

REGIONAL OIL AND CHEMICAL POLLUTION **CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR SOUTH ASIA**

Pulakesh Mondalⁱ

Spilled oil poses serious threats to marine and fresh water environments. It harms mangroves and a wide range of subsurface organisms which are linked in a complex food chain that includes human food resources. It may harm the environment in several ways, including the physical damages that directly impact wildlife and their habitats (such as coating birds or mammals with a layer of oil), and the toxicity of the oil itself, which can poison exposed organisms. The severity of an oil spill's impact depends on a variety of factors.

South Asia lies close to the main shipping route from the Middle East to the Far East Asia. About 25% of total world movement of crude oil by sea pass through this area which is dominated by trade routes linking Karachi, Mumbai, Chittagong and Colombo with East African and South African Ports. The region imports much of its oil for consumption. Presently India is undertaking oil exploration activities, while Sri Lanka and Bangladesh is looking at the possibilities. The maritime oil spill risks arises from non-tanker shipping carriage of refined products, offshore exploration and production operations, transfer of oil cargoes at sea, routine shipping operations at ports-bunkering and ship recycling activities. So huge illegal discharges of oil from different activities is very common and frequent in this region. These activities are posing serious ecological damages in South Asian Seas water. Recently, oil spill incident are also noticed in Bangladesh within Sundarbans Reserved Forest which is a world heritage site.



Fig: Oil spill in Shala river, Sundarbans, Bangladesh

The South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) an intergovernmental organization established in 1982 by the Government of South Asia to promote and support protection, Conservation and sustainable management of the environment in the region. Eight countries, namely; Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have ratified the articles of Association of SACEP. SACEP has its headquarters at Colombo and is enlisted as a Specialized Agency under the Diplomatic Missions of the Ministry of External Affairs of Sri Lanka. SACEP is also the Secretariat for the South Asian Seas Programme (SASP) which is one of the eighteen Regional Seas Programme of United Nations Environment Programme. South Asian Seas Action Plan was formally adopted in March 1995 and today enjoys the unqualified support of the region's five countries (Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka).

Five South Asian countries namely Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka share the Indian Ocean and are part of the South Asian Seas Programme. With a view to protect the marine environment in the region, South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) undertook a jointly funded project to assist the region in developing a South Asian Regional Oil and Chemical Spill Contingency Plan in 1989. A draft Regional Oil Spill Contingency Plan and other background documents were reviewed by the regional stakeholders in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 14th to 16th December 1999 and the revised plan was shared with the national governments for their concurrence.

The purpose of this Contingency Plan is to establish a mechanism for mutual assistance, under which the national Authorities of Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka co-operate towards an integrated response to the marine pollution incidents either affecting or likely to affect the territorial sea, coasts and related interests of one or more of these countries, or to incidents beyond the available response capacity of each of these countries alone.

As per the recommendation of the Regional Meeting held from 26-28 February 2014 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The meeting brought together national experts from the key relevant competent national authorities of the project's beneficiary countries (Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) who presented their respective national preparedness and response systems for dealing with marine pollution incidents, in addition to discussing the nomination of project focal points, and updating of regional oil spill contingency plan. Four countries (Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) have already signed the MoU and India is in an advance stage of national approval. Every country has nominated their focal Ministry and Focal point to enhance the activities. In order to develop and update the National and Regional Oil and Chemical Spill Contingency Plans, SACEP has completed 5 national workshops in each of the five member countries (With the financial assistance of NORAD and the IMO.).

Government nominated Focal Ministry and Focal Points/Contacts:

Country	Focal Ministry	Focal Person/Contact
	Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of Bangladesh.	Mohammad Md. Mokbul Hossain, Director, Department of Environment Email: chittagong@doe.gov.bd
	Ministry of Earth Science, Government of India.	Dr. R. S. Kankara Director, National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), Chennai. Email: kankara@icmam.gov.in
	Ministry of Environment and Energy, Republic of Maldives.	Capt. Abdul Nasir Mohamed, DG, Transport Authority, Maldives Email: anasir@transport.gov.mv
	Ministry of Climate Change, Government of Pakistan,	DG, Pakistan Maritime Security Agency. Email: hqmsa@cyber.net.pk
	Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment, Government of Sri Lanka.	Chairman, Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA) Email: ch@mepa.gov.lk

A regional exercise and workshop was held from 2-6 November, 2015 in Colombo, Sri Lanka to examine the mechanisms for effective communication during an oil and chemical spill incident in order to facilitate the decision making process and enhance the effectiveness of the response. The regional workshop also reviewed the existing 'Regional Oil and Chemical Pollution Contingency Plan' that was finalized in the year 2000. The exercise and workshop also identified the areas of the regional plan that would need strengthening and further revision based on experiences from the five national workshops, regional exercise and the latest technological advances in incident preparedness and response. The workshop provided

a platform for the relevant national authorities responsible for spill preparedness, response and cooperation to discuss national issues as well as regional approaches to facilitate co-operation among coastal states to effectively respond to oil and chemical pollution incidents in south Asian region.

A final regional workshop will be arranged to finalize the Regional Oil and chemical Spill Contingency Plan for South Asian Seas Region in 2nd quarter of 2016.

ⁱ Senior Programme Officer (Regional), South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP)
69/4, Maya Avenue, Colombo, Sri Lanka, E-mail: pulakesh.mondal@sacep.org; web: www.sacep.org