

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO- 407
ANSWERED ON- 28/11/2024

ARRESTS OF TAMILIAN FISHERMEN

407. SHRI C. VE. SHANMUGAM

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

- (a) whether it is a fact that Tamilian fishermen are being arrested by Sri Lankan Government perennially;
- (b) if so, the details of the number of fishermen arrested by Sri Lanka since 2019 till date, year-wise, and the number of fishermen released each year;
- (c) the details of the number of fishermen still detained by Sri Lanka for prosecution; and
- (d) the steps taken by Government to resolve this issue permanently?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(SHRI KIRTI VARDHAN SINGH)

(a to d) 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. As per available information, as of 22 November 2024, 141 Indian fishermen are in Sri Lankan custody, of whom 45 fishermen are under trial while 96 are currently serving sentences. They have been provided with consular and legal assistance by our High Commission in Colombo and Consulate in Jaffna. With sustained diplomatic efforts, the Government has secured the release and repatriation of 351 of the fishermen apprehended this year. An additional twelve (12) Indian fishermen have been released and are to be repatriated shortly.

Government of India attaches the highest priority to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen. Government has been taking up the fishermen-related issues, including the early release and repatriation of Indian fishermen and fishing boats, at the highest level. The matter was also raised recently by the External Affairs Minister during his meeting with the new political leadership of Sri Lanka during his visit to Colombo on 04 October 2024.

The Sri Lankan Government has been repeatedly requested to treat the fishermen issue as a humanitarian and livelihood concern. It has been stressed that force should not be used under any circumstances.

Regular meetings of the bilateral Joint Working Group on fisheries, which includes representatives from the Government of Tamil Nadu, are held to discuss the entire gamut of issues related to fishermen. The last JWG on fisheries was held on 29 October 2024 during which both sides discussed issues related to fishermen.

As per records, the details of fishermen arrested since 2019 are as follows:

Year	Number of fishermen arrested	Number of fishermen released	Number of fishermen in custody
2019	210	210	NIL
2020	74	74	NIL
2021	159	159	NIL
2022	268	268	NIL
2023	240	239	01(currently serving sentences)
2024	503	363	141 (96 serving sentences, 45 under trial)
