

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

**LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.1023
TO BE ANSWERED ON 22.07.2022**

DISCUSSION WITH SRI LANKA

1023. SHRI S. VENKATESAN:

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

- (a) whether the Government has taken up with Sri Lankan authorities the matter related to release of the fishermen from Tamil Nadu and Puducherry who were arrested after they resumed fishing after the annual ban period ended on June 15, 2022 and if so, the details thereof;
- (b) whether any concrete proposal has been discussed in Joint Working Group meeting held in March 2022 to find solution to the said issue; and
- (c) if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

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

(a) to (c) 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, in 2022 (till date) a total of 144 fishermen were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy. Out of these, 29 Indian fishermen have been arrested after 15 June 2022 in 4 separate incidents (12 fishermen on 3 July 2022, 5 fishermen on 4 July 2022, 6 fishermen on 11 July 2022 and 6 fishermen on 20 July 2022). With sustained diplomatic efforts, the Government of India has secured the release of 138 out of 144 fishermen. 115 out of the 138 fishermen released have been repatriated. 23 fishermen are scheduled to be repatriated soon. Currently, there are 6 Indian fishermen (arrested in the night of 20 July 2022) in Sri Lankan custody. Efforts are on for the early release and repatriation of these 6 Indian fishermen.

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 by the then 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. 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. The matter was also discussed by EAM with the Sri Lankan Minister of Fisheries, during his visit to Sri Lanka in March 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 March 2022, 5th Round of JWG was organized between the two governments where the entire gamut of issues related to fishermen was discussed.
