

# Merchant vessel hits fishing boat, crew narrowly escapes shipwreck

Though no casualties were reported, the nets full of the day's catch were ripped by the ship

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THE workers of the fishing boat Prathyasa, who had gone fishing from Fort Kochi, had a miraculous escape from getting shipwrecked after a merchant ship, MSC Silver 2, sailed very close to their vessel and hit the rear side on Wednesday evening. Though no casualties were reported, the crew suffered a huge loss after the ship tore into the net that was full of the day's catch. The crew of Prathyasa said they lost the catch, mainly mackerel.

"The market value of the mackerel itself comes to around ₹10 lakh. Then there is the rest of the catch, apart from the damaged net, which is very costly," said the crew.

Recounting the incident, they said: "At 5 pm, when we were hauling in the nets at approximately 7.5 nautical miles off the Kannamaly coast, the merchant ship MSC Silver 2 sailed right into our vessel. Seeing the ship approaching, we sent a wireless signal to warn them. But the captain didn't seem to understand our signal and continued on a collision course," said the crew.

According to them, numbering 45, the ship corrected its course only after other fishing boats in the vicinity raised an alarm.

"If the ship hadn't stopped when hearing the alarm raised



Fishing vessel Prathyasa that got rear-ended by MSC Silver 2 on Wednesday



If the ship hadn't stopped when hearing the alarm raised by other boats, our vessel would have been crushed completely, leaving us all in the water. Many of us could have lost our lives

The crew of Prathyasa

by other boats, our vessel would have been crushed completely, leaving us all in the water. Many of us could have lost our lives," they said.

The crew highlighted how the incident has financially set them back. "Besides the loss of our net and catch, we also have to cough up ₹5 lakh to repair the damage wreaked on our boat. Also, with no net and a damaged boat, we won't be able to go out to sea anytime soon. This will severely affect our livelihoods," they added.

The fishers allege such accidents are becoming common in the area. Jackson Pollayil, state president of Kerala Independ-

ent Fishermen's Federation (KSMTF), said it has been only a few days since the MSC Elsa III sank in the fishing zone.

"The fishermen were already reeling from that tragedy. Now, yet another ship of the same company, Silver 2, has violated the shipping channel rules and come close to the shore, posing a threat to fishermen. Such tragedies occur because after entering Vizhinjam Port, MSC ships change their course, violating all rules and sailing as they please. If the Union Ministry of Shipping, port authorities, and coastal police do not act against such errant behaviour, fishermen will resort to

blocking ships entering the port."

The federation demanded compensation from the shipping company for the losses suffered by the fishermen.

## 'Ensure fishermen's safety'

Ship collisions are increasing off the Kerala coast. "Since the 2012 Enrica Lexie incident, there have been eight accidents involving ships that have claimed the lives of 15 fishermen," said Charles George, leader of Kerala Matsya Thozhilali Ayikyavadi (TUCI). According to him, the ships that hit these boats continue to sail.

"These merchant ships do not follow the International Maritime Organization's Code of Conduct. In 2020, the Director General of Shipping had set a 50-km westward route for ships. Most ships now sail in violation of that. The merchant ship involved in Wednesday's incident was also in complete violation of the law. Our position that the shipping route should be changed to 50 nautical miles westward has not yet been accepted. The captain who violated the law must be arrested and subjected to legal action, and the fishermen must be provided with due compensation."

In June, in another such incident, a ship tore into the net laid by a fishing boat.