

(a3/1600/rk-rps)

1600 hours

**STATEMENT RE: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS
OF THE OIL SPILL OFF MUMBAI COAST**

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Sir. I rise to make a suo motu statement on the environmental implications of the recent incident of the oil spill off Mumbai coast.

At around 09:15 a.m., August 7, 2010, there was a collision in the Mumbai harbour between a container vessel MSC Chitra, which was proceeding from the Jawarharlal Nehru Port to the sea and another vessel Khalijia 3, which was proceeding towards the Mumbai Port. The collision appears to have been due to the fact that the two Vessels were communicating on different VHF channels.

Khalijia 3 collided with the port side of MSC Chitra damaging one of its hatches leading to ingress of water and consequent listing of MSC Chitra. Due to the impact of collision, three containers on its deck dropped into the sea. It was reported that about 200 litres of hydraulic oil had leaked out.

Immediately, two tugs were requisitioned by the Mumbai Port Trust and were rushed to provide assistance. 24 crew members were evacuated by the crew of the tugs. The master of the vessel and 5 crew members remained on board and were brought on shore at Mumbai. There were no casualties.

The bow of Khalijia 3 was damaged. This vessel proceeded further and is safely docked at the Mumbai Port Trust.

The agents of MSC Chitra were immediately contacted and told to take steps for securing and salvaging the vessel. The vessel agents have appointed M/s Smit Salvage, Singapore for assessment and salvaging of the vessel. The representatives of this firm boarded the vessel, secured the compartments and dropped the port and starboard anchors to prevent it from drifting. They have reported that fuel oil appears to be leaking from one of the wing tanks.

Attempts have been made to tow the containers that have fallen off from the vessel.

The Navy carried out a survey of the main channel in the early morning of 9th August, 2010. The channel was reported to be clear at the time and limited shipping movements were carried out.

MSC Chitra had in all 1219 containers, 707 in the hold and 512 on the deck. The lashings of the containers can not hold long on account of high pressure due to the listing of the vessel. This has resulted in about 150 containers having broken off and falling into the sea. Consequently, shipping movements have been suspended pending fresh survey of the channel.

Regarding oil spill, the vessel had 2662 tonnes of heavy oil in its various tanks and 245 tonnes of diesel oil. There is oil spill around the vessel. The coast guard vessel and three JNPT tugs are spraying dispersant under the directions of the Coast Guard. No oil spill has been observed in the harbour.

At the last survey, the vessel was listing about 35 degrees. The Coast Guard vessel CG 22 and the two tugs of JNPT are standing by for assistance.

The following action plan has been drawn up -

- collect the floating containers and take them to JNPT; this will be by anchoring a barge at a suitable anchorage with floating cranes. Tugs will tow the floating containers to come for the placement on the barge;
- thus the Harbour is likely to be cleared of the floating containers by 10-8 2010, that is today;
- once the list of the vessel stabilises and is certified safe to board, the salvagers would board the vessel and remove the fuel from the various tanks into barges to eliminate threat of pollution;
- the containers on deck would have to be removed with the help of tugs and crane and barge arrangement and taken to JNPT;
- the removal of the remaining containers in the holds and salvage of the vessel would then be attended to.

The entire salvage is expected to take 45 days,

An enquiry by the DG (Shipping), which is in the Ministry of Shipping, into the causes of the accident has been ordered and is underway.

I would like to mention here that the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) is the Central coordinating agency for marine pollution in the country. The Coast Guard have prepared a National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan and are engaged in building up the pollution response capabilities to deal with oil spills in the Exclusive Economic Zone of India. The National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan stipulates the organization and operational details to effectively combat any oil spill contingency.

(b3/1605/rc/jr)

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Comment: Shri Jairam Ramesh cd.

As per the information provided by the State Government, the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB) is monitoring samples at the coast to determine the oil content. The Maharashtra Pollution Control Board has instituted an FIR under sections 7, 8 and 9 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, let me assure the House that all agencies of the Government are making all efforts to tackle the situation.

Sir, since the statement was prepared and distributed, there is some latest information that I would like to share with the hon. Members. The oil spill has stopped. The Coast Guard has been successful. No more oil is spilling off the coast now. So, the oil spill has stopped. I have contacted the Coast Guard this morning and they have assured me that by Sunday, the 15th of August, 2010, the harbours will be cleared. Today, 17 ships are berthed to leave JNPT and Mumbai Port Trust and 15 ships are waiting to berth in JNPT and the Mumbai Port Trust. So, about 32 ships are waiting either to leave or to come. By the 15th of August, we have been assured by the Coast Guard which is the central coordinating agency for such contingencies that the harbour would be cleared. There are about 200 such containers which are floating around in the water. I have been assured that by Sunday, this would be cleared so that the Port would re-open for normal traffic.

In addition, an advisory has been issued and all fishermen have been advised not to continue with their normal fishing activities till the 15th of August, 2010. I say this because many Members would be concerned about the livelihood, security and safety of the fishermen. The fishermen have been advised day before yesterday not to venture out into the waters for their normal fishing activities till 15th of August, 2010.

Sir, there are many other issues relating to the damage that the oil spill could cause to the mangroves in and around the area. I have requested the Bombay Natural History Society to carry out a comprehensive assessment of what the damage is likely to be. Meanwhile, the Maharashtra Environment Department has contacted the District Collectors and arrangements are being made to place straw bags in order to ensure that there is no further damage to the sensitive mangrove areas. We are awaiting a report from the Bombay Natural History Society and we will then take suitable remedial action in order to protect and safeguard the mangroves.

I would also like to say that strictly speaking, this subject does not concern the Ministry of Environment and Forests. As I have mentioned, it is the Coast Guard that is the central agency since 1986 for dealing with marine pollution. The Ports are the responsibility of the Ministry of Shipping but since two hon. Members raised this question, I volunteered to make a *suo motu* statement. I have made the statement and as and when I get fresh information, I will share it with the hon. Members.

(ends)