

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.1352
TO BE ANSWERED ON 09.12.2021

ARREST OF FISHERMEN BY THE SRI LANKAN NAVY

1352. SHRI S. SELVAGANABATHY:

Will the Minister of **External Affairs** be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government is aware that very frequently, fishermen from Tamil Nadu and Puducherry were taken into custody by the Sri Lankan Navy under cross border fishing;
- (b) action taken or contemplated by Government to save the life of fishermen and in order to solve the perennial problems of fishermen of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry; and
- (c) whether a consensus will be arrived with Sri Lankan Government in resolving the issue of fishermen often captured by them?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN)

(a) Indian fishermen are arrested from time to time by the Sri Lankan authorities for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) and fishing in Sri Lankan waters. As per available information, in 2021 (till date) a total of 91 fishermen were arrested by the Sri Lankan authorities. Due to the sustained diplomatic efforts of the Government of India, all of them have been released and repatriated. Currently, there are no Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan custody.

(b) & (c) Government of India attaches the highest priority to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen. As soon as reports of alleged attacks on Indian fishermen are received, the Government through diplomatic channels takes up the matter with the Government of Sri Lanka. Issues relating to Indian fishermen have been raised at the highest levels, including by our Prime Minister with the Sri Lankan Prime Minister during the Virtual Bilateral Summit held in September 2020. This year, during his visit to Colombo from 5-7 January, External Affairs Minister (EAM) had met the Minister of Fisheries of Sri Lanka and discussed all issues related to Indian fishermen. The issue was also taken up in Foreign Secretary's discussions with the Sri Lankan dignitaries during his visit to Sri Lanka from 2-5 October 2021. The need to deal with issues pertaining to fishermen in a humanitarian manner was reiterated to the Government of Sri Lanka. It was also stressed that existing understandings between the two Governments in that regard must be strictly observed 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 (JWG) mechanism and meeting of the Ministers for Fisheries of the two countries was institutionalized to address the fishermen issues with Sri Lanka. On December 30, 2020, 4th Round of JWG was organized between the two governments where the entire gamut of issues related to fishermen was discussed. Both sides are in consultation for the early convening of the 5th Round of JWG on Fisheries.
