



Ministry of External Affairs

Fishermen in Custody of Sri Lanka

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The number of Indian fishermen in the custody of Sri Lankan authorities as on 17 July 2017 is 81 (eighty one).

Government regularly takes up the matter of early release and repatriation of Indian fishermen with the Government of Sri Lanka. Our High Commission in Colombo provides humanitarian and legal assistance to the apprehended fishermen. As a result of sustained diplomatic efforts, Government has so far secured the release of 174 fishermen in Sri Lankan custody in 2017.

Government has taken up the fishermen issues at the highest level, including by the Prime Minister with the Sri Lankan President and Prime Minister during his visit to Sri Lanka in May 2017. External Affairs Minister also raised the matter with the visiting Sri Lankan Prime Minister in April 2017 and subsequently with the Sri Lankan Minister of Foreign Affairs during the latter's visit to India in June 2017.

Following our 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 two rounds of the JWG meeting have been held. The 2nd meeting of the JWG held on 7 April 2017 in Colombo took stock of the implementation of the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) agreed to by both sides pending a permanent solution to the fishermen issues.

Government has taken several measures to encourage our fishermen to diversify into deep-sea fishing using tuna long-liners. An amount of Rupees 200 crore has been allocated by the Government during the current financial year as its share to support the fishermen under the "Assistance for Deep Sea Fishing" scheme. As part of the efforts to rehabilitate the fishermen, training and capacity building programmes commenced in January 2017. Three batches of fishermen from Tamil Nadu have been trained so far in deep-sea fishing, long-lining and onboard handling and processing of fish. Among other initiatives jointly implemented with the State Government of Tamil Nadu, construction of fishing harbours at Kunthukal and Mookaiyur is currently in progress.

This information was given by GEN. (DR) V. K. SINGH (RETD) the Minister of State for Ministry of External Affairs., in written reply to a question in Rajya Sabha today.

YSK

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