

# MSC Chitra ordered to pay damages

Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** Even as efforts were on to resume navigation in Mumbai harbour by Saturday, the Centre has ordered that MSC Chitra pay damages for its collision with the MV Khalijia III last week.

Ministry of Shipping secretary K. Mohandas told *The Hindu* that the Panamanian owner and the insurers would have to bear the costs. What ever the terms of the insurance of the vessel, the government would seek third party damages.

The Ministry of Shipping has appointed the Mumbai Port Trust as the nodal agency to work out the third party insurance claims. The various kinds of damage suffered, including environment costs, were being assessed.

The owner of MSC Chitra has engaged a Singapore-based salvage agency and it

- **Various kinds of damage suffered are being assessed**

- **Oil slick is estimated at around 500 to 800 tonnes**

would be his responsibility to clean up the thick film of oil that had spread across the surface of the Arabian Sea in the vicinity of the collision.

Mr. Mohandas said the government was monitoring the situation to ensure that the owner carried out all the necessary measures.

Much like the BP having to bear the cost of the Mexico Gulf incident, the fact that the government directed the ship owner to bear damages was a clear indication that the vessel was being held responsible for the collision.

About one million tonnes of oil had spilled in the Mexico Gulf, whereas in comparison the oil slick was around

500 to 800 tonnes at the Mumbai harbour.

To a question, Mr. Mohandas said that in case the Director-General of Shipping found the Khalijia was also responsible for the collision then it would also have to bear the cost as well.

Admitting that Khalijia had a problem last year, Mr. Mohandas said that it had drifted and it was being investigated how this vessel had been allowed to enter the harbour.

As regards the Chitra which was 30 years old, he clarified that it had been allowed to enter the port based on the valid inspection certification it possessed. The captains of both these ships,

incidentally, are Indians.

Both are single hull ships which the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has banned. The secretary said such ships had been permitted to enter Indian ports till the end of 2010 and from 2011 they would stand banned. No ship with single hull would be registered in India. The existing Indian ships have been given a grace time to operate till 2015.

The key concern of the Ministry is to clear the thick oil sheet and resume the use of the channel. Cabinet Secretary K.M. Chandrasekhar held a meeting of the committee of secretaries and reviewed the situation.

Mr. Mohandas said the channel would be made navigable by Saturday. Some ships have been diverted and oil tankers carrying crude for refineries have been asked to move to Cochin or Mangalore

ports.

Because of its huge tilt, about 400 out of the 512 containers placed on the deck had fallen off. There was no way to prevent these from slipping into the sea and the only solution was picking them out of the water. Another 707 containers are placed in the ship's hold. He said there was no need to panic on account of what was being termed as hazardous cargo. There are 31 containers in this category of which 25 were carrying solid sodium hydrochloride, which the secretary pointed out were not hazardous in sea water.

Meanwhile, Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh in identical statements in both the Houses of Parliament said that the entire salvage was expected to take about 45 days and hoped that the channel would be made navigable by August 15.