

Date: 3 September 2020

BLAZE BREAKS OUT AGAIN ON SUPERTANKER OFF SRI LANKA



A new fire broke out on a supertanker carrying about 2 million barrels of oil in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Sri Lanka, spokesmen for the country's navy said on Thursday, adding that one of its 23 crew was missing and another injured.

Navy spokesman Captain Indika de Silva said flames had spread to the bridge of the New Diamond, and that two Russian warships in Sri Lanka's Hambantota harbour had left to assist in the firefighting. He had earlier said navy personnel at the scene had reported the fire was under control.

"We will need an international effort," de Silva said, adding that there was still no damage to the ship's cargo area.

"There were 23 crew on board. We are bringing one injured crew member to Sri Lanka on board one of our vessels."

The New Diamond, a very large crude carrier (VLCC) chartered by Indian Oil Corp (IOC), was fully loaded with the equivalent of about 2 million barrels of oil, Refinitiv data showed.

Photographs taken by Sri Lanka's air force showed extensive damage to the tanker's funnel, and thick black smoke and flames coming from the bridge, that sits just behind the cargo area.

Another spokesman, Commander Ranjith Rajapaksa, said the VLCC was ablaze about 20 nautical miles off the east coast of Sri Lanka and that the military had sent an aircraft and two ships to assist. One of its 23 crew was missing.

On Twitter, India's coast guard said it had sent several ships and aircraft to help fight the fire. The ship sailed from the port of Mina Al Ahmadi in Kuwait, loaded with Kuwait Export Crude, Refinitiv Eikon tracking data showed. It was headed for the Indian port of Paradip, where state-run IOC has a 300,000 barrel-per-day refinery. Sri Lanka's Marine Protection Authority said it would take measures to prevent any possible oil leak from the tanker.

Such a spill could cause an "environmental disaster", warned Ashok Sharma, managing director of shipbroker BRS Baxi in Singapore.

"No double-hull VLCC has spilt oil to date, but (it) depends on the damage to the ship," he added.

Thursday's incident came a little more than a month after a state of "environmental emergency" triggered by the spill of about 1,000 tonnes of fuel oil from a Japanese bulk carrier, MV Wakashio, when it ran aground on a reef in Mauritius.

De Silva said some of the New Diamond's crew were rescued by oil product tanker Helen M, which an industry source said was on a time charter with India's Reliance Industries.

"The fire happened at 7.45 a.m. India time," said the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "The nature is explosion and fire and serious injury to the crew."

In a statement, the vessel's insurer, West of England, said: "We can confirm that these two vessels are entered in the West of England. The Club is liaising closely with our members and the relevant authorities and it would be inappropriate to comment further at this time."

The second vessel referred to was the Gulf Livestock 1, sailing to China from New Zealand with 43 crew and nearly 6,000 cattle that sank off Japan on Thursday.



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There was no immediate comment from IOC, Reliance Industries and Kuwait Petroleum Corp.