

Fire Onboard Oil Tanker off Sri Lanka's Coast Completely Extinguished, Says Indian Navy

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Indian Coast Guard and Sri Lankan ships, fast patrol vessels and tugs have been deployed in the fire-fighting exercise. (News18)

The ship was carrying 270,000 metric tonnes of crude oil from Kuwait to India and caught fire on Thursday.

The fire on board an oil tanker off Sri Lanka's eastern waters has been completely extinguished, nearly 79 hours after the incident was reported, the Navy said on Sunday.

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The Sri Lankan Navy on Friday confirmed that a Filipino sailor died in the boiler explosion in the engine room of the Panama registered tanker MT New Diamond.

Indian ships supported the Lankan Navy to douse the flames on the tanker off the coast of Sangamankanda in the eastern district of Ampara.

"Nearly 79 hours after the distress was reported, the Sri Lanka Navy and other stakeholders were able to bring the fire under control at around 3.00 pm Sunday," the Navy said in a statement.

The ship was sailing 38 nautical miles off Sangamankanda Point when it caught fire with an explosion in a boiler in the ship's main engine room.

The Navy said the Dry Chemical Powder (DCP) sacks tested by the Sri Lanka Air Force delivered successful results to smother the raging flames onboard.

However, the Navy warned that although the fire has now been completely extinguished, there is a possibility of a recurrence of the fire due to the high temperature inside the ship and environmental influences.

A specialised Indian Coast Guard (ICG) pollution response ship, Samudra Paheredar, joined the firefighting operation onboard an oil tanker off the Sri Lankan coast on Sunday, the coast guard said.

The Indian Coast Guard has launched the firefighting and pollution response operation for MT New Diamond off Sri Lanka on September 3.

The Indian Coast Guard is the competent authority under the South Asian Cooperative for Environment Protection (SACEP) for coordinating pollution response in the South Region Sea Area.

"Specialised ICG pollution response ship Samudra Paheredar arrived at the scene of the incident today at 0300 hours and joined the firefighting operation. The ship is equipped with an ocean boom, four oil skimmers and oil spill dispersant to handle pollution response in event of an oil slick," a statement issued by the coast guard said.

A team of 10 British and Netherlands experts, including salvage operations experts, assessors and a legal adviser arrived in Sri Lanka Sunday morning under the facilitation of the company that works as the commercial and technical operator of the tanker.

The Sri Lanka Navy said the commercial owners of the tanker had appointed an international Singapore-based company as its salvage expert.

The team of experts will make an assessment of the damage caused to the ship.

Accordingly, the proceedings regarding the ship will be decided on their recommendations.

Some 5 ships of Indian coast guard and one Indian Navy ship engaged in fire fighting, the Navy said.

Further, the Sri Lanka Navy will continue to provide assistance to the distressed ship until it leaves the Sri Lanka's Maritime Search and Rescue Region.

The tanker had 23 crew members - 18 Filipinos and five Greeks. Twenty-two of the 23 member crew had been safely rescued off the tanker.