

Container ship sinks off India's south coast with hazardous cargo

AFP :: A Liberian-flagged container ship with hazardous cargo has sunk off the coast of Kerala in India's south, the navy said on Sunday after rescuing all 24 crew members safely.

India's navy said the MSC ELSA 3, listed as a 184-metre (603-foot) long freight ship, which was sailing from the Indian port of Vizhinjam to Kochi, ran into trouble on Saturday and issued a distress call.

Navy aircraft scrambled to the area and spotted two life rafts, with the container ship listing at a dangerous angle some 38 nautical miles southwest of Kochi.

"All 24 crew members on board were rescued," the Ministry of Defence said in a statement, with the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and a navy patrol boat collecting the sailors, who were from Georgia, Russia, Ukraine and the Philippines.

"The vessel went down with 640 containers, including 13 with hazardous cargo and 12 containing calcium carbide," the statement said.

The Defence Ministry did not specify what was inside the containers it said were hazardous. Calcium carbide is used in the chemical industry, including for fertiliser production and steelmaking.

"Given the sensitive marine ecosystem along Kerala's coast, ICG has activated full pollution response preparedness," the navy said.

The vessel also contained some 370 tonnes of fuel and oil but, while the coast guard had deployed "detection systems", it said that "so far, no oil spill has been reported".

AFP