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“COAST GUARD, FISHERMEN MADE A SMART MOVE”, *THE TIMES OF INDIA* (ELECTRONIC EDITION), 18 FEBRUARY 2012

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Coast Guard, fishermen made a smart move

T Ramavarman | TNN

Kochi: The Coast Guard had actually tricked the Italian ship. "There were four merchant vessels and we asked each of them whether they had a piracy incident. When Enrica Lexie officials confirmed they had an encounter with pirates, we asked them to sail to Kochi to identify the pirates. We informed them that they were under investigation for the murder of two fishermen only after they reached the outer anchorage off Kochi port," Coast Guard regional commander (western region) S P S Basra said on Friday.

There were possibilities that the Italian crew would have either denied or shown reluctance to cooperate if they were intimidated earlier, he said. Prompt reporting by fishermen helped them intercept the ship, he said.

Coast Guard vessel Sambar

was diverted to the area around 18.00 hours. Coast Guard's Dornier squadron was pressed into service at 18.10 hours, and patrol vessel Lakshmi Bai was directed to sail to the area for force augmentation. By 18.20 hours, MRCC had four suspect vessels operating in the probable area, and initial inputs were correlated with four of them to identify the suspect merchant vessel by 18.30 hours.

The Southern Naval Command sent INS Kabra to augment force level at 19.00 hours, and by 20.15, Lakshmi Bai picked up AIS transmission of the vessel. The vessel was intercepted and told to proceed to Kochi under escort. It reached Kochi at 22.35 hours.

The details of the case were disclosed to the Italian crew only when Kerala police officials and Coast Guard personnel boarded the ship, after the vessel reached Kochi.

**S P S Basra**