

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

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MV X-Press Pearl, en route from Hazira to Colombo, is loaded with 1,486 containers carrying about 25 tonnes of hazardous nitric acid and other chemicals

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has deployed its ships 'Vaibhav' and 'Vajra' to render assistance to container carrier ship MV X-Press Pearl on which a major fire broke out about 9 nm from Colombo port, Sri Lanka on May 25, 2021. MV X-Press Pearl, en route from Hazira to Colombo, is loaded with 1,486 containers carrying about 25 tonnes of **hazardous** nitric acid and other chemicals.

The vessel is holding about 325 metric tonnes of fuel in its tanks. All 25 crew, including five Indians, have been evacuated. ICG ships Vaibhav and Vajra, the offshore patrol vessels with external foam fire-fighting and pollution response capabilities, were deployed after Sri Lankan authorities sought the assistance of ICG.

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

On May 20, 2021, a fire 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, 2021, the fire re-ignited following an explosion reportedly due to the collapse of a few of the containers due to rough weather. About 8-10 containers are reported to have fallen overboard post the explosion and fire.

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