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## MV Express-Pearl Fire to help keep fires going

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**CENTRE FOR AEROSPACE AND DEFENCE LAWS (CADL)**  
**DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**  
**NALSAR UNIVERSITY OF LAW, HYDERABAD**  
 Justice City, Shameerpet, Medchal-Malkajgiri Dist., Hyderabad-500 101, Telangana  
 Phone: +91 40-23498445/446 Fax: +91-40-23498386  
 Website: www.cadl.nalsar.ac.in Mail: cadladmissions@nalsar.ac.in

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A major fire ignited onboard MV X-Press Pearl, a container carrier ship anchored about 9 nm from Colombo port, Sri Lanka on AM 25 May 21. The vessel enroute from Hazira to Colombo and loaded with 1486 containers carrying about 25 tons of hazardous nitric acid and other chemicals. The ship was manned by 25 crew including 5 Indians, all of whom have been evacuated.

Initially, a fire occurred onboard MV X-Press Pearl off Colombo port on 20 May 21 which was reported to be brought under control with the help of Port authorities by 21 May 21. However, on AM 25 May 21, the fire re-ignited after an explosion onboard, reportedly due to collapse of few of the containers due to rough weather. About 8-10 containers reported to have fallen overboard post explosion and fire. The vessel is holding about 325 metric tons of fuel in its tanks, which is likely to pose a threat of oil spill.

Sri Lanka authorities has sought Indian Coast Guard assistance towards fire fighting and for augmenting pollution response measures in the light of Oil Spill. Upon government directives, ICGS Vaibhav, an offshore patrol vessel with external foam fire fighting and pollution response capabilities on maritime patrol, was diverted for assistance and arrived on scene of incident PM today. Another ICG offshore patrol vessel Vajra with similar capabilities for fire fighting and pollution response has also been deployed ex- Tuticorin.



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In addition, ICG formations at Kochi, Chennai and Tuticorin are standby for immediate assistance towards Pollution Response. ICG is in continuous coordination and communication with Srilankan authorities for the operation. Further, ICG aircraft are being brought to Tuticorin from Chennai and Kochi for aerial surveillance and pollution response.

It may be recalled that in Sep 2020, a major fire had broken onboard MT New Diamond, carrying about 2.7 lakh metric ton oil off the eastern coast of Sri Lanka, that was brought under control by herculean efforts of Indian Coast Guard in coordination with other agencies. ICG being an active member of South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) remains committed to its responsibilities of safeguarding of the ocean environment in the region.

