

Ship damages coral reef, oil spill fear looms

Viju B | TNN

Mumbai: A cargo ship ran into a coral reef off the Kavaratti Island in Lakshadweep on Sunday night, damaging around 400 square metres of the reef. The latest environmental damage comes eight days after two container vessels collided off Mumbai, causing an oil spill and serious damage to mangroves and marine life.

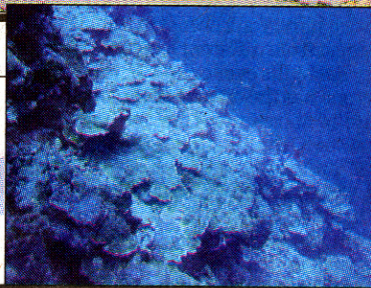
Coast Guard officials said Nand Aparajita, a 78-metre-long cargo vessel, was still situated on the eastern side of the island near a solar plant. The coral reefs around Kavaratti Island are the second largest collection of reefs in Indian waters after those off the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Marine scientists at Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), who have been working in Lakshadweep for several years, said an initial assessment



Sea Sick

- ▶ Nand Aparajita, a 78-metre-long vessel, runs into coral reef off Kavaratti Island and damages 400 sq metres of it
- ▶ These coral reefs are the second largest in Indian waters after those off the Andamans
- ▶ Ship precariously perched, raising fears of spilling oil and damaging ecology further



of the sea accident showed the eastern side of the island, where the ship has grounded, was an "excellent coral reef-rich area".

There was no evident oil spill right away but the ship was "dangerously perched on the reef", a Coast Guard official said. "We cannot rule out an oil spill in the coming days. The vessel was hired by a transport operator to ferry cement. The rescue operation carried out by the local police and the Coast Guard has been delayed because of bad weather, but all the crew members are safe," he added.

A BNHS official said: "Even if there is no oil spill, the grounding itself will cause extensive damage to the reef, extending up to 400 square metres. It needs to be seen if salvage or towing operations further damage the reef."

▶ Ship-hit adds to bleaching woes, P 10