

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

**RAJYA SABHA**  
**UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.2460**  
TO BE ANSWERED ON 24.03.2022

**INDIAN FISHERMEN ARRESTED BY SRI LANKAN NAVY**

2460. SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA:

Will the Minister of **External Affairs** be pleased to state:

- (a) the details of the number of arrests made by Sri Lankan authorities since 2019, including the boats seized and the number of fishermen who died due to the same;
- (b) whether Government has taken steps to initiate talks to address the issue of growing number of Indian fishermen arrested by the Sri Lankan Naval authorities;
- (c) if so, the outcome so far in finding a permanent solution to the problem; and
- (d) if not, the reasons therefor?

**ANSWER**

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

(a) to (d) 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, 210, 74 and 159 Indian fishermen were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy in 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively and a total of 73 Indian boats (42 in 2019, 11 in 2020 and 20 in 2021) were confiscated by the Sri Lankan authorities. In 2022, so far, a total of 80 fishermen along with 11 boats have been apprehended by Sri Lankan Navy. Due to sustained efforts by the Government, all these fishermen have been released. Currently, no Indian fishermen remain in Sri Lankan custody. Out of these 80 fishermen arrested in 2022, 29 were repatriated back to India on 10 March 2022. Repatriation of the remaining 51 fishermen is under process. According to available reports, since 2019, 6 fishermen lost their lives in separate incidents following alleged collision between their vessel and a Sri Lankan naval craft.

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 in his discussions with 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 and his bilateral meeting with Foreign

Minister of Sri Lanka, during the latter's visit to India in February 2022. The issue was also taken up during the visit of Finance Minister of Sri Lanka to India in March 2022.

Government 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 fishermen's issues with Sri Lanka. On December 30, 2020, the 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 5th Round of JWG on Fisheries.

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