

LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.508
TO BE ANSWERED ON 05.02.2020

FISHERMEN ARRESTED BY SRI LANKAN NAVY

508. **SHRI SUDHEER GUPTA:**
SHRI SHRIRANG APPA BARNE:
SHRI GAJANAN KIRTIKAR:
SHRI SANJAY SADASHIV RAO MANDLIK:
SHRI BIDYUT BARAN MAHATO:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government is aware that 14 Indian fishermen were arrested and their 3 trawlers were seized by the Sri Lankan Navy recently;
- (b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons for the same;
- (c) whether Sri Lankan Government has increased the fine on foreign vessels, particularly Indian fishing trawlers manifold to deter them from entering disputed waters and if so, the details thereof;
- (d) whether the Indian Government has held any consultation with the Sri Lankan counterpart to free the alleged Indian fishermen along with their logistics and if so, the details thereof along with the response of the Sri Lankan Government thereto;
- (e) whether the Government is aware that many Indian fishermen often accidentally/inadvertently cross international waters of neighboring countries particularly Sri Lanka and Pakistan and caught by their patrolling units with their logistics and do not return the same when they are released leading to huge financial loss to the fishermen and they lose their livelihood and if so, the details thereof; and
- (f) whether the Government is going to take any steps to provide financial assistance to the fishermen and if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
[SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN]

(a) & (b) Fourteen Indian fishermen were arrested along with three fishing boats by the Sri Lankan Navy on 28 December 2019 for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) and fishing in Sri Lankan territorial waters near Delft island .

(c) In January 2018, the Sri Lankan Parliament passed the Fisheries (Regulation of Foreign Fishing Boats) Amendment Act, 2018 to amend Fisheries (Regulation of Foreign Fishing Boats) Act No. 50 of 1979. The amendment raised the fines imposed on foreign fishing vessels based on the length of the fishing boat for fishing in the territorial waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Sri Lanka ranging from Sri Lankan Rupees 4 to 220 million.

(d) to (f) Government of India attaches the highest priority to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen. The Government of India has taken up

the matter of release of our fishermen and their fishing boats at the highest levels with the Government of Sri Lanka.

With sustained diplomatic efforts, the Government has secured the release of 2096 Indian fishermen and 381 fishing vessels from the custody of Sri Lanka since May 2014. This includes the 14 fishermen arrested on December 28, 2019. During his recent visit to India, President of Sri Lanka, Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa assured that Sri Lanka would take steps to release the boats belonging to Indian fishermen in their custody.

With the assistance of Government of India, 507 transponders have been installed by the Government of Tamil Nadu in mechanised fishing boats on pilot basis under a scheme for Diversification of Trawl Fishing into Long Lining from Palk Bay into Deep Sea Fishing. Under the Scheme on 'Blue Revolution: Integrated Development and Management of Fisheries' of Government of India, assistance is provided to fishermen for obtaining safety kits which consist of GPS, communication equipment, echo-sounder, lifejackets, lifebuoys, Distress Alert Transmitter (DAT), life-saving appliances (VHF radiotelephones), fish finder, backup battery, search and rescue beacon etc.

As regards Pakistan, the Government, upon receipt of reports of apprehension of Indian fishermen, immediately takes up the matter with Pakistan through diplomatic channels and seeks their consular access and their early release and repatriation. Government's persistent efforts have succeeded in securing release and repatriation of 2133 Indian prisoners, including fishermen along with 57 boats from Pakistan's custody since 2014. This includes release and repatriation of 20 Indian fishermen on 6 January 2020. The Government continues to consistently call upon Pakistan to ensure safety, security and well-being of the Indian prisoners in their custody and release and repatriate them expeditiously.
