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Indian Coast Guard mobilises its assets to help MV X-Press Pearl off Colombo coast

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has deployed its ships Vaibhav and Vajra to render assistance to container carrier vessel MV X-Press Pearl on which a major fire broke out about 9 nm from Colombo Port, Sri Lanka on May 25, 2021. The vessel, en route from Hazira to Colombo, is loaded with 1,486 containers carrying about 25 tonnes of hazardous nitric acid and other chemicals. Besides, it holds about 325 metric tonnes of fuel in its tanks. All 25 crew, including five Indians, have been evacuated. The ICG ships, offshore patrol vessels with external foam fire-fighting and pollution response capabilities, were deployed after Sri Lankan authorities sought assistance, informed an official communiqué.

In addition, ICG formations at Kochi, Chennai and Tuticorin are standing by for immediate assistance. ICG aircraft are also being brought to Tuticorin from Chennai and Kochi for aerial surveillance and pollution response. The ICG is in constant touch with the Sri Lankan authorities for the operation.

It was on May 20 that a fire first broke out onboard MV X-Press Pearl off Colombo Port, which was reported to be brought under control with the help of port authorities the next day. However, on May 25, the fire re-ignited following an explosion reportedly due to the collapse of few of the containers as a result of rough weather. About 8-10 containers are reported to have fallen overboard post the explosion and fire.

The ICG, being an active member of South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP), is committed to its responsibilities of safeguarding the ocean environment in the region, the release stressed.

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