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Satellite images show oil spill in Chennai after Cyclone Michaung-induced floods

India Today's OSINT team maps the severity of the oil spill in Chennai following floods

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Ennore before (L) and after (R) the floods in Chennai following Cyclone Michaung



Subham Tiwari



Bidisha Saha

New Delhi, UPDATED: Dec 14, 2023 17:51 IST

Posted By: [Ashutosh Acharya](#)

More than a week after the devastating floods, major parts of Chennai are now largely free from waterlogging. However, in some localities, a larger and more severe problem – a crude oil spill – remains a headache for authorities and inhabitants.

A large amount of oil allegedly leaked from the state-run Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited's (CPCL) refinery in Chennai's Manali, during floods caused by the torrential rains induced by Cyclone Michaung last week.

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As per the official assessment, the oil spill is currently spread over an area of 20 square kilometers. Efforts to remove it are underway.

Satellite images from the Copernicus Sentinel Program accessed by India Today's Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) team show the oil spill in large swathes floating through the Ennore Creek into the Bay of Bengal. We created a custom visualisation by using the Oil Spill Index (OSI) script of the Sentinel-2 satellite of the European



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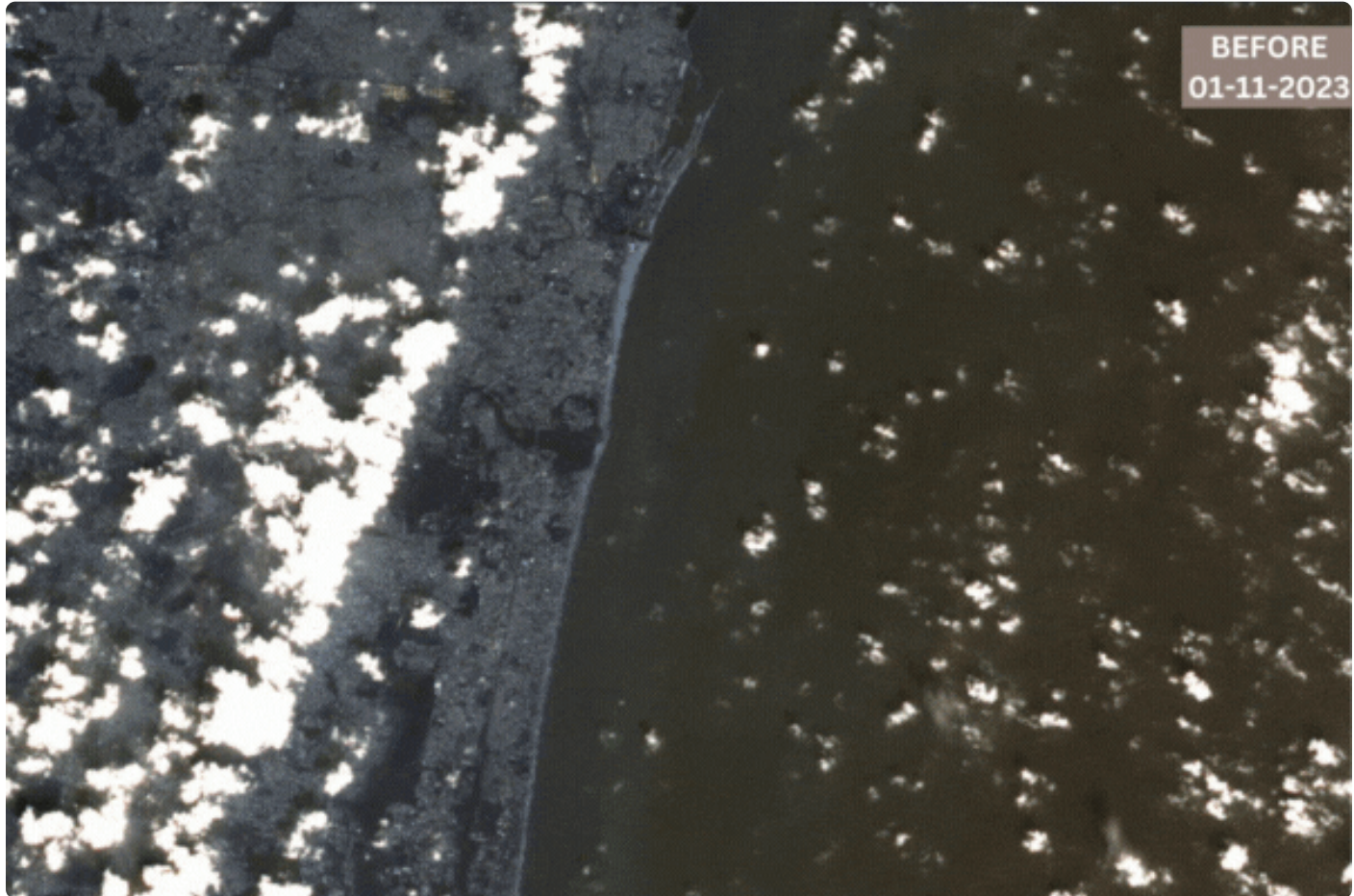
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The oil mixed with floodwaters in the aftermath of Cyclone Michaung on December 4 and spread into the sea through water bodies, severely impacting neighbourhoods in Eranavur, Adi Dravidar Colony, Thiruveethiamman Kovil, with fishing hamlets in Ennore and surrounding areas being the worst affected by the oil spill.



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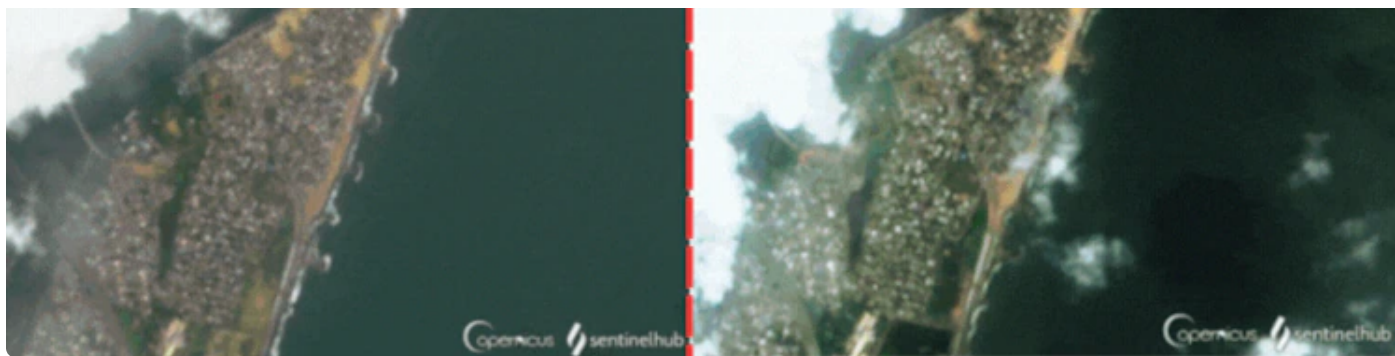
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Tracing leak source

The CPCL, a subsidiary of the Indian Oil Corporation (IOL), was initially blamed by the local fishing community. However, the company denied any pipeline leaks at its Manali refinery. Further investigation by the Tamil Nadu government's State Oil Spill Crisis Management Group (SOS-CMG) traced the spill to the CPCL premises, where guard ponds and stormwater drain ponds emptying into the Buckingham Canal were identified as the source.

"The oil permeated from the CPCL plant into the floodwaters, which took it to nearby Buckingham Canal and a tributary of the Kosasthailayar river – polluting areas downstream on their way to the Ennore Creek," said Tamil Nadu-based mapper and urban development expert Raj Bhagat.

Cyclone Michaung: Tracking the route of Oil spill in Chennai



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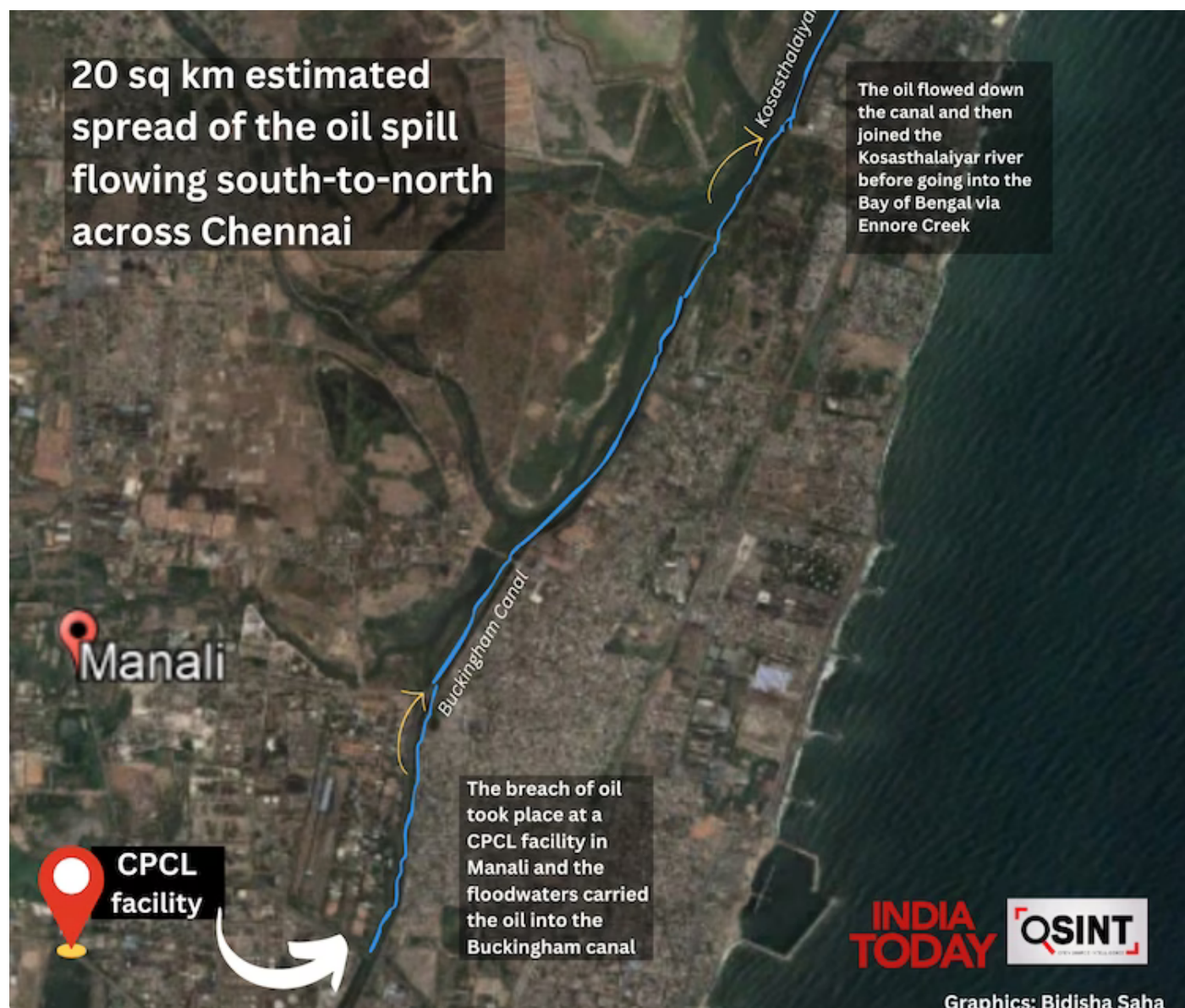
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Health concerns

The chemical hazard not only caused the death of aquatic life in the Kosasthalaiyar river and the Ennore Creek, but also damaged fishing boats and equipment, severely impacting the livelihoods of the fishing community.

Residents in affected localities have complained of a persistent, unbearable odour, along with physical symptoms such as eye irritation, dizziness, and skin itching. Many people in Ennore told India Today that the foul smell has led to respiratory issues among vulnerable groups like women, children, and the elderly.



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Thousands of dead fish have washed ashore in affected areas.

Government's response

The Tamil Nadu government, in coordination with the Indian Coast Guard, is spearheading efforts to address the situation. Helicopter sorties have been deployed to spray Oil Spill Dispersants (OSD) over the affected area, and

compensation is being offered to affected families



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Creek area to “remove the floating oil, which will be safely disposed of at the designated location at Gummudipoondi which is licensed for storing hazardous waste”. It has also deployed oil-controlling booms to contain the oil at some locations. Specialised oil cleaning agencies have been pressed into action.

This is not the first oil spill in Ennore. The region, a hub of petrochemical industries and an eco-sensitive zone, witnessed a similar incident in 2017 following a collision between two ships.

Published By: Ashutosh Acharya

Published On: Dec 14, 2023

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