

Fuel crisis may blow over today

Delay In Arrival Of Oil Carriers, Now Ship From Kochi Expected

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Chennai: With a massive fuel shortage hitting Chennai, Bangalore and surrounding regions in the south for the second consecutive day, oil companies and government agencies are scrambling to explain the reasons for the sudden scarcity in supplies. The main factor, according to officials, is the non-arrival of oil carriers at Chennai port, the landing point for fuel for distribution across Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Sources in BPCL attributed the crisis — which has resulted in milelong queues at petrol pumps in Chennai — to delay in the arrival of a ship carrying 15,000 tonnes of diesel from Lebanon. The cargo is the equivalent of 10 days supply from BPCL for the Greater Chennai region. “The ship, RN Tagore, was supposed to arrive here on June 20. But the consignment readied by the Lebanese agency was not as per our specifications. The consignment which conforms to our standards was shipped later and the vessel is expected to arrive only on July 6,” sources said.

However, the supply gap may be temporarily bridged with the BPCL vessel, Sampurna Swaraj, expected to arrive at Chennai port on Wednesday at 10 am carrying 12,000 tonnes of high speed (HSD) oil. “Sampurna is coming from Kochi,” sources said. The cargo may be sufficient to meet a week’s requirements, and by then the Lebanese vessel too may be able to offload its cargo at Chennai.

To meet the shortfall created by what some in the industry described as BPCL’s “mismanagement”, IOC and HPCL have both stepped up supplies from their depots in the city. Chief secretary L K Tripathy said the state government had received an assurance from the union petroleum ministry that the crisis would be resolved with immediate effect. “IOC has increased its daily supply from 360 trucks to 438. CPCL (Chennai Petroleum Corporation Ltd, an IOC subsidiary with a local refinery) has diverted 2,000 kilolitres each to BPCL and HPCL,” he told mediapersons. Sources in BPCL said they would also receive an additional 2,500 kilolitres of diesel from CPCL on Tuesday night.

RUNNING ON EMPTY

3,300

KILOLITRES

Chennai’s fuel requirement per day

1,300

KILOLITRES

City’s daily petrol consumption

2,000

KILOLITRES

Chennai’s diesel usage per day

FUEL PUMPS

in the city and its suburbs **IMPACT OF SCARCITY**

More people use public transport Vegetable prices shoot up Unauthorised shops sell fuel in pet bottles Corporate attendance drops Schools declare holiday Oil companies hopeful of ending fuel crisis soon

Chennai: Oil companies have cited non-arrival of oil carriers at Chennai port, the landing point for fuel for distribution across Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, as the main reason behind the fuel shortage in the region.

In an official release, the southern regional-level coordinator for the oil industry, D S L Prasad, said, "The berthing of BPCL's diesel carrier in the next 24 hours at Chennai port is expected to significantly improve supplies of diesel in the city and its suburbs." Prasad's optimism notwithstanding, vehicles continued to form long queues at petrol pumps all through Tuesday. The scarcity prompted many office goers to leave their vehicles at home and take buses and trains.

The Metropolitan Transport Corporation and the overhead Mass Rapid Transit System saw a surge in passenger traffic.

The chaos on the city's roads and the impending threat of an autorickshaw-transporters' strike prompted some schools to announce a holiday on Wednesday.

Chennai receives diesel and petrol from three points. Crude oil comes from Bombay High, which is refined at CPCL; the three petroleum companies bring diesel and petrol by tankers from refineries owned by them in other parts of the country. They also import diesel and petrol from oil-producing countries.

But no ship arrived at Chennai port on Tuesday. Sources in Chennai port told TOI that three vessels were expected to arrive in the next three days. "Daily we hold a berthing meeting at 8 am, when shipping agents declare the position of their vessels. The vessel position is further updated at 11 am. Going by the vessel position declared as of 11 am today, we're expecting only three vessels in the next three days," sources said.

Vessel C V Raman, on its way from Mumbai and expected to be at Chennai port on Thursday at 10 pm, is carrying 34,261 tonnes of crude oil.

The Chennai Port Trust is expecting another vessel, Pratibha Chandrabahu, on Friday, which is carrying 11,500 tonnes of furnace oil. It is sailing from Vizag port.

When contacted, Chennai Port Trust chairman K Suresh said, "We are expecting only these vessels and not any huge tanker immediately." He also confirmed that the three oil berths at the port had been free for the last three days.

"There's no problem from our side. As and when the vessels arrive, we can ensure quick discharge," he said.

Suresh said the last vessel to reach Chennai port was Sampurna, which came from Kochi with 9,700 tonnes of diesel. "After discharge, it left the port on June 25," he said.

Two days before that, the port received a huge tanker from Ceyhan Port in Turkey. "The vessel name is ICE Transporter. It brought in 1,27,144 tonnes of crude oil. The discharge is

almost complete. As of today afternoon, only 12,000 tonnes remain. It's expected to complete its discharge by tonight," the source said.

Even as the state government is certain that the situation would be normal on Wednesday morning, the fact that no major tanker carrying refined fuel is expected to berth at Chennai port in the next three days would mean that the optimism could be misplaced.

(With inputs from M Allirajan and B Aravind Kumar)

