

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

**LOK SABHA  
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.647  
TO BE ANSWERED ON 04.02.2022**

**CUSTODY OF INDIAN FISHERMEN**

647. SHRI A. GANESHAMURTHI:

DR. T.R. PAARIVENDHAR:

SHRI MANICKAM TAGORE B:

SHRI A. RAJA:

SHRI KARTI P. CHIDAMBARAM:

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

- (a) whether there has been an increase in incidents of attacks on Tamil fishermen by Sri Lankan Navy and seizure of Indian fishing vessels in the recent past and if so, the details thereof;
- (b) whether the Government has any data about the number of Indian fishermen who were kept in Sri Lankan jails and if so, the details thereof indicating the number of fishermen arrested/released during the last three years;
- (c) the details of reasons for their captivity;
- (d) whether the Government has called any meeting of Joint Working Group on Fisheries to discuss the issues and find out permanent solution to this problem and if so, the details thereof; and
- (e) the steps taken/being taken by the Government to ensure release of remaining Indian fishermen who are in the custody of Sri Lanka?

ANSWER

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

(a) to (c) There have been recent incidents of attacks on Tamil fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy. 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. As per the available information, 74 and 159 Indian fishermen were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy in 2020 and 2021 respectively. With sustained diplomatic efforts, the GoI has secured the release of all these Indian fishermen. At present, 21 Indian fishermen, arrested along with 2 boats on 31 January 2022 are in Sri Lankan custody. They have been provided consular and legal assistance by our High Commission in Colombo and Consulate in Jaffna. Efforts are ongoing to secure the release of these fishermen.

(d) & (e) 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. As a result, 56 Indian fishermen were released by Government of Sri Lanka on 25 January 2022.

Government of India attaches the highest priority to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen. Following the 2+2 initiative in November 2016, when the Foreign and Fisheries Ministers of the two countries met in New Delhi, a bilateral Joint Working Group (JWG) mechanism and meeting of the Ministers for Fisheries of the two countries was institutionalized to address the fishermen issues with Sri Lanka. On December 30, 2020, 4th Round of JWG was organized between the two governments where the entire gamut of issues related to fishermen was discussed. Both sides are in consultation for the early convening of the 5<sup>th</sup> Round of JWG on Fisheries.

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