

# ONE MORE LESSON IN SAFETY

8th August 2012

**THE** fire on board of the Malaysian International Shipping Corporation (MISC) tanker, MT Bunga Alpinia in Labuan on 26th July 2012 during methanol loading is yet another unfortunate incident that has not only resulted in the loss of lives and damage to properties but also indirect economic losses due to disruption at the Patau-Patau Power Station. It is a cause of concern for everyone in the industry but hopefully, it will also prove to be an opportunity for rectifying shortcomings and in initiating new measures to improve the existing safety procedures and to ensure that accidents are minimised, if not altogether mitigated in future.

Whatever the reasons for the incident, the cause of the fire will fall into one of these three possibilities: human error, faulty safety systems or a combination of both. If freak lightning was the cause of the incident as reported, then the next question arises is whether sufficient mitigating measures have been taken, as there are technologies available to contain the effects and dangers of lightning. To solely identify lightning as the cause and at the same time to label it as too challenging to manage is technically unjustifiable; which leaves us with the pressing question – what really did happen?

A comprehensive investigation and a transparent answer will benefit everyone if it could help to avoid such incidences in the future because lightning is a natural phenomenon which will not disappear but will continue to happen.

It is pertinent to note that this incident enhances the fact that Hazard and Operability Studies (HAZOP) are still very fundamental to risk management. From the HAZOP's perspective, the transfer of flammable material such as methanol will surely need to address fundamental questions such as the dangers of lightning which would have required a systematic engineering approach of protection, prevention and mitigation.

As a learned professional organisation, the Institution of Engineers, Malaysia (IEM) would be keen to engage with the relevant authorities on safety issues such as this, as our members and the engineering fraternity in general will learn from such incidences that will go a long way in helping to build a safer Malaysia. ■

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