

Colombo ship fire appears under control, no oil spill says Indian Coast Guard

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Indian Coast Guard: Day-night firefighting continues for the fourth day, blaze appears under control.



Indian Coast Guard try to douse the fire onboard MV X-Press Pearl off Colombo. (ANI Photo)

With firefighting operations on Container ship MV X-Press Pearl, off Colombo, running into the fourth day, the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has said that fire appears to have reduced in the front and mid-region of the ship, while the blaze continues in the rear (Aft). Based on an aerial survey conducted by the ICG's Dornier aircraft on Thursday, it is said that there is no oil spill.

Amid adverse weather and rough seas, ICG vessels Vaibhav and Vajra have been fighting the blaze with Sri Lankan vessels by spraying seawater and Aqueous Film Forming foam (Fire suppressant), in sustained day-night efforts. The blaze has led to the large container ship looking mangled on most sides, tilting towards its right and the burnt containers face the risk of falling overboard. Under these conditions, the ICG vessels have been maneuvering as close as 40-50 meters of the casualty ship for effective firefighting.

To bolster the firefighting operations, ICG vessel Vajra handed over 4500 litres of AFFF compound and 450kg Dry Chemical Powder to Sri Lankan authorities on Wednesday, 26th May.

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The ablaze ship was carrying 1486 containers and about 25 tons of hazardous nitric acid and other chemicals. Earlier, the 25 crew onboard the ship, including five Indians have been evacuated. It was on 20th May, Thursday that fire first broke out on the said ship, following which it was brought under control by Sri Lankan Port authorities by the next day.

However, on Tuesday morning (25th May), owing to rough weather nearly 10 containers are said to have fallen overboard after the explosion and resultant fire. The 325 metric tons of fuels held in the large container vessels tanks are feared to pose a threat of oil spill in the region.

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Besides the two ICG vessels headed for the site of fire, their formations at Kochi, Chennai, and Tuticorin are on standby for immediate assistance towards Pollution Response. ICG is in continuous coordination and communication with Sri Lankan authorities for the operation. ICG aircraft are also being brought to Tuticorin from Chennai and Koch for aerial surveillance and pollution response.

Over the last two weeks, the Indian Coast guard and Indian Navy have been engaged in monitoring, search and rescue operations across India's West Coast, which was struck by a very severe cyclone 'Tauktae'. The effects of this cyclone were felt in Lakshadweep islands, Kerala, South Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Goa, and in Gujarat where it made landfall. This week, the ICG assets were also deployed for search and rescue, for the impact of Cyclone Yaas on India's East Coast between Odisha and West Bengal.

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In Sep 2020, a major fire had broken onboard MT New Diamond, that was carrying about 2.7 lakh metric ton oil and positioned off the eastern coast of Sri Lankan. Mammoth efforts by the Indian Coast guard in coordination with other agencies ensured

that the blaze was brought under control, without any instances of the oil spill. The ICG has said that, as an active member of the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), it remains committed to its responsibilities of safeguarding the ocean environment in the region.