

An oil tanker with 22 Indians on board that went missing off the coast of Benin in West [Africa](#) on February 1 has been found, EAM Sushma Swaraj said today thanked the government of Nigeria and Benin for their help and support.

We thanks Governments of Nigeria and Benin for their help and support.

— Sushma Swaraj (@SushmaSwaraj) [February 6, 2018](#)

In an earlier tweet, EAM Swaraj expressed her happiness informing the status of Merchant Ship Marine Express with 22 Indian nationals on board.

I am happy to inform that Merchant Ship Marine Express with 22 Indian nationals on board has been released.

— Sushma Swaraj (@SushmaSwaraj) [February 6, 2018](#)

EAM Swaraj had spoken to her Nigerian counterpart yesterday to seek assistance in tracing the missing oil tanker. The Indian mission in Abuja was in touch with Nigeria and Benin for help in locating the ship. “The ship, Marine Express, has been released and is back under the command of the captain,” Director General of Shipping Malini Shankar told PTI in Mumbai. It was not immediately clear if any ransom was paid to secure the release of the vessel and the cargo.

I have just spoken to Foreign Minister of Nigeria regarding missing Merchant Ship with 22 Indian nationals on board. Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Nigeria has promised all help and assistance in locating the missing ship. We have set up a Helpline no.(+234)9070343860.

— Sushma Swaraj (@SushmaSwaraj) [February 5, 2018](#)

“I have just spoken to Foreign Minister of Nigeria regarding missing Merchant Ship with 22 Indian nationals on board. Hon’ble Foreign Minister of Nigeria has promised all help and assistance in locating the missing ship,” Swaraj tweeted late Monday night.

Merchant Ship Marine Express with 22 Indian nationals is missing off the Coast of Benin in the Gulf of Guinea. We are making all out efforts in coordination with Nigerian and Benin naval authorities to trace the missing ship. We have set up a Helpline no.(+234)9070343860.

— Sushma Swaraj (@SushmaSwaraj) [February 4, 2018](#)

Also, the Anglo-Eastern company tweeted about the release of MT Marine Express

We are delighted to report that the MT Marine Express, which was hijacked by pirates on Feb 1, is now back under the command of the captain & crew since ~04:00 SG time today. All crew members are reported to be safe & well & the cargo intact. We thank you all for your well wishes the company tweeted.

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— Anglo-Eastern (@angloeasterngrp) [February 6, 2018](#)

What happened earlier

The Marine Express was anchored in Cotonou in the Gulf of Guinea in Benin when it was taken over by pirates on February 1. All communication systems on the vessel were switched off by pirates before making it sail. In a Facebook post, ship manning agent Anglo Eastern said the Panama-flagged vessel was the victim of “pirate attack and seizure” and confirmed its safe release. The cargo of 13,500 tonnes of gasoline remains on board, the

post added.

An official at the Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) had said earlier that the waters, from where the vessel was taken, are unsafe because of the presence of pirates. There have been a few incidents where pirates let off hijacked vessels and crew after syphoning the cargo onboard cargo without demanding a ransom.



Due to the volatile nature of Nigeria waterways, foreign shipping companies spend over N13.76 billion (\$45 million) annually to escort their vessels from one point to another on Nigeria's waterways | Image: lss-sapu

DGS officials had been in contact with the Indian mission in Nigeria, which was coordinating rescue efforts with local agencies.

The Marine Express went missing less than a month after another vessel, MT Barret, disappeared off the coast of Benin in January and was later confirmed to have been hijacked. The 22 crew members of MT Barret, most of whom were Indians, were reportedly released after a ransom was paid.

The Panama-registered vessel tanker vessel, owned by Mumbai-based Anglo-Eastern shipping company, has been carrying gasoline worth nearly 8 million U.S. dollars when it lost contact on Feb. 1.

"We regret that contact has been lost with the AE-managed MT Marine Express while at Cotonou, Benin. The last contact was at 03:30 UTC, Feb. 1. Authorities have been alerted and are responding," the company tweeted.

We regret that contact has been lost with the AE-managed MT Marine Express while at Cotonou, Benin. Last contact was at 03:30 UTC, Feb 1. Authorities have been alerted and are responding. Our top priority is the safety of the crew, whose families have been contacted. Updates TBA.

— Anglo-Eastern (@angloeasterngrp) [February 2, 2018](#)

The region near Benin, especially the Gulf of Guinea, is known to be pirate-infested, and

several ships have been targeted. In January, another ship went missing off the coast of Benin and two days later, it was confirmed to have been hijacked.

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Pirates Free Hijacked Oil Tanker With 22 Indian Crew In Gulf of Guinea

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