

## India coast guard averts major disaster off Sri Lanka, fights fire on Very Large Crude Carrier

 defence.capital/2020/09/26/india-coast-guard-averts-major-disaster-off-sri-lanka-fights-fire-on-very-large-crude-carrier

By defence.capital

September 26, 2020



Photo: Firefighting on board MT New Diamond by Indian Coast Guard (ICG) ships, alongside Sri Lankan ships, tugs and ETV Ocean Bliss.

**New Delhi:** An alert and sharply intuitive operation by **India's** coast guard has averted a major shipping and environment disaster off **Sri Lanka** this month that had threatened ecological degradation along the South Asian giant's southern coast, the island nation's eastern coast and the Maldivian atolls.

The Indian Coast Guard's action is seen by maritime historians as a major achievement in maritime history, for emergency response.

The Indian Coast Guard's rescue operations and saving of both the cargo on board the **Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC) 'MT New Diamond'** and its 23 crew members in an action that lasted a week from Sep. 7, according to the ICG officers at the headquarters here.

As is obvious, MT New Diamond, a 333-metre oil tanker, was carrying a highly inflammable '**Kuwait Export Crude**' and the ICG action was responsible in saving the entire cargo, despite the ranging fire and intermittent explosions on board the VLCC, the

officers said.

The ICG spearheaded a perilous firefighting on board the oil tanker off Sri Lanka's East coast and the VLCC was carrying 300,000 metric tons of crude oil, which is a Category 1 inflammable liquid according to **Material Safety Data Sheet**.

“The fire on board the VLCC MT New Diamond could have been a serious disaster for the region, and it could have threatened bio-diversified marine environment off Sri Lanka, **Maldives** and southern India,” the officers said.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/nm37IXfcj00>

Video: Indian Coast Guard ship fighting the fire on board MT New Diamond off Sri Lanakan coast ably assisted by Lankan Navy vessels and tugs on Sep. 9, 2020.

Comparing with the recent oil-spill mishap of 1,000 T Bunker Oil from **MV Wakashio** witnessed off **Mauritius** in Aug. 2020 that led to declaration of ‘**National Emergency**’ by the island nation, the quantum of crude in this incident was 270 times voluminous. “The oil spill from MT New Diamond would have had a devastating effect of a very high magnitude for the region.”

MT New Diamond, a **Panama**-flagged vessel with 23 crew, was on passage from Kuwait to India's Paradip Port. Its crew reported fire due to boiler explosion aboard on Sep. 3 morning around 40 nautical miles (approximately 70 km) off **Tirrukkovil** in southeastern Sri Lankan coast.

The distress message was picked-up by the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in **Colombo** and by MRCC in **Mumbai**. The Government of Sri Lanka, post assessing the situation, requested immediate Indian support through the High Commission of India in Sri Lanka.

The Indian Coast Guard is the authority for National Maritime Search and Rescue (NMSAR), the National Coordinating Authority for Oil Spill Response in Indian waters and the **Competent National Authority** under the Regional South Asian Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) for responding and coordinating marine pollution response in South Asian Sea region.

The SACEP of Sri Lanka sought assistance of ICG, as the threat of the oil spill to the entire region was imminent, to conduct the rescue and firefighting operation on the distressed tanker, including pollution response operation. India is one of the signatories to the regional association mechanism for such operations.

A multi-mission capable Offshore Patrol Vessel **ICGS Shaurya**, on preventive operations deployment off **Tamil Nadu** coast, was immediately diverted to carry out the rescue and the firefighting operations on MT New Diamond. It was the first ship to arrive at the **“Golden Hour”** on scene to commence firefighting by afternoon on the same day.



Photo: An infograph on the MT New Diamond firefighting operations.

On Sep. 3 night, another blast on board MT New Diamond took place due to the fire, yet ICGS Shaurya continued her effort to keep the fire under control. Meanwhile, a joint effort by MRCC of ICG and Sri Lanka Navy ensured the rescue of 22 of the 23 crew members by alerting the nearest ships around the operation spot.

“The timely and daring firefighting efforts by ICGS Shaurya was the game changer and ensured that the fire remain contained within the bridge and accommodation area,” an officer said.

“If not, the fire would have spread to the cargo hold, carrying huge volume of crude, resulting in explosions and consequent catastrophic environmental disaster.”



By Sep. 4, six ICG ships, including specialist **Pollution Response Vessel**, augmented initial response and two Dornier aircraft were pressed into action to operate from Sri Lankan soil for logistics and pollution response. ICG ships utilised sophisticated special-fit **External Fire Fighting** (EFF) system to spray foam compound for smothering the oil fire. In addition to the ICG ships, Sri Lankan tugs **Ravana**, **Vishaba** and **ALP Winger**, also joined the operations on Sep. 4 and commenced firefighting.

While the collective firefighting was underway, the adrift distressed vessel was moving towards Sri Lanka coast due to the prevailing seasonal currents in the area, posing an immediate threat of grounding and resultant oil spill once the vessel neared the depths of 20 metres.

The Indian Coast Guard boarding team, in a high risk operation braving the rough seas and adverse conditions, embarked the on-fire unmanned tanker and successfully connected the tow to Sri Lankan Tug TTT-1 to pull it away from land and position favourably into the wind, to prevent spread of fire to the forward section of the ship.

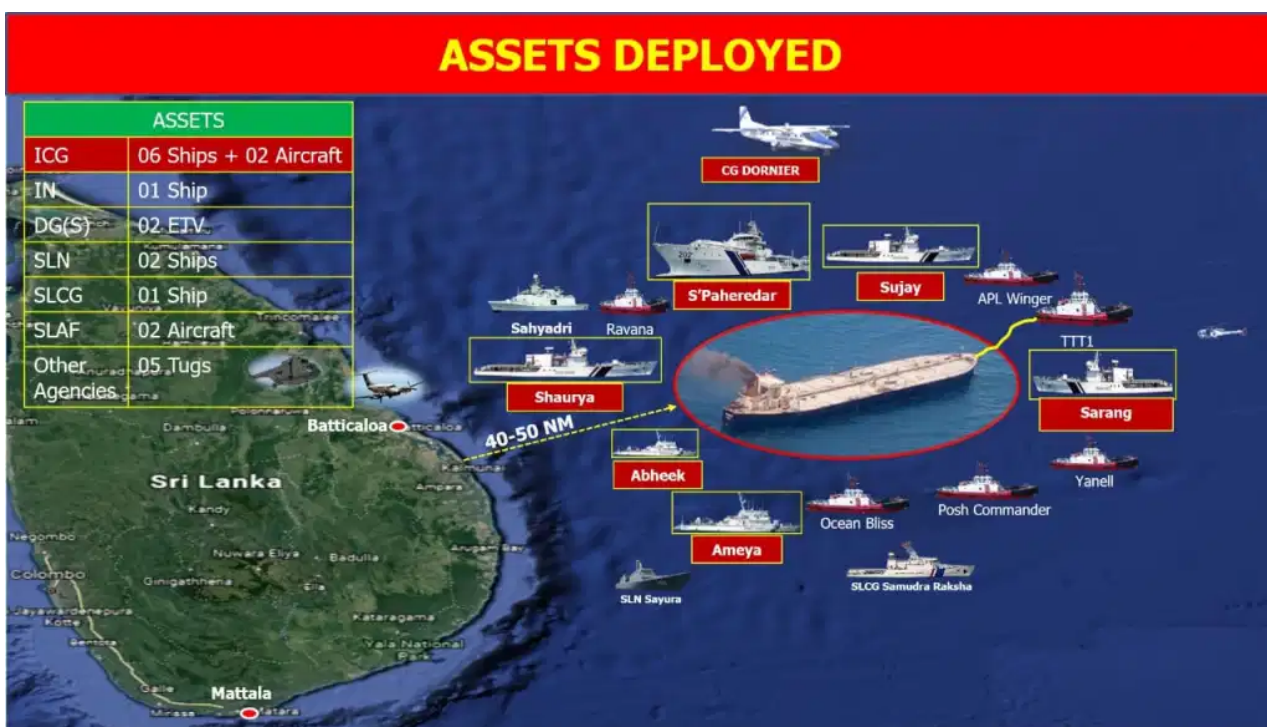


Photo: An infographic on the Indian and Sri Lankan vessels and aircraft deployed in MT New Diamond firefighting operations for a week.

“This move was crucial turning point of the operation that ensured saving cargo of the oil tanker as also averting major oil spill in the region.”

With intense and persistent firefighting attack for three days by ICG ships, along with Sri Lankan ships and tugs, coming within 50 metres of a potentially huge explosive seat, the fire got doused by Sep. 6 morning.

ICG ships however continued to monitor the situation, in case of eruption due to prevalent temperature and embers and undertook surface-boundary cooling to reduce the temperature around the cargo holds.

As estimation of a likelihood of re-occurrence, a huge explosion again occurred on the starboard of the diesel tank on Sep. 6 evening, and by midnight, huge flames reaching up to 60 metres height from the deck were seen at the rear part of the vessel.

All units scaled up from boundary cooling to firefighting and as a result of yet again sustained and close quarter efforts by four ICG ships and two Sri Lankan and three salvage tugs, the fire was completely doused again by Sep. 8 evening.

Continuous boundary cooling with sea water was maintained to reduce temperature of the ship's structure.



As a result of two major explosions of fuel oil tanks, the deck and hull on port and starboard side got ruptured. This led to escape of oil water emulsion from engine room to sea, and formation of minor oil sheen.

On Sep.9, ICG's Dornier aircraft, which was preemptively positioned at a Sri Lankan air base in **Mattala** was launched in pollution response configuration for spray of **Oil Spill Dispersant** (OSD) to neutralise the sheen.

Simultaneously, ICG ships in the area also sprayed OSD and churned the waters for kinetic action and to accelerate the disintegration of the oil sheen. Under no circumstances, the major cargo tanks were breached, nor the Kuwait export crude escaped to the sea.

“Had there been an oil spill of such magnitude, the fisheries and livelihood of fishermen of the entire region would have been severely impacted,” an officer said.

The collective surface firefighting efforts was supplemented by aerial drop of **Dry Chemical Powder** (DCP), a fire-fighting substance by the Sri Lankan Air Force. Sri Lankan Navy sought ICG support for five tons DCP for firefighting, which was sourced from Indian Oil Corporation Limited at **Chennai** and airlifted to **Trincomalee**.

The salvage team hired by the vessel owner arrived on Sep. 6 and aligned with ICG plan and approach to the firefighting operation. The salvage team boarded the vessel on Sep. 9 and assessed no hot spots, flames, or smoke, with no breach of the cargo tanks.



Photo: India and Sri Lankan firefighting operations to contain the fire on board MT New Delhi in the first half of Sep. 2020.

The naval architect in the salvage team confirmed that the ship's stability remained within the safe zone. Indian Coast Guard continued to closely monitor the situation even after the salvage team took over control of the ship.

Post-declaration by the salvage team that the vessel is safe, and upon receiving information from the Sri Lankan authorities through Indian high commission in Sri Lanka, the ICG units were withdrawn from the operation on Sep. 10.

Sri Lankan government and its armed forces, and the Maldivian President sent out appreciative messages to the Indian Coast Guard for its timely operation to douse the fire on board MT New Diamond and for the rescue of the crew members, and bio-diversity and ecology protection.

**NOTE:** Defence.Capital is available on **Telegram**. Please click [here](#) to subscribe

Categories: [Indian Coast Guard](#), [Shipping](#)

Tagged as: [Accident](#), [Air Base](#), [Aircraft](#), [ALP Winger](#), [Archipelago](#), [Atoll Nation](#), [Authority](#), [Bio-Diversity](#), [Biodiversity](#), [Blasts](#), [Boats](#), [Cargo](#), [Cargo Ship](#), [Cargo Vessels](#), [Chennai](#), [Coast Guard](#), [Coast Guard Headquarters](#), [Colombo](#), [Commercial Shipping](#), [Competent National Authority](#), [Cooperative](#), [Crude](#), [Crude Oil](#), [DCP](#), [Degradation](#), [Disaster](#), [Dornier](#), [Dry Chemical Power](#), [Ecological](#), [Ecological Disaster](#), [Ecology](#), [Environment](#), [Environment Disaster](#), [Environment Protection](#), [Environmental](#), [Explosions](#), [Fire Accident](#), [Firefighting](#), [Golden Hour](#), [Government of Sri Lanka](#), [High Commission](#), [High Commission of India in Colombo](#), [High Commission of India in Sri Lanka](#), [History](#), [ICG](#), [ICGS Shaurya](#), [India](#), [Indian](#), [Indian Coast Guard](#), [Indian Coast Guard Ship](#), [Indian High Commission](#), [Indian High Commission in Colombo](#), [Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka](#), [Indian Oil Corporation](#), [Indian Oil Corporation Limited](#), [IOC](#), [IOCL](#), [Island](#), [Island Nation](#), [Kuwait Export Crude](#), [Lankan](#), [Maldives](#), [Maldivian](#), [Maritime](#), [Maritime Rescue](#), [Maritime Rescue Coordination Center](#), [Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre](#), [Mattala](#), [Mauritius](#), [Mishap](#), [MT New Diamond](#), [Mumbai](#), [MV Wakashio](#), [National Coordinating Authority](#), [National Emergency](#), [National Maritime Search and Rescue](#), [Naval Architect](#), [NMSAR](#), [Oil](#), [Oil & Gas](#), [Oil and Gas](#), [Oil and Natural Gas](#), [Oil Spill](#), [Oil Spill Dispersant](#), [Oil Spill Response](#), [Oil Tanker](#), [OSD](#), [Panama](#), [Plane](#), [Pollution Response Vessel](#), [President](#), [Program](#), [Ravana](#), [Regional South Asian Co-operative Environment Programme](#), [Rescue and Response](#), [SACP](#), [Salvage](#), [SAR](#), [Search and Rescue](#), [Shipping](#), [Ships](#), [SLAF](#), [SLN](#), [South Asia](#), [South Asian](#), [South Asian Co-operative Environment Program](#), [Sri Lanka](#), [Sri Lankan](#), [Sri Lankan Air Force](#), [Sri Lankan Navy](#), [Tamil Nadu](#), [Tirrukkoil](#), [Trincomalee](#), [Tugs](#), [Very Large Crude Carrier](#), [Vessel](#), [Vessels](#), [Vishaba](#), [VLCC](#)