

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO-4809

ANSWERED ON- 28/03/2025

ARREST OF TAMIL NADU FISHERMAN BY THE SRI LANKAN NAVY

4809 SMT. KANIMOZHI KARUNANIDHI

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

(a) the details regarding the number of fishermen from Tamil Nadu who were arrested, attacked and their boats confiscated by the Sri Lankan Navy during the last ten years;

(b) the details regarding the number of fishermen and boats still under the custody of the Sri Lankan authorities;

(c) the details regarding the measures taken by the Ministry to arrange a meeting between the representatives of the fishermen association in India and Sri Lanka as requested in the 6th meeting of the Joint Working Group on Fisheries;

(d) the scheduled time-frame for the next meeting of the Joint Working Group on Fisheries; and

(e) the details regarding the meeting of the Joint Working Group on Fisheries conducted so far and the reasons for the delay in scheduling regular meetings for the same?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

(SHRI KIRTI VARDHAN SINGH)

(a) 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.

Details in respect of fishermen and boats from Tamil Nadu apprehended by Sri Lankan authorities since 2015 is as below:

Year	No. of Tamil Nadu fishermen arrested by SL authorities	No. of Tamil Nadu fishermen allegedly attacked in SL waters	No. of boats from Tamil Nadu confiscated by SL authorities
2025*	135	02	18
2024	526	20	72
2023	220	28	33
2022	229	10	31
2021	143	7	20
2020	74	3	11
2019	190	15	39
2018	156	Nil	26
2017	453	02	82
2016	290	01	51
2015	454	16	71

*** As of 22 March 2025**

Details of Indian fishermen and boats released as a result of the Government of India's diplomatic efforts are as below:

Year	No. of Indian fishermen released and repatriated by SL authorities	No. of boats released by SL authorities
2025	80 (another 6 fishermen completing formalities before repatriation)	01
2024	535	12
2023	240	14
2022	268	01
2021	159	06
2020	74	Nil
2019	210	02
2018	156	178
2017	453	42
2016	290	03
2015	454	87

(b) As of 22 March 2025, 86 Indian fishermen (03 of whom are awaiting trial and 83 serving prison sentences) and 225 boats are in Sri Lankan custody.

(c) to (e) Government of India attaches highest priority to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen. The Government has been consistently taking up the issue of the early release and repatriation of Indian fishermen and fishing boats with the Sri

Lankan Government through bilateral mechanisms, diplomatic channels, and various official interactions, including by the Prime Minister in his recent meeting with the Sri Lankan President (16 December 2024). In all interactions, it has been conveyed to the Sri Lankan authorities that this issue may be considered purely on humanitarian and livelihood grounds.

In addition, all issues related to fishermen are dealt with through bilateral institutional mechanisms, viz., Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries, which also includes representatives from the Government of Tamil Nadu. The last JWG meeting was held on 29 October 2024. Government is also following up with the Government of Sri Lanka on early scheduling of talks between fishermen associations of the two countries. Dates are awaited from the Sri Lankan side. Details of the JWG meetings held so far are placed below:

JWG meeting on fisheries	Dates
1st meeting of JWG on fisheries	31 December 2016, New Delhi
2nd meeting of JWG on fisheries	07 April 2017, Colombo

3rd meeting of JWG on fisheries	13 October 2017, New Delhi
4th meeting of JWG on fisheries	30 December 2020, (Virtual Mode)
5th meeting of JWG on fisheries	25 March 2022, (Virtual Mode)
6th meeting of JWG on fisheries	29 October 2024, Colombo
