

Indian fishermen back again and ‘crushing’ our livelihoods, say Sri Lankan counterparts

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Northern Tamil fishermen seek meeting with TN CM M.K. Stalin to discuss a “permanent solution”

Just after Tamil Nadu’s annual fishing ban ended mid-June, Indian fishing trawlers are back near Sri Lanka’s northern coast, “crushing” fishermen’s livelihoods that are already under enormous strain during the [island’s economic crisis](#), according to northern Sri Lankan fisher leaders.

“At least four of our fishermen’s nets, worth 6.5 lakh rupees [LKR], were damaged by the Indian trawlers yesterday in Point Pedro. The economic crisis has already impacted us severely, we don’t have enough kerosene for our boats. Now the return of the trawlers is just crushing what is left of our livelihoods,” said Annalingam Annarasa, leader of the federation of fisher cooperative societies in Jaffna, on Thursday.

Tamil Nadu’s annual fishing ban— to allow breeding of marine organisms— that lasts for nearly two months, usually offers some respite to northern Sri Lankan fishermen. Fishermen in Mannar, Jaffna, Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi could go fishing with greater hopes of a decent catch, and no fear of their nets being damaged.

However, this year, fishermen in the island’s northern, coastal districts hardly went to the sea during this time due to an acute shortage of kerosene, used by 90% of the fisherfolk for their modest boats. “We get some kerosene once in 12 or 14 days, and it’s just 20 litres per boat. Only about 20 % of our fishermen have been able to go out to the sea with that,” Mr. Annarasa told *The Hindu*.

Sri Lanka’s crippling economic crisis has compounded the northern fishing community’s old challenges of falling production and incomes, for which they mainly blame Indian trawlers that originate from Tamil Nadu and fish illegally in Sri Lankan waters. Their concern has persisted for well over a decade, but the problem remains unresolved.

In a recent news report from Mullaitivu, local television channel Newsfirst showed visuals of Indian trawlers, captured from the north-eastern coast of Sri Lanka, indicating that the fishing vessels had travelled well into Sri Lanka’s territorial waters, around the Jaffna Peninsula. Although the Sri Lankan Navy periodically arrests Indian fishermen on charges of “poaching”, it has not made any recent arrests owing to diesel shortages that have limited its patrol units, fishermen noted.

Destructive method

For the northern fishermen, it is the destructive fishing method of bottom trawling that is more of a concern than marine boundaries. “We have written to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu already. This fishing method will destroy our marine resources and that will be a blow not only to our, war-affected fishermen, but also to Tamil Nadu fishermen in the long run,” Mr. Annarasa pointed out.

Further, on Mr. Stalin's recent demand to the Centre to retrieve Katchatheevu, a Sri Lankan island, he said it amounted to destroying "the lives and livelihoods of 50,000 families and 2 lakh people" in northern Sri Lanka. Indian fishermen usually came well past Katchatheevu to reach the Sri Lankan coastline, he observed, suggesting that its "retrieval" was hardly a solution to the long-festering problem.

Meanwhile, emphasising the need to hold bilateral talks to resolve the fisheries problem, Mr. Annarasa said, "We have sought a meeting with Mr. Stalin. We must resume talks and find a permanent solution to this long-standing problem."

"Profusely thanking" the CM and the people of Tamil Nadu for the "timely assistance" extended to the people of Sri Lanka, he further added, "Finding a solution to the fisheries problem will only strengthen our relationship."

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