

TROUBLED WATERS: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA-SRI LANKA FISHING CONFLICT

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Sri Lanka

Fishermen from Tamil Nadu keep getting caught with alarming regularity in the territorial waters of Sri Lanka for “poaching”. Yet, the stakeholders concerned have yet to demonstrate the alacrity required for well-known solutions. In the latest development, the [Sri Lankan Navy arrested 22 fishermen](#) who are from Nagapattinam and neighbouring Karaikal, on Wednesday. There are already 29 fishermen in custody in Sri Lanka, as pointed out by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin in his [letter to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar](#) a few days ago. As per an estimate, Sri Lankan authorities have also impounded 84 boats. The frequency with which Tamil Nadu’s fishermen allegedly cross the International Maritime Boundary Line, despite being aware of the consequences, highlights their level of desperation driven by livelihood concerns. This is, however, not to absolve them of their culpability in endangering Sri Lanka’s marine biodiversity, which is of vital importance to Tamil fishermen of the Northern Province, who suffered in the civil war. The vexatious problem has also been aggravated by events over the past month — the reported death of two Jaffna fishermen following “mid-sea clashes with their Tamil Nadu counterparts” on January 27 and 29, subsequent protests by northern Sri Lankan fishermen, and the reported auctioning by Sri Lanka of 140 impounded boats even before a Tamil Nadu government team and fishermen’s representatives could visit Sri Lanka to finalise modalities on the disposal of unsalvageable boats. There has been no word from Colombo on permitting fishermen-devotees to attend, in March, the annual festival of St. Anthony’s Church at Katchatheevu.

Apart from getting the arrested fishermen released, the governments of the two countries should fix a date for an early meeting of the Joint Working Group, last held in December 2020. They should also facilitate the resumption of talks at the level of fisherfolk, especially from Tamil Nadu and the Northern Province. Sri Lanka should be proactive as its citizens in the North bear the brunt of the alleged acts of transgression. Besides, its positive actions would be in tune with what the Prime Ministers of India and Sri Lanka agreed at the virtual summit in September 2020 — to “continue engagement to address the issues related to fishermen through regular consultation and bilateral channels”. New Delhi should also consider providing additional incentives and concessions to fishermen of the Palk Bay districts of Tamil Nadu to elicit a better response from them for its deep sea fishing project. It could also propose assistance for the fishermen of the Northern Province as a gesture of goodwill. There is no paucity of ideas in the area of the Palk Bay fisheries conflict, but adequate action on the part of the stakeholders is found wanting.

[Our code of editorial values](#)

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com