

SITREP – 4, 1600 Hrs on 26/05/2025

Sinking of MSC ELSA III (IMO no – 9123221, Flag Liberia) South West of Kochi

1. Incident Overview:

On 24 May 2025 at approximately 1300 hrs IST, the container vessel MSC ELSA 3, operated by MSC Ship management Ltd., developed a severe starboard list while enroute from Vizhinjam to Kochi, about 30 nautical miles southwest of Kochi Port. By 1515 hrs IST, the list had increased to 30 degrees and stabilized, with no further progression observed.



Figure 1: MSC ELSA 3

2. Response Actions Initiated:

The Indian Coast Guard has deployed three capital ships along with aerial surveillance (Do-228 sorties) to monitor oil pollution and drifting containers. MSC has mobilized four company representatives to Kochi to coordinate response efforts with ICG, MMD, and other relevant authorities. The single point of contact for the operation from MSC has been established, with local assets being engaged to support recovery efforts. Medical and psychometric evaluations of the rescued crew are currently in progress.



Figure 2: MSC ELSA # position at 2130 hours on 24th May 2025

3. Present Status:

The vessel remains sunk off the Kerala coast, with the Indian Coast Guard deploying aerial and maritime assets for pollution monitoring and container tracking. MSC representatives are coordinating with ICG, MMD, and local authorities; crew members are in Kochi undergoing medical and psychometric checks. Salvage and oil spill response equipment are being mobilized and key assets like tugs are yet to be deployed. Public advisories have been issued to prevent civilian contact with hazardous containers, and ITOF is supporting modelling and risk assessment.

4. Additional Support:

Further assistance is required to expedite the mobilisation of tugs for container recovery and oil spill response. Immediate deployment of Emergency Towing Vessels (ETVs) is recommended to prevent containers from drifting into sensitive areas. Professional saturation diving support with appropriate vessels is essential due to the depth (~60m) at the site. Coordination with OSR agencies at Kochi and Vizhinjam is necessary to ensure timely availability of equipment. Support from P&I Clubs is needed to fast-track approvals, authorise equipment mobilisation, and facilitate public communication and claims processes. Local

resources, including fishing boats and trailers, may be further engaged to aid in shoreline cleanup and logistics.

5. Situation Assessment:

The sinking has led to the drifting of multiple containers at sea. At least 30 containers have already washed ashore along a 120 km coastal stretch. An oil sheen has been observed near the incident site, indicating leakage of diesel oil from the vessel. The wreck now lies fully submerged at an approximate depth of 60 metres. Several containers remain submerged with the vessel and may resurface, posing navigational and environmental hazards. Prevailing weather conditions continue to hamper salvage and containment efforts, highlighting the urgent need for a well-coordinated and expedited response.

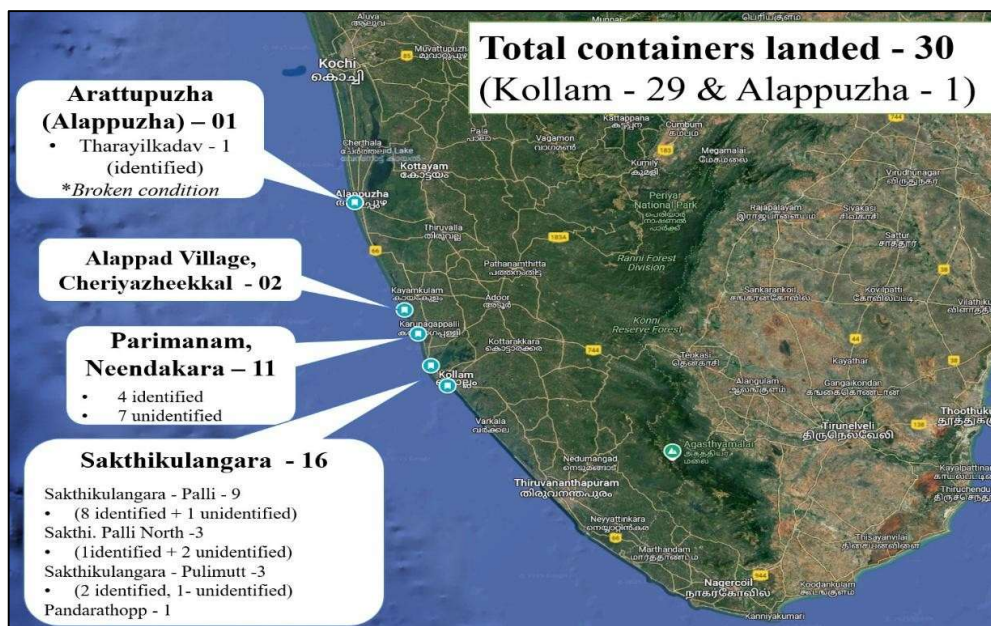


Figure 3: Containers recovered on the Coastline

6. Environmental Risks:

The adrift containers not only pose a navigational hazard but also represent a significant environmental threat, particularly given the nature of the cargo involved. The vessel was carrying approximately 367 tonnes of Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) and 64 tonnes of Diesel Oil at the time of the incident. With the wreck located in close proximity to the Kerala coastline, there is a heightened risk of an oil spill. Such a spill could have serious ecological consequences, including damage to marine biodiversity, coastal ecosystems, and local fisheries. Immediate containment and recovery measures are essential to mitigate the potential impact on the environment and nearby coastal communities.



Figure 4: Container drifted on shore

7. Coordination Measures

A series of coordination meetings were convened on 24, 25, and 26 May 2025, involving officials from DG Shipping, Indian Coast Guard (ICG), IFC-IOR, MSC, salvors (T&T Salvage), P&I Club, ITOPF, port authorities, and state representatives. These meetings aimed to review the evolving situation, assess

on-ground challenges, and issue directives for accelerated and coordinated response actions.

Key instructions included the immediate mobilisation of salvors, appointment of expert agencies, and implementation of pollution prevention strategies. Six-hourly updates from the shipowner have been mandated to ensure real-time monitoring.

During the latest meeting on 26 May, MSC confirmed that four company representatives, including Capt. Deepak Agarwal, are stationed in Kochi and actively coordinating with ICG and MMD. Fishing boats are being mobilised for container retrieval, while efforts are underway to hire two tugs from Mumbai. A dedicated salvage support coordination point has been established to streamline field operations and liaise with local authorities.

However, serious concerns were raised regarding delays in the deployment of key assets, particularly tugs and oil spill response equipment. MSC was instructed to provide immediate clarity on the availability and expected timelines of all hired marine assets, including crane barges. The need for a local contingency centre in Kochi with a single point of contact was reiterated to enhance inter-agency coordination.

In response to public safety concerns caused by beached containers, the state administration has begun disseminating advisories, and MSC has been asked to support these awareness efforts. ITOPF will share container drift modelling to assist in anticipatory response, while P&I is responsible for initiating crew processing and damage claim mechanisms.

All participating agencies have been directed to submit updated action plans, confirm deployment schedules, and ensure a unified and time-bound execution of containment, salvage, and pollution mitigation operations.