

Wildlife deaths blamed on ship disaster mount in Sri Lanka

June 18 2021, by Amal Jayasinghe



Sri Lankan navy personnel remove debris washed ashore from the MV X-Press Pearl ship in Colombo.

More dead turtles washed up on Sri Lankan beaches Friday, underscoring the environmental blight caused by a container ship fire off

the country's coast.

The Singapore-registered MV X-Press Pearl was carrying hundreds of tonnes of chemicals and plastics when it caught fire last month, before burning for two weeks. Since June 2 its wreckage has been partially submerged off the capital Colombo.

Wildlife officials said the carcass of an olive ridley turtle—a species listed as threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature—was found at the tourist resort area of Bentara, 80 kilometres (50 miles) south of Colombo.

Another was seen on a [beach](#) in Induruwa, just south of Bentara, raising to 15 the number found in the southern tourist resort belt, an official said.

"We see a clear link with the ship and the turtle deaths," the senior wildlife official on the island's south told AFP, declining to be named.

He said the disaster struck during the height of the turtles' mating season.

It is not unusual for some turtles to suffocate and die during the [mating season](#), but deaths this year were "10 to 20 times more compared to last year", he said.

Local media reports have said more than 50 [turtles](#) and eight dolphins have been found dead across the island since the ship caught fire on May 20.



A Sri Lankan fishing boat operates against the backdrop of the MV X-Press Pearl, which lies partially submerged in shallow seas off Colombo.



Wildlife officials remove the carcass of a sea turtle washed ashore at Galle Face beach in Colombo last week.

As the [fire](#) spread, two explosions dumped several containers into the Indian Ocean, along with plastic pellets which blanketed nearby beaches.

The country's top environment official, Anil Jasinghe, on Thursday linked the deaths to the X-Press Pearl, but said he was still waiting for final autopsy reports.

About 1,200 tonnes of plastic pellets and other debris scooped from beaches are being stored in 45 shipping containers, officials said.

Sri Lanka is seeking \$40 million in damages from the ship's operator, X-

Press Feeders.

Environmentalists are suing the government and X-Press Feeders for allegedly failing to prevent what they have called Sri Lanka's worst marine environmental disaster, while Sri Lankan police have launched a criminal probe against the ship's captain, chief engineer and chief officer.

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