

Business Standard

Fire erupts on Singapore-flagged container vessel off Kerala coast

18 crew members who abandoned the vessel rescued by Indian Navy and Coast Guard; four remain missing

Press Trust of India | **Kochi**



Thick black smoke billows from Singapore-flagged container vessel MV Wan Hai 1503 following an explosion off Kerala coast on Monday | Photo: PTI

A major fire broke out on board a Singapore-flagged ship after a container explosion off the Kerala coast on Monday, defence sources said. Eighteen crew members were rescued, while four remain missing.

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The incident occurred at approximately 9.20 am IST, around 44 nautical miles off Azhikkal in Kannur district of Kerala and 130 nautical miles northwest of Kochi. Defence sources said that of the 22 crew members on board the Singapore-flagged container ship, MV Wan Hai 503, 18 who had abandoned the vessel were rescued by Indian Navy and Coast Guard assets.

They are being brought to Mangaluru Port on the Navy ship INS Surat for disembarkation and further necessary procedures.

The vessel was enroute from Colombo, Sri Lanka to Nhava Sheva, Mumbai, with an expected time of arrival (ETA) on June 10, 2025.

"The fire rapidly engulfed the mid-section of the vessel, which is currently adrift. Preliminary reports suggest that 1015 containers have fallen overboard," a Coast Guard release said.

The crew members include eight Chinese, six Taiwanese, five Myanmar, and three Indonesian nationals.

"Following the explosion and escalation of the fire, the crew abandoned the ship. 18 crew members have been rescued, while four remain missing. A search and rescue operation is currently underway," the release said.

Visuals provided by the maritime security agencies showed the fire engulfing the mid section of the Singapore-flagged container vessel measuring 270 metres in length with a draught of 12.5 metres.

The Coast Guard said it initiated an immediate response, deploying two Dornier aircraft equipped with life rafts for aerial surveillance and situational assessment. Five ICG ships, including specialised firefighting and pollution response vessels, have been mobilised to the incident site.

The Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC), Mumbai, activated the International Safety Net (ISN), prompting nearby merchant vessels MV AMBRA and MV ONE MARVEL to divert and assist in the rescue effort.

The distress alert was initially relayed by MV Cape Valencia to MRCC Mumbai.

"The vessel continues to emit dense smoke, and the onboard fire poses a risk of further explosions and structural failure. Maritime traffic in the area has been advised to maintain a safe distance from the vessel," the release said.

The Flag Administration of Singapore has been formally notified.

The Directorate General of Shipping (DGS), India, has instructed the ship's owners to immediately engage qualified salvors and firefighting experts.

"Preliminary contact has been established with SMIT Salvage for specialised support. Owners have also been directed to provide an urgent assessment and disclosure of the nature of cargo in the affected containers," the release said.

The DGS remains in continuous coordination with all stakeholders, including the ship management team, to ensure a unified emergency response.

Owners have been instructed to provide two-hourly updates until the situation is stabilised, it said.

Defence sources said saving lives and containing the fire remain the highest priorities.

Meanwhile, a top officer at Azhikkal Port said the containers on the ship contain dangerous cargo, including flammable solids, liquids and toxic substances.

"The containers in the ship have dangerous cargo, including Class 3 (flammable liquids), Class 4.1 (flammable solids), Class 4.2 (spontaneously combustible substances) and Class 4.6 (toxic substances)," Captain Arun Kumar P K, port officer, Azhikkal Port told reporters.

It was the second incident involving cargo vessels off the Kerala coast in a month. On 24 May, a Liberian-flagged cargo vessel, MSC ELSA-3, sank 14.6 nautical miles off the coast.

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