

50-foot up in air, when luck ran out on a crane driver

Rai jumped to save his life, breaking his hip and suffering multiple fractures to his left arm

By [Anshuman Phadikar](#) in Haldia Published 28.04.19, 7:05 AM Updated 28.04.19, 7:05 AM



The crane on fire at Haldia port. Picture by Jahangir Badsa

A crane operator at Haldia port who jumped off his 50-foot-high cabin to escape a blaze on Saturday told this newspaper he was forced to “chance my luck”, hours before he died of his injuries at a Calcutta hospital.

Uttar Pradesh resident Dravin Rai, 28, was operating the private mobile harbour crane at the 13th berth of Haldia port, unloading coal from a docked tanker, while the crane was being refuelled from a diesel truck. Apparently, a mistake during the refuelling caused the crane to catch fire.

Port sources said the diesel truck had failed to remove the Rs 25-crore crane’s fuel cap in time, causing some diesel to spill from the truck’s fuelling pipe onto the crane’s body.

“The heat generated from the fuel touching the operating surface caused the crane’s fuel tank to catch fire and explode,” a worker said.

Rai jumped to save his life, breaking his hip and suffering multiple fractures to his left arm. “It’s a hazardous job. I had to chance my luck to save myself,” Rai told The Telegraph around 10am from a nursing home in Haldia.

“I fell unconscious after hitting the concrete and regained consciousness only here.”

Rai was later brought to Calcutta and admitted to a private hospital. Haldia police said he died at 5.37pm.

Rai’s helpers, Sheikh Rafique, 55, and Sheikh Anaul, 30, were inside a lower compartment of the crane. They too jumped but suffered minor injuries, and were discharged from a Haldia hospital in the evening.

Port sources said six fire tenders took about three hours to douse the flames. They said the crane was one of 12 private cranes operating at the Haldia port.

“We shut the 13th berth down for the day and have launched an investigation into the cause of the fire,” said Amal Dutta, general manager (administration), Haldia port.

Sources said the port would have lost “crores of rupees” on Saturday because of the halt in work.

“No damage was caused to the coal tanker that was being unloaded. But the smoke from the crane billowed into the surrounding berths, causing operations to be halted for a few hours in those as well,” a source said.