

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

**LOK SABHA
STARRED QUESTION NO.322
TO BE ANSWERED ON 25.03.2022**

INDIAN FISHERMEN IN CAPTIVITY

***322. SHRI THIRUNAVUKKARASAR SU:**

Will the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government is aware of the increasing incidents of Indian fishermen being apprehended and their fishing vessels being seized by the Sri Lankan and Pakistan authorities during the last few years;
- (b) if so, the details thereof and the number of Indian fishermen particularly the fishermen from Tamil Nadu in captivity during the last three years, year-wise and till date along with the losses incurred to the fishermen as a result thereof;
- (c) whether any steps are being taken by the Government to get the release of the captured Indian fishermen and their fishing boats/vessels and provide any financial assistance for the losses incurred to them;
- (d) if so, the details thereof; and
- (e) if not, the reasons therefor?

**ANSWER
THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(DR. SUBRAHMANYAM JAISHANKAR)**

- (a) to (e) A statement is laid on the table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a) TO (e) OF THE LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION No.*322 REGARDING “INDIAN FISHERMEN IN CAPTIVITY” FOR ANSWER ON 25.03.2022.

(a) As per the India-Pakistan ‘Agreement on Consular Access’ signed on 21 May 2008, lists of civilian prisoners and fishermen of each country, lodged in the jails of the other, are exchanged on 1 January and 1 July every year. According to the lists exchanged on 1 January 2022, Pakistan has acknowledged the custody of 577 fishermen who are Indian or are believed to be Indian. Besides, as per our records, 1164 Indian fishing boats are also believed to be in Pakistan’s custody. However, Pakistan has not acknowledged custody of the Indian fishing boats.

There have been periodic instances of Indian fishermen being apprehended by Sri Lankan authorities for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) and fishing in Sri Lankan waters. Currently, 16 Indian fishermen and 88 Indian fishing boats are in Sri Lankan custody.

(b) As per available information, in the last three years, a total of 502 Indian fishermen were arrested by Pakistan authorities. There are no fishermen from Tamil Nadu in Pakistan’s custody. Year-wise details are as given below:

Year	Number of fishermen from Tamil Nadu arrested by Pakistan	Total number of Indian fishermen arrested by Pakistan
2022	Nil	96
2021	Nil	223
2020	Nil	183
Total	Nil	502

In case of Sri Lanka, as per available information, in the last three years, a total of 329 Indian fishermen were arrested, out of which 305 fishermen were from Tamil Nadu. Year-wise details are as given below:

Year	Number of fishermen from Tamil Nadu arrested by Sri Lanka	Total number of Indian fishermen arrested by Sri Lanka
2022	88	96
2021	143	159
2020	74	74
Total	305	329

(c) to (e) The Government attaches the highest priority to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen. As soon as cases of apprehension of Indian fishermen and their fishing boats are reported, immediate steps are taken by Indian Missions and Posts to seek consular access, ensure their welfare and also pursue their early release and repatriation along with their boats. Given the humanitarian and livelihood dimensions of this issue, the Government has put in place several bilateral mechanisms to ensure cooperation and understanding with the countries concerned, to promote safety and security of Indian fishermen.

In case of Pakistan, incidents of apprehension of Indian fishermen and their fishing boats by Pakistan authorities are consistently raised with the Pakistan Government and it is conveyed that this issue may be considered on purely humanitarian and livelihood grounds. All possible assistance, including legal assistance, is extended to the fishermen for their early release and repatriation, along with the release of their boats. As a result of sustained efforts by the Government, 2140 Indian fishermen and 57 Indian fishing boats have been repatriated from Pakistan since 2014.

In case of Sri Lanka, issues relating to Indian fishermen are being raised at all levels, including at the highest level. A bilateral Joint Working Group was set up with Sri Lanka in 2016 to address fishermen related issues.

With sustained diplomatic efforts, the Government of India has secured the release of all the Indian fishermen arrested in 2020 and 2021. Out of the 96 Indian fishermen who were arrested by Sri Lankan authorities in 2022, the Government has secured the release of 80 Indian fishermen. 29 of these fishermen were repatriated back to India on 10 March 2022.

Government remains engaged with the Government of Sri Lanka for early release and repatriation of Indian fishermen along with the fishing boats.
