

Indian Coast Guard rushes help as fire continues to rage on container ship off Sri Lankan coast

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The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) on Wednesday rushed its vessels to help douse the fire that broke out on a container ship off the Colombo Coast in Sri Lanka last week. The fire at the container **ship carrying chemicals and fuels has been raging on for six days now.**

The ship -- MV X-Press Pearl -- was anchored about 9.5 nautical miles (NM) (18 kilometers) northwest of Colombo and waiting to enter its port when the fire began six days ago. All 25 crew members, including five Indians, have been evacuated.



(Photo: AP)

Two Indian Coast Guard (ICG) ships -- 'Vaibhav' and 'Vajra' -- have been sent for assistance.

"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," the defence ministry said.

In addition, the Indian Coast Guard ships at Kochi, Chennai and Tuticorin are on a stand by for immediate assistance.

Coast Guard aircraft are being brought to Tuticorin from Chennai and Kochi for aerial surveillance and pollution response. The ICG is also in constant touch with the Sri Lankan authorities for the operation.



(Photo: AP)

Meanwhile, the High Commission of India in Sri Lanka was quoted by news agency ANI as saying, "In view of the developments connected with the fire on MV X Press Pearl, Indian nationals currently in Sri Lanka are advised to refrain from going close to the seas off Colombo and Negombo."

The MV X-Press Pearl, enroute from Hazira to Colombo, is loaded with 1,486 containers, carrying around 25 tonnes of hazardous nitric acid and other chemicals. The vessel is holding about 325 metric tonnes of fuel in its tanks, the Indian Ministry of Defence said.

The container ship 9 NM from Colombo port, Sri Lanka, has been on fire since last week.

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 eight to ten containers are reported to have fallen overboard after 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.

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