SITREP - 6, 2000 hrs on 28/05/2025

Sinking of MSC ELSA 3 (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. ICG's Samudra Prahari and ETV Water Lily departed Mumbai on 26th May 2025, and are expected to reach Kochi on 28th and 30th May 2025, respectively. 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. The crew

remains in Kochi for debriefing and statements towards Preliminary investigation being done by MMD Kochi.



Figure 3: Position of the wreck after sinking at 0750 hours on Figure 2: MSC ELSA # position at 2130 hours on 24th May 2025 25th May 2025

3. Present Status:

The salvors have mobilised the following manpower, assets and equipment to recover containers that are adrift and beached on the shoreline:

Oil Spill Response Team for MSC Elsa 3					
Personnel Deployed for shore watch and clean up by MSC & TT Salvage		Personnel Deployed for shore watch and clean up by MERCS			
108		38			
Salvage Masters – 2 Project Managers - 2 Chemist – 1 + 1 (remote) Dive team – 6 Side Scan Team – 3 OSR spill team – Level 1= Level 2= Level 3= 1 Naval Architect – 1 SCR – 1 Salvors – 7 Salvage Engineer – 1 Commercial / Costing Manager – 1 (remote) Oil spill specialist – 1 Drone team – 2					
Trivandrum Team	Alleppe	y Team	Kollam Team		
8 pax (including team lead)	4 pax (includir	ng team lead)	15 pax (including team lead)		

Assets Being Deployed by Salvors

- 150 T bollard pull tugboat for offshore recovery works
- 40 T bollard pull tug for offshore recovery works
- 60 T bollard pull tug for offshore search and recovery works
- 60 T bollard pull tug for survey works
- High range (up to 5 kilometers) drones for surveillance
- High precision Side Scan and Multibeam equipment for underwater scanning and mapping
- Specialized Oil spill response equipment
- Specialized fuel recovery and hot tapping equipment
- Marine Diving gear and spread

These personnel are stationed on-site to support recovery efforts. Customs authorities have been informed and are present at these locations to facilitate inspection and handling.

To retrieve the containers, four road trailers were mobilized. The containers which are not accessible due to the location being remote and terrain constraints, the containers are being extracted using tugs and dragged to the designated safe areas identified by the salvors in coordination with the ports and local authorities.

Plastic Pellets (Nurdles) have been observed along the shoreline near Thiruvananthapuram. Immediate manual clean-up operations have been initiated to mitigate environmental impact by the salvors, with about 100 personnel at the site. Additionally, the local government has deployed 600 personnel for the clean-up activities. Plastic nurdles have spread over 20 km, a caution has been provided by ITOPF that nurdle contamination could spread along a 100-km coastline and emphasized the need for elevated storage and mechanical assistance (front-end loaders or excavators) for cleanup. A detailed plan for nurdle collection, transportation, and disposal is to be submitted by the salvors within 2 days.

Oil Spill equipment is kept on standby in Kochi. Full diving system as well as professional divers are on standby. They shall be mobilised after assessment of the vessel after the multi-beam survey which is to commence on 29th May 2025.



Figure 4, 5 & 6: Shore Cleanup for Plastic Pellets

4. Additional Support:

The coordinated response has been significantly reinforced by the critical contributions of multiple stakeholders. ICG has played a pivotal role in identifying, monitoring, and initiating mitigation measures for the oil sheens observed around the incident site.

The Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA), in collaboration with local government bodies, has mobilized substantial additional manpower including Civil Defence personnel and locals to support ongoing shoreline cleanup operations.

Further, the local fishing community which has extended crucial support by providing trawlers and/or boats for reconnaissance and recovery of containers adrift and beached on locations with difficult terrain, enabling better access to impacted coastal stretches and enhancing the overall operational reach of the response teams.

5. Situation Assessment:

A total of 54 beached containers have been identified by Kerala State Disaster Management Authority along a 120 km coastal stretch, with personnel being mobilized accordingly. The salvors have identified 47 containers and recovered 23 of them from the coastline. Designated safe areas for storage are identified and container numbers of recovered units are being verified against the manifest, and open or damaged containers are being examined under customs supervision. MSC will continue to deploy personnel accordingly to these sites. The Coast Guard continues aerial surveillance; no hazardous containers have been found as yet, and according to recent surveillance, no containers have been spotted on the coast or afloat as of now.



Figure 5: Containers recovered on the Coastline and adrift

Further, ICG, as part of its aerial surveillance identified and reported the presence of an oil sheen extending approximately 1 nautical mile around the vicinity of the sunken vessel MSC Elsa 3. The ICG has provided the exact coordinates of the observed oil sheen to enable targeted environmental sampling and containment efforts. These coordinates are being used to guide the deployment of oil pollution response equipment, support aerial and drone surveillance, and inform further salvage operations in the affected maritime zone.

The salvors have been clearly instructed that plugging of the tanks/airpipes to contain oil and bunker must be completed without any further delay, with immediate emphasis on expediting the operation. Given the depth and complexity of the task, it has been conveyed that reliance on anchor-handling tugs currently proposed by the salvor will not suffice. Deployment of a Diving Support Vessel (DSV) is being treated as a priority, and negotiations for its hiring must be initiated without delay. In parallel, the option of naval support—both in terms of divers and platforms—is to be kept open should commercial arrangements prove inadequate or time-consuming. The urgency of the situation has been strongly reiterated, and the salvors have been directed to proceed on a war footing to ensure the leakage is plugged at the earliest.



Figure 6: Coordinates of the Oil Sheen spotted during aerial surveillance

Oil sample analysis is currently being undertaken by the Kerala State Pollution Control Board (KPCB), and ICG would try to expedite the testing process, with the findings to be shared shortly. Another site, Kovalam, remains under observation; although it serves as a passage for fishing boats and will not be immediately boomed, equipment will be kept on standby. Dornier reconnaissance sorties have confirmed the presence of oil sheens likely emanating from the vessel's diesel leakage, further necessitating preventive booming in vulnerable areas. Cross-verification with local authorities is ongoing.

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. Further, 13 containers of IMDG 4.3 cargo carrying calcium carbide and 65-70 containers of plastic pallets

have been identified which may hazardous. Five of the IMDG containers which were carried onboard are adrift, however, none have been currently washed up to the shore. Such cargo & oil may have serious ecological consequences, including damage to marine biodiversity, coastal ecosystems, and local fisheries.



Figure 7: Packed Calcium Carbide Container

7. Coordination Measures

A series of coordination meetings since the 24th of May 2025, chaired by DG Shipping with participation from ICG, IFC-IOR, MSC, T&T Salvage, P&I Club, ITOPF, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), port authorities, and state agencies, and, on 28.05.2025 a meeting was convened in hybrid mode under the chairmanship of the Director General of Shipping, with the presence of state authorities in Kochi, focused on streamlining the response to the MSC Elsa 3 incident. Key directives are focused on mobilisation of salvors for salvage of containers that are ashore as well as adrift, and the plan for pollution mitigation, and regular six-hourly updates from the shipowner.

DGS is steering coordinated response operations involving central, state, and local authorities. A three-pronged salvage plan is underway addressing (i) oil recovery from the sunken vessel, (ii) drifting containers, and (iii) containers ashore. Further, a

comprehensive and structured salvage operation plan is to be submitted by the salvors and MSC. It was requested that the plan clearly delineate three critical aspects: i) for oil spill response — the removal of bunker oil from the sunken vessel, assessment and mitigation of water contamination including the potential impact on nearby river mouths, and addressing any associated pollution risks; (ii) for container recovery the coordinated handling of containers that have drifted ashore, those currently adrift at sea, and those that sank with the vessel. Additionally, stakeholders insisted that the entire vessel and all sunken containers, along with associated residues, be removed as part of the recovery operation. A detailed, time-bound action plan covering each of these components — including operational timelines, resource mobilization, environmental safeguards, and reporting protocols — was requested within 2 days to ensure effective coordination and accountability across all responding agencies.

All parties have been asked to submit updated action plans and confirm resource mobilisation timelines. MSC is to support public advisories, salvors to provide detailed deployment schedules, and ICG to coordinate on retrieval.

<u>Annexure 1</u>

		Containers List 28-05-	2025 , 6.30 pm	T 1
Sl No	District	Taluk	Container Details	No.of containers
1	Kollam	Kollam	Unidentified	11
2	Kollam	Karunagappaly	Unidentified	10
3	Kollam	Kollam	Identified	18
4	Kollam	Karunagappally	Identified	4
5	Alappuzha	Karthikappally	Identified	2
6	Trivandrum	Trivandrum-Thumba	Identified	1
7	Trivandrum	Varkkala	Identified	3
8	Trivandrum	Neyyattinkara	Identified	3
9	Trivandrum	Trivandrum -Thumba	Unidentified	1
10	Trivandrum	Chirayankeezhu	Identified	1
Total Containers landed				54
		Kerala State Disaster Mana	gement Authority	95. -