

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO-231
ANSWERED ON- 08/12/2022

ATTACKS ON INDIAN FISHERMEN BY SRI LANKAN NAVY

231. SHRI VAIKO

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government is aware that there are frequent arrests and seizure of boats by Sri Lankan Navy thereby shattering the livelihood of many Indian national Tamil fishermen;
- (b) if so, the details of attacks on Indian fishermen, number of fishermen injured, deaths, boats damaged by the Sri Lankan Navy during the last three years; and
- (c) steps taken by Government to hold high level talks to find a permanent solution?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

(SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN)

(a) to (c) 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. 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 channel takes up the matter with the Government of Sri Lanka.

As per the available information, in last three years, a total of 485 (74 in 2020, 159 in 2021 and 252 in 2022) Indian fishermen were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy and a total of 66 Indian boats (11 in 2020, 20 in 2021 and 35 in 2022) were confiscated by the Sri Lankan authorities. Due to sustained efforts by the Government, 461 of these fishermen have been released. As on 2nd December 2022, there are 24 Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan custody.

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. In 2021, 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. Recently, on 15 January 2022, EAM discussed the issue of early release of Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan custody, during his virtual meeting with Finance Minister of Sri Lanka and his bilateral meeting with Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, during the latter's visit to India in February 2022. The issue was also taken up during the visit of Finance Minister of Sri Lanka in March 2022.
