



Pandelis Sfinias: suicide

Greek ferry disaster boss leaps six floors to his death

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THE general manager of the Greek shipping line under investigation for the loss of the ferry Express Samina, which sank in September killing 82 passengers, leapt to his death yesterday from the top of the company's headquarters.

Pandelis Sfinias, 62, jumped from his office on the sixth floor of the Minoan Lines building in the

port of Piraeus, near Athens. He had been discussing the effects of the disaster with another shipping executive when he suddenly opened a window and leapt out, landing on a car in the road below and dying instantly.

Ioannis Lefakis, manager of Saronicos Ferries, said later that he had no idea that Mr Sfinias was about to commit suicide.

The ageing ferry was carrying about 500 passengers when it hit a

well-marked outcrop of rocks as it approached the island of Paros on the evening of Sept 26. It sank in less than hour.

The captain later admitted that he had been sleeping as the ship approached the harbour in heavy seas.

Other crewman were said to have been watching a football match as the ferry headed for the rocks at high speed. Costas Simitis, the Greek Prime Minister, expressed

his regret over the death of Mr Sfinias, saying: "Every suicide is a tragic event."

Minoan Lines is the parent of Minoan Flying Dolphins, owner of the Express Samina and the largest operator of ferries in the Aegean. It is now facing criminal proceedings and civil claims involving at least £20 million as a result of the disaster.

A judicial investigation has still not determined the cause of the

sinking. The ferry's captain and first officer have been detained in custody pending their trial for manslaughter.

Sfinias, who was also a vice-president of Minoan Flying Dolphins, was preparing to testify at a hearing next month.

Dozens of lawsuits are pending against the company in the wake of the disaster, the worst in Greece for 35 years. One survivor has already been awarded £160,000.