

Indian Coast Guard escorts immobile oil tanker MT New Diamond to Fujairah Port in UAE

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In a significant improvement, MT New Diamond the Very large crude carrier (VLCC), that is held 50 miles off the Sri Lanka coast has neither been ablaze nor emitted smoke for over 48 hours. Due to the efforts of Indian Coast Guard ships and their Sri Lankan counterparts, the oil slick (diesel from the explosion) to the rear of the ship has also started disintegrating.

Four Indian Coast Guard (ICG) vessels are on site to closely monitor the situation. While the rear portion of MT New Diamond continues to be sunken by nearly 1 meter, efforts are on to get the ship on even keel with the assistance of the salvors.

Besides having discussed the immediate plan of action with the ship's caption and the salvors, ICG has also decided to initiate preventive action to avoid re-ignition of the blaze and to correct the trim of the ship. However, following inspections, it has been understood that the transfer of cargo (Crude) would not be possible at the seas, as none of the VLCC's on-board machinery are operational.

The minor oil sheen which was sighted aft (rear) of MT New Diamond has started disintegrating and the ships are being used to churn the waters to accelerate this process. No new oil sheen has been sighted. Post-inspection of the casualty ship, the salvage team are also taking necessary preventive steps to ensure the ship's integrity and safety of its cargo.

ICG Dornier aircraft continue to operate from Mattala, Sri Lanka in Pollution Response configuration and sprayed Oil Spill Dispersant spray on Thursday. ICG Helicopter is also being launched for regular aerial assessment of the situation.

Vice Admiral Nishanta Ulugetenne, Commander of the Srilankan Navy visited ICGS Ameya at Trincomalee harbour on Thursday and conveyed his appreciation for Indian Coast Guard's efforts in dousing the fire and neutralizing oil sheen, thereby averting a major disaster.

Indian Coast Guard has been playing an active role in the firefighting, rescue efforts since the afternoon of September 3rd, just hours after the fire was reported. Seven ICG vessels and two Dornier aircraft have contributed toward various facets of this operation.

“The three lakh metric ton cargo of Kuwait crude being carried by the vessel is intact, not a drop of it has leaked. Our ships are equipped and prepared to even contain and perform recovery operations even in the event of an unfortunate spill” Krishnaswamy Natarajan, Director General, Indian Coast Guard said. He expressed hope that the Coast guard would be able to recover the entire cargo and create maritime history, as they had done earlier in 2016, at the Gulf of Kutch.

Speaking of the challenges involved in the current operation he said that the ships and tugs are required to maintain a 10-15 meter distance from the burning vessel to remain safe, adding that the vessels had to simultaneously douse the fire and cool different parts of the ship. “There is a breach on the port side of the superstructure and the hull and the crack on the deck above the water line. However, these breaches are not causing any entry of sea water” DG, Coast Guard added.

Currently 7 ICG vessels are on site to aid in the phase 2 operations in the recovery of MT new Diamond, as the

phase 1(fire-fighting) is said to have ended.

WION had earlier reported that the oil slick was from the explosion and not from the cargo hold.

This very large crude carrier- MT New Diamond is a Greek owned vessel, under charter by Indian Oil Cooperation. The vessel has been ablaze following a major explosion in the engine room, while transiting Sri Lanka's Exclusive Economic Zone. The first information about the vessel being on fire was received at Indian Coast Guard Maritime Rescue Co-Ordination Centre (MRCC) Mumbai.

MT New Diamond is reportedly carrying more than 2.7 lakh MT Kuwait export crude oil that was destined for Paradip, Odisha. According to Marinetraffic.com, MT New Diamond is a 20-year old Crude oil tanker that is 333 meters long and 60 meters wide.

A bilateral MoU between ICG and SLCG covers cooperation in the Marine pollution Response domain. The Indian Coast Guard is also the Competent National Authority under South Asian Co-operative for Environment Protection (SACEP) for responding and coordinating pollution response in South Asian Sea region.