju, off the nation’s southwestern coast.

**Civilian diver dies trying to recover bodies from sunken South Korean ferry**

HTTP://FOX4KC.COM/2014/05/05/CIVILIAN-DIVER-DIES-TRYING-TO-RECOVER-BODIES-FROM-SUNKEN-SOUTH-KOREAN-FERRY/

MAY 5, 2014, BY CNN WIRE

This is an archived article and the information in the article may be outdated. Please look at the time stamp on the story to see when it was last updated.

JINDO, South Korea (CNN) — A diver searching the sunken Sewol ferry died Tuesday, according to South Korea’s Government Rescue Headquarters.

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Over the weekend, South Korean President Park Geun-hye visited the port where the rescue operation is based, to console families and encourage divers.

More than 100 divers are combing the ship room by room, looking for the remaining missing bodies.

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The ferry sank en route from Incheon to the resort island of Jeju, off the nation’s southwestern coast.

*CNN’s Stella Kim reported from Jindo; Ed Payne wrote from Atlanta*

**Rescue Diver Dies Looking for Bodies on Sunken South Korean Ferry**

http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/05/06/civilian-rescue-diver-dies-looking-for-bodies-on-sunken-south-korean-ferry/

6 May 2014 by **AWR HAWKINS**

On April 29th, a 53-year old diver taking part in the search for bodies aboard the sunken South Korean Sewol ferry became unconscious and later died after descending 25m into the water.
The diver was known as “Mr. Lee” According to BBC News, the deceased diver was “a veteran crew member of Undine Marine Industries, which specializes in maritime engineering and rescue work.” This was his first rescue dive around the sunken ferry.

“Fellow divers lost communication with [Mr. Lee] five minutes into his dive and later pulled him to the surface,” the report stated.

South Korean Prime Minister Chung Hong-won “has since ordered government officials overseeing the rescue operation to thoroughly check divers’ health conditions.”

**South Korea ferry disaster: Diver dies trying to recover bodies from sunken ship**
http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/south-korea-ferry-disaster-diver-3501177
6 MAY 2014 BYSAM ADAMS
He lost consciousness during the search operation for victims still missing after last month's disaster.

A diver has died trying to recover bodies from the sunken South Korean ferry. He lost consciousness during the search operation for victims still missing after last month's disaster.

The diver was diving to fix guideline ropes on the fifth deck of the sunken ferry, according to Ko Myung-seok, spokesman for the government's emergency task force.

He was unable to breathe by himself when he was brought to the surface, and his death was later confirmed at a hospital.

The dead man had been working for Undine Marine Industries, the company brought in to lead search efforts on the Sewol ferry, which capsized and sank about 20 km (12 miles) off the southwest coast of South Korea on April 16 with 476 passengers and crew on board.

Among the passengers were 339 children and teachers on a high school outing to the southern island of Jeju.

Only 174 people have been rescued. The confirmed death toll is 263, with 39 still missing.

An investigation is ongoing and amid rising indignation over the government's handling of the disaster, President Park Geun-hye voiced criticism on Tuesday of the role played by the ferry operator and government officials.

"Safety rules that must be observed were not followed because of worldly desires and irresponsible acts that tolerated those injustices have resulted in death," she said during her address at a temple in Seoul on Tuesday to celebrate Buddha's birthday.

She promised to fundamentally change national policies and systems to improve safety and to clean up malpractices to ensure businesses and government officials comply with requirements.

President Park visited the families of the ferry victims on Sunday afternoon in Paengmok port in Jindo for the second time since the tragedy.

Her approval rating had slipped to 53 percent as of May 5, 12 percent down for the two weeks after the disaster, according to Seoul-based polling company Realmeter.
SEOUL, May 6. /ITAR-TASS/. During the search and rescue operation carried out April 16 on the sunken South Korean ferry Sewol, one diver died, the National Maritime Police Agency (Coast Guard) on the island of Chindo reported.

During regular submersion 53 -year-old diver, surnamed Li lost consciousness. At 07.12 am local time he was rushed to a nearby hospital in the port of Mokpo in the southwest of the country, but the doctors could not do anything and soon announced that he had died.

Communication with lifeguard, who worked for the company Undine Marine Industries, was lost five minutes after his dive to a depth of 25 meters.

262 dead bodies were found for 19 days of search and rescue operations on the sunken ferry. Another 40 people are unaccounted for, said the government's operational headquarters on the island of Chindo.

Civilian diver dies in South Korea ferry search
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/06/diver-dies-in-south-korea-ferry-search
May 6, 2014 Associated Press in Seoul

Civilian was pulled to surface unconscious after beginning his first dive to look for bodies on wreck of Sewol
A civilian diver has died while helping to search for bodies on the sunken Sewol ferry in South Korea.

The 53-year-old had been pulled to the surface unconscious by fellow divers after losing communication about five minutes after he began what was his first dive on the wreck, government task force spokesman Ko Myung-seok said. He was pronounced dead at a hospital.

It is the only death so far in the recovery operation, according to the coast guard.

Despite the death divers were continuing to search on Tuesday, with the authorities saying most of the remaining missing people were in 64 of the ship’s 111 areas. Ko said divers had searched all those 64 areas at least once and planned to revisit them to look for more victims. Efforts were assisted by better weather and easing ocean currents.

The Sewol carried 476 people, most of them students from a single high school near Seoul, when it sank off South Korea's southern coast on 16 April. There were 174 survivors including 22 of the 29 crew members. The sinking left more than 260 people dead, with about 40 others still missing.

Darkness, floating debris and the maze of corridors and cabins on board have made the search difficult.
Investigators have made their first arrests of people who were not on board the Sewol when it sank. The three arrested on Friday and Sunday are suspected of negligence in their handling of cargo on the vessel, according to prosecutors.

In all 19 people have been arrested in the investigation, 15 of them crew members accused of abandoning passengers. An executive with ties to Chonghaejin, the company that owns the ferry, was detained on suspicion of malpractice related to company finances.

Improper stowage and overloading of cargo is suspected as a possible cause. The Sewol had been carrying an estimated 3,600 tonnes of cargo, more than three times its safe limit. A ferry loaded too heavily could overbalance when making even a small turn.

Diver dies at S. Korea ferry disaster site
http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/599939/south-korea-diver-dies-in-sunken-ferry-searches
May 6, 2014  Agence France-Presse

SEOU – A diver died Tuesday while working at the scene of South Korea’s ferry disaster, as investigators disclosed that the ship was carrying nearly four times its legal limit of cargo.

Lee Gwang-Wook, 53, (a diver working for Undine Marine Industries died during the search) suffered breathing difficulties after reaching a depth of 25 meters (82 feet), said coastguard spokesman Ko Myung-Suk.

Lee, who was making his first dive at the scene, lost consciousness and was pronounced dead in hospital.

Lee lost contact with surface controllers after five minutes in the water. His air hose was found entangled with other lines, a coastguard official was quoted as saying by Yonhap news agency.

“He was a veteran diver, who used to work up to 60 meters below the surface,” his brother-in-law Kim Hyun-Chul told journalists, adding Lee had no health problems. He was the first victim among scores of divers engaged in the grim and
dangerous task of finding and retrieving bodies from the sunken ship, while fighting strong currents and low visibility in silty water.

Some 10 others have received treatment for exhaustion and decompression sickness since the operation began.

It has been 20 days since the 6,825-ton Sewol capsized and sank with 476 people on board — most of them schoolchildren — off the southwest coast.

The confirmed death toll rose to 264 on Tuesday afternoon, while 38 people remain missing.

**Overloaded and unbalanced**

Yonhap, citing investigators, said Tuesday the ferry was overloaded on 139 out of its 241 voyages between the western port of Incheon and the southern resort island of Jeju since beginning the service in March last year.

When disaster struck it was carrying 3,608 tons of cargo — more than half its own weight — including 108 vehicles, the news agency quoted investigators as saying. The legal limit, according to Yonhap, was 987 tons.

The ferry was carrying just 580 tons of ballast water — only 37 percent of the legal requirement — in order to carry more cargo. This made the ship dangerously unbalanced, Yonhap said, citing investigators.

President Park Geun-Hye on Tuesday issued a fresh apology for her government’s failure to prevent the tragedy and renewed a pledge to eradicate “corruption and wrongdoing” blamed for the disaster.

“As the president who should protect the lives of the people, I don’t know how to express my condolences to the bereaved families. I feel sorry and my heart is heavy with grief,” she said.

“Greed for material gain prevailed over safety regulations and such irresponsible behavior resulted in the loss of precious lives.”

Park previously apologized for her government’s failure to combat systemic and regulatory “evils” that may have contributed to the accident and vowed to sternly punish culprits.

The ferry sinking is one of South Korea’s worst peacetime disasters, made all the more shocking by the loss of so many young lives.

Of those on board, 325 were students from the same high school in Ansan city just south of Seoul.
All 15 of the surviving crew including the captain who were responsible for sailing the ferry are in custody, facing charges including negligence and abandoning passengers.

Prosecutors also arrested three officials from the ferry operator — Chonghaejin Marine Co — last week on charges of loading the ferry well beyond its legal limit. Investigators said on Monday that the crew had failed to alert passengers to the imminent danger for 40 minutes after sending distress signals. They became the first to leave the ship aboard a rescue boat, leaving hundreds of passengers trapped inside the sinking ship.

Criticism has also been directed at the government, as more evidence emerges of lax safety standards and possible corruption among regulators.

The independent Hankyoreh Shinmun daily said enforcement of safety regulations remained lax despite earlier incidents. In 1993, 292 passengers perished when an overloaded ferry sank off the west coast.

Diver dies at S. Korea ferry disaster site
http://www.rappler.com/world/regions/asia-pacific/57329-dive-dies-south-korea-ferry-disaster
May 6, 2014 BY AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SEARCHING. South Korean Navy's SSU members prepare to search for missing passengers near the buoys installed to mark a capsized ferry at sea off Jindo on April 18, 2014. Jung Yeon-Je/AFP
A coast guard official says the diver lost consciousness and was pronounced dead at a hospital after suffering difficulty of breathing in his first dive.

SEOUL, Korea (UPDATED)– A diver died Tuesday, May 6, while working at a ferry disaster site in South Korea as further details emerged about how deception and negligence contributed to the April 16 tragedy.

The 53-year-old was on his first dive at the site and suffered breathing difficulties after reaching a depth of 25 meters (82 feet), coastguard spokesman Ko Myung-Suk told journalists.

The diver, Lee Gwang-Wook, lost consciousness and was pronounced dead at a hospital, Ko added. He was described as a veteran crew member of private firm Undine Marine Industries, a specialist in maritime rescue work.

Lee lost contact with surface controllers after 5 minutes in the water. His air hose was found entangled with other lines, a coastguard official was quoted as saying by Yonhap news agency.

Lee was the first victim among scores of divers who have been engaged in the grim task of finding and retrieving bodies from the sunken ship in hazardous and challenging conditions such as fast currents and silty water.

Some 10 other divers have received treatment for exhaustion and decompression sickness since the operation began.

It has been 20 days since the 6,825-ton Sewol capsized and sank with 476 people on board – most of them schoolchildren – off the southern coast.

President Park Geun-Hye on Tuesday issued a fresh apology for her government's failure to prevent the tragedy. The confirmed death toll stands at 263, while 39 people remain missing.

"As the president who should protect the lives of the people, I don't know how to express my condolences to the bereaved families. I feel sorry and my heart is heavy with grief," she said.

"Greed for material gains prevailed over safety regulations and such irresponsible behavior resulted in the loss of precious lives", she added.

Park had apologized for her government's failure to combat systemic and regulatory "evils" that may have contributed to the accident and vowed to "sternly punish" any culprits.

All crew arrested
The ferry sinking is one of South Korea's worst peacetime disasters, made all the more shocking by the loss of so many young lives.
Of those on board, 325 were students from the same high school in Ansan city, just south of Seoul.

All the 15 crew including the captain have been arrested for abandoning the ship while hundreds were trapped inside.

Prosecutors also arrested 3 officials from the ferry operator – Chonghaejin Marine Company – last week on charges of loading the ferry well beyond its legal limit. Yonhap news agency, citing investigators, said Tuesday that the Sewol ferry was loaded with just 580 ton of ballast water – only 37% of the legal requirement – in order to carry more cargo. This made the ship dangerously imbalanced.

Investigators said on Monday that the crew had failed to alert passengers to the imminent danger for 40 minutes after the crew sent distress signals and became the first to leave the ship aboard a rescue boat, leaving hundreds of passengers trapped inside the sinking ship, according to Yonhap.

Criticism has also been directed at the government, as more evidence emerges of lax safety standards and possible corruption among state regulators.

The independent Hankyoreh Shinmun daily said enforcement of safety regulations remained lax despite earlier incidents. In 1993, 292 passengers perished when an overloaded ferry boat sank off the western coast. – Rappler.com

**THE KOREA TIMES**

**Editorial**

**Diver's death**


2014-05-07

As was feared, a diver died early Tuesday morning while working at the scene of the sunken ferry Sewol off the southwestern coast. It's horrible to witness another tragedy because of the failure to observe safety rules at the very place where a catastrophe took place only three weeks ago due to a disregard for safety.

Lee Gwang-wook lost contact with surface controllers five minutes after jumping into the waters during his first dive. His air hose was found entangled with guidelines between the vessel and the barge above. It's suspected that Lee lost consciousness while trying to untangle the ropes.

A veteran diver with 30 years experience was assigned to dive only a day after he arrived at Paengmok Port as one of 15 new divers deployed to replace existing ones who withdrew because of decompression sickness and exhaustion. He was the first victim among scores of divers engaged in search and rescue operations.

Lee's death was reminiscent of the late Navy Chief Warrant Officer Han Joo-ho who died while participating in a rescue operation for missing sailors aboard the warship Cheonan sunk by a North Korean torpedo in March 2010. The causes of the two mishaps are quite similar as divers were in a hurry to search for and rescue the
missing in violation of safety regulations.

In the latest case, the government deserves harsh criticism. To begin with, the divers reportedly worked without enough rest as the operations entered their final stretch, but the authorities turned a blind eye to their violation of rules, apparently conscious of negative public sentiment about the government's search operations.

Most unbelievable is that the barge didn't have any emergency medical staff and facilities despite calls for safety measures since the ferry disaster that left more than 300 people dead or missing. So Lee had to be rushed to a hospital in Mokpo by helicopter without due first aid at the rescue site. It also defies our understanding that Lee whose father was also a diver began to dive without having an adjustment period.

Divers have been engaging in search operations at the risk of their lives, braving strong currents and winds and high waves. They routinely break safety rules and dive beyond permitted limits, sympathizing with the grief and sorrow of the families of the victims, but this should be halted immediately in order to prevent any more accidents.

With more than 30 bodies yet to be recovered, Prime Minister Chung Hong-won on Wednesday told the rescue authorities to wrap up their search for bodies from the doomed ferry by the weekend. But it's stupid to set a deadline, given that such instructions will cause the rescue team to once again rush operations.

South Korea ferry disaster: head of parent company held
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/08/south-korea-ferry-disaster-head-of-parent-company-held
May 8, 2014 Associated Press in Seoul

South Korean authorities say they have detained the head of the company that owns the Sewol ferry, which sank in April, over an allegation of cargo overloading.

Yang Jung-jin, a senior prosecutor, said Kim Han-sik, president of Chonghaejin Marine Co, was allegedly aware the Sewol exceeded its cargo limit but did not intervene. The ferry sank on 16 April and more than 300 people are either dead or missing.

Yang says prosecutors were investigating Kim's actions to decide whether they would formally arrest him.
All 15 surviving crew members involved in the ferry's navigation have been arrested, accused of negligence and failing to protect passengers. Four other Chonghaejin employees, who handled cargo on the ship, have been arrested.

South Korean diver's harrowing diary of grim search for bodies inside Sewol
09 May, 2014

“Started search and touched a wall. Groped along the wall ... moved along further. Felt a body.”

It’s a grim diary entry for a harrowing job – the recovery of hundreds of bodies, most of them schoolchildren, from the cold, dark interior of the submerged South Korean ferry Sewol that sank more than three weeks ago.

A diver who worked on the rescue and recovery operation for nearly all that time kept a journal that outlines, in stark detail, the physical and psychological demands placed on the teams, which also suffered a fatality during the search.

It follows the progression of the operation, from the early optimism that some passengers might be found in air pockets, to the tragic realisation that there were no survivors beyond the 172 who escaped before the ship fully capsized. “My mind
is totally occupied by one thought – find anyone still alive,” the journal begins on April 19, three days after the 6,825-tonne Sewol went down.

Of the 476 on board, 325 were children from the same high school, on an organised trip to the southern resort island of Jeju.

The diver was hired by a salvage company on a temporary contract that forbade him to speak to the media. But his journal entries were published under the pseudonym “Mr B” by Kookje Shinmun, a newspaper in the southern city of Busan.

By April 22, the reality had sunk in that the search for survivors had become a search for bodies, even as relatives clung to the thinnest of hopes.

“What have we done to these children?” the entry reads. “Sorry, Sorry, Sorry.” A parent’s thanks for retrieving his child’s body does little to lift the sense of helplessness. “I don’t think I deserve this gratitude,” he writes.

The most searing entries are the most recent, recorded as dive teams moved deeper into ferry. The divers were under immense pressure to retrieve all the bodies as quickly as possible, but faced working in near zero visibility.

“The torch is almost useless,” notes a May 4 entry. “The visibility is so bad, it’s better to just close your eyes and grope with your hands.”

On May 6, the journal describes discovering a body, bumping into something which touch reveals to be an arm belonging to a corpse. After securing the body, the diver signal to the surface team to pull them up: “I get through the doorway and gently guide the body through after me, and then we start rising again.

South Korean ferry captain and three crew charged with manslaughter
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/15/south-korea-ferry-captain-charged-manslaughter
May 15, 2014  Agence France-Presse in Seoul

Four are accused of leaving sinking Sewol ship while telling passengers to stay where they were.

The captain and three other crew members of the ferry that sank off South Korea last month have been indicted on charges of manslaughter through gross negligence, Yonhap news agency reported.

Lee Joon-Seok, the captain of the Sewol ferry, plus two navigators and a chief engineer could receive the death sentence if convicted, although that penalty is very unlikely to be carried out.

They are accused of leaving the ship as it was sinking while telling passengers – mostly students on a school excursion – to stay where they were.
The four, together with 11 other lower-ranking crew members, are accused of being the first to scramble to safety while hundreds of passengers remained trapped in the sinking vessel.

The four not only failed to issue an order for passengers to leave the ship but also kept to themselves the information that a rescue boat had arrived, investigators were quoted as saying by the Munhwa Ilbo daily.

They took off their uniforms and changed into civilian clothes, being aware that uniformed crew members should be the last to evacuate, the daily said.

Even after being instructed by maritime safety authorities to help passengers evacuate the ship, they failed to take any action and almost an hour later got on the first rescue boat, it said.

The death penalty is rarely applied in South Korea, where a moratorium has been in place since the last execution took place in late 1997. There are 60 people on death row.

The 11 other crew members were indicted on less serious charges including wrongfully steering the vessel, and abandoning a ship and leaving passengers in a sinking boat without making efforts to rescue them.

A coastguard spokesman said a further five bodies had been retrieved late on Wednesday, including one found floating on the surface. The confirmed death toll now stands at 281, with 23 still missing.

The Sewol was carrying 476 people when it sank on 16 April after listing sharply to one side. Of those on board, 325 were children from a high school in Ansan City, in the southern suburbs of Seoul, who were on an organised trip to the southern resort island of Jeju.

Initial investigations suggest the ferry was carrying up to three times its safe cargo capacity, and that it had been habitually overloaded.

The coastguard chief, Kim Suk-Kyun, said on Wednesday that divers engaged in the dangerous task of retrieving bodies were being seriously hampered as waterlogged
partition walls inside the ship collapsed. "As time goes by, the interior is caving in faster and faster, posing serious threats to divers' safety," he said.

One diver, Chun Kwang-Geun, said poor visibility inside the ship forced them to blindly grope through the debris to find victims. "If we stumble upon something, we grope it by hand [to determine whether it is a body]," said the 40-year-old diver, who has been working on the scene since the day after the disaster. "Many partition walls have collapsed, blocking our access," he said.

Another diver, Lee Sun-Hyong, 35, said the collapsing walls threatened to cut off air supply to divers, who mostly use breathing systems tethered to the surface.

South Korean president to disband coastguard in wake of ferry disaster
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/19/south-korean-president-disband-coastguard-ferry
May 18, 2014 Associated Press

Park Geun-hye uses a televised address to announce emergency services shake-up and takes the blame for tragedy.

South Korea's president said on Monday that she will disband the coastguard in the aftermath of last month’s ferry disaster which left more than 300 people dead or missing.

The coast guard has been under growing public criticism over its alleged poor search and rescue work after the ferry Sewol sank on April 16. Most of the victims were students from a single high school near Seoul who were traveling to the southern tourist island of Jeju.

"The coast guard's rescue operations were virtually a failure," Park said in a nationally televised speech.

Park said she will push for legislation that would transfer the coast guard's responsibilities to the national police agency and a new government body she plans to establish.

Park also again apologised for the government's handling of the sinking, one of the deadliest disasters in decades in South Korea.
"The final responsibility for not properly dealing with this incident is placed on me," she said. Park has apologised over the incident at least three times.

About one month after the sinking, 286 bodies have been retrieved but 18 others are still missing. Some 172 people, including 22 of the ship's 29 crew members, survived.

Prosecutors last week indicted the ferry's 15 crew members tasked with navigating the ship, four on homicide charges.

**Condolences for Two Divers Killed While on Duty in Ferry Sewol**


2014.05.30

**We mourn for two divers who died while searching the sunken ferry Sewol.**

(30 May 2014, Seoul) Another diver fell unconscious during ferry disaster search and was taken to hospital but he died on May 30. The veteran crew member was being involved in cutting open the hull of the sunken ferry Sewol. He was the second who fell victim during search and rescue work after another civilian diver died on May 6. We are deeply saddened to hear that two more lives have been taken after the April 16 ferry disaster. We, People’s Committee on the Sewol Ferry Disaster, would like to mourn for two civilian divers who shared the pain and tried to rescue the missing victims at the risk of their own lives and to pray for their bereaved families.

Divers have faced intense pressure to retrieve as many of the missing as possible and take all the risks and burdens on their own. The Korean government, bearing ultimate responsibility, should have tried to minimize risks involved with the overall search operation and to provide safety for the divers. It was revealed when Lee Gwang-wook, a diver, died while on duty on May 6, that no medical staff were standing by on the barge where divers rest and resupply. The government should set up measures to ensure that divers could rest enough after underwater search and get medical assistance immediately when they need.

Since the early stage of the ferry sinking, all the Koreans as well as the families of the victims have been shocked and become outraged at the government’s incompetency and irresponsibility laid bare in handling the accident. As a private firm, not a government agency as a control tower, took on the rescue operations, the early critical moments were wasted, with failure of expeditious rescue and search. And even after the government set up a disaster management taskforce, individual divers have taken all the risks without proper support. To make matters worse, President Park Geun-hye’s sudden announcement of disbanding the Coast Guard rather intensified confusion at the scene, stirring up resentment among the families of the missing. Presidential spokesman Min Kyung-wook’s inappropriate remarks on “divers being paid per body” not only hurt the bereaved but also insulted divers to dampen
their morale. The government has still drawn a profound distrust upon itself by resorting to temporary expedients.

No more pain should be inflicted on the families of the missing and the victims of the ferry disaster. They are now concerned about the divers’ health and safety more than anyone else. The authorities should thoroughly ensure the search operations to be prompt and complete and check the safety measures for divers. We, People’s Committee on the Sewol Ferry Disaster, urge the government to make sincere efforts to end suffering and tragedy that has continued since April 16.

Korean Statement >> 세월호 수색 민간 잠수사 두 분의 명복을 바랍니다

(Translated by Kyungsun Park, Volunteer)

**Another Sewol diver dies**

http://fairplay.ihs.com/article/12969/another-sewol-diver-dies

30 May 2014  Crystal Chan

Another civilian diver has died during the search for the missing bodies of 16 Sewol passengers who remain missing.

A statement released by South Korea’s Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries said that the 46-year-old diver, identified only as Lee, injured himself while making an incision on Sewol’s hull this afternoon.

The statement, written in Korean, said: “At 13.50hrs South Korea time today, the divers accessed the fourth level of the ferry and began cutting through the structure. Around 14.20hrs, the team heard moaning. The team immediately stopped work to see what was wrong.

“When Lee was found by a fellow diver and brought to the surface, he was unconscious and bleeding from the face. The medical team onsite performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation on Lee and at 14.48hrs, he was airlifted to the hospital.”

Lee, an Incheon resident, arrived at Korea Hospital in Mokpo around 15.25hrs. He was pronounced dead 10 minutes later.

Lee’s death follows that of Lee Gwang Wook, 53, another civilian diver, who died on 6 May after losing consciousness soon after entering the waters around the Sewol.

The Sewol capsized on 16 April. Of the 476 passengers and crew, 304 are presumed dead. So far, 288 bodies have been retrieved while 16 remain missing.

Since 21 May, no bodies have been found and rescuers are under mounting pressure to retrieve all the corpses.
South Korea ferry search diver dies
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/30/south-korea-ferry-search-diver-dies
May 30, 2014 Agence France-Presse

Cause of death unclear but 46-year-old is second diver to die in effort to retrieve bodies from the Sewol, which sank last month.

A diver has died during efforts to cut a new access hole into a submerged ferry that sank last month with the loss of about 300 lives, the South Korean coastguard said.

The 46-year-old diver, identified only as Kim, was pulled on Friday from the water unconscious and bleeding from his face, a coastguard official said.

He was later pronounced dead in hospital, but the precise cause of death was not immediately clear, the official said.

He was the second diver killed in the operation to retrieve hundreds of bodies from the 6,825-tonne Sewol ferry, which sank on 16 April off the southern coast of South Korea.

The Sewol was carrying 476 people – most of them schoolchildren.

No bodies have been recovered since 21 May, leaving the confirmed death toll at 288, with 16 still unaccounted for.
Divers have had to battle strong currents and work in near-zero visibility. Two dozen have been treated for injuries and decompression sickness.

“Diver Kim Kwan-hong, we will always remember you as a hero and a righteous man.”

[Fact TV] In the wake of the sinking of the MV Sewol, private diver Kim Kwan-hong dedicated himself to recovering the missing victims, on the morning of June 17th he was found to be deceased. Mr Kim joined the underwater recovery effort 7 days after the Sewol sank and worked for over two months. He and his diver colleagues entered the scene alongside the Coast Guard Sea Salvage & rescue Unit (SSU) and recovered 292 of the 295 missing victims.

After Sewol, Mr Kim suffered from decompression sickness and a spinal disc injury among other conditions and he was forced to give up his occupation. He tried to make ends as a surrogate driver and also worked alongside the Sewol families campaigning for an investigation into the Sewol.

Last September, Mr Kim spoke as a consultant at the Sewol parliamentary audit, he expressed the frustration of the private divers as he levelled criticism at the Coast Guard who had shirked responsibility for their role in the death of one of his diver colleagues during the recovery operation. The Coast Guard attempted to shift the blame over diver Lee Kwang-wook’s accidental death to fellow private diver Gong Woo-young, Mr Gong was charged with criminal negligence and sentenced to one year in prison.

He also attended the first Sewol Special Investigation Team hearing as a witness last December and described the confusion and illogical situations that arose on the ground during the recovery operation. When he saw government officials who had been in charge at the time take the stand and repeatedly answer questions with, “I can’t remember,” he confronted them, “I want to ask the senior government officials something. I remember everything. I can’t forget and the memories forged into my bones – how can you say you don’t know or forget?”

In the lead-up to the 20th general election, Mr Kim volunteered for the campaign of then-candidate, now-lawmaker ‘Sewol Lawyer’ Park Joo-min, working as his driver amongst other roles that he shared with the Sewol families. On June 8, Mr Kim attended a press conference calling for the newly established 20th parliament to amend the Sewol Special Law and on the day before his death, he attended a Sewol-related cultural event alongside Sewol family members.

Mr Kim passed away on the morning of June 17, leaving behind a wife and three children as well as his parents. At 7pm the following day, a crowd of 500 gathered to pay their respects and comfort his family at the memorial that was set up at the
funeral parlour at Seobuk Hospital, Yeok-chon, Eun-pyung, Seoul. The parlour was filled with the sound of the song. Not only his family but many others also shed tears.

“We said we would get our grand revenge... I promise we will find the truth of the Sewol, cheer us on from heaven.”

Park Rae-gun, chairperson of the 416 Network spoke about their relationship, “I thought we would continue to work together like family but he has gone ahead of us. We said we would get our revenge on the wretches who failed to rescue the students from inside the Sewol, who still think money is more important than lives, who are too busy looking out for themselves to notice the suffering of others, we said we would get our grand revenge.”

“Looking at your three children who have not yet comprehended the death of their father and the wife who stood by and saw how you suffered, my heart is torn to shreds.” Becoming increasingly choked up he continued, “Now you can let go of everything and rest, all the sleep you tried but couldn’t achieve, catch up on it all and rest. As for the rest of us who are still here, I promise we will find the truth of the Sewol, cheer us on from heaven.”

Jung Myung-sun, chairperson of the 416 Family Council declared, “Today’s situation is completely unjust, it is deplorable, it is difficult to accept. We will do our best to look after the people that Mr Kim loved the most, his family – his two daughters and son and his parents.”

“While the government failed to rescue and refused to even recover our loved ones, private divers like Mr Kim risked their lives and voluntarily did the job for them. We call these divers the heroes of the Sewol.” He went on emphatically, “We will never forget. We will always remember you as a hero and a righteous man.”

Park Jong-hoon, senior member of the Sewol Special Investigation Team also paid his respects, “I have been meeting with the private divers since the summer of 2014 and few were as courageous as Mr Kim,” he went on to say, “Even though it could have disadvantaged him, he spoke up at the hearing, clearly outlining the situations in which the government performed poorly. I can still hear him saying ‘if it’s right, it’s right, if it isn’t right then it’s wrong.’”

Kim Sang-woo was a diver colleague who also work at the site of the Sewol and reminisced about their work, “Even when (Kim Kwan-hong) got hurt, he knew that if he didn’t go back in, someone else would have to – he said that we had to share the load and help each other. He was energetic and always cheerful. When we got holes in our wetsuits, he would patch them for us. He helped us in a lot of ways.” Park Joo-min “He nagged me a lot... he must have been particularly desperate for me to get elected.”

Newly elected The Minju Party lawmaker Park Joo-min arrived in tears and said, “When I was the last person to become a nominee and when I was sent to an
unfamiliar electorate (Eunpyung), Mr Kim was an especially special member of the campaign. He stayed closer to me than anyone else throughout the campaign.”

Mr Park went on to say, “He nagged me a lot, ‘Why is your posture so bad?’ ‘Why do you keep hesitating when handing out your card?’ ‘Make eye contact when talking to people.’ ‘Why is your voice so quiet?’ It was a bit difficult to take at times.” However he teared up as he continued, “Looking back Mr Kim must have been particularly desperate for me to get elected. There were pressing matters that he felt that could be addressed through my getting elected. I didn’t understand that clearly at the time.”

“I knew about his difficulties but I thought he would be doing okay. I cried a lot yesterday. I haven’t cried like that in a long time. But from today, even though I am still in mourning, I will eat and get my strength up to work towards achieving our goals. I will address the problems that Mr Kim was so agonised by.” He concluded on emphatically, “(Through this memorial) A fire has been lit in our hearts, a fire that cannot be extinguished. We must use this fire as a lamp, to light the way towards the society that Mr Kim dreamt of. We cannot let our tears put out this fire.”

A cousin of Mr Kim’s spoke as a family representative, “My cousin who wasn’t interested in social problems at all, who was proud and always confident (after Sewol) seems to have been exposed to an overwhelming torrent of emotions all at once. The powerless are already sacrificing enough. Those in positions of power have to do more (in order to discover the truth behind the Sewol disaster).

He then addressed members of the media who were present and criticised them for distorting the facts around the Sewol, “I want to ask you if you think happiness is just a clickbait-worthy headline. I want you to know that every decision you make can turn someone’s life upside down.”

“Ssangyong Motors, Hanjin Industries, Sewol. I didn’t think those stories would apply to my family. But it happened to my family too. I hope everyone realises that now.” He choked up as he said, “I can still clearly picture Kwan-hong’s swaggering. I miss him so much.”

Following this, the host of the memorial, Yoo Gyoung-geun Executive Director of the 416 Family Council addressed Mr Kim’s family, “Once the funeral is over, you go home and care for your three children, the fact that your neighbours can continue to carry on like normal will make you angry.” He continued, “Let’s overcome this together. Let’s come back to life with the Sewol families and supporters. We will stay with you so that your family can live the life that Mr Kim wanted for you.”

After the tribute speeches, there were performances of songs such as by the 416 Choir and a choir named after Lee So-sun, the mother of worker’s rights martyr Lee Tae-il. Following the performances, crowds of mourners stood in line to place white chrysanthemums in front of a photograph of Mr Kim. Mr Kim was laid to rest at 8.30am on June 19 at Beokje Cemetary.
This new clipping was taken from: http://facttv.kr/facttvnews

Translated by R. Jaung

**Murder trial opens for South Korea ferry captain and crew**

**Jun 10th 2014**

The bulk of the charges arise from the fact the Captain and the others chose to abandon the ferry while hundreds of people were still trapped inside the vessel before it capsized.

WITH SOUTH KOREAN divers still searching for victims of April’s ferry disaster, the murder trial of 15 crew members opened today in a highly-charged atmosphere that raised concerns about a fair hearing.

The trial began in the southern city of Gwangju in a packed courtroom which included grieving relatives of some of the 292 confirmed victims of the April 16 tragedy.

Captain Lee Joon-Seok and three senior crew members are accused of “homicide through wilful negligence” a charge that falls between first-degree murder and manslaughter, but still carries the death penalty.

Eleven other members of the crew are being tried on lesser charges of criminal negligence.

Wearing numbered prison uniforms, handcuffed and with their arms bound to their waists with rope, the defendants were taken to the courthouse well before the trial began.

The bulk of the charges arise from the fact that Lee and the others chose to abandon the 6,825-tonne Sewol ferry while hundreds of people were still trapped inside the heavily-listing vessel before it capsized.
A handful of crew members who stayed and tried to guide passengers to safety were among those who died.

The Sewol was carrying 476 passengers, including 325 students on a school trip, when it sank off the southwest coast.

So far 292 have been confirmed dead, with 12 still unaccounted for as divers continue to search the submerged vessel for remaining bodies.

The tragedy stunned South Korea, knocking the entire country off its stride and unleashing a wave of public anger, as it emerged that incompetence, corruption and greed had all contributed to the scale of the disaster.

Much of that rage focused on Lee and his crew, especially after the coastguard released a video showing the captain, dressed in a sweater and underwear, scrambling to safety from the sinking ferry.

**Fair trial?**
South Korean media coverage of their arrest and arraignment was often coloured by a presumption of guilt and just weeks after the disaster President Park Geun-Hye stated that the crew’s actions had been “tantamount to murder”.

In such a heated atmosphere, with public calls for severe punishment, there are concerns that Lee and the other defendants may be unable to receive a fair trial in the Gwangju district court.

“It will be a very difficult case and the court will be under a lot of pressure,” said Jason Ha, a senior attorney with a leading law firm in Seoul.

“Public emotion is still running very high and, with the police still searching for the absconding ferry owner, the captain and crew are the target of all that anger.”

Around 250 parents of the high-school victims travelled to Gwangju to attend the trial, both inside and outside the court.

The defendants reportedly had enormous difficulty in securing private legal representation, with few lawyers willing to take on the defence in such an emotive case.

Six public defenders have been appointed to the defence team. District court cases of this nature are usually heard by a three-judge bench. Ha said, “We don’t have a jury system here and these are professional, independent judges who hopefully should be able to ignore the clamour outside.”

Although the captain and three crew could, if convicted, be handed the death penalty, it is extremely unlikely it would be carried out.
A moratorium has been in place in South Korea since the last execution took place in late 1997. Currently, there are some 60 people on death row.

“There is enormous public interest and emotion surrounding this trial,” said Choi Jin-Young, a spokesman for the Korean Bar Association.

“The judges must avoid being swayed by the public sentiment, although that might play a part if it comes to handing down a sentence.”

A nationwide manhunt is still underway for Yoo Byung-Eun, the fugitive patriarch of the family behind Chonghaejin Marine Co, the company that owned and operated the Sewol.

Yoo is wanted for questioning on possible charges of embezzlement and criminal negligence.

6,000 Korean police storm religious compound in manhunt for sunken ferry owner
http://www.thejournal.ie/ferry-disaster-manhunt-1511079-Jun2014/
Jun 11th 2014

Followers of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Korea erected a barricade at the entrance to the complex, but made no move to block police.

THOUSANDS OF SOUTH Korean police have forced their way into the compound of a splinter religious group in their search for a fugitive businessman wanted in connection with April’s ferry disaster.

Live television reports showed police officers, many in full riot gear, streaming into the sprawling church and farming complex in a morning raid in Anseong, 80 km south of Seoul.

A spokesman for the Gyeonggi province police force said 6,000 officers were involved.

The huge operation came a day after President Park Geun-Hye urged police and prosecutors to step up a manhunt for Yoo Byung-Eun, 72, a leading member of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Korea.

Yoo is the patriarch of the family behind the Chonghaejin Marine Co., the company that owned and operated the 6,825-tonne Sewol passenger ferry which sank on 16 April with the loss of 300 lives, most of them schoolchildren.

“Yoo must be brought to justice,” Park told a cabinet meeting.
He is wanted for questioning on possible charges of embezzlement and criminal negligence, as prosecutors investigate the extent to which the Sewol disaster was caused by a lack of safety standards and regulatory violations.

The raid netted three church followers suspected of helping Yoo evade a nationwide dragnet put in place after he defied an official summons to surrender to prosecutors last month.

Police were searching for 10 more alleged accomplices identified in a warrant that was “also aimed at getting hold of Yoo and his son,” according to a prosecutor.

**Ferry company ‘brushed aside’ warnings**

Yoo has no direct stake in Chonghaejin, but his children and close aides control it through a complex web of holding companies.

A reward of €360,000 has been offered for information leading to the capture of Yoo and €73,000 for that of his eldest son, Yoo Dae-Kyun.

Police had raided the church complex in Anseong three weeks ago but came away empty-handed, amid reports that Yoo may have fled overseas.

The church followers erected a barricade at the entrance to the complex, but made no move to block the police Wednesday after they forced their way through.

More than 100 members staged a sit-down protest outside the main gate of the complex, singing hymns and chanting slogans.

One spokesman argued that Yoo was being set up as a fall guy for the Sewol disaster, because the government was unwilling to accept responsibility for regulatory failings that contributed to the tragedy.

“(Prosecutors) should fully investigate the true cause of the accident before arresting Yoo,” he said in statement read out to reporters.

“Our church will give 500 million won (€360,000) for those who reveal the truth behind the accident,” he added.

Yoo has described himself as an artist and photographer, and was once convicted of fraud when a company under his control went bankrupt.
The Sewol’s regular captain, who was off duty on the day of the accident, has told prosecutors that Chonghaejin Marine Co. “brushed aside” repeated warnings that the 20-year-old ship had stability issues following a renovation in 2012.

Five Chonghaejin officials have been arrested on various charges, including criminal negligence and breaches of maritime safety laws. The police operation also came a day after the trial opened of 15 of the Sewol’s surviving crew.

The captain and three of his senior crew members are charged with “homicide through wilful negligence” and could face the death penalty if convicted.

South Korean divers recover another body from sunken Sewol ferry


23 Jun 2014

Dive teams have recovered another victim of South Korea's ferry disaster, the first to be retrieved from the sunken vessel in 16 days.
The body of a woman passenger brings the total number of confirmed victims from the April 16 disaster to 293. Eleven people remain missing.

The Sewol passenger ferry was carrying 476 people, most of them students on a school trip, when it sank off the country's southwest coast.

The recovery operation has dragged on for more than two months, with the body retrieval rate falling off rapidly since the beginning of June.

Two divers have been killed and voices have begun to be heard calling for heavy cranes to be brought in to lift the sunken vessel.

Relatives of those still missing insist all the bodies must be recovered first, despite indications that some may have been carried away by the strong currents in the area.

The last body found on June 5 was spotted miles away from the accident site by a local fisherman.

Investigations are still underway into the exact cause of the accident, but the trial has begun of 15 Sewol crew on charges of criminal negligence and abandoning passengers.

Captain Lee Joon-Seok and three senior crew members are accused of "homicide through wilful negligence", a charge that carries the death penalty.

South Korea ferry disaster boss Yoo Byung-eun found dead in plum orchard
22 July 2014

The body of South Korea’s most wanted man was identified today almost six weeks after police first stumbled on the remains near where his overloaded ferry sank in April, taking more than 300 passengers to their deaths.

The question, after police claimed to have conclusively identified 73-year-old Yoo Byung-eun from one grisly fingerprint and DNA matching that of his older brother, was why they had taken so long to find out who he was. Beside him was a book that he had written, “Greater Love Has No Man Than This”, a religious treatise reflecting the controversial evangelical cult that authorities say had been illegally draining money from his shipping company for years.

Beside Yoo’s body, found in a plum orchard in the historic town of Suncheon, renowned for its wetlands and wildlife, was a bottle of shark liver oil, a health product manufactured by one of his companies, and three empty bottles of soju, a
rice wine. Police were still not certain whether he took his life, was murdered, or had had far too much to drink while eluding a nationwide manhunt.

The local police chief, Woo Hyung-ho, said his men were not aware when they inspected the book that Yoo was the author. In a news conference, Woo acknowledged “we were not perfect” – after which his superiors at the national police agency relieved him of his post.

Woo said the body was decomposed when discovered on 12 June after authorities had offered a bounty of nearly $500,000 to anyone leading them to where he was. Members of his Evangelical Baptist Church, which he founded and tightly controlled, refused to cooperate, blocking police from entering their compound near Seoul.

Yoo became the central figure in the tragedy that cost 304 lives, most of them school students on a cruise from the west coast port of Incheon to the scenic island of Jeju off the Korean south coast. The 6,800-ton vessel, the Sewol, sank after turning sharply in turbulent waters as cargo, including more than 100 vehicles, suddenly shifted.

Authorities believe Yoo and his managers, most of them members of his church, deliberately overlooked safety requirements, authorising several times the
maximum capacity on voyages down the Korean west coast. Yoo’s brother is on trial for embezzlement, his wife also faces charges, and their two sons are still missing. The captain of the ship and 14 crew members are on trial for manslaughter and negligence for abandoning the ship. They were winched off by helicopter while passengers were told to wait below decks for rescue that never came. Korean coast guard officers and crew members also face charges for botching the rescue in which only 172 of 476 passengers survived.

French authorities arrested Yoo’s oldest daughter, Som-na, in Paris, where she was living near the Champs-Elysee while running an elite interior decorating firm.

Prosecutors say funds from church donations and Yoo’s many businesses were transferred through the firm while he displayed his naturistic photographs under the pseudonym, Ahae, an old Korean word for “child,” around the world.

Befitting his cosmopolitan lifestyle, Yoo was wearing an Italian jacket and custom-made shoes when his body was found. The remains were flown to the national police headquarters in Seoul for scrutiny by experts. The hunt for Yoo embarrassed the country’s highest leaders. and threatened to plunge the conservative government into a crisis ripe for exploitation by its leftist foes. South Korea’s President Park Geun-hye said that Yoo was “ridiculing the law” and “causing indignation among the people”.

South Korea ferry disaster: students testify in captain's murder trial
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/28/south-korea-ferry-disaster-students-testify-captain-murder-trial
July 28, 2014 Agence France-Presse in Ansan, South Korea

Survivors say they were told to stay put as water rushed into their cabins in disaster that killed more than 300 people.

Student survivors of South Korea's Sewol ferry disaster, testifying in the murder trial of the captain and crew, recalled being repeatedly told to stay put as the ship was sinking.

"They kept saying the same thing over and over," one said, describing how she and classmates obeyed the order until the ferry had listed so far that the door to their cabin was above their heads.

Another described watching a wave sweep her classmates back inside the sinking boat.

The trial is taking place in the southern city of Gwangju, but the judges and lawyers decamped to a court in Ansan city, south of Seoul, for a special two-day session with the 17 students who agreed to testify.
Police cordons blocked public access to the district court as the students – all from Ansan’s Dawon high school – arrived in a red minibus and were escorted into the building by a tight phalanx of police officers.

Although they were offered the option of testifying by video from a nearby room, five of the six female students involved in Monday’s morning session chose to give their testimony in the courtroom.

The student who took the video option described how passengers suddenly slid to one side as the ferry listed heavily.

"The internal tannoy announcement said we should put our life vest on and stay put," she was quoted as saying by a pool reporter in the court, adding that the message was given repeatedly.

The 6,825-tonne Sewol passenger ferry capsized on 16 April off South Korea's southern coast. Of the 476 people on board, 325 were Dawon high school pupils on an organised outing. Only 75 students survived.

The female student said they had obeyed the order not to move until water started coming through the window of their cabin which, by now, was under their feet.

"The door was above our heads. We had our lifejackets on and the president of our class suggested we wait until we could float upwards and then escape," she said.
Eventually some classmates managed to clamber up fixed furniture. They pulled the others up and out as the waters inside rose.

Another witness, who testified in the courtroom, said at no time was she or those who escaped with her helped by any crew.

As the ferry keeled over to one side, she said a group of students managed to move along a now horizontal stairwell towards an escape hatch.

At the moment she jumped out, a sea swell swept over their escape route.

"There were many classmates in the corridor and most of them were swept back into the ship," she recalled.

The tragedy, and in particular the loss of so many young lives, rocked South Korea. In the days immediately after the disaster, TV stations broadcast wrenching mobile phone footage taken by one student victim of himself and his classmates laughing and joking about being in the Titanic movie as the ferry begins to list.

As the situation worsens, the students begin to panic, even as the ship tannoy can be heard advising them to stay put.

Sewol captain Lee Joon-Seok and three senior crew members are accused of "homicide through wilful negligence" – a charge that can carry the death penalty.

Eleven other crew are being tried on lesser violations of maritime law.

The bulk of the charges against the crew arise from the fact that Lee and the others chose to abandon ship while hundreds of people were still trapped inside the heavily listing vessel before it capsized. The final death toll was just over 300.

The crew were also condemned for ordering the passengers to remain where they were when the ship began listing. A handful of crew members who stayed and tried to guide passengers to safety were among those who died.

Lee and his crew were publicly vilified in the wake of the tragedy, and there have concerns about the possibility of a fair trial with emotions still running high.

**South Korea ferry disaster: inexperienced sailor was at helm**


October 7, 2014 Agence France-Presse in Gwangju, South Korea

Captain Lee Joon-Seok, on trial for murder, admits he should have been steering overloaded ship through notorious channel.
The captain of the South Korean ferry which sank in April killing more than 300 people has admitted during his murder trial that he had left an inexperienced crew member at the helm when the vessel capsized.

Testifying for the first time in court, Lee Joon-Seok denied allegations by some of the crew that he was playing games on his mobile phone when the 6,825-tonne Sewol ran into trouble.

The passenger ferry capsized and sank on 16 April. Most of those who died were schoolchildren.

On Monday, the findings of a five-month investigation by state prosecutors were released. They concluded that a deadly combination of cargo overloading, illegal redesign and human error had caused the disaster.

Questioned in court, Lee, 69, said he knew that crew member Cho Jun-Ki, who was steering the ship after working on the Sewol for only six months, did not have the required skill and experience.

Lee, when asked if he should have taken the helm as the ship entered a channel notorious for its strong underwater currents, replied: “Yes, I guess so.”

The Sewol, which was overloaded and top heavy following an illegal refit, made a sharp turn in the channel, causing it to list sharply to one side.

This caused the cargo to shift, and the ferry was unable to right itself. The bespectacled Lee, dressed in a khaki prison uniform, appeared tense and stammered during his testimony in the court in the south-western city of Gwangju.
Lee and three senior crew members are accused of “homicide through wilful negligence” – a charge that can carry the death penalty.

Eleven other crew members are being tried on lesser violations of maritime law.

The captain and crew were vilified for abandoning the ferry while hundreds were still trapped inside, and criticised for ordering passengers to remain where they were when the ship began listing.

Asked where he was when the ferry ran into trouble, Lee said he was in his cabin “smoking and changing clothes”.

He denied the allegation that he had been playing games on his phone. “No, I wasn’t playing a game. I wouldn’t know how to. I was just holding the smartphone,” he said.

Lee has insisted that the ferry owners are the real culprits as it was their decision to habitually overload the vessel.

**South Korean ferry disaster: captain says sorry for abandoning passengers**
October 8, 2014   The Associated Press in Seoul

Captain Lee Joon-seok, on trial for murder along with three crew members, said he had not intended to kill any of his passengers.

The captain of a doomed South Korean ferry has apologised for abandoning passengers but said he did not know his actions would lead to the deaths of more than 300 people, reports said.

Captain Lee Joon-seok and three other crew members from the ferry Sewol were indicted on homicide charges alleging they were negligent and failed to protect passengers when the ferry sank in April. Eleven other crew members were indicted on less serious charges. The 15 crew on trial were among the first group of people to leave when the ship began listing.

Lee told the trial at the Gwangju district court in southern South Korea that he would continue to pray for the souls of the dead people until he dies, according to South Korean media. “I committed a grave sin. I’m sorry,” Lee was quoted as saying.

Lee, 68, said he had no intention of killing any of his passengers. “I know I cannot get out of prison, but I must not let my children and grandchildren live being called family members of a murderer,” he was quoted as saying.
Court officials could not confirm Lee’s comments but said the court is expected to issue its ruling on him and the 14 other crew members next month.

Asked by prosecutors whether he had issued an evacuation order to passengers, Lee said he definitely had, according to Yonhap news agency.

Many survivors have said they were repeatedly ordered by loudspeaker to stay on the sinking ship and that they did not recall any evacuation order being given before they helped each other flee the vessel.

About six months after the sinking, 294 bodies have been recovered but 10 others are still missing. Most of the dead were high school students who were travelling to a resort island for a trip.

**South Korea ferry disaster: prosecutors seek death penalty for captain**


October 27, 2014
Prosecution tells court Lee Joon-seok should be sentenced to death after more than 300 killed in capsized ferry.

South Korean prosecutors have sought the death penalty for the captain of a ferry that capsized in April, leaving 304 people, most of them schoolchildren, dead or missing.

Lee Joon-seok, 68, has been charged with homicide. The prosecution told the court he should be sentenced to death for failing to carry out his duty, before resting its case in a trial that has taken place amid intense public anger towards the crew.

Lee was among 15 accused of abandoning the sharply listing ferry after telling the passengers to stay put in their cabins. Four, including the captain, face homicide charges.

The rest face lesser charges, including negligence. A three-judge panel is expected to announce its verdicts in November. No formal pleas have been made but Lee has denied intent to kill.

South Korea prosecutors demanded the death penalty for Lee Joon-seok, captain of the Sewol ferry that sank in April with the loss of more than 300 lives. Photograph: Park Chul-hong/AP

There have been no executions in South Korea since 1997 despite several death sentences in recent years.
“Lee supplied the cause of the sinking of the Sewol … he has the heaviest responsibility for the accident,” said lead prosecutor Park Jae-eok. “We ask that the court sentence him to death.”

The prosecutors sought life sentences for the other three charged with homicide, and prison terms varying from 15 to 30 years for the rest.

The Sewol capsized and sank on a routine voyage on 16 April, triggering an outpouring of nationwide grief and sharp criticism of the government of President Park Geun-hye for its handling of the rescue operation. The crew members on trial have said they thought it was the coastguard’s job to evacuate passengers.

**Court to rule on death penalty for South Korean ferry captain**


November 10, 2014 Reuters in Gwangju

Judges in Gwangju to pass verdicts and sentences in trial of captain and crew over disaster that killed more than 300 people.

A South Korean court is to rule on whether the captain of a ferry that capsized, killing more than 300 people, should be executed for culpable homicide.

A three-judge panel in the southern city of Gwangju will hand down verdicts and sentencing on Tuesday in the trial of captain Lee Joon-seok, 68, as well as 14 crew members, who face jail terms if convicted.

The overloaded Sewol capsized on 16 April while making a turn during a routine voyage to the holiday island of Jeju. The crew were among the first people to be rescued from the ship, while many passengers – mostly children on a school trip – waited in their cabins.
The tragedy provoked a public outcry and there have been concerns over whether the crew would get a fair trial, with private sector lawyers largely shunning the defendants. Only one crew member was represented by a private lawyer.

“I think the prosecutors have been under very heavy pressure,” said Cheong Yeong-seok, a law professor at Korea Maritime and Ocean University.

“In my opinion, the death penalty which prosecutors demanded is too much for the captain’s charge. But the public opinion was too negative and the situation from the gallery in the courtroom wasn’t good,” said Cheong.

Death sentences are rare in South Korea, which has not carried out an execution in more than 15 years.

Kim Hyun, a maritime lawyer advising the government on payouts to victims of the disaster, said he believed the crew received a fair hearing.

“I think it has been a fair trial given the defendants and their lawyers have made enough arguments in favour of them, despite public criticism,” he said.

Only 172 of the 476 passengers and crew were rescued. Of the 304 confirmed dead or still missing, 250 were schoolchildren.

Those on trial have said they thought it was the coastguard’s job to evacuate passengers. Video footage of their escape triggered outrage, especially after survivors testified that crew repeatedly told passengers to stay put.

Apart from Lee, three other crew members face homicide charges, with prosecutors seeking life prison terms. Prosecutors sought sentences ranging from 15 to 30 years for the other crew on trial, who face lesser charges, including negligence.

There are 58 people on death row in South Korea, according to the justice ministry, but the last time the country carried out an execution was in December 1997, when 23 convicts were hanged.

Lee has apologised to the families of the victims and said he never intended to harm anyone.

Some of the crew made tearful apologies following their lawyers’ closing speeches, which argued that the defendants were mostly too badly trained to handle the disaster.

South Korea ferry verdict: Sewol captain sentenced to 36 years in prison
November 11, 2014 Justin McCurry and agencies in Gwangju
Lee Joon-seok found not guilty of murder but is convicted of gross negligence over deaths of more than 300 people.

The captain who abandoned hundreds of schoolchildren as the Sewol ferry capsized and sank off the coast of South Korea in April has been sentenced to 36 years in prison, on the same day as officials called off the underwater search for those still missing.

A court in the city of Gwangju found Lee Joon-seok not guilty of murder, but convicted him of gross negligence.

The overloaded Sewol capsized on 16 April while making a turn during a routine voyage to the holiday island of Jeju. Lee abandoned the sinking ship with hundreds of people, most of them teenagers on a school excursion, on board.

Only 172 of the 476 passengers were rescued. Nearly seven months after the disaster 295 bodies have been recovered but nine are unaccounted for. Of the 304 confirmed dead or still listed as missing, 250 were pupils from the same high school.

Prosecutors had demanded the death penalty for Lee, 69, after branding him a liar who abandoned the Sewol despite knowing that hundreds of trapped passengers would probably die.

The court sentenced the Sewol’s chief engineer, Park Gi-ho, to 30 years in prison for homicide for not assisting two injured fellow crew members. The remaining 13 surviving crew members were found guilty and given terms of between five and 20 years on various charges including criminal negligence and accidental homicide.

A prosecutor involved in the case said his team would appeal against the decision on all 15 crew members, calling the rulings “disappointing,” particularly the not guilty verdict against three senior officers including the captain on homicide charges.
The captain and his fellow defendants, bound and handcuffed, were brought to the courthouse four hours before the 1pm hearing. Lee, wearing glasses and a green prison uniform, was seen under security escort climbing a set of stairs, his close-cropped head bowed.

Relatives of the victims voiced their disgust in the courtroom when the sentence was read out. One reportedly invited the judge, Lim Joung-youb, to free Lee and his crew so the families could “punish them ourselves”.

The Sewol sinking – South Korea’s worst maritime disaster in decades – stunned the entire country and raised fraught questions about what it had sacrificed in its rush to development.

Video shows the captain and some crew of the Sewol being hauled to safety as the ferry sank.

Lee and his crew became the targets of widespread public vilification, prompting legal experts to raise doubts over whether they would receive a fair trial, with emotions running high over the loss of so many young lives.

At the same time South Koreans were forced to confront the uncomfortable possibility that their country, having risen from the ashes of war, had ignored public safety as it rose to become Asia’s fourth-largest economy.

Local media coverage of their arrest and arraignment was often coloured by a presumption of guilt. Before the trial even began President Park Geun-hye publicly stated that the crew’s actions had been “tantamount to murder”.

When the trial ended in October, Lee said he had committed a crime for which “I deserve to die”, but strenuously denied that his decision to abandon the ship with passengers still on board had amounted to murder. He had panicked and failed to take “appropriate measures” that could have saved lives, Lee admitted. “But I swear from my heart that there was never any intention to murder,” he said.

In the end the court said it could not accept prosecutors’ demands for a murder verdict and the death penalty. It is not clear that Lee would ever have been executed – there are 60 people on death row in South Korea but no such sentence
has been carried out since 1997. Lee’s age, however, means he is likely to die in prison if he serves his full term.

“We find it hard to conclude that the defendants ... were aware that all of the victims would die because of their actions and they had an intention to kill them,” the court said. “Therefore the murder charges are not accepted.”

The public rage directed at Lee intensified after the release of images showing him clambering aboard a coastguard lifeboat while his young passengers remained trapped in their cabins and other parts of the sinking ferry.

It emerged that before leaving his ship Lee had instructed the remaining passengers to stay put, even as the vessel began to list dramatically. Prosecutors argued that decision alone contributed to the heavy loss of life.

Hours before the court ruling was expected, the maritime minister, Lee Ju-young, announced the end of the near seven-month search of the sunken vessel for missing bodies.

“The situation within the ship has become too difficult to continue,” Lee said, citing the collapsing interior and worsening sea conditions with the onset of winter.

Two divers died in May during search efforts in an area known for rapid currents and poor underwater visibility.

With nine victims still unaccounted for, and warnings that they may have been washed out to sea, Lee said he “deeply regretted” that some families would be left with no body to mourn.
The minister did not elaborate on when or whether the government planned to pull the ship out of water, saying the decision would be made after discussions with experts.

The relatives of the missing issued a statement supporting the decision and thanking the “heroes” on the recovery teams for their efforts.

“We have endured these painful times with the hope that we will, someday, be able to hold in our arms and cry over the bodies of our loved ones,” said a tearful family member, reading out the statement. “But what’s most important is the safety of divers ... and we want the search operation to stop,” she said, adding that the decision had been a “heartbreaking” one to make.

Min Dong-im, the wife of a missing teacher, told a televised news conference: “As our loved ones remain trapped in the cold waters this decision is unbearably painful...
for us. But we requested that the search operations be stopped” because of safety concerns.”

The disaster, among the worst in South Korea’s modern history, exposed serious safety lapses in what quickly came to be seen as an entirely manmade disaster.

The 6,825-tonne Sewol had undergone an illegal redesign and was carrying twice as much cargo as it was designed to accommodate – flaws that did not come to light until it was too late. Observers blamed this on collusive ties between ferry operators and regulators that had also enabled the Sewol’s owner to skimp on safety features to save money.

Despite the heroics of many rescue personnel the coast guard was criticised for the slow pace of efforts to save trapped passengers. Last week South Korean MPs approved plans to disband the coast guard and transfer its responsibilities to other government agencies.

Three relatives of the ship’s billionaire owner were sentenced to up to three years in prison, about four months after he was found dead while trying to evade the authorities.

**South Korea ferry boss jailed for 10 years over Sewol sinking**

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/20/south-korea-sewol-ferry-operator-boss-jailed-10-years

November 20, 2014 Associated Press in Seoul

Kim Han-sik failed to stop the improper storage and overloaded cargo which caused ferry to sink killing more than 300 people

A South Korean court has sentenced the head of a ferry operator to 10 years in prison over the ship sinking in April that killed more than 300 people.

Kim Han-sik, president of Chonghaejin Marine Co Ltd, also received a 2m won (£1,150) fine for failing to stop the improper storage and overloaded cargo on the ship that judges ruled contributed to the sinking, the Gwangju district court said.

Four other Chonghaejin officials were sentenced to three to six years in prison on similar charges, and two other company employees received suspended prison sentences.

An official from the Korea Shipping Association, which oversees safety issues of ships, was sentenced to three years in prison for allowing the ferry to leave a port near Seoul without checking its cargo and storage. Two employees at a private company that loaded the ship received two-year prison terms.
More than seven months after the Sewol ferry sank on its way to a southern resort island, the country is still grappling with the aftermath of the disaster, which exposed serious shortcomings in public safety and sparked fierce political wrangling. Officials blame crew members’ negligence, overloaded cargo, improper storage, unprofessional rescue works and corruption by the ship’s owners for the incident.

Last week the Gwangju court sentenced the 15 navigational crew members to prison terms ranging from five to 36 years.

Divers recovered 295 bodies from the wreckage before the government stopped underwater searches last week. Nine victims remain missing.

Sewol, one year on: Rescue divers struggle in the wake of ferry tragedy
15 Apr 2015 09 By Lim Yun Suk

The civilian divers who risked their lives during the search and rescue operations of the Sewol ferry disaster in 2014 are struggling to cope in the aftermath of the tragedy.

SEOUL: The welfare of civilian divers who risked their lives to help find victims’ bodies from the Sewol ferry sinking is among many issues that arose from last April’s tragedy.

When the ferry sank in April 2014, dozens of professional and amateur civilian divers headed to Jindo island in South Korea's southwest thinking they were prepared for the potential dangers of the rescue mission that awaited them.

But the divers would find themselves battling months of bad weather and fast currents. Murky conditions underwater also meant they had to feel their way around the ship due to low-to-zero visibility, and to avoid being hit by floating objects at the same time.

Despite the dangerous conditions, some did as many as five dives a day, often with little concern for their own safety, hoping to recover as many people as possible.
"The Sewol site is not only deep, but the tidal current is so strong," said Jung Yong-hyun, Head, Korea Diving Industry Institute. “The uldolmok (tidal power station) made famous by the Battle of Myeongnyang is nearby. But these divers overcame such strong tidal currents and dived in, thinking of the victims' families.

Not all survived the mission. Two civilian divers died after losing consciousness during the search. And for many of the other divers, the past 12 months have been tough.

"I am afraid to be in dark places alone because the images run through my head," said diver Kim Kwan-hong. “So I keep going out to meet people in wide open spaces and move around. If I walk around, I think of it less."

**BODIES DECAYED "BEYOND RECOGNITION**

Nothing could have prepared Mr Kim and many of his fellow divers for coming face-to-face with the bodies. Said another diver, Kim Sang-woo: "I dived in with a sad heart, thinking of the children, but entering the hull is frightening work. The state of the bodies goes beyond our imagination. They have decayed beyond recognition."

Mr Kim Dong-soo is also suffering from the trauma of last year's dives. He was a hero for saving more than 10 people from the sinking ferry. But the recognition has done little to assuage his guilt.

He was back in the news last month after he attempted suicide. He says he cannot forgive himself for not having saved more lives. Police say he has suffered mentally, physically and financially, due to the lack of government assistance after completing the mission. He is now receiving treatment.

The search and recovery operation ended in November. The ship remains submerged in the waters off Jindo.

As the country marks the first anniversary of the sinking of Sewol, many have returned to Jindo to see what has happened since. For them, being at the site of the tragedy has triggered memories of the Apr 16 disaster, when more than 300 passengers, mostly high school students, died as the ferry listed and sank to the bottom of the sea.

**South Korean president's vow to raise Sewol fails to appease angry relatives**

[https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/16/grief-anger-first-anniversary-south-korea-sewol-ferry-disaster](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/16/grief-anger-first-anniversary-south-korea-sewol-ferry-disaster)

April 15, 2015 Staff and agencies

Families of 304 people killed in ferry disaster boycott anniversary event to push for independent inquiry as prime minister is blocked from Ansan memorial site.
South Korea’s president has vowed to raise the Sewol, bowing to a key demand from victims’ relatives as they marked the first anniversary of the ferry disaster in which 304 people died – most of them schoolchildren.

“I will take the necessary steps to salvage the ship at the earliest possible date,” Park Geun-hye said on Thursday during a brief visit to the southern island of Jindo – the closest landfall to the site where the vessel sank on 16 April 2014.

The announcement to raise the 6,825-tonne vessel – at an estimated cost of between £64m ($91m) and £92m – failed to appease victims’ families, who boycotted an anniversary event to push their separate demand for a fully independent inquiry into the tragedy.

The depth of anger remains considerable a year after the passenger ferry sank.

While largely blamed on the ship’s illegal redesign and overloading, the accident also exposed deeper-rooted problems of corruption, lax safety standards and regulatory failings in South Korea.

The overloaded ferry was carrying 476 people, including 325 students from the high school in Ansan, when it sank. Only 75 students survived. A total of 295 bodies were recovered from the ferry, but nine remained unaccounted for when divers finally called off the often treacherous search in November.

The end of the search came as the captain who abandoned the ferry as it capsized was sentenced to 36 years in prison for gross negligence. The head of the ferry operator was later jailed for 10 years.

Raising the Sewol could take up to 18 months.

f Ansan, a city south of Seoul where the majority of those who died were from, was the focus of Thursday’s remembrance activities.
Flags flew at half mast and yellow ribbons fluttered from trees and lamp posts across the city, where sirens blared at 10:00am local time (and residents bowed their heads for a minute’s silence and prayer).

Despite torrential rain, thousands of mourners passed through a memorial hall containing hundreds of black-ribboned, flower-ring portraits of the dead students from Danwon high school.

Parents and other relatives sobbed and beat their chests as they left messages, stuffing animals and favoured snacks under the photos.

“My son, I hope you’re happy up there. Mom misses you so much,” one message read.

A giant screen showed a slideshow of family pictures below a large banner that read: “We’re sorry. We love you. We won’t forget.”

Uniformed students from the school were among those who paid their respects. A formal memorial event had been scheduled for the afternoon in Ansan, but the victims’ families cancelled it, despite Park’s agreement to salvage the ferry.

Yoo Kyung-geun, a spokesman for the families, said there was anger that the president had not given assurances regarding an independent inquiry, adding: “I’m afraid her words were just meaningless.”

Public opinion has been largely supportive of the families, although some conservative groups say leftwing organisations have hijacked the cause in an effort to embarrass the government.

The families of those still missing had spearheaded the calls for the ferry to be raised.

“My heart still aches when I think of the nine people who are still under the cold water, and of their families,” Park said in Jindo.

The president had intended to pay her respects at a special altar erected at the island’s harbour, but angry relatives had put up a barrier to block her access. The
prime minister, Lee Wan-koo, was turned away at the entrance to the remembrance hall by victims’ families.

There is widespread frustration among many South Koreans who see their government as having failed to improve safety standards and hold senior officials accountable for a disaster blamed in part on incompetence and corruption.

“Nothing has changed,” the JoongAng daily said in an editorial on Thursday. Chosun Ilbo, which has the largest circulation, concluded that “the country remains unsafe”.

Large crowds were expected to turn out later on Thursday for an evening candlelight vigil in central Seoul.

**South Korean ferry captain's sentence revised to life in prison for homicide**

April 28, 2015  Associated Press in Seoul

Revised sentence follows November verdict of 36 years for captain of Sewol, which sank last year with the deaths of more than 300 people.

A South Korean appeals court has handed down a toughened sentence of life in prison to the captain of the Sewol ferry which sank last year with the deaths of more than 300 people.

The revised sentence follows a November verdict by a district court that sentenced Lee Joon-seok to 36 years in prison for negligence and abandoning passengers in need. Victims’ relatives criticised that sentence at the time, saying it was too lenient. Prosecutors had demanded the death penalty for Lee.

Lee’s sentence was increased on Tuesday because the Gwangju high court convicted him on homicide charges, according to court spokesman Jeon Ilho. In the November ruling Lee was acquitted of homicide.
The appellate court sentenced 14 other navigation crew members to 18 months to 12 years in prison, Jeon said. In November they had received sentences of five to 30 years in prison.

Jeon said both prosecutors and the crew members would have one week to appeal the verdicts.

Most of the victims were teenagers traveling to a southern island for a school trip. A total of 295 bodies have been retrieved but nine others are missing.

Many student survivors have said they were repeatedly ordered over a loudspeaker to stay on the sinking ship and that they didn’t remember there any evacuation orders made by crewmembers before they helped each other to flee the ship. Lee has said he issued an evacuation order.

A year after the April 2014 sinking, the South Korean government is still reeling from lingering public criticism of its handling of the incident, the country’s deadliest maritime disaster in decades. Violence occurred during a Seoul rally led by relatives and their supporters earlier this month, leaving dozens of people injured.

Last week South Korea formally announced it would salvage the ship from the ocean floor off the country’s south-west coast, in an operation estimated by experts to cost US$91m-137m and take 12 to 18 months.

Authorities blame excessive cargo, improper storage, botched negligence and other negligence for the sinking, and have arrested about 140 people. Critics say higher-level officials have not been made accountable.

**South Korea ferry boss given seven years' jail for Sewol disaster**


October 29, 2015  Associated Press in Seoul
South Korea’s highest court has sentenced the head of a ferry operator to seven years in prison over the 2014 sinking of the Sewol in which more than 300 people died.

The supreme court upheld a lower court ruling that sentenced Kim Han-sik, president of Chonghaejin Marine Co, to seven years in prison on charges including manslaughter. The court found Kim responsible for failing to prevent the overloading of cargo and improper storage on the ship that judges said contributed to the sinking.

Four other Chonghaejin officials were sentenced to two and a half to four years in prison on similar charges.

A total of 304 people died when the Sewol sank off South Korea’s south-west coast in April 2014. Most of the victims were teenagers from a single high school.

Divers recovered 295 bodies from the wreckage before the government abandoned the prolonged underwater search with nine people still missing.

A verdict is awaited on Sewol captain Lee Joon-seok, who has appealed after a regional high court convicted him of homicide and sentenced him to life in prison.

The Gwangju high court ruled that Lee committed “homicide by wilful negligence” because he fled the ship without making any evacuation order despite being required by law as captain to take rescue measures.

South Korea is paying $74m to a consortium led by China’s state-run Shanghai Salvage to handle the difficult and potentially dangerous operation of salvaging the 6,800-tonne Sewol. The government expects the ship to be raised by around July 2016.

A diver's pain: Living with the ghost of Sewol tragedy
27 JULY 2016 By Steven Borowiec

More than two years after Sewol ferry disaster in South Korea, rescue workers are still recovering from the trauma.
Seoul, South Korea - In April 2014, Kim Sang-ho received a phone call at his home in Seoul from a fellow diver, pleading with him to get down to the country's southern coast as soon as possible.

It was several days after the Sewol ferry had sunk, and Kim had been glued to his television, watching the constant coverage as a team of rescuers tried to retrieve the bodies of more than 300 people still inside the ferry.

Kim accepted his colleague's request after he learned that there weren't enough certified divers on the scene, and drove several hours to the site. He would spend two months risking his own life, making several deep-sea dives every day searching for bodies.

More than two years later, South Korean society still hasn't reckoned with the legacy of one of its worst peacetime disasters and Kim is still suffering the physical and emotional trauma of the experience.

Soldiers of the South Korean Navy's Ship Salvage Unit conduct a search and rescue operation for missing passengers in the sinking of the ferry Sewol [Yonhap/EPA]

"My biggest regret is that I got there late, that I couldn't save even one person," Kim said during an interview at a small restaurant in Gangnam, the affluent Seoul district where he lives.

With an athletic build, taut skin and a slightly receding hairline, Kim looks younger than his 43 years, and dresses in a form fitting white t-shirt and grey slacks. Though there were no survivors by the time he arrived, he kept diving.
"I felt like I could die myself, but after a while, that stopped mattering to me."

The stuff of nightmares
The Sewol went down in a stretch of water with strong currents and poor visibility, which complicated divers' efforts to reach the hull.

Kim says that even when he managed to reach the ferry, things only got harder. He had to squeeze through an opening slightly smaller than his muscular shoulders, then slither down narrow hallways to the passenger rooms where most of the bodies were.

Kim and the other divers worked around the clock in three-hour shifts, followed by three hours of rest. Kim said the stress of dangerous deep dives, and the grim task of searching for waterlogged corpses, made it difficult to get restful sleep.

Even now he doesn't sleep soundly, bothered by regular nightmares that evoke the texture of flesh decomposing in salt water, and the sensation of clinging to dead bodies as he carried them to the surface.

The anxiety was increased for the divers who had to use a thin, flexible air hose, which could potentially fold over with every turn and cut off the diver's air supply. Such a hose was necessary, Kim said, as a more rigid hose would have made it impossible for divers to make the intricate manoeuvres needed inside the ferry. The situation was frightening even for Kim, who has a wealth of experience with challenging dives, going back to his time serving in the South Korean navy in his early 20s. He quickly found that he had a knack for diving; his speed and zeal in the water earned him the nickname "Jaws" from his comrades.

READ MORE: Sewol disaster victims - the bedrooms they left behind

Divers were called upon to inspect the sunken ferry Sewol after it sank [EPA]

Collective trauma
Throughout his career, he has been assigned to the epicentres of some of South Korea's darkest episodes.

In 1993, he retrieved victims from the country's gravest maritime disaster before the Sewol, the sinking of the Seohae ferry, in which 292 people died. The next
year he was dispatched to the waters beneath the Seongsu Bridge in Seoul, which collapsed during a morning rush hour, causing **32 deaths**.

Those episodes, and the Sewol sinking, have special resonance among South Koreans, as they highlight the corners that were cut regarding safety in the country's rush to develop economically after being decimated in the 1950-53 Korean War. While many South Koreans take pride in rising from postwar poverty to developed country status, such mishaps serve as a painful reminder of how far there still is to go.

**WATCH: South Korea hunts for ferry disaster fugitive**

Victims' families and their supporters are pushing for a thorough investigation into the causes of the Sewol sinking, arguing that aspects of how and why the vessel went down, and why such a large portion of the 476 passengers died, haven't been clarified.

Experts say it is normal for victims to seek a clear understanding of the details of a traumatic episode before moving on.

"We had a collective death of our kids, our friends, our brothers and sisters. It is no wonder that we question how this happened," said Ansuk Jeong, a PhD in community psychology and lecturer in the University of Utah's psychology department.

Kim hasn't worked as a diver since the Sewol mission. In addition to the psychological hardship, he suffered a shoulder injury that has required surgery and
still hasn’t fully healed. Kim says he sustained the injury when on one dive some objects tumbled out of a Sewol luggage compartment and on to his shoulder.

He spends much of his time these days meeting friends for drinks, cruising between Gangnam bars and restaurants in his sleek black sedan. He says he drinks every day to take his mind off his troubles.

"I use this as a kind of medicine," he said, pointing to a cup of makgeolli, a Korean rice-based alcohol.

Though out of practice, he still clings to his identity as a diver. The background photo on his mobile phone is a fully uniformed diver. On his upper left arm he has a large tattoo of a diver, with the gothic text, "The greatest deep sea diver". He regularly texts with fellow divers, and around once a month large groups of divers get together for food and drinks, in what have become informal therapy sessions.

"We get together to talk about what we've been through," Kim said. "We're the only ones who understand each other's experiences."

The divers' informal group drew closer in June, when 43-year-old diver Kim Gwan-hong was found dead from apparent suicide in his home in a suburb of Seoul.

Like Kim Sang-ho, he had suffered injuries during the Sewol mission that prevented him from working again as a diver. Last September, he testified during a hearing of the government's Sewol investigative commission that he had been haunted by painful memories of handling dead bodies he retrieved from the Sewol.
His case has become a rallying cry for his surviving colleagues as they call on the government for financial support for medical bills and psychological counselling. "As divers, really, we were doing work that should be the government's responsibility. It's only fair that they compensate us for how we suffered," Kim Sang-ho said.

READ MORE: Grief and anger as South Korea marks ferry tragedy

After uniting the country two years ago, the Sewol sinking has mostly faded from the South Korean public agenda.

At the end of June, the state investigative commission's mandate expired, and its task now is to write a report based on findings collected so far through interviews with survivors and rescuers.

But the commission members say they haven't had enough time to thoroughly investigate, and need the government to allocate the commission more budget so it can investigate further, through interviews and parsing of official documents. Some have argued that the government is trying to brush the painful episode aside.

"Government in Korea is not trusted to be fair and objective, particularly about its own shortcomings, and in turn does not trust the good faith of so-called independent bodies. This impasse may continue until the next administration," said Michael Breen, a Seoul-based historian and author of the book The Koreans.
Kim Sang-ho says he's hopeful that investigators can compile a factual record of the causes of and circumstances surrounding the sinking, that South Koreans can learn from in the future. He hopes that the Sewol can be the end of the string of maritime tragedies he has seen throughout his career.

"I don't ever want to get another call asking me to come to one of these accidents," he said.

**Trial opens of 'Rasputin' at heart of South Korea political crisis**


December 19, 2016  Agence France-Presse

Choi Soon-sil, who is alleged to have conspired with impeached president Park Geun-hye, denies all charges.

![Choi Soon-sil appears in court. Her lawyer countered prosecution allegations that she had conspired with Park Geun-hye. Photograph: KPPA/EPA](image)

Choi Soon-sil, the woman at the centre of a corruption scandal that triggered the biggest political crisis for a generation in South Korea, has denied all charges at the opening of her fraud trial.

During the preliminary hearing at the Seoul central district court on Monday, her lawyer countered prosecution allegations that Choi had conspired with the country’s
now impeached president, Park Geun-hye, and the former presidential aide Ahn Jong-beom to strong-arm “donations” from major conglomerates.

“A major focus today was on collusive relations. We stressed that there was no collusion between the defendant, Ahn or the president,” the lawyer, Lee Kyung-jae, told reporters afterwards.

It was the first public appearance since October for Choi, who has been nicknamed Korea’s “female Rasputin” for the alleged influence she wielded over Park.

Wearing a surgical mask that obscured her face, Choi, who has been in custody for the past seven weeks, was brought to the court in a special prison bus. Television footage showed her handcuffed and wearing a blue-grey prison outfit with a serial number on the chest as she was taken off the bus and led into the court building by a female guard.

Minutes later she entered the courtroom – minus the mask and handcuffs – and sat down next to her lawyer.

Choi, who was in Germany when the corruption scandal broke, said she had felt “willing to be punished” when she returned to South Korea. “But now, I think I must clarify myself,” she said in court. Asked by the judge whether that meant she denied all the charges, Choi said: “Yes.”

The 60-year-old is being tried for coercion and abuse of power – largely related to the corporate funding of two dubious foundations she controlled and allegedly plundered. A long-time friend of Park’s, Choi is accused of leveraging her relationship with the president to strong-arm large companies like Samsung into handing over tens of millions of dollars.

The accusations that Park colluded with Choi formed the basis of an impeachment motion against the president that was passed by parliament earlier this month. The motion is now being considered by the constitutional court which has up to 180 days to make a ruling on whether to endorse or reject the president’s ouster.

The last time Choi was seen in public was in late October when she attended a summons at the Seoul prosecutor’s office and lost a Prada shoe in the media scrum outside the building.

Choi was not obliged to turn up for the hearing on Monday, which was largely procedural and focused on preparing the way for the trial proper. But her lawyer said she had volunteered to appear. “She has expressed a willingness to participate sincerely in the trial,” Lee was quoted as saying by the Yonhap news agency. Choi was criticised for refusing to attend ongoing hearings of a parliamentary committee investigating the scandal.
Park is also accused of ordering aides to leak state documents to Choi, who has no official title or security clearance, and allowing her to meddle in some state affairs, including the appointment of top officials.

Choi’s late father was a controversial religious figure called Choi Tae-min, who was married six times, had multiple pseudonyms and set up his own cult-like group known as the Church of Eternal Life.

Choi Tae-min befriended a traumatised Park after the 1974 assassination of her mother – whom he said had appeared to him in a dream. He became a mentor to the future president who subsequently formed a close bond with his daughter that persisted after Park’s 2012 election victory.

South Korean ferry in which hundreds died raised after three years

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/22/south-korean-ferry-in-which-hundreds-died-raised-after-three-years
March 22, 2017  AFP in Seoul

Parents of children lost on the Sewol and not yet recovered are maintaining a vigil at the site of the salvage operation.

![The sunken ferry Sewol is raised during its salvage operations on the sea off Jindo, South Korea. Photograph: STRINGER/Reuters](https://i.imgur.com/3Q5Q5Q5.jpg)
Salvage operators have raised South Korea’s sunken Sewol ferry, nearly three years after the ship sank, killing more than 300 people and dealing a crippling blow to now-ousted president Park Geun-Hye.

The vast majority of the dead in the country’s worst-ever maritime tragedy were schoolchildren, and parents of victims had earlier urged people to pray for a successful recovery.

“Part of the Sewol’s structure, which is believed to be its stabiliser, can be seen above the water with the naked eye,” an official from the oceans and fisheries ministry was quoted as saying by the Yonhap news agency early on Thursday.

It is expected to take around eight days to fully raise the ship and move it to the port of Mokpo, and another four days to move it onto a dry dock, he added.

The vessel was lying more than 40 metres (130 feet) below the waves off south-western South Korea and the operation, originally scheduled for last year, had been pushed back several times because of adverse weather.

It is thought that nine bodies still unaccounted for may be trapped inside the sunken ship, and raising the ferry intact has been a key demand of the victims’ families.

“I am a mother who just really misses her daughter. Please pray for us so we can go home with Eun-Hwa,” said Lee Keum-Hui, one of a handful of relatives who have been living in makeshift homes at Paengmok, the closest port to the wreck, since the accident.

“We will be grateful if you pray with us so that the last remaining victims can return to their families,” she said, breaking down.

Other bereaved family members have been maintaining a vigil at a camp on a hilltop on Donggeochado, the nearest island to the site, just a mile away.
Yellow ribbons – a symbol for the victims of the disaster – hang on nearby trees, their colour faded by the course of time.

“My heart is pounding,” said father Jung Seong-Wook of the decision to go ahead with the lift. “I have mixed feelings that I cannot put into words. I’m also a little scared.”

In a tense atmosphere during the day, another father nervously watched through binoculars, trying to get a glimpse of the operation. Some 50 bereaved family members went out to sea by boat to watch the proceedings, he added.

Two enormous barges were positioned on either side of the 6,825-tonne ship and airbags had been inserted for the salvage effort, which is being led by a Chinese consortium. Beams were installed by digging through the seabed underneath the wreck, which was lying on its side, and cables attached to bring it painstakingly towards the surface.

Once two-thirds of it is exposed, a semi-submersible will be positioned underneath to raise it out of the water and transport it Mokpo to carry out investigations and search for the missing.

A senior official from the maritime ministry said it took three hours to raise the wreck one metre off the seabed in what was initially a feasibility test. The ministry then decided to go ahead with the full lifting, it said in a statement. The operation is expected to take three days.

The disaster and its aftermath gripped South Korea and overshadowed the presidency of Park, who stayed at her residence for seven hours in the crucial initial phase of the sinking. She has never specified what she was doing, sparking wild rumours including a tryst and cosmetic surgery.

A permanent Sewol protest site targeting her was subsequently set up in the centre of Seoul, with effigies of the head of state on display alongside pictures of the dead schoolchildren.

Negligence over the sinking was one of the grounds for which parliament
impeached Park in December, although the constitutional court ruled that it was not
an impeachable offence when it upheld her dismissal on other charges earlier this
month.

Donggeochado Island has a population of only around 300, but the once-a-day
ferry to it was packed with reporters on Wednesday and at least one broadcast
truck.

Investigations into the disaster, in which 304 people died, concluded it was largely
manmade – the cumulative result of an illegal redesign, an overloaded cargo bay,
inexperienced crew and a questionable relationship between the ship operators and
state regulators.

Even though the vessel took around three hours to sink, those on board were never
ordered to evacuate, while the crew escaped to safety. Captain Lee Jun-Seok was
sentenced to life in prison for “murder through wilful negligence” and 14 other crew
members given terms ranging from two to 12 years.

**Sunken South Korean ferry slowly emerges three years after disaster**

https://www.aol.com/article/news/2017/03/23/sunken-south-korean-ferry-slowly-emerges-
three-years-after-disas/22009337/

Mar 23rd 2017 JU-MIN PARK

SEOU, March 23 (Reuters) - A South Korean ferry that sank nearly three years
ago, killing 304 people, most of them children on a school trip, slowly emerged
from a grey sea on Thursday, a somber reminder of a tragedy that traumatized
the country.

"We can't help but feel stunned seeing the ship being raised," Lee Kum-hee,
whose daughter Cho Eun-hwa was one of the nine, told reporters.

"My Eun-hwa has been in that dirty place. My poor Eun-hwa. It's been heart-
breaking, how cold she's been there," Lee said in tears.

Salvagers started to bring up the vessel, which has been lying on its side at a
depth of 144 feet, late on Wednesday, and worked through the night.

Television pictures taken from the air early on Thursday showed the white 460-
foot long hull, coated in mud and sediment, breaking above the surface, flanked
by winching barges.

"The work needs to be done very cautiously," Lee Cheol-jo, an official at the
Ministry of Ocean and Fisheries, which is in charge of the operation, told a
briefing.

A Chinese salvage company has fitted 33 beams beneath the hull with 66
hydraulic jacks inching the ship up.
Salvage workers in orange overalls and white hard-hats clambered over the hull fixing cables. The name Sewol could just be made out through the grime.

The ferry, the Sewol, was structurally unsound, overloaded and traveling too fast on a turn when it capsized and sank during a routine voyage off the southwest coast on April 16, 2014.

Bereaved families have been calling for the ship to be raised and for a more thorough investigation into the disaster. Officials also hope to find the last nine missing bodies.

Lee said the ferry would be raised as high as 42 feet above the sea and then moved onto a semi-submersible vessel. That operation was expected to take until Friday and it would then be taken to a nearby port, but that could take up to 12 or 13 days, he said.

Once the sunken ferry had been secured on the semi-submersible vessel, bereaved families would be allowed to observe from a closer distance, another official said.

Only when the ferry has been brought to port will it be inspected, media reported.

This aerial image shows part of the damaged Sewol ferry between two barges after being raised during a salvage operation at sea off the southwestern island of Jindo on March 23, 2017. South Korea's sunken Sewol ferry emerged from the waters on March 23, nearly three years after it went down with the loss of more than 300 lives and dealt a crushing blow to now-ousted president Park Geun-Hye. (STR/AFP/Getty Images)
Of those killed, 250 were teenagers from the same high-school, many of whom obeyed crew instructions to remain in their cabins even as crew members were escaping the sinking ship.

The botched rescue and toll of children in one of Asia's most technically advanced economies shocked and angered the country, with former President Park Geun-hye and her administration the focus of much of the ire at the time.

Park denied accusations that she failed to act decisively but for many South Korans, she has never fully explained what she was doing during the seven hours between the first news reports and her first television appearance that day.

Her response to the disaster was again raised in recent months after she came under suspicion in the course of an investigation into a corruption scandal that led to her dismissal from office on March 10.

The Sewol ferry is lifted during a salvage operation off the coast of South Korea's southern island of Jindo on March 24, 2017. South Korea's sunken Sewol ferry emerged from the waters March 23, nearly three years after it went down with the loss of more than 300 lives and dealt a crushing blow to now-ousted president Park Geun-Hye. / AFP PHOTO / Ed JONES (Photo credit should read ED JONES/AFP/Getty Images)

The captain of the ferry was found guilty of homicide in 2015 and jailed for life. More than a dozen other crew members got shorter sentences.

The salvage is costing about $75 million, another ministry official said this week. (Reporting by Ju-min Park; Editing by Robert Birsel and Michael Perry)
South Korea's Sewol ferry emerges amid hopes last passengers will be found


March 24, 2017 AP

Relatives of nine passengers still missing watched as 6,800-ton ferry was brought to surface, ready to taken to port and be searched.

South Korean efforts to bring a sunken, 6,800-ton ferry back to land cleared an obstacle on Friday after divers cut off a dangling vehicle ramp.

Removing the ramp allowed workers to raise the ferry to a height where it can be loaded onto a semi-submersible transport vessel and taken to a port.

More than 300 people – most of whom were students on a high school trip – died when the Sewol sank on 16 April 2014, touching off an outpouring of national grief and soul searching about long ignored public safety and regulatory failures. Public outrage over what was seen as a botched rescue job by the government contributed to the recent ousting of Park Geun-hye as president.

Salvage crews raised the Sewol until its upper side was about 13 metres above the water’s surface so they could load it onto the transport vessel about three kilometres away.
The ferry’s captain is serving a life sentence after a court found him guilty of homicide through ‘wilful negligence’. Photograph: Pool/Getty Image

Workers plan to complete loading the ferry by midnight on Friday. The waters where the ferry sank are notorious for dangerous currents. The sea is relatively calm now, but currents are forecast to strengthen on Saturday.

The sunken ferry Sewol lies on its side after its sinking in April 2014. Photograph: Reuters
Workers on two barges began the salvage operation on Wednesday night, rolling up 66 cables connected to a metal frame that divers spent months placing beneath the ferry.

The bodies of 295 passengers were recovered after the sinking, but nine are still missing. Relatives, some of whom were watching from two fishing boats just outside the operation area, hope those remains will be found inside the ferry. Some cried as they watched the emerging wreckage with telescopes.

“I shouted in joy when we heard that the ship surfaced at dawn. I thought we finally can find the missing nine,” Lee Geum-hee, the mother of a missing school girl, told a television crew. “But when I actually saw the ship coming up, I was devastated. All this time my poor child was in that cold, dirty place. It was heart wrenching.”

Once the Sewol is loaded onto the transport vessel, it will take about two weeks for it to reach a port 90 kilometres away in the city of Mokpo.

Workers will then begin clearing mud and debris and search for the remains of the missing victims. An investigation committee will also search for clues that could further explain the cause of the sinking, which has been blamed on overloaded cargo, improper storage and other negligence.
The ferry’s captain is serving a life sentence after a court found him guilty of committing homicide through wilful negligence because he fled the ship without issuing an evacuation order.

Ousted president Park was forced to defend herself against accusations she was out of contact for several hours on the day of the sinking. The allegations were included in an impeachment bill lawmakers passed against Park in December, amid broader corruption suspicions.

Park was formally removed from office by the constitutional court earlier this month. She is now under criminal investigation over suspicions she conspired with a confidante to extort money and favours from companies and allow the friend to secretly interfere with state affairs.

**Sewol recovery leaves unique trail for Chinese veteran diver**


2017-04-10

The recovery of the South Korean sunken ferry has been an unprecedented challenge that gave the veteran salvage team many "first" experiences, the chief diver involved in the project said Sunday.

"I have dived about 6,000 times, spent some 30,000 hours of my life in water, but the Sewol operation has been somewhat different," Jin Feng, the head of diving unit of the Shanghai Salvage, told Yonhap News Agency in an interview on Sunday.
The Chinese salvaging firm has worked with the South Korean government since August 2015 to recover the 6,800-ton ship from the seabed. The ferry capsized in waters off the southwestern tip of Jindo Island on April 16, 2014, killing 304 people on board with nine of them still unaccounted for.

The sinking of the Sewol ferry has been the worst maritime disaster in the country's history. Most of the victims were high school students en route to the resort island of Jeju on a school trip. Alleged inaction and unclear whereabouts of former President Park Geun-hye at the time of the sinking were some of the key issues that triggered moves for her impeachment.

The 51-year-old veteran has led a team of some 100 professional divers in the herculean operation. The Shanghai Salvage used two large barges to lift the wreck from the bottom of the sea.

"The seawater here is extremely cold and the water's very muddy, which has made our job much harder," he said, as he recalled the first time he went into the water. "The ship had already been under water for so long that much of it was already being corroded and full of marine animals."

The coast near Jindo Island is notorious for its fast and unpredictable current. Jin said his team had to get ready at least two hours before the low tide came, which only lasted for a short while throughout the operation.

"We wore diving suits that had been inserted with hot water to extend the time in water as long as possible."

On Sunday, the government said the vessel, which now weighs some 17,000 tons due to water and mud inside, has been moved on land, three weeks after it was raised from the seabed.

The Sewol operation has been not only an extremely risky job but gave many first experiences even for the veteran divers, Jin said.

"We've never had a ship that was lifted intact, lying tilted on the ground because usually we place a wreck upright before raising it. It was also the first time for us to cover every window and door of the ship with nets to prevent any losses."

Despite the hardship, Jin expressed confidence in his work and team, saying that he would not hesitate to take part again if he went back two years and was asked to do the job.

"I'm sure I'd say yes if I was asked to do it again. I believe we can do it." (Yonhap)
Remains of Possible Sewol Victim Found
2017-05-06

The National Forensic Service says a bone fragment found by a diver near the site of the 2014 Sewol disaster is believed to be from a human shin.

The 34-centimeter bone is undergoing DNA testing for further confirmation.

It was found Friday morning about three kilometers north of Byeongpung Island near Jindo Island in South Jeolla Province.

If the fragment is confirmed as human bone, its DNA will be compared to that belonging to families of nine victims who remain missing. The process is expected to take about a month.

The government had set up a fence 200 meters wide, 160 meters long and three meters high around the seabed to prevent anything from drifting out of the sunken ferry vicinity during the salvaging operation.

The bone fragment was in one of 40 sections in which divers have been carefully searching since the ship was raised in April.
The Sewol Tragedy: Part I - The Accident

http://askakorean.blogspot.com/2014/04/the-sewol-tragedy-part-i-accident.html

APRIL 29, 2014 [Series Index]

To be completely honest, I really did not want to write this post. I do not want to re-live this awful tragedy, seeing again what I saw, hearing again what I heard. Writing this post was greatly upsetting. Many times, I had to stop, take a deep breath, scream in anger, or clench my teeth before I could continue writing.

But I cannot possibly write another post about Korea without addressing this terrible accident. More than 300 lives, most of them young students, perished in an entirely preventable accident. This story needs to be told, and not in the manner of the disgusting disaster porno put on by cable television news.

So here it is: a summary of the most relevant information regarding the sinking of Sewol. This summary will be in three parts: (1) description of the accident and the rescue efforts; (2) causes and contributing factors of the accident, and; (3) political and social reactions from Korea.

THE ACCIDENT

Who and what were involved in the accident?
The Sewol was a cruise/ferry ship that traveled between Incheon, a port city near Seoul, and Jeju-do, a tropical resort island. The ship was carrying 476 passengers, as well as several trucks and container cargoes. Vast majority of the passengers--325 to be exact--were second grade students from Danwon High School, a high school in Ansan, a suburb of Seoul.
Inside of the Sewol. Photo was taken the day before the accident.  
(source)

Because Korean high schools have three grades, the second grade students are equivalent of juniors in American high schools, i.e. between 16 and 17 years old. Korean high schools usually go on one long school trip per year involving all students in the same grade. As Ansan is a working class neighborhood, the students tended to be from blue collar families.

**How did the ship begin to sink?**

The travel by ferry between Incheon and Jeju is approximately 13.5 hours. The ship had traveled overnight, and entered the western shore of Jindo island, nearly at the southwestern tip of Korean Peninsula.

At 8:49 a.m. of April 16, 2014, the ship made a sharp turn, turning more than 10 degrees within one second, according to the ship’s Blackbox. Immediately, the ship began to list due to the sharp turn. There are reasons to believe that the ship had an imbalanced construction, and the cargo was not properly secured. It appears likely that the cargo shifted to one side, causing the ship to list and sink. More on this in the next part of the summary.

**When did the authorities first learn the accident?**

At 8:52 a.m., the first report of emergency came out of the Sewol--not from the
ship's crew, but from a student on board calling 119 (equivalent to 911 in the U.S.)
In a couple of minutes, the student was connected to the Coast Guard. (The
student, named Choi Deok-ha [최덕하], was found dead.) In response, at 8:58
a.m., the Coast Guard station in the nearby port city of Mokpo dispatched the first
rescue team.

At 8:55 a.m., the Sewol's captain Lee Jun-seok [이준석] communicated to the
Vessel Transportation Service (VTS) station in Jeju that the ship was listing and
sinking. (Note, however, that the nearest VTS station was at Jindo, not Jeju. More
on this later.) At 9:10 a.m., the Coast Guard headquarters formed a rescue central.
At 9:31 a.m., President Park Geun-hye was notified.

**How did the ship's crew respond to the accident? How did the passengers respond?**

The ship's crew, particularly the captain, responded with grievous, deadly
incompetence. It is probably fair to say that the incompetence by the captain and
the senior crew members bears the majority of the blame in letting this incident
escalate from an expensive accident to a horrific, full-scale disaster.

As soon as the Jindo VTS station established contact with the Sewol, the VTS
repeatedly asked the captain whether the passengers were able to escape. In a
reply that is almost certainly a lie, the captain replied they could not. At 9:25 a.m.,
approximately 30 minutes after the ship began to sink, **Jindo VTS station ordered
the captain in unequivocal terms: have the passengers put on life jackets, and
evacuate the ship.** Inexplicably, the captain did nothing, telling the Jindo VTS that
the ship's PA system did not work. This was a lie, as the PA system was completely
functional at the time. Jindo VTS again told the captain to do what he could to
evacuate the ship. The captain, again, does nothing. At 9:33 a.m., **Jindo VTS
station orders the captain to release all emergency floats** from the ship. The
captain, again, does nothing other than to keep telling the VTS station to send
rescue boats as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, manning the PA system in the lower deck were junior crew members,
who continuously asked the bridge if they should evacuate the ship. The bridge,
where the captain was, did not respond. Without information, the crew followed the
manual and **repeatedly told the passengers to stay in their rooms.**

When the first responders arrived at 9:30 a.m., **22-year-old Park Ji-yeong [박지영],
28-year-old Jeong Hyeon-seon [정현선] and 45-year old Yang Dae-hong [양대홍], all
of whom are crew members, directed all passengers they saw to get out of the
ship.** Realizing that there was no PA announcement, Park rushed to the PA system
and ordered the passengers to jump into the water—at 10:15 a.m.
Unfortunately, this was far too late, as the port side (left side) of the ship was already fully under water by 9:54 a.m. Once submerged, the passengers in the port side cabins were doomed.

Park and Jeong were later found dead; Yang is still missing. Surviving students recall that Park saved many students by putting on life jackets on them and pushing them upstairs. When the students asked if Park wasn’t leaving, she replied: "The crew has to stay until the end." Before returning to rescue, Yang telephoned his wife and said: "the ship listed a lot. Use the money in the bank account for the children's tuition. I have to go save the students."

According to survivors, many students gave their lives trying to save each other, or to save little children. A six year old boy put a life jacket on his five year old sister, and told her that he was going to find his parents. The five-year-old was rescued; the boy, and his parents, are missing. Danwon high school student Jeong Cha-ung [정차웅], a blackbelt holder in kendo and the first confirmed casualty from the Sewol, perished after giving up his life jacket to a friend and trying to save more. According to surviving students, two of Danwon high school teachers, 36-year-old Nam Yoon-cheol and 24-year-old Choi Hye-jeong, each saved at least 10 students before succumbing to the rising water.

Wait, go back. What the hell was the captain and the senior crew doing during all that time? Why were they lying to the Vessel Traffic Service?

For now, we cannot be certain. One tidbit, however, is revealing: between 9 a.m. and 9:37 a.m., the captain and the crew spoke on the phone with the ferry company's headquarters six times. Police investigation is heavily focused on what was said in these communications.

How effective was the first response?

The first responders, consisting of two boats and two helicopters, did their best given the circumstances. -EDIT 2015/04/15- Because of the additional facts uncovered since the accident, the preceding clause is not true. For additional context, please refer to this update post.
The first rescue team, dispatched by the Mokpo Coast Guard station, arrived at the scene by 9:30 a.m. and began taking people off the ship by 9:35 a.m. Jindo VTS also ordered the nearby ships to join the rescue effort at 9:30 a.m.

Then the now-infamous moment occurred: Lee Jun-seok, the captain, was one of the first to escape. Critically, the captain left the ship without announcing to the passengers and other crew members to abandon ship or deploying the life boats. In a case of stomach-turning injustice, the captain and the crew arrived at the port of Jindo by 10:30 a.m., only moments after the ship sank.

Though the first rescue team arrived as quickly as it could, it was already too late. The first responders did not have adequate equipment to rescue the passengers who were trapped inside the ship. Korean Navy responded, but its ship did not arrive until 10:21 a.m.—when the Sewol was mostly underwater. A ship with rescue divers did not arrive until 11:24 a.m., four minutes after the ship sank completely.

At 10:06 a.m., the Coast Guard saw passengers screaming inside a ship's cabin. The Coast Guard broke the window, and rescued seven passengers from inside the cabin. Those seven were the only ones rescued from inside the ship. Many of the passengers who were trapped inside the ship were not able to escape, even as they were watching the rescue boats outside. The students of Danwon high school took the worst end of it, as most of them were in the lower decks of the ship where the fare was cheaper.

**How many survived?**

In the end, 174 out of the 476 survived. Out of the 325 students of Danwon high school, only 75 survived. Although there was faint hope that rescue divers may be able to save at least a few trapped inside the ship, the survivor count did not go up after the first day of the accident.
The Sewol Tragedy: Part II - Causes and Contributing Factors
MAY 02, 2014

[NOTE: I finished writing the first draft of this post on April 30, 2014. Since then, additional facts have been uncovered. I will periodically update this post as I learn new, relevant facts.]

The Sewol. The ferry company's logo ("Chonghaejin") is also visible. (source)

The sinking of the Sewol is a terrible disaster that was entirely preventable. Instead, a confluence of numerous circumstances, people and their decisions resulted in the senseless destruction of more than 300 lives, overwhelming majority of whom were young high school students, about to enter the prime of their lives.

What caused the sinking of Sewol? What contributed to those deaths? The best way to answer these questions is to sort out the actions of the important parties involved at important junctures.

In this accident, there are three significant actors:
- The captain and the crew, who was immediately responsible for the ship and the passengers;
- Cheonghaejin Marine Co., the ferry company in charge of maintaining and operating the ship, and;
- The government, which played a dual role of the regulator and the rescuer.

There are four significant segments of time:
1. Before the accident;
2. Between when the Sewol set sail and when it began to list;
3. Approximately 40 minutes between when the ship began to list, and
4. After the rescue efforts began.
When we examine how these three actors behaved in the four segments of time, we begin to have an understanding of what could have prevented this tragedy.

THE ACTORS

The Crew

There were 33 crew members on the Sewol. Out of the 33, 15 were the senior crew members who were in charge of steering and operating the ship (as opposed to, say, manning the snack bar or providing customer service.) The 15 include: 69-year-old Captain Lee Jun-seok [이준석], two First Mates, one Second Mate, one Third Mate, three Helmsmen, three Engineers and four Assistant Engineers. The other 18 were junior crew members, which included stewards, an event planner and custodians. All 15 senior crew members were in the bridge when the ship began sinking; all 15 survived. Out of the 29, 20 crew members survived—a rate vastly superior to the survival rate of the entire ship (174 out of 476) or that of the Danwon High School students (75 out of 325). Currently, seven out of the 15 senior crew members are under arrest pending investigation.

Because the 15 senior crew members bore the responsibility for the steering and operation of the ship, this post will only focus on them. When I refer to "the Crew" from this point on, I am referring to the 15 senior crew members.

The Company

Cheonghaejin [청해진] Marine Co. (alternately romanized as "Chonghaejin") is the largest coastline ferry company in Korea. Cheonghaejin was established in 1999; its name is for the famous historical seaside fortress in the southwestern part of Korea. Cheonghaejin operates three lines with four ships, and operates the water taxi on the Han River in Seoul.

The distinction of being the largest coastline ferry company in Korea is less impressive than it sounds. In terms of efficiency, passenger ferry is no match for high speed rails and low cost airlines. Thus, Korea's coastline ferry companies tend to be small, and the profit margin thin. Cheonghaejin was a small-ish mid-size company that has been losing money for the last several years.

The Incheon-Jeju line, however, was a moneymaker for Cheonghaejin. Cheonghaejin has a monopoly on the Incheon-Jeju line, for which it operated two ships: the Omahana and the Sewol. Cheonghaejin made significant investment to create the monopoly. Even as Cheonghaejin was losing money, it had spent more than $14 million in purchasing and modifying the Sewol in 2012. With two ships, Cheonghaejin was able to set sail five times a week, absorbing all demand for the line and freezing out other ferry companies.

The line was particularly lucrative because Jeju, a large island, consistently required supplies from the mainland. Although both the Omahana and the Sewol were
passenger ships, they were also able to carry trucks and container cargoes. Doing so came with an additional price advantage: because the two ships were technically passenger ferries, they were exempt from the fees that the Jeju seaport charged on cargo ships. Essentially, Cheonghaejin was making up the decreased demand in passenger ferry by doubling as a bootleg cargo carrier.

Cheonghaejin's revenue from 2008 to 2013.

Unit = KRW 1M (~US$1,000).

Blue line represents income from passengers; red line represents same from freight.

(source)

Cheonghaejin is ultimately owned by 73-year-old Yoo Byeong-eon. In addition to overseeing a small corporate empire, Yoo's day job included being a pastor for a Christianity-derivative cult called the Saviorists [구원파]. (I previously covered the Saviorist cult in this blog. For those living in New York: they are the creepy Asian people in orange t-shirts talking about "Bible Crusade.") Currently, Yoo and his cronies are under investigation for embezzlement and bribery.

The Government

President Park Geun-hye's administration is entering its second full year. The previous administration was led by President Lee Myeong-bak, who was also a conservative like his successor. In the area of economic policies, President Lee was the most neoliberal president that Korea has ever had. Like America's Republican presidents after which he modeled himself, President Lee pushed for lower taxes, privatization and deregulation. The Park administration was content to keep the trend going.
Outgoing President Lee Myeong-bak, congratulating the newly elected Park Geun-hye after the 2012 election. *(source)*

During her presidential campaign, one of Park's signature themes was public safety. After Park took office, one of her first notable moves was to change the name of the Ministry of Public Administration and Security to the Ministry of Security and Public Administration—so as to convey the message that public safety takes priority in the Ministry's mission.

After the jump, how these three actors before, during and after the sinking of the Sewol.

**BEFORE THE ACCIDENT**

**The Government**

Cheonghaejin's purchase of the Sewol was made possible by Lee Myeong-bak administration's deregulation drive. In 2008, under the Lee administration, the maximum allowable age for a passenger ship went from 20 years to 30 years. This allowed Cheonghaejin to purchase an 18-year-old Japanese ferry ship that was going out of commission, for nearly scrap-metal price.

The advanced age of the ship caused constant problems. Company records show that the Sewol had engine RPM issues two months prior to the accident. A report from the beginning of April shows that the Sewol's helm would lose power.

**The Company**

Once Cheonghaejin purchased the Sewol, *it added two more floors on top of the ship in order to hold more passengers and cargo*. The ship, originally three stories, was modified to five stories. To build on top, Cheonghaejin removed a drawbridge.
ramp, which weighed 50 metric tons, from one side of the ship. In short, the modifications made the Sewol a much more unstable ship: its center of gravity became higher, and a massive piece of metal (the ramp) was removed from only one side of the ship. A former Engineer of the Sewol said the ship would frequently list, sometimes as much as by 10 degrees. One Cheonghaejin employee quit the company before he was concerned of the Sewol's instability.

Cheonghaejin, a small, financially struggling company, also cut corners on safety. Because it never had enough money to invest in a new ship, it had consistently set itself up for the safety hazards that come with older ships. (In 2001, for example, Cheonghaejin lost two ferry ships due to fire.) Even though the Sewol was more of a (thinly) disguised cargo ship rather than a passenger ferry, the ship never had a proper harnessing system for containers. Unlike a regular container ship, there was no locking mechanism on Sewol's deck that held the containers to the floor, nor were there winches that would mechanically tighten the steel cable over the top of the containers. The containers simply rested on the deck, nominally held down by ropes that were tied to the hooks in the ship. Further, Cheonghaejin outsourced the harnessing of the cargo to a subcontractor. The subcontractor, afraid of losing Cheonghaejin's account, never could ask the ferry company to invest money in proper harnessing mechanism.

In 2013, the company only spent around $500 on the crew's safety education. As discussed further below, the company also hired inexperienced crew as a way to save money.

**The Crew**

As a group, the crew members had terrible job security. Korea's labor law is closer to Europe than the United States, in that employees are legally guaranteed certain rights and benefits, such as the right to unionize, receive pension and take annual leaves. However, the deregulation trend in Korea for the last decade eroded those guarantees. Currently, the labor market in Korea is divided into two groups: "regular workers" [정규직], who receive the traditional benefits provided by Korea's labor laws, and "irregular workers" [비정규직], who do not. Unlike with the regular workers, the employer may fire the irregular workers without cause and without paying severance. As a result, compared to regular workers, irregular workers have little to no leverage with the company.

As of late 2013, approximately 2/3 of all wage workers in Korea were regular workers, 1/3 irregular workers. With the crew of Sewol, the reverse was true: nine out of the 15 crew members were irregular workers, including the Captain. Nine out of the 15 crew members had worked for the Cheonghaejin for less than six months. (The Captain had worked for the company for more than a decade, but was recently converted into an irregular worker, presumably because of his age.) One of the First Mates joined the company the day before he boarded the Sewol. Among the top three decision-makers of the ship--i.e. the Captain and the two First Mates--only one of the First Mates was a regular worker.
The crew members were also paid poorly. Employees for domestic ferries receive less than two-thirds of the same for the ships that travel internationally. In addition, irregular workers generally get paid less than regular workers. This means that the Sewol’s crew tended to be either too old or too inexperienced. The Captain was 67 years old; the Third Mate, who was steering the ship when the ship began listing, was 25 years old. Both the Third Mate and the Helmsman who were at the helm when the ship began listing had never worked on a passenger ferry until they joined the crew of the Sewol, less than six months prior.

Particularly problematic was the Captain Lee Jun-seok. Lee, in addition to being an irregular worker, was a substitute who was called in when the original captain—who is a regular worker—was taking his labor law-mandated monthly leave. Further, contrary to the normal practice of having two alternating captains for each ship, Lee served as the substitute captain for both the Sewol and the Omahana, the two ferry boats from Incheon to Jeju.

THE SEWOL SETS SAIL

The Company

Korean Register of Shipping, a non-profit organization, certified the safety of the Sewol after modification with several conditions. Because the ship became significantly heavier, KRS ordered the Sewol to reduce the maximum cargo load from 2,437 tons to 987 tons. Further, the Sewol had to increase the amount of ballast water it carried in the stabilizing tanks from 1,023 tons to 2,030 tons.

However, Cheonghaejin habitually overloaded the Sewol with cargo, as the cargo business from Incheon to Jeju was the true moneymaker for the company. The
Sewol’s regular captain, as well as the substitute Captain Lee, **routinely complained that the company was overloading the ship.** On the day the Sewol embarked its fateful journey, **the ship’s First Mate told the company that unless it stopped loading, the ship would sink.** The Sewol’s bill of lading shows that the ship carried jaw-dropping 3,608 tons, 3.7 times the allowed cargo weight. In order to balance the ship, the company almost certain drained a huge amount of ballast water. The net effect was to make the ship extremely unstable due to excess weight, with not enough ballast water to balance the ship.

**The Government**

How did the Incheon Coast Guard, which was in charge of overseeing the port of Incheon, fail to catch this unconscionable overloading? **Part of it was that the Sewol’s paperwork indicated that it was allowed to carry the total weight (as opposed to the cargo weight) of 3,963 tons.** The paperwork should have been approved by the Coast Guard, Incheon Port Authority, the KRS, Korea Ship Safety Technology Authority and Korea Shipping Association. All of the foregoing are under investigation, as the incorrect paperwork strongly suggests potential corruption.

In fact, the Sewol was not even supposed to leave Incheon. The night before the accident, the port of Incheon was surrounded in thick fog. The Sewol, which was supposed to leave at 6:30 p.m., left the port at 9 p.m. **However, at 9 p.m., the visibility was too low for the Sewol to be allowed to leave.** On the night of April 15, 2014, the Sewol was the only ship that was allowed to set sail out of Incheon.

**The Company**

Cheonghaejin’s preferred course from Incheon to Jeju included a passage through the Maenggol Road [맹골수도], near the southwestern tip of Korean Peninsula. Maenggol Road is named after the nearby Maenggol-do island, which means "the island of fierce bones" in reference to the numerous sharp rocks around the island.

The waters of the peninsula's southwest is treacherous. The body of water there is alternately known as Dadohae [다도해], "the Sea of Many Islands." The largest among them is the Jindo island, home of the famously smart and loyal Jindo dogs. The numerous small islands form a huge number of channels, which funnel the water into a surprisingly fast and choppy ride. More than 400 years ago, the legendary Admiral Yi Sun-sin [이순신] used the unpredictable current around the southwestern sea to achieve one of the greatest naval victories in recorded history, which is now known as the Battle of Myeongryang [명량해전]. With only 13 warships at his disposal, Yi lured the oncoming Japanese fleet of 133 ships into the narrows between Jindo and the mainland, called Uldolmok [울돌목]. At the Uldolmok narrows, the Japanese fleet was caught in the current that suddenly reversed direction, exactly as Admiral Yi designed. The Japanese fleet, unable to maneuver against the current, became sitting ducks for Korean fleet's focused cannon fire. The Japanese fleet withdrew after losing more than 30 ships.
The Sewol's path was in that vicinity. The Maenggol Road, located on the opposite end of Jindo from the Uldolmok narrows, has the second-fastest current speed in Korea after the Uldolmok, at approximately 6 knots (7 miles per hour.) The tide in the Maenggol Road was so fast that Korean government was planning to build a tidal power plant nearby. Naturally, it is an accident-prone course: 28 maritime accidents occurred in Maenggol Road since 2007, which was enough for Korean Marine Safety Tribunal to advise ferries to avoid taking it.

On the plus side for the company, however, taking the Maenggol Road instead of going around it saved seven nautical miles of distance. So the Sewol would sail through the fast current.

**The Crew**

The Sewol was speeding, likely because the ship embarked 2.5 hours after it left Incheon and wanted to make up the time. As the ship was entering the Maenggol Road, the Sewol was traveling at 19 knots, or approximately 22 miles per hour. The off-duty helmsmen of the Sewol said, normally, the ship would travel through the Maenggol Road at between 16 to 18 knots. A speeding ship tends to turn faster than a slower ship.

At the time, the ship was being steered by the 25-year-old Third Mate Park Hanygeoł [박한결] and a 55-year-old Helmsman Jo Jun-ki [조준기]. They were not supposed to. The crew's shifts were set up such that when the Sewol passed through the Maenggol Road, it would be controlled by the First Mate, who would be relieved by the Third Mate once the ship reaches the open sea between Korean Peninsula and Jeju island. But the ship departed more than two hours after the scheduled time, which meant that the First Mate's shift was over before the ship reached the Maenggol Road.

So the Third Mate was in charge. Put together, the Third Mate and the Helmsman had worked for Cheonghaejin for only nine months. Before working on the Sewol, neither the Third Mate nor the Helmsman worked on a passenger ferry. Before this time, the Third Mate had been in control of the ship through the Maenggol Road exactly once, going from Jeju to Incheon.

Korea's Sailor Act provides that the captain must steer the ship himself when the ship is passing through dangerous areas, such as a narrows. But the Captain of Sewol was in his cabin. The Captain stopped by the bridge 10 minutes before the accident to give several instructions, and returned to his cabin.

It is unclear what he was doing in the cabin. Depending on where you look, the accusations run from ludicrous to salacious.

It is unclear why the Sewol made that fateful turn. The Third Mate and the Helmsmen gave conflicting statements to the police. The Third Mate and the
Helmsman may have made a mistake, or the ship's rudder may have malfunctioned.

We do know, however, that the Sewol turned sharply. The ship, modified to have a higher center of gravity and weight imbalance on each side, carrying more than three times the recommended weight in cargo which was not properly secured, with much of the stabilizing water drained out of its ballast tanks, started to list beyond the crew's control.

The Sewol turned sharply, lost its balance, and began sinking at 8:48 a.m., on the morning of April 16, 2014. The nearest Coast Guard station, in Mokpo, was nearly 30 miles away.

THE SEWOL SINKS FOR 40 MINUTES

The Crew, the Company and the Government

As discussed further below, all relevant parties--the crew, Cheonghaejin, the Coast Guard, the Vessel Traffic Service--were aware that the ship was sinking by 9:07 a.m., less than 20 minutes after the accident. For the Sewol's passengers to escape
from the ship, they had to be outside by around 9:50 a.m. Had any one of the actors made the correct judgment to evacuate ship during those 40 minutes or so, virtually all passenger could have been saved. Instead, all parties engaged in varying degrees of incompetence, indecision and confusion, which cost more than three hundred lives.

**The Crew**

At 8:55 a.m., seven minutes after the crew lost control of the ship, the crew sent a distress call to the Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) at Jeju. The Crew's distress call was three minutes later than the 119 call from a Danwon High School student. To its credit, the Coast Guard station in Mokpo almost immediately dispatched a rescue team in response to the 119 call.

It is unclear why the crew sent the distress call to the VTS station at Jeju (which was still more than more than 50 miles away) as opposed to the nearest VTS station at Jindo. One former crew member of the Sewol suggested that the Crew probably called Jeju VTS instead of Jindo VTS to avoid attracting too much attention by the authorities.

**The Government**

The Crew's decision to call the Jeju VTS instead of the Jindo VTS caused critical inefficiency, although the inefficiency was not merely the Crew's fault. By regulation, Jindo VTS was required to monitor the movement of all vessels passing through its jurisdiction. But Jindo VTS did not establish communication until 9:07 a.m., nearly 20 minutes after the Crew lost control of the ship. It took 12 minutes for the Jeju VTS and the Mokpo Coast Guard to relay the distress call to the Jindo VTS station.

Even if the Jindo VTS station received the news earlier, it is unclear if much more could have been done in terms of rescue. The nearest Coast Guard station was in Mokpo, more than 30 miles away from the Maenggol Road and the Sewol. In short, despite the accident-prone nature of the Maenggol Road, the Coast Guard was poorly positioned to help.

The Coast Guard also did not have enough personnel to deal with a major disaster like this one. Although Mokpo Coast Guard did send the rescue team at its disposal at quickly as it could after receiving the 119 call, the team was made up of only two helicopters and two boats. The next wave of rescue team, from Korean Navy, did not arrive until 10:21 a.m., well after the 9:50 a.m. "deadline." A boat with rescue divers did not arrive until 11:24 a.m., because the divers did not assemble until 9:30 a.m. By then, Mokpo Coast Guard did not have the ship or the helicopter to send the divers directly from Mokpo to the Sewol. Some of the divers hitched a ride with the police helicopters, which were located farther inland. Some of the divers had to drive from Mokpo to Jindo, then take the boat from Jindo.
The Company

At 9:01 a.m., one of the junior crew members of the Sewol—a cabin manager for the passengers—called the Cheonghaejin Marine Co., presumably to report the accident. Afterward, the company telephoned the Captain once, and the First Mate five times. The last phone call between the Crew and the company was at 9:37 a.m. By then, the rescue team had arrived.

The contents of those telephone calls are under heavy scrutiny by the police; as of now, they are not yet known. However, the fact that Cheonghaejin called the First Mate (who was, recall, a regular worker) far more frequently than the Captain (an irregular worker) suggests that the actual decision-making authority did not correspond with the formal order. It appears that the Captain was the leader in name only; the First Mate was calling the shots. The First Mate was the one that communicated with the Jindo VTS, and he was the first to escape the Sewol when the rescue team arrived. According to the video of the rescue, the Captain did not exit the ship until the First Mate waved him out of the bridge.

The Crew

In the 40 minutes between 8:55 a.m. (the distress call) and 9:37 a.m. (last call between the First Mate and the company,) the Crew does nothing to save the passengers. Nothing. Fucking nothing. The Crew did not even answer the call from the junior crew members from below the deck, who could only tell the passengers haplessly to remain in their cabins.

When the Jindo VTS told the Crew to make the announcement to the passengers to put on life jackets, the Crew lied and said the PA system was out. When the Jindo VTS told the Captain at 9:25 a.m. to "put out life boats, use your judgment and make the decision to evacuate ship," the Crew replied with a non-sequitur: "if we evacuate now, will there be a rescue right away?"

The Government

Once Jindo VTS began communicating with the Sewol, it acted reasonably well. It did order the Captain to deploy the life boats and evacuate the ship based on his judgment. Given that the VTS had no visual of the exact situation, it seems like an unfair, 20/20 hindsight claim to say that the VTS should have been more forceful in ordering the Captain to evacuate.

However, Jindo VTS did fail to do one thing it reasonably could have done: take an accurate stock of the situation, and relay the information to the rescue team that was heading to the Sewol. To be fair, the VTS asked the Sewol how much water it was taking on, and whether the passengers could escape. But it could have asked more pointed questions: where were the passengers? Did they jump into the water? Huddled at the deck? Still inside the ship?
THE PARTIAL RESCUE

The Sewol sinks, with most of its passengers trapped inside. (source)

The Crew

At 9:35 a.m., the Coast Guard rescued the first group of people from the Sewol. As it is now infamously known, the Crew escaped first, before everyone else on the ship. Critically, the Crew never announced to the passengers that they must evacuate the ship. The junior crew, below the top deck, was left to fend for their own. They heroically saved many passengers before they themselves perished.

Initially, the Captain claimed during the investigation that he did order to evacuate before he escaped. Text messages from the passengers, sent after the Captain's escape, showed that it was a lie. Afterward, the Captain said he was concerned that the passengers would not survive if they exited the ship because the water was too cold and too fast and there was no rescue ship around. If you are wondering if that explanation makes sense, don't.

The Company

At 9:38 a.m. an employee of the Cheonghaejin Marine Co. placed a call to its field office at the port of Incheon. The employee, who is now under investigation, called to tell the field office to destroy evidence of the fact that the Sewol was vastly overloaded with cargo.

The Government

The Coast Guard first responders deserve high praise for arriving as quickly as they did. The first responders, however, had no idea about the specifics of the situation because no one asked. The first responders said when they arrived at the ship, they were perplexed that there were not a ton of people in the water already. But the urgency of the situation made the Coast Guard focus first on taking the people who were ready to get out. (And of course, the people who were most ready to board the Coast Guard rescue boat was the Crew.)
For the passengers--mostly young students--who were not lucky enough to run into the junior crew frantically running to save as many people as they could, the last official instruction they heard was to stay in their cabins. The Coast Guard's helicopter did blare through the bullhorn, telling the passengers to evacuate, but the sound did not travel far enough inside the cabins. (Also, many of the passengers were simply not in a position to escape, as the part of the ship in which they were located had already listed too much.) Had the Coast Guard known that hundreds of passengers were still inside the ship, or that the Crew never told the passengers to evacuate, they may have made a different decision and ventured into the inside of the ship, saving more people.

EDIT 2015/04/15 - Because of additional information uncovered since the accident, the preceding sentence is no longer true. Please refer to this update post for additional information. Although it would have been very dangerous for the Coast Guard to approach the main cabin door, it was not impossible.

Ultimately, it came down to the fact that the rescue team simply did not have enough time. The Coast Guard began the rescue at 9:35 a.m. Slightly more than 20 minutes later at 9:56 a.m., the Sewol had listed 90 degrees on the left side, trapping everyone on the left. At 10:06 a.m., the Coast Guard saw passengers screaming inside a ship's cabin. The Coast Guard broke the window, and rescued seven passengers from inside the cabin. Those seven were the only ones rescued from inside the ship. The Coast Guard had no divers, and not enough people to keep breaking glass.

The last text message from inside the ship, sent by a Danwon High School student, was transmitted at 10:17 a.m. At 10:31 a.m. the Sewol capsized completely, taking everyone inside with it.

The Sewol Tragedy: Part III - The Fallout
http://askakorean.blogspot.com/2014/05/the-sewol-tragedy-part-iii-fallout.html
MAY 31, 2014 [Series Index]

One cannot get away from events in this age; the 24-hour news coverage and the Internet would not allow it. The Sewol disaster unfolded in real time in front of a horrified nation. When more than 300 lives--vast majority of them children--senselessly perish in an entirely preventable accident, it cannot help but affect the public. Similar reaction occurred in the United States, following the mass shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, in which dozens of young children died at the hands of a deranged shooter.

But as horrific as it was, the Newtown shooting was over within an hour. Not so with the Sewol sinking. The ship sank for more an hour. The rescue effort subsequently unfolded for days, on live television. In the aftermath of the disaster, every last bit of incompetence from every corner of Korean society was magnified, amplified. It drove Koreans toward self-loathing, cynicism, and finally anger toward the political system.
What do You do When Everything Falls Apart?

The saying goes: failure is an orphan, but success has a million parents. But in the Sewol disaster, the devastating failure had a million parents: the captain who abandoned the ship, the ferry company that dangerously overstocked the ship, government that let deregulation run wild. Unfortunately, the failures did not stop when the ship sank. The hits continued to come from all directions: from the media, the government and the society as a whole.

The capsized Sewol
(source)

First, the media. Purely from the perspective of mental impact, perhaps the most devastating error was the media’s early reports that everyone aboard the Sewol was rescued. The cause of this error is under investigation, but it appears fairly clear that the media reported an unconfirmed rumor in the race to break the news first. This misfire significantly impacted the manner in which Korean public processed the news. When Koreans first learned the news about the Sewol sinking on the morning of April 16--around 11 a.m., 30 minutes after the ship completely capsized--they took it as a mildly scary event with no true harm done. The complacency set by the encouraging news made the full scale of the true horror much more destructive. Instead of no casualty, there were more than 300 missing, most of them high school students.

In the hours following the sinking, the media landscape in Korea was the lowest circle of hell in disaster porno. Because the Internet age came to Korea earlier than virtually any other country in the world, the issues that the Internet age created have affected Korea for longer, and more severely. The worst instincts for
clickbaiting and sensationalism afflicted every part of the media, from tabloids to the more respected papers.

Newsis, an up-and-coming online newspaper infiltrated Danwon High School, and took a staged photo of a dead student by setting up an open notebook on the desk. Chosun Ilbo--the conservative newspaper that prides in its ability to steer Korean public opinion on any given issue--released an article discussing which insurance companies insured the Sewol, and what the expected payout was supposed to be while the ship was still sinking. Respected TV stations like SBS and JTBC harassed the freshly-rescued survivors for an interview. A reporter from SBS attempted to interview a six year old child, the rest of whose family perished in the ship. On a live television, a reporter from JTBC asked a rescued Danwon High School student if he knew his friends died, which caused the student to crumble in tears.

**Second, the government.** Much like the media, the government tortured the families of those aboard the Sewol as well as Korean public with a false promise: the possibility that there may be survivors in the capsized ship thanks to the supposed "air pockets." With a benefit of the hindsight, this promise was most likely illusory. Yet, if those in Korean government who were responsible for the rescue genuinely believed the possibility of air pockets, they moved far too slowly to capitalize on the opportunity.

Korea's Coast Guard did not have enough resources to rescue people from a capsizing ship, but other disaster-response authorities did. The Sewol's passenger made the first emergency call to the Coast Guard at 8:52 a.m. But the Coast Guard did not inform the Ministry of Public Security and Administration--which had more sophisticated rescue ships and helicopters to deploy--until 9:30 a.m. In fact, the Ministry first learned the accident from the television news rather than its subordinate. It was not until 9:31 a.m. until the Blue House was notified. By then, the ship was three minutes away from the point at which no escape was possible.

Further, the initial report to the government said nothing to indicate that a massive disaster was unfolding; it simply said that the Sewol was sinking, and the rescue was in progress. Incredibly, even after 5 p.m.--half a day after the ship sank--it appears that President Park Geun-hye did not have a clear idea of what exactly happened. During her visit to the rescue central, the President asked why the students could not be saved if they were wearing life jackets--implying that, in her understanding, the Sewol's passengers were floating in the sea rather than trapped inside the ship.

The President was hardly alone in not having a clear sense of exactly what happened. Until 4:30 p.m.--again, half a day after the ship sank--the rescue central could not even figure out exactly how many people were on board on the Sewol, and how many were rescued. At 2 p.m., the rescue central announced that 368 were rescued, only to halve the number at 4:30 p.m. to 164 rescued. (The final tally of rescued passengers is 174.) When the Blue House was criticized for not having adequate information about the disaster, a senior Blue House official gave a tone-deaf response that the Blue House was not the "control tower" for disasters. While technically

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correct, this type of response could not help but give off the impression that the government was abdicating its duty to keep people safe.

Allegations of graft and corruption also emerged even as the rescue was progressing. There were allegations that the Coast Guard prevented the Navy divers from entering the water, such that the Coast Guard’s private contractor (called Undine Marine Industry) could send its divers first. This led to suspicion that the Coast Guard delayed the rescue effort for the sake of taking care of its contractor. Because the government initially represented that there might be survivors in the overturned ship, it could not avoid the severe criticism that they were wasting precious time to play favorites.

Third, the society. Nearly as soon as the news broke, the Internet trolls in Korea’s cyberspace were out in full force. Within minutes after the Sewol sinking was reported on the Internet, the vilest comments imaginable began appearing on the news story. (Here is a selection of them. I will not translate.) When the picture of Park Ji-yeong (the heroic 22-year-old crew member who drowned after saving dozens of children) appeared on the news, scores of god-awful lewd comments appeared below. It came to a point where Naver, Korea’s largest search engine, put up a notice urging its users to not add comments injuring the victims’ dignity. The media packaged those trolling comments into another round of clickbait news stories, fueling further outrage.

The situation was only slightly better offline. (Actually, it is not clear if it is better or worse that people were willing to say the same crap publicly.) Jo Gwang-jak, a pastor and the vice president of the conservative Christian Council of Korea said: "The low-income kids should have gone to a cheaper destination for their school trip. Why were they on a boat to Jeju and have this happen?" (Jo later resigned after much criticism.) Kim Si-gon, the head of new reporting at
KBS, suggested that the sinking of the Sewol was not a big deal because more people die from traffic accidents. The enraged families of the Sewol victims protested in front of the KBS overnight, demanding apology. (Kim later resigned.) Insensitivity was only one part of the way in which Korean society turned into a monster in the face of the disaster. Soon after the news broke, Facebook and other social networking sites were flooded with photo captures of text messages and instant messages, supposedly sent by Danwon High School who were still trapped inside the ship alive. Families of the students desperately latched onto them. But they were all fake. When arrested, the fabricators of the messages said they were hoping to drive up the subscribers to their social networking site accounts so that they may later sell them.

There is an even more brazen case of celebrity-seeking. One woman, who claimed to be a rescue diver, gave a live interview with a TV station to claim that another diver heard survivors from inside the ship, but the government is letting them die by not allowing regular divers join the rescue effort. This was a lie, as she was not at all a rescue diver. (In fact, it was revealed later that the woman has a long history of lying to gain celebrity. In another instance, she claimed that she was a cousin of T-ara's Hwayoung to take pictures with idol groups.)

* * *

Major disaster like the Sewol sinking has not struck Korea in a decade, or two decades depending on how one qualifies a "major disaster" that is comparable to the Sewol sinking. In 2003, 192 people died in a subway fire in Daegu, but the fire
was a result of an arson. To find a death-by-thousand-cuts disaster like the Sewol sinking, one may have to go back to 1995 when a department store in Seoul that illegally modified its structure collapsed, killing more than 500. By 2014, Koreans were gaining confidence that the bad old days were behind them.

The Sewol tragedy shattered that confidence. Every major institution of Korean society—the government, the media, the church, the civil society—failed to properly function in some form or another. This total failure stunned Koreans. Without any institution in which to place their trust, Korean public first recoiled in self-loathing: what were we doing, letting hundreds of young children die on an illegally modified ship? Then followed cynicism and despair: perhaps nothing can be done, because something ingrained deep inside Korea's culture that inevitably drew them toward disaster. The depression was widespread and palpable: consumer spending in Korea in the later part of April dropped like a rock, similar to the way in which Americans responded to the 9/11 terrorism.

Next came the indignation against those responsible of preventing this disaster. Why couldn't the Coast Guard save a single person from inside the ship? Why couldn't the Ministry of Public Security put together the disaster response team more quickly? And why couldn't the president figure out what was going on for more than half a day?

**President Park's Katrina Moment**

President Park Geun-hye had only been elected a year ago, in a solid victory after the hotly contested presidential election. Throughout the presidential campaign, the fact that she was the daughter of the late president and dictator Park Chung-hee hampered her numbers. One of the turning points of the presidential campaign was when Park courageously recognized that the reign of her father—who ruled the country for 16 years after taking power by rolling into Seoul with tanks—violated the spirit of Korea's constitution and delayed the advent of democracy in Korea. This historic apologia by Park Geun-hye played a key role in her election, as it allayed the voter's fears that Korea was not about to travel backward toward her father's dictatorship.

In its first year, however, the Park administration began assuming a dictatorial posture that was not unlike her father's. As soon as she was elected, it was uncovered that Korea's spy agency and the military were engaged in a massive operation to sway the election by adding Internet comments and sending out tweets over Twitter, amplifying the Park campaign's message. When the Supreme Prosecutor's Office began prosecuting the head of the spy agency, the Ministry of Justice ordered an audit over the SPO—which caused the Prosecutor General to resign rather than suffer the indignity.

Contrary to her campaign promise, Park began taking first steps to privatize Korea's railways. When the railway union went into a strike in protest, Park sent thousands of policemen to arrest the union leaders based on an arrest warrant that the court later quashed. When the police got the wind that the union leaders fled their offices
and escaped to the building next door—which belonged to a liberal newspaper—the police took a battering ram the newspaper's offices and ransacked the premises.

The Sewol tragedy struck as the public confidence in the Park administration was on the decline. The tragedy, standing alone, was enough of a damage to the administration; one of Park's major campaign promises was to enhance public safety. Park even changed the name of the Ministry of Public Administration and Security to Ministry of Security and Public Administration, to emphasize the government's responsibility for public safety. But any support that Park garnered by leveraging the public safety angle went underwater with the Sewol.

Still, the Park administration could have handled the crisis better. But it did not. Instead, it turned toward its dictatorial instinct, treating the angered people as its enemy rather than the people whom the president was elected to represent.

The first sign of trouble occurred five days into the search process. The family of the Sewol victims, gathered in a gym in Jindo that served as a makeshift shelter for the families, became restless in anger. Someone suggested visiting the President at Blue House; immediately, a crowd of 300 formed. But they were stopped as soon as they stepped outside of the gym; a hundred policemen were waiting for them. As it turned out, the government had planted plainclothes police inside the gym to conduct surveillance on the families. The families tried to rent a bus to go up to Seoul, but the government already told all the bus companies in the area to stonewall the families. Desperate, the families began walking toward Seoul in the middle of the night, trying to cover 200 miles on foot. Nearly a thousand policemen forcibly stopped them at the bridge connecting the Jindo Island and the mainland. Even after this episode, the families of the Sewol victims came under constant surveillance by plainclothes policemen for signs of trouble.

The government also cracked down on criticism of the rescue effort, while tightening its control over the media. Daegu Metropolitan Office of Education censured an area public school teacher who criticized the president on Facebook. Program directors at television station who complained that the news was not sufficiently critical of the President were suspended. (Recall that, in Korea, the government indirectly controls two of the three network TV stations.) In fact, the government directly ordered KBS to avoid criticizing the Coast Guard and the rescue effort.

Needless to say, this is a terrible response by the Park administration. Beyond the obvious creepiness and infringement of the fundamental freedom of movement, press and speech, the Park administration's actions neatly overlapped with the malfeasance of the Sewol's captain that served as a proximate cause of the disaster: stay where you are, don't cause trouble, so that we may escape out of this jam first. Inspired by this overlap, dozens of demonstrations emerged across Korea to protest the government reaction. For the most part, the protesters marched silently, only holding up a sign that said: "Stay Put."
To her credit, President Park responded strongly. She sacked the Prime Minister (who is akin to Vice President in the U.S.,) and abolished the Coast Guard, which is to be replaced with a newer and hopefully more competent agency. Korea's Supreme Prosecutor's Office charged the Sewol's captain with murder, and is currently trying to arrest Yoo Byeong-eon, the ultimate owner of the ferry company that operated the Sewol. But Park's numbers—which was as high as 61 percent prior to the accident—continued to sink. Her choice of new Prime Minister, Ahn Dae-hee, did not even last a week before withdrawing his nomination based on the allegations that he unethically wielded his influence as a former Supreme Court Justice to steer inordinate number of cases to his law practice.

All of this amounts to a real political consequence for the president and her conservative party. In less than a week, Korea is facing local elections where Koreans elect mayors, provincial governors, etc. What should have been a conservative landslide across the board is now up in the air, with the crown jewel of Seoul mayoralty now solidly in the hands of the current, progressive mayor Park Won-soon. Even beyond the local elections, it is likely that this disaster will be the lasting image of Park Geun-hye's presidency. It is her Katrina moment.
The Sewol Tragedy, One Year On
http://askakorean.blogspot.com/2015/04/the-sewol-tragedy-one-year-on.html

APRIL 15, 2015

Today, one year ago, the Sewol ferry sank off the southwestern coast of Korea, claiming more than three hundred lives. TK's series discussing the accident is below:

Part I: The Accident
Part II: Causes and Contributing Factors
Part III: The Fallout

Based on the information that was uncovered since TK has written the post, Parts I and II contain some revision. The biggest revelation was that the Coast Guard responded negligently. For nine minutes after arrival, the Coast Guard was unaware that hundreds of passengers were still inside the ship. Because the Coast Guard made no effort to rescue the passengers from inside the ship in that precious time period, dozens of lives that could have been saved were lost. Kim Gyeong-il, the captain of the responding Coast Guard, was sentenced to four years in prison due to the dereliction of duty.

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There is no good way to respond to a sudden, and completely avoidable, death of more than three hundred lives, most of which belonged to young children. Even with the best response, the lost lives are not regained. But the striking part of the past year has been just how poorly Korean government, and in particular the President Park Geun-hye's administration, responded to the tragedy.

Imagine the United States, a week after the September 11, 2001 attacks. Information started appearing that the George W. Bush administration was utterly incompetent in detecting the threat by Osama Bin Laden, to a point that the attack really should have never happened in the first place. Families of the victims, outraged by the avoidable loss of their loved ones, began blaming the government.

Now imagine if the Bush administration responded by shutting out the families, and planting CIA agents to monitor any subversive activities. The Republican faithful, sensing that their president was under attack, begin clamoring that the families
should just get over it; all the mourning was putting a damper on domestic spending, hurting the economy. For the next year, the government does its best trying to pretend the 9/11 attacks never happened.

This is essentially what happened for the last year in Korea. The Sewol tragedy was one version of the 9/11 attacks, in that the entire nation saw hundreds of lives perishing real time on television. The collective trauma that Korea suffered was no less than the same that the U.S. suffered in 2001. Yet, facing this once-a-generation national tragedy, the Park Geun-hye administration responded to the tragedy in the worst way possible. The Park administration saw the social unrest following the tragedy as a threat to its power, rather than the natural expression of collective grief. Instead of taking active leadership to heal the nation, the administration did everything it could to paint the victims' family as greedy money-grabbers who were trying to profit from the deaths of their loved ones.

Incredibly, this shit worked. Korea's right-wing, which looks back on the dictatorship period of President Park's father with fond nostalgia, was happy to buy into the ridiculous idea that the victims' family were only too happy to wield their newly found power. Since the accident, nearly three-quarters of the Internet comments left on the Sewol-related news had been blaming the victims' family for asking money and other favors (which, obviously, were not true.)

Perhaps the lowest point came in late August of last year, when families of the Sewol victims began a hunger-strike to demand an investigation by special prosecutor. In one of the lowest display of sheer malice I have ever seen, members of Korea's largest conservative website organized a "gorging strike," mocking the families by essentially engaging in an eating contest of pizza and fried chicken.
Aside from disgusting way in which the victims' families were marginalized, the most disheartening consequence of the events that followed was that no lesson was learned from the senseless tragedy. As the Sewol issue was increasingly seen as a political issue, ordinary Koreans grew tired of following the aftermath. The president and the administration played their parts, doing everything they could to pretend that the accident never happened. In a stunning display of tin-earedness, President Park Geun-hye went on a tour of South American summit meetings, declining to attend the anniversary memorial ceremony of the disaster. None of the cabinet ministers is visiting the memorial ceremony either.

As such, the most obvious lesson that should have been learned from the Sewol tragedy--public safety--has been completely forgotten. The administration established a new Ministry of Public Safety and Security, but it could not even get enough staffing to function properly. The victims' families, blinded by the pain of their tremendous wound, are stuck with protesting the government and demanding the ship to be taken out of the water. In the meantime, safety accidents on school grounds increased by 11 percent since 2014. On October 17, 2014, only six months after the Sewol tragedy, the grate covering a massive air vent at an outdoor concert venue collapsed, killing 16 K-pop concert-goers.

As with many Koreans, my mood at this one year anniversary is grim. There does not seem to be an upward trajectory. I pray for the souls of those who were so senselessly lost. I am angered that I cannot do much more.