

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

**RAJYA SABHA**  
**UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.1619**  
TO BE ANSWERED ON 27.12.2018

**RELEASE OF INDIAN FISHERMEN IN CUSTODY OF SRI LANKA**

1619. SHRI C. M. RAMESH:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the number of Indian fishermen along with their boats who were reportedly abducted by Sri Lankan Army/petrol boats during the last three years;
- (b) the number out of them who have been released with their belongings so far; and
- (c) whether Government has taken up the matter with the Government of Sri Lanka at an appropriate level for expediting release of remaining fishermen and if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

**ANSWER**

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
[GEN. (DR) V. K. SINGH (RETD)]

(a) & (b) There is no information about any abduction of Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan authorities. However, from time to time, Indian fishermen have been arrested by Sri Lankan authorities for allegedly fishing in their territorial waters. The details of Indian fishermen and their fishing vessels detained by Sri Lanka during the last three years are given below:

S.No.	Year	No. of fishermen arrested	No. of boats detained
1	2015	454	71
2	2016	290	51
3	2017	453	82
4	2018 (till 20 December)	156	26

As on 20 December 2018, out of the 1353 fishermen arrested during the above period, 1335 fishermen have been released and 1325 have been repatriated to India. Out of the 230 fishing vessels which have been detained since 2015, 219 have been released so far. Currently, there are 18 Indian fishermen and 11 fishing vessels in Sri Lankan custody.

(c) The fishermen issues have been raised at the highest level, including by the Prime Minister with the Sri Lankan Prime Minister during the latter's visit to India in October 2018. This also figured in EAM's discussions with the Sri Lankan leadership. It was reiterated that Sri Lankan Government may consider the fishermen issue as a purely humanitarian and livelihood concern and both sides should ensure that there was no use of force under any circumstances.

Following the 2+2 initiative in November 2016 when the Foreign and Fisheries Ministers of the two countries met in New Delhi, a bilateral Joint Working Group mechanism and meeting of the Ministers for Fisheries of the two countries was institutionalized to address the fishermen issues with Sri Lanka. Government continues to take various measures to diversify our fishermen from the ecologically unsustainable method of bottom trawling to deep sea fishing using tuna long-liners. Government has initiated the "Assistance for Deep Sea Fishing" scheme to support the fishermen in this pursuit. Prime Minister had unveiled the scheme in the Palk Bay area in July 2017. Several batches of fishermen have been trained so far in deep-sea fishing, long-lining and onboard handling and processing of fish.

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