

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO-559
ANSWERED ON- 04/12/2025

DISCUSSION WITH SRI LANKA ON FISHERMEN ISSUE

559. SHRI P. WILSON

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

(a) whether Government has raised concerns with the Sri Lankan Government regarding Sections 14(O) and 49 of the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (Amendment) Act 2023, which criminalises Indian fishermen and imposes exorbitant fines;

(b) whether any steps are being taken to seek repealment or amendment of these laws through diplomatic engagement; and

(c) whether more than 3800 Indian fishermen, particularly from coastal districts of Tamil Nadu have been arrested by Sri Lankan authorities since 2014, and if so, the steps taken to bring permanent resolution to this issue?

ANSWER

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

(a to c) Indian fishermen are arrested from time to time by Sri Lankan authorities for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) and fishing in Sri Lankan waters. The IMBL was agreed upon between the Governments of India and Sri Lanka in 1974. The then-State Government of Tamil Nadu was consulted by the Union Government before its finalization. Another agreement in 1976, through a formal exchange of letters by the then-Union Government and its Sri Lankan counterpart, stipulated that the fishing vessels and fishermen of India shall not engage in fishing in the historic waters, the territorial sea and the exclusive zone of Sri Lanka.

Given the inherited situation, the Government has, since 2014, endeavoured to address the livelihood interests of our fishing community and its humanitarian aspects. The Government has been consistently taking up these issues, including the early release and repatriation of Indian fishermen and fishing boats, as well as the fines imposed, with the Sri Lankan Government through bilateral mechanisms, diplomatic channels, and various official interactions. Prime Minister in his recent meetings with the Sri Lankan President (05 April 2025) and Prime Minister (17 October 2025) conveyed that this issue may be considered purely on humanitarian and livelihood grounds and that the use of force should be avoided under all circumstances. Concerted efforts of the Government have so far resulted in the release and repatriation of 3642 Indian fishermen since May 2014.

All 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.

Further, our Mission and Consulates make regular visits to local jails and detention centers to ascertain the condition of Indian fishermen and provide requisite support and legal assistance to ensure their well-being and assist in their early release and repatriation.
