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

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

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Story highlights

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

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.

Based on an aerial survey conducted by the ICG's Dornier aircraft on Thursday, it is said that there is no oil spill.

Also read | Ship fire off Colombo: Indian Coast Guard rushes assets, more on standby

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 manoeuvring as close as 40-50 metres of the stricken ship for effective firefighting.

To bolster the firefighting operations, ICG vessel Vajra handed over 4,500 litres of AFFF compound and 450 kg Dry Chemical Powder to Sri Lankan authorities on Wednesday.

The ship was carrying 1,486 containers and about 25 tonnes of hazardous nitric acid and other chemicals.

Earlier, the 25 crew onboard the ship, including five Indians, were evacuated. It was on 20th May that fire first broke out on the ship.

The blaze was brought under control by Sri Lankan Port authorities by the next day.

However, on Tuesday morning, owing to rough weather nearly 10 containers are said to have fallen overboard after the explosion and resultant fire.

The 325 metric tonnes of fuels held in the large container vessel's tanks are feared to pose a threat of oil spill in the region.

Besides the two ICG vessels headed for the site of the 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.

In Sep 2020, a major fire had broken onboard MT New Diamond, which was carrying about 270,000 metric tonne oil and positioned off the eastern coast of Sri Lanka.

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.