

# Neftegaz-67, Yao Hai masters and pilots jailed

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Two masters and two pilots involved in Hong Kong's worst maritime disaster since 1971 were jailed on Friday for up to 38 months on charges related to endangering life at sea.

Court outcome: Judge finds "most serious errors of navigation" committed in Neftegaz-67 collision

The jail sentences came almost two years after 18 Ukrainian crew on the offshore supply vessel, *Neftegaz-67*, died when she capsized and sank after a collision with the panamax bulk carrier, *Yao Hai*, on March 22, 2008.

Yuriy Kulemesin, the Ukrainian master of *Neftegaz-67*, received the longest sentence, of three years and two months, after being found guilty of breaking collision regulation rules five, eight and nine.

These cover failure to keep a proper lookout, failure to avoid a collision and failure to navigate properly in a narrow channel.

Tang Dock-wah, the senior pilot on board the 69,497 dwt bulker, was jailed for three years.

The *Yao Hai* master, Liu Bo, and the ship's junior pilot, Bruce Chun, were both sentenced to 30 months imprisonment.

All three were found guilty of breaking collision regulations five and eight.

Jailing the men after a 90-day trial at a Hong Kong district court, Judge Susana D'Almada Remedios said Kulemesin and Tang were more culpable than the two other defendants.

While accepting the men's pleas for mitigation, she said a deterrent sentence was called for.

She added that the "18 lives lost cannot be ignored".

The *Neftegaz-67* casualty was Hong Kong's worst maritime accident since 88 people died when the Hong Kong-Macau ferry *Fat Shan* capsized during Typhoon Rose in August 1971.

The judge told a gallery packed with family members and members of the Hong Kong Pilots Association that the defendants "committed the most serious errors of navigation".

She added: "Safe navigation is about observation, not expectation."