

Indian Coast Guard Escorts Oil Tanker MT New Diamond To Fujairah Port In UAE

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Three Indian Coast Guard ships are escorting damaged crude tanker MT New Diamond, as it is being towed off from the Sri Lankan Coast to the Fujairah Port in the United Arab Emirates.

The tanker which that rendered immobile or 'dead within the water', after a severe blaze in the engine room is now being towed by a team of salvors that have been arranged by the vessel's owners.

MT New Diamond is a 20-year old Crude oil tanker that is 333 meters long and 60 meters wide, it was under charter by the Indian Oil Corporation. The tanker was carrying about 3 lakh metric tons of Kuwaiti export crude oil.

From its current position off Dondra Head, which is the southernmost point of the Sri Lankan coast, the very large crude carrier MT New diamond is headed for Fujairah, the largest port on the Eastern seaboard of UAE.



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According to the Indian Coast Guard, Pollution control vessels Samudra Pavak and Sumdra Praheri with an on-board helicopter and ICSG Shaunak with pollution response gear have been deployed to escort MT New diamond, an undertow at high seas. Coast guard ships are meant to provide preventive pollution response cover in case of any oil leakage contingency during the passage of the vessel to Fujairah.

The Panamanian flagged tanker, carrying 270,000 tonnes of crude and 1,700 tonnes of diesel, is expected to take several weeks to reach its destination, given the drastic reduction in speed while being safely towed.

A fire broke out when the carrier was in the eastern seas of Sri Lanka on 3rd September 2020 at around 8:00 AM. The fire started because of an explosion in a boiler in the ship's main engine room when it was sailing 38 nautical miles off Sangamankanda Point. Indian Coast Guard and their Sri Lankan counterparts and the respective Navies from the countries along with tug boats had joined the firefighting efforts. Indian Coast Guard had mobilised seven ships and two aircraft for this operation and had provided necessary support to the Sri Lankan authorities.

It took a mammoth effort spanning over a week to douse the blaze and ensure that there was no oil spill. At first, there was an oil sheen was spotted, only to be later confirmed that it was from the engine room explosion and not from the cargo hold. The sheen was cleared by the Coast guard by using pollution response equipment and oil spill dispersants.

Krishnaswamy Natarajan, Director General, Indian Coast Guard had said after the operation "The three lakh metric ton cargo of Kuwait crude being carried by 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".



Image Credits: @srilanka_navy – Twitter

Speaking of the challenges involved, he said that the ships and tugs are required to stay within a 10-15 meter distance from the burning vessel to fight the fire and conduct boundary cooling in tandem. DG, Coast Guard had stated regarding the structural condition of the ship that “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 seawater”.

The fire on the MT New Diamond was feared to be a major environmental disaster in the making, as the ship was carrying nearly 3 Lakh metric tons of Kuwaiti crude oil and a leak would have meant an unprecedented ecological catastrophe.

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.

On completion of the firefighting operation, Nishanta Ulugetenne, Vice Admiral and Commander of the Srilankan Navy communicated his appreciation for Indian Coast Guard’s efforts in extinguishing the fire and neutralising oil sheen, thereby averting a serious disaster.

Reference: dnaindia.com