Japan - Sri Lanka Joint Efforts to Protect the Beauty of the Ocean

“Towards Better Management of Oil Spill Incidents”

With the rapid development of the shipping industry especially transportation of petroleum, accidental oil spillages has become one of the human pressure and biggest threats to marine ecosystems. It is reported that approximately twenty-five percent of world’s oil, counting to around 550 million tons per annum is transported using Sri Lanka’s nearby International Logistic Sea Lane.

An oil spillage, a marine accident in the nearby sea lane of the Indian Ocean will affect the safety and security of vessel transports and is very likely to cause extensive damage and serious influences to Sri Lanka’s environment, economy and livelihoods in the tourism sector.

Recognizing the importance of maritime cooperation, a Joint Statement was signed between the Government of Japan and the Government of Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in September, 2013 to cooperate in extending technical assistance to the Sri Lanka Coast Guard (SLCG) through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Under agreed provisions, JICA initiated “the Survey for Developing Outline Design for the Project for Maritime Safety Capability Improvement” in year 2014 to review the prospects of providing design and built 2 semi-large petrol vessels to SLCG, in order that SLCG will be well equipped to cope with oil spill incidents including at off sea.

In addition, the first ever training course on Oil Spill Incident Management was conducted from January to February 2015, aiming at training SLCG Oil Spill Response Team (OSRT) members. The training involved basic competences on oil spill incident management, perils of oils and good practices in handling oils without any side effects, not leading to a secondary disaster. Training was followed by a joint tactical exercise session with the fire brigade of Sri Lanka Port Authority simulating a real case of an oil spill incident at sea using Japan’s vast experience in handling disasters. 32 SLCG OSRT members and 20 Fire Brigade officers participated in this joint exercise.

Although the technical cooperation project is still under implementation, SLCG OSRT has made convincing efforts to transfer knowledge and capacities to its successors to prepare them for any
unpredictable disasters. SLCG OSRT officers were eager to absorb as much knowledge and capacities as possible from the National Strike Team (NST) of Japan Coast Guard dispatched as short-term experts of JICA. SLCG has successfully trained 15 other OSRT members using their in house accumulated capacities. To further assist SLCG, JICA under its standard training programs has accepted further 28 Sri Lanka Coast Guard officers in Japan for extensive training at Japanese ports.

Lieutenant Commander Tanaka, Team Leader of NST said “the characteristic of Japanese and Sri Lankans are similar, I think. Especially the one joined in my training course steadily followed my guidance and revised the work when we made any kinds of comment for further improvement. They are very enthusiastic to acquire all the contents of training and try very hard to succeed the knowledge within their organization. SLCG started to make some communications with authorities’ concerned and even started to organize joint tactical exercises with them during the absence of JICA Expert.”

A good example of these self-help efforts was exposed in October, 2015 in which OSRT appropriately coped with a fire and oil spill incident occurred at the Kudawella Fishery Harbor. Soon after the oil spill was reported, OSRT has notified the fire incident to fishery boats, and transferred JICA donated oil combat equipment such as Oil fences and other equipment to the site. Most decisively, protective measures have been timely taken to collect spilled oils from the fishery boats avoiding a possible expansion of the disaster.

The second oil spill incident was reported in Lunawa Lagoon, North of Dikovita at the very end of year 2015, in which oil was accidentally released to the Lagoon by an oil transporting pipeline under maintenance. By using JICA granted Oil fences, OSRT has taken appropriate measures to control any further diffusion of spilled oils in which release of oils to Hamilton Canal was prevented. This well-timed decision has modestly contributed to the protection of livelihoods of fisherman and Mangrove ecosystems in the close by Muturajawala natural Sanctuary preventing a major environmental issue.

The third oil spill incident was identified in Akurassa in which 12,000 liters of diesel oil was released nearby Nilwala River in close proximity of 2 water intakes of the water supply board. Oils
were immediately absorbed to soil necessitating a complex retrieval method. Due to the strong river flow it was also necessary to gather as much as oils within a short period. OSRT has taken proper measures in mitigating further expansions using oil fences and nets and has collected oils using JICA provided absorbent materials. This has prevented further impairment to the livelihoods of the thousands of people using Nilwala river water in their daily livelihoods.

“Although Sri Lanka Coast Guard is only five years from its inauguration, JICA is very proud that they are very talented and eager to acquire the new skills and knowledge. In addition, they are very much keen on how to utilize those skills and knowledge by giving training to their juniors by themselves. This has been the foundation for their excellent performance in handling recent oil spill incidents as true professionals” says, Mr. Kiyoshi AMADA, Chief Representative of JICA Sri Lanka Office.

To demonstrate the capacity and know-hows of OSRT to the relevant authorities and persons engaged in the maritime sector, SLCG and JICA has arranged an “Exhibition on Oil Spill Incident Management Skills” on 29th of January 2016 at Dikovita Fishery Harbor in the presence of Honorable State Minister of Defense, Ambassador of Japan, Vice Admiral Hiroyuki Nakano of JCG and invited delegates. 50 OSRT members will demonstrate their technical skills under the guidance of NST members - Experts of JICA Technical Cooperation project.