

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO-2320
ANSWERED ON- 20/03/2025

ARREST OF INDIAN FISHERMAN BY SRI LANKAN NAVY

2320. SHRI M. MOHAMED ABDULLA

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :-

- (a) whether Government is aware of the recent escalation in protests across Tamil Nadu following the arrest of 32 Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy on charges of poaching;
- (b) if so, the steps taken by Government to secure the immediate release of the detained fishermen, including any diplomatic engagements with Sri Lankan authorities; and
- (c) whether discussions regarding the protection of Indian fishermen's rights and the retrieval of seized boats have been held in recent bilateral meetings with Sri Lanka?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(SHRI KIRTI VARDHAN SINGH)

(a) to (c) Thirty two (32) Indian fishermen were apprehended by Sri Lankan authorities on 22 February 2025 for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) and fishing in Sri Lankan waters. Consular officials of our Consulate in Jaffna have been providing requisite support, including legal assistance, to the Indian fishermen. Subsequently, following hearings on 7 March and 14 March 2025, Sri Lankan courts have released all 32 fishermen subject to payment of fine of LKR 250,000 each (aprx INR 73,000), or undergo imprisonment of six months, as per applicable local legislation. Our Consular officials continue to extend all necessary support to the Indian fishermen.

Government of India attaches the highest priority to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen. The Government has been consistently taking up these issues, including the early release and repatriation of Indian fishermen and fishing boats, with the Sri Lankan government through bilateral mechanisms, diplomatic channels, and various official interactions, including by the Prime Minister in his meeting (16 December 2024) with the Sri Lankan President. In all our interactions, it has been conveyed that this issue may be considered purely on humanitarian and livelihood grounds.

Issues related to fishermen are also dealt with through bilateral institutional mechanisms such as the regular meetings of the Joint Working Group on fisheries, which includes representatives from the Government of Tamil Nadu. The last JWG meeting on fisheries was held on 29 October 2024. Sustained diplomatic efforts of the Government have secured the release and repatriation of 591 fishermen apprehended by Sri Lankan authorities since 2024.
