

Death of American Engineer in Singapore Raises Questions

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Parents of the late American Shane Todd, Mary, right, and Rick Todd, left, arrive to waiting press at the Subordinate Courts, May 13, 2013, in Singapore.

An inquiry in Singapore into the death of 31-year-old American engineer Shane Todd has revealed he suffered from depression and visited websites about suicide. But his parents believe he was murdered because of a project he worked on to transfer sensitive military technology to a Chinese company in violation of United States laws.

Legal proceedings in Singapore continued for a second day Tuesday into the cause of Todd's death. His body was found hanging by a strap from the bathroom door at his residence in the city-state in June last year.

Singapore police concluded the death was a suicide. But Todd's parents, Mary and Rick, believe he was murdered because of work involving the illegal transfer of sensitive military technology to a Chinese company.

In testimony Monday, police said there were no signs of forced entry at his residence. They said suicide notes were found on his laptop as well as an Internet browsing history showing he visited websites detailing how to commit suicide.

The inquiry also heard testimony from Todd's girlfriend confirming he suffered from depression and was on medication, though she said she doubted he would take his own life.

The parents have questioned the legitimacy of the suicide notes and the way police handled the investigation. They have also raised the possibility of a cover-up, which Singapore authorities deny.

They have enlisted the support of their two Montana U.S. senators and say they want the U.S. Congress to investigate.

Eugene Tan is an assistant professor of law at Singapore Management University. He said the differing accounts of Todd's death could have larger implications.

"But certainly here, one hopes that the coroner's inquiry, will come up with a definitive

description of what actually happened," said Tan. "And, I think there are international implications, because there could be implications for Singapore-U.S. bilateral relations. But, on a larger level, there will be questions about the integrity of the Singapore legal system, particularly into investigations into this death of Dr. Shane Todd."

Todd's parents sent the Singapore autopsy report to a U.S. doctor who concluded bruises on the hands and neck indicated Todd fought for his life and was possibly choked to death.

Singapore senior state counsel Tai Wei Shyong at the Monday inquiry said other U.S. doctors refuted that conclusion. He outlined the testimony and evidence presented at first day of the hearing.

"First and foremost, the autopsy report, the Singapore autopsy report provided that the death was asphyxia due to hanging, there is a conflicting report that the next of kin have produced, have presented this to the court," said Tai Wei. "We hope very much that their expert, Doctor Adelstein, will be able to come to Singapore and give evidence."

Todd's parents say their son was worried his work at the Singapore Institute of Micro-Electronics (IME), a government-linked research agency, could compromise U.S. security. He quit the job at IME just two days before his death and was due to start a new job in the United States.

They say a hard drive recovered at Todd's residence contains evidence he worked on a project to transfer an advanced semiconductor material with military applications to Chinese company Huawei.

Huawei has been blocked from projects in Australia, and the U.S. Congress considers it a security risk for spying.

Huawei and IME deny having any projects that would violate U.S. regulations and say they only discussed commercial projects.

More than 60 witnesses are expected to give testimony and evidence for at least another week before a final ruling will be made on the cause of death.