

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO-1141
ANSWERED ON-28.12.2017

Release of fishermen by Sri Lankan and Pakistani navies

1141 Ch. Sukhram Singh Yadav

Smt. Chhaya Verma

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the details of Indian fishermen detained by Pakistani and Sri Lankan navies who were fishing in the territorial waters of the country during the last three years;
- (b) the number of Indian fishermen currently kept in custody by Sri Lankan and Pakistani navies;
- (c) the steps taken towards release of such Indian fishermen kept in custody of Sri Lanka and Pakistan and the number of fishermen released during the last three years; and
- (d) the number of requests received at various level to get fishermen released and to bring them back to our country?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
[GEN. (DR) V. K. SINGH (RETD)]

(a) & (b) The details of Indian fishermen detained by Sri Lanka and Pakistan during the last three years are given below:

| Sl. No | Year | No of fishermen arrested |
|--------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| | | Sri Lanka Pakistan |
| 1 | 2014 | 787 435 |
| 2 | 2015 | 454 370 |
| 3 | 2016 | 290 316 |
| 4 | 2017 (till 22 December) | 440 387 |

As on 22 December 2017, the number of Indian fishermen in the custody of Sri Lanka is 140. As per available information, there are 537 believed

to be Indian fishermen in Pakistan's custody as on 22 December 2017.

(c) Government has regularly taken up with the Governments of Sri Lanka and Pakistan, the matter of early release and repatriation of India fishermen. Our High Commissions in Colombo and Islamabad provide humanitarian and legal assistance to the apprehended fishermen.

With Sri Lanka, the fishermen issues have been raised at the highest level including by the Prime Minister with the Sri Lankan Prime Minister during the latter's visit to India in November 2017. External Affairs Minister had also raised the matter with the Sri Lankan President and Prime Minister during her visit to Colombo earlier this year. This also figured in EAM's discussion with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka during the latter's visit to New Delhi in September 2017.

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 was institutionalized to address the fishermen issues. It was also agreed that Ministers for Fisheries of the two countries meet every six months to review the progress. So far three rounds of the JWG meeting have been held. The 3rd meeting of the JWG and the 2nd Ministerial meeting held on 13 October and 14 October 2017 respectively in New Delhi took stock of the measures taken by both sides to address the fishermen issues pending a permanent solution. As on 22 December 2017, 351 Indian fishermen have been released by Sri Lankan authorities in 2017. Sustained diplomatic efforts continue to secure the release of the remaining Indian fishermen from Sri Lankan custody.

The state of bilateral relations between India and Pakistan impinges on the release and repatriation of Indian fishermen. Even in the absence of a structured bilateral dialogue, both sides have released fishermen. In 2017, we have successfully secured the release and repatriation of 363 Indian fishermen, including 245 Indian fishermen who have been repatriated in the last six months. Further, Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has conveyed on 18 December 2017, the decision of Government of Pakistan to release/repatriate 291 Indian fishermen in batches of 145 and 146 on 29 December 2017 and 08 January 2018 respectively.

The number of Indian fishermen released from the custody of Sri Lanka and Pakistan during the last three years is given below:

| Sl.No | Year | No of Fishermen released | * |
|-------|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| | | Sri Lanka | Pakistan |
| 1 | 2014 | 1045 | 185 |
| 2 | 2015 | 375 | 448 |
| 3 | 2016 | 333 | 410 |
| 4 | 2017 (till 22 December) | 351 | 363 |

(*This number also includes fishermen arrested in previous years and not released earlier)

(d) Government continues to receive requests at various levels, including from Chief Ministers of the concerned States, highlighting cases of arrest of Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan and Pakistani authorities. Government of India attaches the highest priority to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen.