

Palk Bay news articles
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India and Sri Lanka: Bottom trawling in Palk Bay: Struggles of fish in Indo Sri Lankan Waters!

<https://mahabahu.com/bottomtrawlinginpalkbaystrugglesoffishinindosrilankanwaters/>

"Palk Bay is a narrow stretch of water separating the Tamil Nadu coast from Sri Lanka's Northern Province. Spanning 137 kilometers, it serves as a rich marine habitat, supporting over 580 species of fish. Among them are high value commercial species like tuna and shrimp, which play a significant role in export trade. For generations, Palk Bay has sustained fishing communities on both sides, providing them with livelihoods. However, this once thriving ecosystem now faces growing threats.

Destructive practices like bottom trawling have led to the overfishing of 65% of commercially important species in Tamil Nadu's waters. Compounding the crisis, human induced climate change is warming the oceans, while increasing pollution and growing tensions between India and Sri Lanka are further destabilizing this already fragile ecosystem. What is truly happening in Palk Bay, and what does the future hold for this vital ecosystem and the communities that depend on it?

India is the world's third largest fish producer, accounting for 8% of global fish production. The country's fishing industry saw a significant boost in the 1960s when Western aid agencies promoted the adoption of mechanized trawling among Indian fishers. During this period, international demand for shrimp was rising, with new markets emerging in the U.S., Japan, and Western Europe. Seizing this opportunity, India launched the Blue Revolution to capitalize on the demand and boost foreign revenue.

Both central and state governments heavily invested in trawl machinery, encouraging fishers to expand their shrimp catch. "Bottom trawling is used to catch prawns, as they primarily inhabit the seabed, which provides a conducive environment for their survival. Fishers employ twin nets, dragging them along the ocean floor using powerful engines. This practice severely impacts marine ecosystems, destroying seaweeds, coral reefs, and other vital seabed resources.

It is undoubtedly an unsustainable practice," says Herman Kumara, National Convenor of the National Fisheries Solidarity Organization (NAFSO). Over the following decades, fishery exports driven by trawling became a crucial part of India's economy. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka remained in a state of turmoil, grappling with a conflict that persisted on and off for a quarter of a century. The civil war led the Sri Lankan Navy to ban fishing along the coastal side of Palk Bay, devastating local livelihoods for nearly three decades. As Sri Lankan fishers were sidelined, Indian fleets intensified their trawling efforts, nearly tripling India's fisheries output during this period.

Over time, the expansion of trawlers and advanced fishing vessels depleted fish stocks on the Indian side of Palk Bay, forcing Indian fishers to cross the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL)—a demarcation that equally divides control of Palk Bay between India and Sri Lanka. By the time the civil war ended in 2009, more than 2,500 Indian trawlers, many equipped with larger engines and advanced technology, were operating in Sri Lankan waters of Palk Bay—a significant increase from around 700 trawlers in the 1970s. Meanwhile, Sri Lankan fishers, using small boats and traditional methods, stood little chance against these massive fleets. This gave rise to a conflict between territorial boundaries and traditional livelihoods.

“When Indian trawlers enter our waters, it has a devastating impact. It destroys the economy, the boats, the engines, and the nets. At times, the conflict escalates to such an extent that people lose their lives. The way of life, traditions, and peaceful existence of the community are being disrupted,” the National Convenor, NAFSO added. In 2024, a record 535 Indian fishermen were arrested by Sri Lanka for crossing the IMBL. As of November 29, 2024, 141 of these fishermen remained in Sri Lankan jails, and 198 trawlers had been seized.

India is working to shift away from unsustainable trawling practices through initiatives like the Palk Bay scheme and by promoting alternative livelihoods for fishermen. “The government is also implementing various regulatory mechanisms to better manage fisheries. For certain species, we have introduced notifications, such as minimum legal zones, and mechanized fishing is banned during specific periods to support the reproductive cycles of fish, allowing for stronger and sustained reproduction. If fishing pressure rises or trends indicate it might, we must also offer alternative, diversified livelihood options.

The Government of India, in collaboration with the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, will play a key role in developing these alternatives for communities in those areas. These include mariculture activities such as cage farming, seaweed farming, and other related ventures that can generate income for local populations,” said Dr. Grinson George, Director of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute. However, these changes are occurring at a slow pace. At the same time, the accelerating effects of climate change, such as ocean warming and coral bleaching, are further aggravating the situation.

In 2022, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that the Indian Ocean has warmed faster than any other ocean since the 1950s. Warmer waters hinder the growth of phytoplankton, which form the foundation of the marine food chain. Over the past 60 years, phytoplankton populations in the Indian Ocean have declined by as much as 20%. Consequently, fish are migrating farther in search of food, forcing fishermen to venture further out into the sea. “Due to climate change, fish are now migrating deeper into the sea, forcing fishermen to travel

farther to catch them. Previously, they would fish up to 4 or 5 kilometers, but now they go as far as 10 to 15 kilometers, increasing their expenses.

This also contributes more to global warming as they travel further. Additionally, this creates a social issue, as fishermen cross into foreign waters. At the same time, the move to deeper waters means that fresh fish are not as readily available to the public as they once were, putting food security at risk,” the National Convenor, NAFSO said. “In the IndoSri Lankan region, coral reefs are predominant. However, since 1998, we have witnessed serious coral bleaching incidents. The coral reef ecosystem here is highly sensitive, and if bleaching occurs, it can impact the breeding physiology of certain fish species. Reefs are considered essential habitats for some marine resources.

Such changes also affect the marine ecosystem’s structure and function, influencing the abundance of species like pufferfish and jellyfish,” said the Director, CMFRI This issue extends beyond Palk Bay. In the North Atlantic, a “mackerel war” has erupted between Iceland and several other nations, as warming waters have pushed mackerel closer to Iceland’s shores, putting the entire North East Atlantic mackerel population at risk. Similar conflicts are unfolding between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, between Somali fishermen and international trawlers, and in many other regions.

“At times, the crisis we face is one of the major challenges, and we need to find a solution. This issue extends beyond coastal areas to inland fisheries as well. Inland water bodies are either drying up or submerging surrounding areas.

It’s a global phenomenon, and thus, we need a global solution. While the conservation agenda, like the 30/30 initiative, is being promoted, it often overlooks the rights and values of fisher communities, Adivasi forest communities, and other coastal communities, ignoring their customary tenure rights. I believe that laws alone won’t bring about positive change. The solution must involve dialogue between people, fostering coexistence. Without this, we cannot move forward,” said the National Convenor. Fish and seafood are vital sources of livelihood and protein for millions of people worldwide. In the era of climate change, coexistence is crucial. For any solution to be effective, communities and governments must collaborate to chart a way forward, considering each other’s needs and the challenges of a changing planet.

Sri Lanka: Handling troubled waters: Colombo needs a fresh perspective

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/05022025handlingtroubledwaterscolomboneedsafreshperspectiveoped/>

"Katchatheevu, once dismissed by Indira Gandhi as a "sheer rock with no strategic significance," has now become a hotspot of unrest in Palk Bay. This serves as a striking example of how a place initially deemed strategically unimportant can later transform into a contentious issue, straining the ties between two countries.

The use of force against Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy in Palk Bay, Park Strait, and the Gulf of Mannar is not a new phenomenon in the island nation. During the Mahinda Rajapaksa era, numerous Indian (Tamil) fishermen were killed in shootings by the Sri Lankan Navy. After a long gap, a similar episode has occurred under the National People's Power government (NPP), invigorating memories of past tensions.

On January 28, five Indian fishermen were injured, two of them sustaining serious injuries, due to gunfire from the Sri Lankan Navy while fishing near Delft Island in the Palk Strait. India lodged a strong protest with its Sri Lankan counterparts in New Delhi, emphasising the "need to treat issues pertaining to fishermen in a humane and humanitarian manner, keeping in mind livelihood concerns. The use of force is not acceptable under any circumstances whatsoever. Existing understandings between the two governments in this regard must be strictly observed."

However, the Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN), Vice Admiral Kanchana Banagoda, stated that according to initial investigations, the two Indian fishermen who were injured during a boarding operation of an Indian fishing boat poaching off Kankesanthurai (KKS) in Sri Lankan waters. Following this, Defence Secretary Air Vice Marshal (Retd.) Sampath Thuyacontha emphasised that Sri Lanka will continue to inspect vessels entering its waters, regardless of their country of origin, in accordance with legal protocols to prevent illegal activities.

No one truly knows what happened at sea, as each side attempts to justify its own actions. However, beyond these justifications, the NPP government must treat this as a humanitarian issue and focus on finding an amicable solution to this longstanding problem to prevent further escalation.

While this issue is fundamentally tied to India Sri Lanka relations, successive governments have consistently framed the fishermen's dispute as a matter limited to Sri Lanka's Northern Province. This trend became particularly evident after Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed Douglas Devananda, a northern centric Tamil politician, as the Minister of Fisheries. As a Jaffna based Member of Parliament, Devananda's approach primarily focused on appeasing the coastal community of the Northern Province. Notably, Gotabaya's tenure marked the appointment of the Tamil minister of fisheries since 1952.

The NPP government's approach appears to mirror the strategy that persisted under Gotabaya's administration. The incumbent NPP Minister of Fisheries, Ramalingam Chandrasekaran, is similarly attempting to address this issue by prioritising the concerns of northern fishermen. On the other hand, fishermen's societies in the Northern Province frequently assert that India bears sole responsibility for resolving this conflict. This raises the question of whether the issue is being deliberately amplified to foster anti-Indian sentiment among Tamils in the Northern Province.

It was against this backdrop that the Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka engaged with the Northern Province's fishermen societies. During Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda's visit to China which coincided with the tenth anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) China pledged Rs. 1.5 billion (Sri Lankan rupees) to bolster the fisheries sector in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Given this context, the fishermen's dispute in Palk Bay no longer revolves solely around livelihoods; China's strategic engagement has injected a geopolitical air into the matter.

Although various proposals have been put forward under different circumstances to resolve the Sri Lanka India fishermen dispute, all efforts have fallen short of delivering a permanent solution. Historical experience suggests that a lasting resolution remains elusive.

In March 2024, the Centre for Strategic Studies Trincomalee (CSST) proposed establishing an Indo Lanka Naval Task Force in Palk Bay, recommending that Katchatheevu be considered a joint station for these naval operations between the two countries. This will prevent arbitrary arrests by the SLN and deter Indian fishermen when they try to cross the maritime boundary. This is the only way to prevent tension from escalating further. The CSST stressed that such a collaborative framework is essential to deescalate tensions and prevent further conflict.

"In reexamining the situation, the NPP government should seriously consider the idea of leasing Katchatheevu to India. If China can lease Hambantota for 99 years, there should be no problem extending a similar arrangement for Katchatheevu."

Fishermen around the world often trespass maritime boundaries it is a common occurrence, as they naturally follow 'wherever the fish moves'. However, when such disputes begin to disrupt bilateral ties between nations, a more strategic and humanitarian approach is required. During his March 2015 visit to Sri Lanka, Indian Prime Minister Modi labelled the dispute a "livelihood and humanitarian concern" requiring a long term solution. This was also reaffirmed in the recent joint statement by both leaders, which underscored the need to continue to address the fishermen's dispute through a humanitarian manner.

Amid the growing geopolitical competition between India and China in the Indian Ocean, it is

crucial for both governments to adopt the above recommendations. As a small country pursuing a delicate balancing act in foreign policy, Colombo should collaborate closely with New Delhi to transform this strategically vital region of the Indian Ocean into a zone of cooperation rather than conflict."

India: Climate conflicts: What is the role of climate change in the India Sri Lanka fisheries conflict?

<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/environment/climateconflictswhatistheroleofclimatechangeintheIndiaSrilankafisheriesconflict>

For generations, the Palk Bay has been the lifeblood of both the Tamil and Sri Lankan fishing communities, supporting their livelihoods. But today, this once thriving ecosystem is under threat. Driven by destructive practices like bottom trawling, 65 per cent of the commercially important varieties have been overfished in Tamil Nadu waters.

On top of that, human induced climate change is warming the oceans, while rising pollution and escalating conflict between India and Sri Lanka are making an already fragile situation worse. So, what is really happening here? And what lies ahead for Palk Bay and the communities that depend on it?

India summons Lankan envoy, lodges 'strong protest' over firing on Indian fishermen

<https://english.gujaratsamachar.com/news/national/indiasummonslankanenvoylodgesstrongprotestoverfiringonindianfishermen>

"India on Tuesday summoned the Sri Lankan envoy in New Delhi to lodge a strong protest over an incident of firing by the Sri Lankan Navy during the apprehension of 13 Indian fishermen in the proximity of Delft Island, earlier in the day.

Acting High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to India, Priyanga Wickramasinghe, was summoned by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), while the Indian High Commission in Colombo also raised the matter with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Sri Lankan government.

"Out of the 13 fishermen who were on board the fishing vessel, two have sustained serious injuries and are currently receiving treatment at the Jaffna Teaching Hospital. Three other fishermen received minor injuries and have been treated for the same. Indian Consulate Officials in Jaffna have visited the injured fishermen at the hospital to seek their welfare and are extending all possible assistance to the fishermen and their families," read an MEA statement.

The detained fishermen, hailing from Rameswaram and Pudukottai in Tamil Nadu, were taken

to Jaffna, where they are expected to face judicial proceedings. Their mechanised fishing boat was also seized.

The total number of Tamil Nadu fishermen detained by Sri Lankan authorities in the last three days now stands at 47, with three high value mechanised boats also confiscated.

The recurring arrests underscore the challenges faced by Tamil Nadu's fishing community, particularly in the Palk Bay region, where fishermen frequently face detentions while pursuing their livelihoods.

“Government of India has always emphasised the need to treat issues pertaining to fishermen in a humane and humanitarian manner, keeping in mind livelihood concerns. The use of force is not acceptable under any circumstances whatsoever. Existing understandings between the two Governments in this regard must be strictly observed,” the MEA statement added.

India had raised the issue during Sri Lankan President Anura Dissanayake's visit to India, last month. However, despite these discussions, the arrests continue, prompting frustration and fear among fishermen. Since June 2024, the Sri Lankan Navy has detained 425 Tamil Nadu fishermen and also seized 58 fishing boats.

The frequent arrests have sparked protests and demands for a long term resolution to protect the livelihood of fishing communities. Former Union Minister and PMK President Anbumani Ramadoss have called on the government to take strong measures to safeguard the interests of the fishermen and prevent further detentions.

The situation emphasises the need for a coordinated diplomatic effort between India and Sri Lanka to resolve maritime boundary disputes and ensure that fishermen can continue their traditional livelihood without fear or uncertainty."

India and Sri Lanka: Beyond borders: Palk Bay fishing dispute as a test of regional cooperation

<https://island.lk/beyondborderspalkbayfishingdisputeasatestofregionalcooperation/>

As the New Year unfolds, India and Sri Lanka find themselves at a pivotal juncture in their decades long Palk Bay fishing dispute a conflict that has simmered for years but now holds the promise of resolution following recent high level diplomatic engagements. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's recent visit to New Delhi has reignited hopes for resolution. Yet, this is no ordinary diplomatic challenge. The dispute encapsulates complex socioeconomic pressures, ecological devastation, and political sensitivities on both sides of the narrow strait separating the

two nations.

This moment demands careful diplomacy and a strategic vision. India and Sri Lanka cannot afford piecemeal fixes or short term palliatives. The stakes economic livelihoods, biodiversity, and regional stability are simply too high.

Why This Issue Demands Urgent Attention

The Palk Bay is no pristine paradise. Decades of overfishing, coupled with destructive practices like bottom trawling, have turned what was once a richly biodiverse marine habitat into an increasingly barren seascape. For Sri Lanka, these waters represent a lifeline for communities in the warravaged Northern Province, where fishing supports thousands of families and ensures food security. Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu's fishing communities, reeling from declining catches in domestic waters; see the Palk Bay as their economic lifeblood.

The dispute is exacerbated by starkly divergent pressures. Sri Lanka views incursions by Indian trawlers as ecological sabotage. For India, the political imperative to protect Tamil Nadu's fishermen frequently overrides environmental and cross border concerns. It is a delicate dance—where political expediency risks outweighing long term strategy

A Window of Opportunity

The time is ripe for change. President Dissanayake's visit to India signals a willingness to recalibrate relations. But the real test lies in translating good intentions into sustainable solutions. This requires a bold, multipronged strategy.

1. Joint Scientific Research and Sustainable Fishing Practices

First, science must lead the way. India and Sri Lanka should establish a joint scientific body tasked with conducting regular stock assessments and mapping biodiversity hotspots. Such initiatives, grounded in transparency, would build trust and guide policy decisions. Technology offers additional tools. Indonesia's successful adoption of Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) demonstrates how real time tracking of fishing vessels can deter illegal activities and enforce compliance with maritime boundaries. Both nations should invest in this technology, ensuring that regulations are not just rules on paper.

But technology alone is not enough. A phased transition away from destructive bottom trawling is imperative. Financial incentives can encourage fishermen to adopt more sustainable gear, such as gillnets or hand lines, while Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) could offer a sanctuary for marine life to recover. The Philippines' Tubbataha Reefs show the transformative potential of MPAs, where fish biomass surged by 200% within five years of protection.

2. Economic Diversification and Alternative Livelihoods

No solution will succeed without addressing the economic realities of fishing communities. Overfishing isn't just an ecological issue it's an economic one, born of desperation and lack of alternatives.

Aquaculture as a Safety Net

Sustainable aquaculture could provide much needed relief. Initiatives like seaweed farming and cage culture not only offer alternative income sources but also align with environmental goals. Vietnam's thriving seaweed industry has proven how small scale farming can lift thousands of families out of poverty while improving water quality. Similarly, Thailand's adoption of cage farming has boosted local economies without depleting natural ecosystems.

Skills Training for New Horizons

Fishermen should also have pathways to non-fishing livelihoods. Marine tourism offers untapped potential, particularly in the Palk Bay's biodiverse waters. Dolphin watching tours, ecotourism expeditions, or culinary ventures featuring fresh seafood could attract international visitors. Coastal regions in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka are ideally suited for such enterprises. Meanwhile, training programmes in seafood processing or renewable energy could open doors to entirely new sectors. Tamil Nadu's burgeoning wind and solar energy industries are already creating jobs, and there's no reason why coastal communities shouldn't benefit. Disaster preparedness training and roles in marine conservation could also utilise fishermen's expertise in navigating the ocean while providing stable incomes.

3. Strengthening Cross Border Cooperation

Regional disputes often fester in the absence of dialogue. It is essential to strengthen communication channels—not just between governments, but also at the community level. Regular forums where fishing communities can exchange ideas and grievances could help defuse tensions. Joint patrols to monitor fishing activity and enforce regulations would demonstrate shared commitment and build trust. Malaysia and Thailand's collaboration in the Gulf of Thailand is a case in point, where harmonised policies and joint training have reduced conflicts and boosted cooperation.

Sri Lanka and India must also think beyond borders when designing their frameworks for cooperation. Cross border cooperative bodies, modelled on Vietnam's local fishing cooperatives, could empower communities to take shared responsibility for sustainable practices.

4. Learning from the Region

South Asia and Southeast Asia provide a rich repository of examples for India and Sri Lanka to draw upon. Consider Bangladesh and Myanmar, which resolved disputes in the Bay of Bengal through joint research and a standing dispute resolution committee. Or Indonesia, whose hardline stance against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing—combined with technological enforcement—has drastically reduced violations in its waters.

Vietnam's decentralised management of its fisheries through cooperatives is another success story. By empowering local communities to enforce regulations and manage resources, Vietnam has achieved both ecological sustainability and economic resilience.

These examples share a common thread: collaboration, whether between nations or within communities, is the cornerstone of lasting solutions.

A Balancing Act for the Future

The Palk Bay fishing dispute is emblematic of a broader challenge facing the region: how to balance rapid economic development with environmental conservation and regional stability. For India, this is an opportunity to demonstrate leadership—not by imposing its will, but by fostering true cooperation. Sri Lanka, for its part, must resist the temptation to view this as a zero sum game.

The stakes couldn't be higher. Mismanagement risks not only economic devastation for vulnerable communities but also irreparable damage to the marine ecosystems on which they depend. Conversely, a well-managed resolution could turn the Palk Bay into a global model for sustainable fisheries management, enhanced livelihoods, and regional collaboration.

Conclusion:

President Dissanayake's visit offers more than just a diplomatic milestone it is a call to action. India and Sri Lanka must seize this moment to craft a bold, long term vision for the Palk Bay. That vision must centre on sustainability, cooperation, and a commitment to balancing economic progress with ecological preservation.

The Palk Bay is more than a body of water. It is a shared resource, a shared responsibility, and a shared future. Let us ensure it becomes a symbol of what we can achieve together, rather than a reminder of what we failed to protect."

Tamil Nadu: Marine ecosystem Status and Health Monitoring 202324

<https://island.lk/marineecosystemstatusandhealthmonitoring202324/>

The Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay, biodiversity hotspots along India's southeastern coastline, play a pivotal role in sustaining marine ecosystems and supporting the livelihoods of coastal communities. Amid growing concerns about climate change and human induced pressures, a comprehensive study, titled Marine Ecosystem Status and Health Monitoring 202324, has brought much needed attention to these vital regions.

Edited by Dr. Terney Pradeep Kumara of the University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka, along with Dr. Jayanthi M. of the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board and Dr. J. K. Patterson Edward from the Suganthi Devadason Marine Research Institute, this publication focuses the importance of regular ecosystem monitoring.

Speaking to The Island, Dr. Kumara, Professor in Oceanography, Department of Oceanography and Marine Geology, University of Ruhuna/ Director of the Centre for International Affairs (CINTA), told The Island: "Marine ecosystems are the lifelines of coastal economies. Their degradation not only impacts biodiversity but also the communities that depend on them. Our study aims to provide actionable insights for sustainable management." With over 4,000 species reported in the Gulf of Mannar alone, these ecosystems are treasures of marine biodiversity. The report, authored by V. Naganathan, Deepak S. Bilgi, A. S. Marimuthu, T. K. Ashok Kumar, and Bakan Jagdish Sudhakar, highlights several key findings:

Coral Reefs: Live coral cover has seen a slight recovery in the Gulf of Mannar, increasing from 23.3% in 2022 to 23.5% in 2023. However, the Palk Bay's coral cover remains precariously low at 18.4%.

Seagrass and Mangroves: Seagrass beds, critical for carbon sequestration, exhibit varying health across regions, while mangroves, vital for coastal protection, remain under threat from anthropogenic activities.

Pollution: While physicochemical parameters are largely within safe limits, seasonal fluctuations and marine debris continue to pose significant challenges.

Dr. Kumara emphasizes the global significance of these findings:

“As part of the Indo Pacific realm, the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay hold a unique place in global marine conservation efforts. Collaborative actions between India and Sri Lanka are crucial.”

The report, backed by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department, and other key stakeholders, provides a framework for future conservation efforts. Dr. Kumara and his coeditors, Dr. Jayanthi and Dr. Patterson Edward, hope the findings will catalyze policy changes and foster stronger community involvement.

“This decade is critical,” Dr. Kumara concludes. “We must act now to ensure that future generations inherit thriving oceans.”

For conservationists, policymakers, and researchers alike, this report is a clarion call to protect the invaluable marine ecosystems of the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay.

Marine Ecosystem Monitoring: Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay (20232024)

The Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay, located along the southeastern coast of India, are biodiversity hotspots with immense ecological and economic significance. These marine ecosystems encompass coral reefs, seagrass meadows, and mangrove forests, supporting a vast array of flora and fauna while providing livelihoods to coastal communities. This article explores the findings of the 202324 monitoring report, highlighting the status and health of these ecosystems, the threats they face, and recommendations for their conservation.

The Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay fall within the Indo Pacific realm, known as the world’s richest region for marine biodiversity. With over 4,000 species reported in the Gulf of Mannar and nearly 3,300 species in Palk Bay, these ecosystems are critical for sustaining marine life. The Gulf of Mannar is India’s first marine biosphere reserve and was designated as a Ramsar site in 2022.

However, these ecosystems are vulnerable to both climatic and nonclimatic factors, including coral bleaching, pollution, overfishing, and habitat destruction. Recognizing this, the Tamil Nadu Forest Department has established permanent monitoring sites to assess and manage the health of these vital habitats.

Coral reefs are among the most biologically diverse ecosystems on Earth. The monitoring data for 202324 revealed a slight improvement in coral health in the Gulf of Mannar compared to previous years:

The live coral cover averaged 23.5% in the Gulf of Mannar and 18.4% in Palk Bay. However, these figures are significantly lower than the baseline of 37% recorded in 2005 due to multiple bleaching events and human-induced stressors.

Some 70 coral species were identified in the Gulf of Mannar and 36 in Palk Bay. Massive corals dominated, followed by branching and table forms.

Juvenile Coral Density: This metric, indicative of reproductive success, averaged 9.0 m² in the Gulf of Mannar and 5.8 m² in Palk Bay.

Coral reefs are threatened by invasive species like *Kappaphycus alvarezii*, marine debris, and rising sea temperatures, which have consistently exceeded the bleaching threshold during summers.

Seagrass Meadows

Seagrass beds are crucial for nutrient cycling, coastal protection, and as habitats for species like dugongs and sea turtles. The study recorded:

Seagrass Cover: The Gulf of Mannar showed seagrass coverage ranging between 27.9% and 67.8%, while Palk Bay ranged between 19.5% and 60.9%.

Species Diversity: Nine seagrass species were identified, with *Cymodocea serrulata*, *Syringodium isoetifolium*, and *Thalassia hemprichii* being the most common.

Shoot Density: Higher in regions with greater seagrass cover, showcasing a healthy ecosystem.

Mangrove Forests

Mangroves are natural buffers against coastal erosion and provide critical habitats for marine organisms. The study recorded:

Gulf of Mannar: The largest mangrove cover was in the Tamiraparani river estuary, spanning 172 hectares. Four mangrove species were identified, including *Avicennia marina* and *Rhizophora mucronata*.

Palk Bay: The Karankadu region had the highest mangrove cover of 250 hectares, with three dominant species.

Challenges: Mangroves face threats from habitat destruction, pollution, and encroachment.

Coastal Pollution

Physicochemical parameters indicated that water and sediment quality were generally within acceptable levels. However, seasonal fluctuations caused by strong winds and water currents led to elevated turbidity and suspended solid levels. Heat stress during summer also exacerbated coral bleaching.

Marine Debris: Significant debris was observed, affecting 838 m² of reef area in the Gulf of Mannar and 90 m² in Palk Bay.

Conservation Efforts and Recommendations

The Tamil Nadu Forest Department has taken steps to mitigate threats and improve the health of these ecosystems:

Invasive Species Control: Manual removal of *Kappaphycus alvarezii* has significantly reduced its spread.

Community Involvement: Programmes, like Eco development committees and self-help groups, empower local communities to engage in conservation.

Regular Monitoring: Permanent monitoring sites provide long term data critical for effective management.

Recommendations:

Strengthen marine protected areas and expand eco-sensitive zones.

Promote sustainable fishing practices and regulate tourism.

Enhance public awareness about marine conservation.

Continue monitoring and restore degraded habitats using scientific interventions.

The Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay are ecological treasures that require vigilant protection. While the current state of these ecosystems is fair, ongoing threats necessitate robust conservation efforts. By fostering a balance between biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods, these marine ecosystems can thrive for generations to come."

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen conflict: Looking from the other side of the Palk Bay

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamilnadu/2024/Dec/14/fishermenconflictlookingfromtheothersideofthepalkbay>

"On an early Sunday morning in November, 52-year-old Rathnavadivel Ravichandrarasa, a fisherman from Mullaitivu in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, and his friends gathered on the beach in a makeshift shed their usual hangout spot when they don't have to venture into the sea. Pointing to a school of dead puffer fish, locally called mullu peththai, that just washed ashore, he said, ""This is an indication that bottom trawlers from Tamil Nadu were fishing near our coast yesterday or the day before.""

The puffer fish is among the large quantities of bycatch discarded in the sea from boats engaged in bottom trawling, an environmentally harmful but highly profitable and nonselective fishing method that scrapes the ocean's bed and ends up damaging the benthic ecosystem, including juveniles, nontarget species and coral reefs.

Francis Antonvictor, another fisherman, said, ""On some days, trawlers, which usually come in groups, are visible from the Mullaitivu beach itself. That means they are just two or three nautical miles from our coast," he said, alleging how far fishermen from Tamil Nadu's east coast venture beyond the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) separating India from the island nation.

Troubled waters of Palk Bay

Trawlers from TN's coastal districts like Ramanathapuram, Pudukkottai, Thanjavur, Thiruvarur and Nagapattinam entering Sri Lankan waters is a contentious issue not only in the Palk Bay between Mannar and Jaffna districts on SL's northwest coast, but also on the northeast coast near Mullaitivu, the fishermen said.

Unlike Tamil Nadu which boasts a huge fleet of mechanised trawlers, almost all the fishermen from Mullaitivu own kerosene-powered Outboard Engine Fibreglass Reinforced Plastic Boats (OFRPs), which are of a lesser capacity suited only for intraday fishing expeditions.

"This (October to January) is traditionally our shrimp season. There was a time when we could survive a whole year with the catch collected in these months. Today, most families are deep in debt. While getting up to 50 kg fish in a day was not uncommon earlier, now we consider ourselves lucky if we manage at least 20 kg," said 32-year-old Sabamalai Reginald, a fourth-generation fisherman who started going to the sea as a teenager.

However, Reginald is firm that his children should settle on another livelihood. "There will be nothing left for their generation if we don't end this practice of trawling," he added.

The umbilical cord

When asked about the furore in Tamil Nadu triggered by the continuous arrests of Indian fishermen and seizure of their boats by the Sri Lankan Navy, Ravichandrarasa said they feel

sorry for those getting arrested since most of them are poor daily wage labourers and not wealthy boat owners. “However, when I am not able to feed my own family, I cannot sympathise with those from the other side of the sea (Tamil Nadu), who continue to exploit us even though we supposedly share an “umbilical cord” relation,” he added.

“Thoppul kodi uravu”, which means connected through the umbilical cord, was a term brought up invariably in all conversations TNIE had with the fishing community in Mullaitivu and Jaffna districts, to highlight the cultural ties between the Tamil speaking people of both countries and to stress how they are being betrayed in the name of such a relationship.

Despite this relation, an amicable solution has eluded the conflict between the fishing communities of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. The fisherfolk in the Tamil speaking northern province of Sri Lanka are yet to recover from the armed ethnic conflict that lasted for over three decades and ended with the final Eelam War in 2009.

Their resources are minuscule compared to that of Tamil Nadu. To put it in perspective, there are 5,440 registered mechanised boats in Tamil Nadu that are suited for multiday fishing expeditions, including trawling. More than 60% of these operate from the coastal districts along Palk Bay.

In contrast, entire Sri Lanka has only 5,088 Inboard Multiday Boats (IMULs), which are comparable to TN's mechanised boats, as per its Fisheries Statistics 2023. Of these, only 141 (2.7%) operate from the northern coastal districts of Mannar, Jaffna, Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi even though this region accounts for 27% of the country's fishing households.

Similarly, of the 25 fishing harbours in the country, only one is in the Northern Province at Myliddy in Jaffna district, which was constructed in 2019 but remains largely unusable according to the fishermen.

A line drawn in water

Tamil Nadu fishermen, meanwhile, maintain that they have enjoyed traditional fishing rights across Palk Bay for centuries and cannot be restricted by the IMBL drawn up by the neighbouring nations in 1974 and 1976. They say that the IMBL, which lies at nine nautical miles (nm) at its shortest and 34 nm at its longest along Palk Bay, is too small an area.

While asserting their traditional fishing rights, the Tamil Nadu fishermen, also note that the majority of the arrests and the use of force by the SL Navy, which has at times even resulted in deaths and damages to boats, happened when they had not crossed the IMBL.

A policy note of Tamil Nadu's Fisheries Department stated that "protection of traditional fishing rights of fishermen in Tamil Nadu" in Palk Bay is one of its top agenda, but stresses that the state's fishermen are being arrested by SL Navy under the "pretext" of crossing the IMBL.

"Firstly, this twisting of facts by the media, politicians and fishermen in Tamil Nadu should stop. How can we arrive at a solution when they are not even acknowledging that they are engaging in bottom trawling in our waters," asked Nagarasa Varnakulasingam, a sexagenarian fishing community leader from Jaffna district, whose fishing nets were reportedly damaged six times in the last four years by TN trawlers. He rued that each damage cost him roughly LKR12 lakh (roughly Rs 30,000 to Rs 60,000).

On the day before TNIE was in Jaffna, a group of TN fishermen were arrested and their boats were seized by the Lankan Navy. Before being sent for judicial remand, they were kept in an open shed at the fishing harbour in Myliddy, where tens of seized trawlers from Tamil Nadu are berthed without maintenance.

The arrest, which triggered protests in Ramanathapuram district, was reported in Indian media as an "alleged" case of IMBL crossing. The detained fishermen, however, told TNIE that they were indeed on Sri Lankan waters when they were arrested...

India: Bottom trawling by Indian fishermen must stop: Sri Lanka's Fisheries Minister
<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/bottomtrawlingbyindianfishermenmuststopsrilankasfisheriesminister/article68977145.ece>

"The enduring fisheries conflict in the Palk Bay which impacts fisher folk of northern Sri Lanka and daily wage fishermen of Tamil Nadu can be decisively resolved only if the Indian side stops using the destructive bottom trawling method, according to Sri Lanka's Minister of Fisheries Ramalingam Chandrasekar.

The fisheries conflict has remained a key diplomatic issue between India and Sri Lanka for many years. It is likely to be discussed during President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's scheduled visit to India next week.

"People from all ethnic groups and geographic regions, including the north, east, and hill country, voted for us (National People's Power alliance), giving us a big mandate in the recently held elections. We have a responsibility to address their concerns," said Mr. Chandrasekar, who represents the northern Jaffna district in parliament. "The long persisting problem of bottom trawlers used by Indian fishermen, originating from Tamil Nadu, has been the chief concern of our northern fishing communities," he told The Hindu on Wednesday (December 11, 2024) at the Ministry of Fisheries.

Solving the Indo Lanka fisheries conflict is part of the NPP government's comprehensive plans to enhance Sri Lanka's fish production using modern technology and sustainable methods, he said. The country's per capita fish consumption, which was 17.2 kg in 2017, has now declined to 11.07 kg, reflecting a reduction in people's protein intake, according to the NPP's pre-poll manifesto. Malnutrition has come under sharp focus, especially after the country's painful economic crash in 2022. "We need to enhance seafood production to ensure people have access to nutrition. To do all that, we need our sea and our marine biodiversity to be protected," Mr. Chandrasekar said.

Destructive method

The fisheries conflict in the Palk Bay is largely over competing livelihoods amid a fast depleting catch. While a bilaterally agreed, imaginary maritime boundary line demarcates territorial waters of the neighbours, northern Sri Lankan fishermen have for long pointed to bottom trawling as the underlying problem.

"Bottom trawlers" are fishing vessels that typically drag large fishing nets along the seabed, scooping out everything from eggs and baby fish to marine vegetation, in addition to the target catch of fish or shrimps. For several decades, Indian fishermen from different coastal states, including Tamil Nadu, have used the practice that has boosted India's seafood exports and yielded high profits.

After discussing the issue in a 2016 bilateral meeting, India and Sri Lanka set up a 'Joint Working Group' that, among other things, agreed to "expedite the transition towards ending the practice of bottom trawling at the earliest". However, there has been no respite, according to Tamil fishermen living along Sri Lanka's northern coast, who are among the worst affected in the island's protracted civil war that ended in 2009. Fifteen years since, they have been unable to rebuild their livelihoods, primarily because of the damaging effects of bottom trawling by Indian fishermen.

Sri Lanka banned the practice in 2017 and imposed stiff fines on foreign vessels in 2018. Despite the moves, and the ceaseless appeals from their northern Sri Lankan counterparts, Tamil Nadu fishermen are yet to give up the destructive practice.

On the other hand, daily wage Tamil Nadu fishermen engaged by the trawler owners are frequently arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy on charges of engaging in illegal fishing in Sri Lanka's territorial waters, and the vessels are seized. The arrests so far in 2024 total over 530, more than double last year's figure. Over 400 of those have been released and repatriated, official updates showed.

On Wednesday (December 11, 2024), Indian High Commissioner Santosh Jha called on the Minister at his office and “stressed for a humanitarian & constructive approach in addressing the fishermen issue. Requested early release of fishermen in custody,” the High Commission posted on X.

Sri Lanka greatly valued India’s critical and timely assistance during the economic crisis of 2022, and President Dissanayake’s government appreciates the importance of the country’s India ties, the Sri Lankan Minister noted. “India is not only Sri Lanka’s close neighbour and important development partner, but a country that shares historic and cultural ties... Our grandparents and great grandparents hailed from India,” said Mr. Chandrasekhar, who is from Sri Lanka’s Malaiyaha (hill country) Tamil community, brought down by the British two centuries ago to work in Sri Lanka’s plantations. “Many of us still have familial links in Tamil Nadu,” he said, urging the people and governments of India and Tamil Nadu to see the “larger picture” in the fisheries problem.

“There is a tendency to view the fisheries conflict as one between Tamil Nadu fishermen and the Sri Lankan Navy... but they must understand that bottom trawling has severely affected the livelihoods of Tamil fishermen in northern Sri Lanka, who have suffered huge losses during the war,” he said.

Pointing to several rounds of official talks and past discussions among fisher leaders, the Minister said: “Different actors have politicised this issue for their own gains, finding no real solution. Solving this problem will need political will from both sides. Our government is committed to finding a durable solution; we owe it to the northern fishermen who have placed their trust on us. And we must do this to protect our marine ecosystem”.

Bottom trawling by Indian fishermen must stop: Sri Lanka’s Fisheries Minister

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/bottomtrawlingbyindianfishermenmuststoprilankasfisheriesminister/article68977145.ece>

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Tamil Nadu: Sri Lankan Navy apprehends eight Indian fishermen, captures two boats
<https://www.wionews.com/indianews/srilankannavycapturestwoboatsapprehendseightindianfishermen782562>

"The Sri Lankan Navy apprehended eight Indian fishermen and captured two boats off the coast of Ramanathapuram on Sunday morning. The apprehended fishermen who belong to Ramanathapuram have been identified as Mangadu Bhatrappan (55), Reddayurani, Kannan (52), Chinna ReddayurMuthuraj (55), Agasthiyar Kutam Kali (50) and Thangachimad Yasin (46), Jesus, Uchipulli Ramakrishnan and Velu including 8 fishermen was arrested and taken to the Kangesanturai Naval Camp.

According to the Mandapam Fishermen Association, the apprehended fishermen had gone to the sea from Mandapam. They were fishing in the Palk Bay Sea area when the Sri Lankan Navy came to the area early this morning claiming that the fishermen had crossed the border."

India: Sharing resources on fishermen and the Palk Bay dispute

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/%E2%80%8Bsharingresourcesonfishermenandthepalkbaydispute/article68825844.ece>

"India rightly used the sixth meeting of the India Sri Lanka Joint Working Group on Fisheries, in Colombo on October 29, as an opportunity to again call for a meeting between fishermen of both countries to resolve the vexed problem of fishing in the Palk Bay. In a meeting in Colombo between India's High Commissioner Santosh Jha and Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, stress was laid on the "importance of a long term resolution that respects the needs of fishermen ... and promotes cooperation".

Mr. Dissanayake affirmed his commitment to protecting Sri Lanka's interests. Weeks earlier, when India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met the President, the subject had come up for discussion. The idea of talks between fishermen seems to have takers. On October 25, fishermen staged a demonstration in Rameswaram wanting talks. Nearly eight months ago, representatives of the fisherfolk from the Northern Province had appealed for negotiations with their Tamil Nadu counterparts, despite their complaints about 'destructive bottom trawling' by the other side. It is up to Sri Lanka to respond.

What is well known is the frequent arrest of Tamil Nadu's fishermen, especially from Ramanathapuram, on charges of transgressing the International Maritime Boundary Line. Many are released after India's intervention. According to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, as on October 27, there were 30 incidents of arrests this year; 140 fishermen and 200 boats are with Sri Lanka. There were casualties on both sides, in June and August, in operations by Sri Lanka to nab Tamil Nadu's fishermen.

However, what appears to be a new trend is the increasing detention of Indian fishermen and their boats, with lengthy sentences and fines on repeat offenders. This is why India's longstanding position, that the issue has humanitarian and livelihood angles, assumes

significance. At the same time, marine ecosystem conservation is important. Once Sri Lanka's parliamentary poll is over in mid-November, Mr. Dissanayake should enable a conducive environment for the northern fishermen to arrive at an agreement this would need political support.

Likewise, India should again push for the deep sea fishing project, launched in 2017, for Tamil Nadu's fishermen, apart from promoting alternative forms of fishing. New Delhi should also come up with suitable schemes to help fishermen in the Northern Province, who have still to recover from the civil war.

Fishermen from both countries should explore the relevance of the broad contours of an understanding reached between them in 2010. The northern fishermen should also understand the need to give Tamil Nadu's fishermen a reasonable period of transition. A combination of measures by all stakeholders is what can resolve the Palk Bay dispute."

Sharing resources: on fishermen and the Palk Bay dispute (Editorial from The Hindu)

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/%E2%80%8Bsharingresourcesonfishermenandthepalkbaydispute/article68825844.ece>

"In an editorial, The Hindu, a prominent national daily published from India, has called on Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen from both sides of the Palk Bay to meet to resolve disputes.

The following is the full text of the editorial:

India rightly used the sixth meeting of the India Sri Lanka Joint Working Group on Fisheries, in Colombo on October 29, as an opportunity to again call for a meeting between fishermen of both countries to resolve the vexed problem of fishing in the Palk Bay. In a meeting in Colombo between India's High Commissioner Santosh Jha and Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, stress was laid on the "importance of a long term resolution that respects the needs of fishermen ... and promotes cooperation". Mr. Dissanayake affirmed his commitment to protecting Sri Lanka's interests. Weeks earlier, when India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met the President, the subject had come up for discussion. The idea of talks between fishermen seems to have takers. On October 25, fishermen staged a demonstration in Rameswaram wanting talks. Nearly eight months ago, representatives of the fisherfolk from the Northern Province had appealed for negotiations with their Tamil Nadu counterparts, despite their complaints about 'destructive bottom trawling' by the other side. It is up to Sri Lanka to respond.

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Tamil Nadu: Fishermen arrests: India reiterates request for early Indo Sri Lanka fishermen talks

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamilnadu/atjwgmeetingindiareiteratesrequestforearlyindosfishermentalks/article68811871.ece>

"India on Tuesday (October 29, 2024) reiterated its call, at a meeting of the India Sri Lanka Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries, for an early meeting of fishermen's associations of the two countries to discuss issues concerning the two fishing communities.

This was conveyed at the sixth meeting of JWG in Colombo. It assumed significance in the wake of "increase in detention of Indian fishermen and their boats in Sri Lankan custody, including imposition of long sentences and heavy fines," a matter that India raised at the meeting, according to a release issued by the Indian High Commission in Colombo. The Group last met in March 2022 through virtual mode.

The arrested fishermen are all from the Palk Bay bordering districts of Tamil Nadu, who have been accused of having transgressed the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, in his latest letter to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, pointed out that "in the year 2024 alone, 30 such incidents have occurred. As of today (October 27, 2024), 140 fishermen and 200 fishing boats are under the custody of the Sri Lankan authorities."

In August, representatives of the fishermen bodies in Tamil Nadu, in their meeting with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in New Delhi, sought his intervention in arranging a meeting with their counterparts in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. The arrests in recent months had triggered protests by the fishermen of Rameswaram. However, fishermen of the Northern Province have been contending that in addition to illegal fishing, the Tamil Nadu fishermen have been resorting to “destructive” bottom trawling, a practice banned by Sri Lanka since July 2017 in view of its ability to deplete the marine resources.

At the JWG meeting, India, which referred to the “recent tragic incidents at sea” leading to unfortunate injuries and loss of lives [of the Tamil Nadu fishermen], “strongly reiterated” that the use of force should be avoided under all circumstances.

Calling for the release of Indian fishermen and their boats under Sri Lankan custody at the earliest, New Delhi stressed the need for upholding “established understandings and modalities” on issues related to the fishermen. Both sides agreed that the highest priority should be accorded to address the various issues faced by the fishermen in a “humanitarian manner as they pertain to livelihood concerns on both sides,” the release stated. , adding that the two teams also agreed that “only a humane, constructive and cooperative approach can create a durable basis for addressing the issues” faced by the fishermen of the two countries.

The Indian delegation was led by Abhilaksh Likhi, Secretary, Department of Fisheries while the Sri Lankan team was headed by M.P.N.M. Wickramasinghe, Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries. The Indian delegation included senior officials from the Union Ministries of External Affairs, and Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying; Tamil Nadu government; Navy; Coast Guard; Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute and the High Commission. The two sides would continue to have “comprehensive discussions on the issues related to fishermen for finding a mutually acceptable and long lasting solution,” the release added."

Tamil Nadu: Oil spill contingency plan prioritizes eco sensitive areas

<https://www.dtnext.in/news/tamilnadu/tnoilspillcontingencyplanprioritizesecosensitiveareas807468>

Nearly a year after an oil spill in the Ennore ecological region put the livelihood of fishermen and the environment under threat, the state government has released 'Tamil Nadu State Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan'. As per the plan, coastal ecosystems including the Gulf of Mannar, Ennore, and Pichavaram Mangroves are prioritized in the prevention and combating of oil spills.

As per the plan document, prepared in January but made public a few days ago, in the event of oil spills, locations including Kovalam Creek, Kollidam Estuary, Kalpakkam Creek and others will be given the highest priority apart from the Gulf of Mannar, Ennore and Pichavaram

mangroves. ""In the case of Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay, the entire area is to be considered a priority due to the occurrence of sensitive biological organisms like coral, seagrass, endangered sea cow and other threatened animals,"" it said.

The plan also mandates priority to regions where power plants and desalination plants are located. ""The power plants have indicated that the oil spill affects their seawater intake systems or sources which will cause serious damage to intake systems leading to temporary shutting of respective units of power plants. This applies to desalination plant wells in the sea and intake system for refineries at Ennore, Parangipettai and Nagapattinam,"" it added.

The plan also categorised the oil spill incidents into Tier 1, 2 and 3 based on the extent of the oil spill and quantity. Small oil spills that can be dealt with locally have been categorized as Tier 1, while oil spills beyond local capability or affect a larger area have been categorised as Tier 2. On the other hand, oil spills with larger impacts are Tier 3 spills. The quantity of oil spilled for Tier 1 is less than 700 tonnes and for Tier 2 it is between 700 to 10,000 tonnes. If more than 10,000 tonnes of oil is spilt, it will come under Tier 3.

As soon as the information on the spill with details on locations is received by the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) and ICMAM (Integrated Coastal and Marine Area Management) Project Directorate, Chennai, the organisations will activate the already developed mathematical model for oil spill movement.

Any sighting of oil spilling in the near shore or shoreline areas is to be intimated to the nodal agency of oil spill disaster in Tamil Nadu, the local Coast Guard office located within the district limits or to the Commander, Coast Guard (Tamil Nadu) at Chennai and to the respective District Collector. As per the plan, the spilt oil will undergo a weathering process including spreading, evaporation, dispersion, emulsification, dissolution, oxidation, sedimentation and sinking, and biodegradation.

Tamil Nadu: Fishing boats from other districts allowed in Kodiyakarai down to 125
<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamilnadu/2024/Oct/04/fishingboatsfromotherdistrictsallowedinkodiyakaraidownto125>

The fisheries department has reduced the number of boats from other districts allowed to camp in Kodiyakarai in the district from 150 to 125 this year. This follows the demand by Nagapattinam fishers seeking restriction on boats from other districts during the upcoming fishing season.

The department set the number at a peace meeting called in Vedaranyam on Thursday. As the northwest monsoon is arriving, the fisherfolk from other villages and other coastal districts are

beginning to camp in Kodiyakarai in Nagapattinam district to fish in the waters of the Palk Strait.

The Palk Bay is set to witness heavy competition for fishing for the next three months. The representatives from Vedaranyam had petitioned the fisheries department to restrict fishers from other districts from camping in Kodiyakarai.

On Thursday, a meeting was conducted at the taluk office in Vedaranyam. Officials from the revenue, police and fisheries departments as well representatives from coastal villages in Kilvelur and Vedaranyam participated. ""The increase in number of boats from other districts in Kodiyakarai will affect the livelihoods of those native to Nagapattinam district due to the competition in fishing.

So, we demand restriction on the boats,"" said G Bhoomidasan, a representative from Arukatuthurai in Vedaranyam taluk. From late October to early February, the fisherfolk from Tamil Nadu and Puducherry's coastal districts who usually venture into Coromandel waters shift their preferences to Palk Strait due to the tranquil nature of sea waters and the availability of good fish for four months.

Kodiyakarai, also known as Point Calimere, located at the apex of delta districts becomes their favourite destination to camp and operate as the point which connects Coromandel waters and the Palk Bay. The local fisherfolk in Kodiyakarai provide food, shelter and vessel berths for the visiting fisherfolk and make an income through them.

Only about 60 FRP (fibre reinforced plastic) motorised boats in Kodiyakarai are owned by Kodiyakarai natives. The vessels of visitors had increased up to a thousand boats, leading to conflicts in the past. This forced the department to restrict the number to 150 last year.

""Altercations and clashes broke out on the shores of Kodiyakarai in the past due to operation of boats from other districts. We do not want such incidents to recur. So, we want their number under control,"" said V Manivel, a representative from Seruthur in Kilvelur taluk.

An official from fisheries and fishermen welfare department in Nagapattinam said, ""Taking the grievances from fisherfolk into consideration, we are reducing the number of boats from other districts at Kodiyakarai from 150 last year to 125 this year. The boat owners should get permission from the department for berthing in Kodiyakarai.""

Sri Lanka and India: The simplest way to resolve the TN fishing issue: Implement the law
[https://www.sundaytimes.lk/241006/news/thesimplestwaytoresolvethetnfishingissueimplem
entthelaw573326.html](https://www.sundaytimes.lk/241006/news/thesimplestwaytoresolvethetnfishingissueimplem
entthelaw573326.html)

"The Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Ministry amended the Fisheries (Regulation of Foreign Fishing Boats) Act No. 57 of 1979 on February 8, 2018.

The principal enactment was promulgated subsequent to the declaration of Sri Lanka's 370 km exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and bilateral agreements signed with India in 1974 and 1976, demarcating the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) between the two states in the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay, Palk Strait and Bay of Bengal. The new amendments aligned Sri Lanka's foreign fisheries laws to deter illegal entry (trespass) and fishing in Sri Lankan waters with those of its neighbours in the Indian Ocean region.

For example, Indian courts fine boat owners and skippers between \$11,900 and \$17,854 for trespassing or illegally fishing in Indian waters. Courts in India can also impose prison sentences of up to three years. Sri Lankan boat owners and skippers arrested for trespassing or fishing illegally in Maldivian waters are liable to fines of up to US\$26,000. The Seychelles imposes fines ranging from US\$190,000 to US\$1.9 million depending on the level of the offence and the length of the vessels.

Tamil Nadu vessels and fishermen arrested between 2020 and 2024 compared to the Tamil Nadu fishing vessels detected in Sri Lankan waters. Sundaralingam, D. et al., 2024.

Since 2017, some 54 Sri Lankan vessels and 208 Sri Lankan fishermen have been arrested, fined, or imprisoned by Indian, Maldivian, and Seychellois authorities for trespassing or illegally fishing in their waters.

The Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Department began prosecuting Tamil Nadu fishermen under the amended Act in 2020 after the government lifted restrictions on arrests imposed during the COVID19 pandemic. Magistrates' courts in Kayts, Point Pedro and Mannar Town began imposing custodial sentences in 2022. Fines were first imposed earlier this year. Last month, 12 Tamil Nadu fishermen were fined a total of Rs.185 million (US\$615,269) by the Kalpitiya Magistrate for illegally fishing in Sri Lankan waters. The skipper of the Tamil Nadu fishing vessel was fined Rs.20 million (US\$ 66,512). Each crew member was fined Rs.15 million (US\$ 49,884). All were sentenced to six months' imprisonment in default of the fine.

A recent analysis of remote sensing data obtained from the Global Fishing Watch website (<https://globalfishingwatch.org/>) suggests that the number of Tamil Nadu boats fishing illegally

in Sri Lankan waters declined by 63% between 2020 and 2023.

The observations are consistent with reports in the Indian media that fewer Tamil Nadu vessels are leaving Rameshwaram, Devipattinam, Thondi, Kottaiappattinam, and Nagapattinam every Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday evenings. Anecdotal observations from fishing communities in Delft, Kayts, Point Pedro and Talaimannar also indicate that Tamil Nadu vessels arrive in groups of twenty or thirty now, compared to a hundred or more before COVID19. The decreasing number of vessels detected using remote sensing data was strongly correlated with the increasing arrest of Tamil Nadu boats and fishermen by the Sri Lanka Navy (See figure).

The research findings support Sri Lankan fishermen's contention that imposing fines on fishermen and forfeiting fishing vessels are the most effective and fairest way to resolve the Tamil Nadu fishing issue in accordance with regional best practices and international law. The number of Tamil Nadu fishing boats (55) and fishermen (413) arrested by the SLN to the end of September is the second highest since 2017 (83 boats and 453 fishermen), but less than half the number of boats (167) and fishermen (807) arrested in 2014.

As anyone following this issue will know, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister regularly writes letters to the Indian Prime Minister beseeching the Central Government to resolve the Tamil Nadu fishing issue. Central Government officers recently conducted awareness programmes in Rameswaram, cautioning fishermen not to cross the IMBL. Indian High Courts in Tamil Nadu and New Delhi have both found in favour of Sri Lanka's right to arrest, prosecute (and if guilty) to fine or imprison Tamil Nadu fishermen arrested for illegally fishing in Sri Lankan waters.

The National People's Power's manifesto identifies illegal fishing by foreign fishing vessels as a key issue affecting marine fisheries and resolves to discourage illegal fishing activities per se. President Anura Kumara Disanayake, as the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, is well positioned to deliver these twin commitments with immediate effect.

The continued arrest of Tamil Nadu fishing boats illegally fishing in Sri Lankan waters and prosecution of boat owners, skippers and crew under the amended Act not only strengthens and secures Sri Lanka's maritime border with India but will also begin the process of rebuilding the livelihoods of tens of thousands of small scale fishermen in the north. The new President could claim to have caught two fish with one hook!"

India and Sri Lanka: Conflict over fishing is a major point of dispute

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/conflict-over-fishing-is-a-major-point-of-dispute-between-india-and-sri-lanka-101724338910129.html>

"Despite fish workers in the southern coastal districts of Tamil Nadu withdrawing their indefinite strike and resuming work last week following assurances from chief minister MK Stalin, the situation remains tense.

The need for immediate action to address their safety concerns is palpable in Rameswaram and other major fish landing centres across the region. In the latest incident, the Sri Lankan Navy attacked multiple fishing trawlers from the region, compelling hundreds of workers on board to retreat at gunpoint while they were fishing near the disputed Katchatheevu islet on Tuesday, August 20.

Returning to the Rameswaram jetty, they reported that Sri Lankan naval personnel on fast patrol crafts surrounded their fishing boats and indiscriminately pelted stones at them, causing injuries and significant damage to fishing nets, valued at several lakhs of rupees. Their plight underscores the urgent need for the state and central governments to ensure their safety and protect their livelihoods.

The incident occurred two days after the Sri Lankan Coast Guard released 13 fishermen who had been arrested in June. They were from Rameswaram and neighbouring Pudukottai and were apprehended for illegal fishing across the international boundary. The boats were seized, and they were sent to prison. The external affairs ministry intervened to facilitate their release. However, seven fishermen arrested on July 12 are still in a Sri Lankan jail awaiting trial.

Talking to HT, SP Jesuraja, president of the All India Mechanised Boats Fishermen Welfare Association, said that the decision to go on an indefinite strike was made on August 2 after an attack on a fishing vessel near Kachatheevu was reported. A Sri Lankan naval ship hit the fishing trawler, sinking it. One fisherman died while another is still missing. Jesuraja said that at least 80 fishermen from southern Tamil Nadu remain detained in various Sri Lankan prisons; 120 mechanised boats were seized as well. Fishing problems around Katchatheevu Katchatheevu, a small strip of land spanning just about 1.9 square kilometres, is located in the Palk Strait, an ocean stretch that separates India and Sri Lanka.

Compared to India's contentious land borders, which follow some of the world's most active geopolitical fault lines, the Palk Strait remained tranquil until the 1980s. At its narrowest point, there are 18 miles of open water between the Sri Lankan island of Mannar and the Indian island of Rameswaram, which thrusts eastward into the strait like a stiletto and remains the flash point.

Now, as the number of boats on the strait increases and climate change adversely affects the environment, fishermen from both countries have fewer fish to catch. Tensions have remained high in the Palk Strait since 1983, a year that marked a turning point for Sri Lanka. It plunged

into a three decade long civil war, pitting its Sinhalese majority in the south against the Tamil minority in the north.

This historical context adds weight to the current conflict over prawn fishing. Around that time, Indian Tamil fishermen, who share the same ethnic background as their counterparts in Sri Lanka, began crossing the maritime border regularly to fish and smuggle goods. The Sri Lankan navy viewed every Indian vessel as a potential threat and began attacking and killing Indian fishermen. In about three decades, over 300 fishermen have been killed.

The civil war ended in 2009 with the assassination of LTTE chief V Prabhakaran. The problems faced by the Indian fishermen, however, remain despite New Delhi repeatedly taking up the issue with Colombo. Indian fishermen have been subjected to repeated arrests and subsequent legal remands by the Sri Lankan navy, which accuses the Indian fish workers of violating the International Maritime Border Line and fishing in Sri Lankan waters. The navy's major complaint has been that Indian fishermen fish with trawlers, which are prohibited in the island nation. According to Marine biologists and other specialists in fishing and issues related to deep sea fishing, the debate is mostly about the rights of the diminishing fish, which were previously abundant across the boundary.

“The first and most important thing that India needs to do is take strong diplomatic action and demand, in no uncertain terms, that our fishermen be released immediately. Second, our fishermen should not use the prohibited trawlers in Sri Lankan waters. They should also honour the Blue Resolution, which stands for modern deep sea fishing that does not impact the marine wealth of Sri Lankan waters,” said A P Lipton, retired principal scientist with the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute.

He suggested forming a Palk Bay Authority (PBA) that would include marine biologists, fishing experts, government representatives, and other relevant experts. Experts said that bottom trawling involves scraping the sea beds to catch fish, particularly sought after prawns, and capturing other marine life, such as coral and seaweed. The method is harmful as it damages spawning grounds and the marine ecosystem and depletes future fish populations.

Although bottom trawling is banned in Sri Lanka, it is still practised in India. The Indian government incentivises this method with subsidies due to its productivity and ability to earn foreign exchange. According to A Biju kumar, a marine scientist based in Thiruvananthapuram, the government must convince large trawling corporations to switch to more environmentally friendly fishing methods.

Recently, Sri Lanka amended its Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act, making it illegal for

fishermen to operate or own a boat engaged in bottom trawling. Violating this law carries a fine of Sri Lankan rupees 50,000 (US\$155) and up to two years of imprisonment. Ramanathapuram district collector Simranjeet Singh Kahlon said that the government is promoting alternative fishing methods within its territory, such as deep sea fishing without trawlers. He added that consultations are ongoing with local fishermen to encourage the adoption of safer practices."

Sri Lankan Navy arrests 32 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu on poaching charge

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/srilankannavyarrests32indianfishermenfromtamilnaduonpoachingcharge/article68502319.ece>

"A total of 32 fishermen from Pamban in Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy on charges of poaching on Thursday (August 8, 2024). Their four country boats were also seized. As the news of the arrest spread in the coastal habitation, fellow fisherfolk expressed disappointment and their family members wept uncontrollably.

The fisheries department officials and police sources in Rameswaram said the 32 fishermen ventured into Palk Bay on four country boats belonging to Alex, Ranjan, Charles and Susai Martin on August 6. The Sri Lankan Navy surveillance team intercepted them, accusing them of violating the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) and detained them. According to the fishermen leaders in Pamban, the 32 fishermen were being taken to Puthalam district in Sri Lanka to be produced before a court.

It was only on Thursday (August 8, 2024) that a court in Sri Lanka released 13 fishermen from Tamil Nadu – seven from Pamban and six from Pudukottai district.

The arrest of the 32 fishermen has shaken the country boat fishermen associations here. Already, the mechanised boat fishermen in Rameswaram had announced an indefinite strike after a fisherman drowned mid sea when his boat was allegedly hit by the Sri Lankan Navy personnel last week.

As a sequel, the fishermen leaders led by Sesu Raja and Rayappan from Ramanathapuram district and others from Pudukottai district had gone to New Delhi. On the initiative of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, a delegation led by MPs Kanimozhi, A. Raja, Navas Kani and T.N. Fisheries Minister Anitha Radhakrishnan had met Union External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. He assured them that steps would be taken at the earliest as Sri Lanka was facing elections.

Protest in Jantar Mantar

On Thursday (August 8, 2024), the fishermen leaders staged a demonstration at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. Speaking to The Hindu, Mr. Sesu Raja said a fishermen delegation met Congress

leader Rahul Gandhi and told him about the issues they faced at the hands of the Sri Lankan Navy. Mr. Gandhi had promised that their problems would be raised in Parliament effectively and a solution arrived at, he said.

On the arrest of the 32 country boat fishermen, Mr. Sesu Raja said that from June 15 (when the annual two month ban on fishing ended) till now, the Sri Lankan Navy personnel arrested 109 fishermen. Fifty two of them were released, 12 were jailed for repeating the offence and 45 others were remand prisoners in Sri Lanka. He hoped the issue would not precipitate, and the Union Government registers its strong protest with its counterpart immediately."

Tamil Nadu: Call for cluster based approach in seaweed farming

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/madurai/clusterbasedapproachinseaweedfarming/articleshow/111390428.cms>

"Sagar Mehta, joint secretary of the department of fisheries, stressed the importance of implementing a cluster based approach in seaweed farming during his recent visit to the ICAR Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) at Mandapam Regional Centre in Ramanathapuram on Sunday.

According to a release from CMFRI, Mehta engaged in extensive discussions with scientists from CMFRI and the Central Salt and Marine Chemicals Research Institute (CSMCRI). The visit encompassed a comprehensive tour of CMFRI facilities, including the Marine Fish Brood bank, Marine Hatchery, Recirculatory Aquaculture System, Museum, Marine Aquarium, and fish farm.

Accompanied by CMFRI scientists and officials from the Tamil Nadu fisheries department's Ramanathapuram office, the delegation also visited a seaweed farming site at Munaikadu village in Palk Bay."

Sri Lanka: Indian Bottom trawlers cause Rs.700 million damage to Sri Lankan fishing gear

<https://www.dailymirror.lk/breakingnews/IndianbottomtrawlerscauseRs700milliondamagetoSriLankanfishinggear/108286407>

"Sri Lanka's Fisheries Ministry has estimated the damage done to fishing gear of Sri Lanka fishermen by Indian bottom trawlers at Rs.700 million and communicated it to the Indian authorities including External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar.

Indian bottom trawlers, indulgent in IUU (Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated) fishing has become an irritant to bilateral relations between the two countries. Poaching continues unabated in the Palk bay and Gulf of Mannar, sea areas with one of the richest biological diversity with almost 20 percent of Indian Ocean creatures. This includes highly economically important

marine species such as shrimp, sea cucumber, conch and pearl oyster.

According to the communication sent to the Indian Minister on an earlier occasion, more than 1,000 Indian trawlers, mainly from Tamil Nadu such as Ramanathapuram, Puthukodai, Nagapatnam and Karaikal cross the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) in the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar and fish in Sri Lankan Waters and reach as close as 200 meters off the shoreline.

In bottom trawling, two heavy metal panels are fixed at both sides of the mouth of the net to make sure it scrapes the seabed. According to Ministry sources, trawler boats, in the process, scoop up thousands of tons of bycatch mostly juvenile fish and crustaceans. Whenever bottom trawlers are present in Sri Lankan waters, the Sri Lankan fishermen in the north don't venture into the sea due to risk of damage to their nets and boats and threat to their lives.

Sri Lankan fishers mostly use traditional, basic fishing methods such one Day Fibre Reinforced Plastic (OFRP) vessels (mostly 1821 feet) with 8 – 40 Horse Power engines, and they cannot compete with much larger (6083 feet) 400 HP Indian vessels. The Fisheries (Regulation of Foreign Fishing Boats) Amendment Act No. 1 of 2018 enables legitimate power to the Sri Lanka Navy and Sri Lanka Coast Guard to arrest foreign boats and empowers the Magistrate to detain the captured boats and to give suspended sentences for first time offenders.

Earlier, Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda proposed the establishment of Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar Joint Marine Fisheries Resources Management Authority. The proposal was handed to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2020 but no action could be pursued because of the pandemic.

According to the 1976 agreement, Sri Lankan fishermen are barred from engaging in fishing in Indian waters including the Wadge Bank and Indian Fishermen from fishing in the Sri Lankan Waters. The India Sri Lanka Ministerial Meeting on Fisheries met three times and the Joint Working Group (JWG) four times in January 2016, April and October 2017 and in December 2020. Sri Lanka is asking for reconvening the meetings of these two bodies."

Tamil Nadu: Indian fishermen continue to find themselves in deep water in Palk Bay
<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamilnadu/2024/Jun/25/indianfishermencontinue-tofindthemselvesindeepwaterinpalkbay>

"When the Sri Lankan navy on June 22, 2024 arrested 22 Tamil Nadu fishermen, the total number of fishermen arrested till date this year went up to 204, which was almost 75 percent of the 240 fishermen (approximate) held in 2023. In the latest incident, the Indian fishermen were detained from the North Sea on charges of poaching in Delft Island or Neduntheevu. Their boats

were also seized by the Sri Lankan navy.

This year, including the Saturday's incident, a total of 27 trawlers have been seized, apart from the arrests. Trans-border fishing has been a thorn in the flesh of both India and Sri Lanka for over three decades. Fishermen in Tamil Nadu continue to find themselves in troubled water. Their lives and livelihood is at stake. Since the start of the civil war in Sri Lanka in 1983, Tamil Nadu fishermen from the districts adjoining Palk Bay and Palk Strait have braved arrests and detentions and even risked their lives to fish in Sri Lankan waters.

During the war, many fishermen lost their lives, either caught in the crossfire between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan Navy or being mistaken by the Navy as foes. A few hundreds, who were arrested, had spent weeks and months in Sri Lankan jails and detention camps. Hundreds of boats have been damaged or seized, forcing many boat owners into bankruptcy. Yet, trans-border fishing by Tamil Nadu boats continues unabated. The fishermen claim they cross the international maritime boundary line unwittingly.

There are several other reasons why the fishermen land themselves in trouble, according to fishermen community and the various fishermen societies in Tamil Nadu. The major reason outlined by them is the declining catch in the Indian waters. The Indian fishing grounds are depleted of their resources and the fishermen move over to the Sri Lankan waters for their rich aquatic fauna which, among other reasons, is rich due to the near absence of fishing during the war. V Vivekanandan, Advisor, South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies, said that the fishermen who end up in Sri Lankan waters are mostly 2nd or 3rd generation fishermen.

During the war in Sri Lanka, the oceans were open to the Indian fishermen who could come freely and find their catch. It is after the war that this issue under discussion increased. "This has been going on for 40 years, it's a generational thing," Vivekanandan said.

However there are more pressing issues under this. In recent years, a burgeoning crisis has emerged, pitting the small scale Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen against the destructive forces of industrial bottom trawling. This has profound implications not just for the fishermen's livelihoods, but also for the ecological health of the Indian Ocean.

The destructive bottom trawling

Bottom trawling is a method of fishing that involves dragging heavy weighted nets across the sea floor, in an effort to catch fish. It's a favoured method by commercial fishing companies because it can fetch them a huge haul in one go. The problem with bottom trawling as a fishing method is that it's indiscriminate in what it catches. When dragging the large, weighted nets across the seafloor, everything that happens to be in the way gets swept up in the net. For this

reason bottom trawling has a large bycatch impact, with many non-target species being fished in the process.

This has an impact on the biodiversity of the ocean, and also means many species are being fished to the brink simply as a consequence of commercial activities, not as the target of them. Deep sea coral forests, thought to be some of the most biodiverse ecosystems with high degree of endemism (species found only there), can take centuries to form. But when a trawler runs over them again and again to catch fish, they're destroyed, and so is the whole community that had formed around them. This is exactly what has happened to the Indian fishing grounds. "All the bottom trawling done here has depleted the Indian fish reserves. Many countries like Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Hong Kong and Greece have banned bottom trawling", says Vivekanandan. It is these bottom trawlers that are causing a problem to the Sri Lankan fishermen as well.

Buwanaka S Perera, Sri Lankan Journalist and activist says that there is a sort of camaraderie between the indigenous fishermen of both countries. Their relationship dates back to decades. During the war, Tamil fishermen would go to the Northern island of Sri Lanka to trade or even provide asylum to some Sri Lankan Tamils. But most of the folk on these big trawlers are not the Indian coastal Tamils. They don't understand the dynamics between these two groups. These trawlers come in hundreds. Some days it's even possible to read the names of the boats. They come so close to the Sri Lankan shore".

The Sri Lankan Navy

While there has been a picture painted of the Sri Lankan Navy that they arrest and detain the Indian Tamil fishermen, it is important to note the context. Vivekanandan, in his paper titled, 'The Plight of Fishermen of Sri Lanka and India, The legacy of Sri Lanka's civil war', says that it needs to be understood that over 1000 Indian trawlers crossed into Sri Lankan waters three days a week for over 25 years. Add to this the few hundred country boats that would cross over on the remaining four days of the week. If the Navy were to take action against all of them, it would lead to a geopolitical disaster.

Buwanaka, who has done extensive research into this issue in Sri Lanka, says that there have been reports of boiling water and glass shreds being thrown at the Navy vessels from the huge trawlers. These boats are huge when compared to the Navy's Dvora boats. When the Navy is not able to catch them all, imagine the plight of the small scale fishermen from India and Sri Lanka. Representative Image.

The plight of the fishermen and proposed solutions

The Sri Lankan fishermen predominantly using small, traditional dinghy boats, face immense challenges. Their livelihood depends on the rich but delicate marine ecosystems close to their shores, which are at risk from these bottom trawlers that are meant for deeper waters. In India too, the small scale fishermen suffer due to the dominance of large scale trawling operations. Most often than not, it is these folks with their smaller mechanised boats that are captured and seized by the navy.

There have been a number of solutions proposed by fishermen associations. When representatives from both countries met in Chennai during 22-24 August 2010, the following suggestions were put forth that were agreed by both countries. (i) reduction of fishing days to twice a week, with an overall cap of 70 days in a year; (ii) maintaining a distance of three nautical miles from the Sri Lankan shore to avoid destruction of small fishing nets and corals; (iii) reduction of fishing time in Sri Lankan waters to 12 hours per trip; and (iv) establishing a monitoring and enforcement system on the Indian side that will punish violations; (v) putting an end to bottom trawling within one year.

It's been more than a decade and many of these are still to be enforced and enacted. "The government should streamline their mechanisms", says a source from the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), Chennai. "The plans proposed in the fisherman fisherman dialogue should be enforced". Vivekanandan says that the Government must enforce stringent regulations on trawling and find a middle ground on this issue. "Methods like deep sea fishing as an alternative to bottom trawling, which has been in consideration by the government should be done immediately not only to resolve this issue but also to save our oceans from dying".

India and Sri Lanka: Navigating troubled waters: Indo Lanka fishing dispute and quest for sustainable solution

<https://www.ft.lk/columns/NavigatingtroubledwatersIndoLankafishingdisputeandquestforsustainableolution/4762952>

"The maritime dispute between India and Sri Lanka over illegal fishing by Tamil Nadu fishermen in Sri Lankan waters in the Palk Bay, the Gulf of Mannar, and the Palk Strait has reached a critical juncture. Recent incidents of Sri Lankan authorities detaining Indian fishermen for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) have reignited longstanding tensions. This article will attempt to delve into the heart of the conflict simmering for many decades, explore the environmental and socioeconomic impacts, and highlight the need for an urgent resolution that respects the livelihoods and traditions of Sri Lankan fishing communities in the northern, northwestern, and northeastern parts of the island while ensuring marine conservation.

The core of the conflict

At the centre of the dispute is the narrow, biodiverse rich Palk Bay separating India and Sri Lanka. Despite the demarcation of maritime boundaries in the 1970s after protracted negotiation, Tamil Nadu fishermen have continued their illegal excursions into the Sri Lankan waters of the Palk Bay, the Gulf of Mannar, and the Palk Strait, leading to clashes with local fishermen. The latter accuse their Indian counterparts of employing bottom trawling, a practice prohibited by law in Sri Lanka and a destructive technique that ravages the marine ecosystem and depletes fish stocks.

They do so, claiming traditional rights enjoyed by their forefathers, ignoring that the bilateral agreements of 1974 and 1976 conclusively decided on the dividing line between the two countries. In this process, they also ignored that Sri Lankan fishermen withdrew from their traditional fishing grounds in the Wadge Bank located south of Kanyakumari and the northern part of the Pedro Bank in the Palk Bay, which came under the Indian jurisdiction following the two agreements.

Voices from the ground

Fishermen from districts and areas including Mannar, Pesalai, Jaffna, Gurunagar, Chilaw, and Kalpitiya have shared their longstanding distress over the environmental and socioeconomic ramifications of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing by Indian fishermen. The advanced equipment used and practices employed by Indian fishermen, such as bottom trawling, pose a significant threat to marine life and the livelihoods of local communities. The situation is further exacerbated by perceived inaction by the local authorities, leading to a palpable sense of abandonment among Sri Lankan fishermen.

The narratives of local communities reveal a multitude of issues: technological disparities deployed by Sri Lankan and Indian fishermen, with the latter's advanced equipment and practices like bottom trawling causing significant harm to the seabed, corals, breeding grounds, and marine life; ineffective response to the issue by the state leading to frequent encroachments by Indian fishermen; accusations against the Sri Lankan Navy for treating alleged intruders with kid gloves instead of safeguarding national interests; and the economic strain and desperation faced by the local fishing communities, who are warned by the Indian counterparts not to venture into the sea three days a week when they encroach Sri Lankan waters, as Sri Lankan fishermen struggle with damaged fishing nets and gear and diminished catches due to the continuous encroachment and engaging in environmentally harmful practices by foreign fishermen.

The Kachchatheevu Island controversy

Kachchatheevu Island, a small, uninhabited piece of land nestled between Rameswaram (India) and Delft Island (Sri Lanka) in the waters of the Palk Bay, stands as a symbol of the intricate and enduring maritime dispute between India and Sri Lanka. The waters around the islet, historically utilised by fishermen from both countries for fishing and drying nets, have become a focal point of contention and a litmus test for the bilateral relations between these neighboring countries.

The controversy surrounding Kachchatheevu Island traces its roots back to the early 20th century when questions of sovereignty began to surface while the two countries were still under colonial rule. In a significant diplomatic move in 1974, after long drawn out negotiations, India formally recognised Sri Lanka's sovereignty over the island through a bilateral agreement. This recognition was aimed at quelling emerging disputes and delineating fishing rights in the waters surrounding the island. The 1976 Agreement sought to solidify these arrangements by explicitly addressing the fishing rights issues, allowing conditional access to fishermen from both countries.

The two bilateral agreements of the 1970s have not eased the Indo Lanka fisheries dispute, with Tamil Nadu fishermen asserting traditional fishing rights across the IMBL and engaging in fishing on the Sri Lankan side. Meanwhile, abiding by the two agreements, Sri Lankan fishermen refrained from venturing out to the Wadge Bank' and the northern part of Pedro Bank. Compounding the dispute, Indian fishermen and Tamil Nadu politicians demanded the return of Kachchativu Island when Tamil Nadu trawlers were apprehended over a wide arc from Chilaw in the northwest to Mullaitivu in the east. The livelihoods of local fishermen in these waters are constantly being threatened by continuous incursions by Tamil Nadu fishermen and restrictions imposed by Sri Lankan authorities, who are fighting a losing battle against a steady flotilla of foreign trawlers.

Conversely, Sri Lanka's marine conservation efforts, targeting preserving the marine environment and protecting fish stocks from destructive fishing methods like bottom trawling, have led to increased patrolling and detentions, albeit in small numbers of Indian fishermen venturing into Sri Lankan waters. This clash between the demand for "traditional" fishing rights by Indian fishermen and attempts at environmental conservation adds complexity to the dispute.

A call for collaboration

The resolution of the Indo Lanka fishing dispute extends beyond bilateral negotiations, demanding a commitment to sustainable fishing, marine conservation, and adherence to international maritime boundaries. It calls for a multifaceted approach that includes dialogue, cooperation, and punitive action against owners of trawlers and their skippers.

The focus should be on embracing sustainable fishing practices to combat destructive methods

like bottom trawling, which harm marine ecosystems, and prioritising conservation efforts to protect the biodiversity of Palk Bay and the surrounding areas. Additionally, respecting established maritime boundaries is crucial for managing and regulating fishing activities within each nation's territorial waters, ensuring environmental protection and livelihood sustainability.

Moving forward, continuous dialogue and cooperation between India and Sri Lanka are essential to find an urgent solution to the decade's long practice of illegal crossings of IMBL, fishing without licenses, and engaging in bottom trawling prohibited by laws in Sri Lanka. Since the Joint Working Group on Fisheries (JWG) has not succeeded in solving the issue, Sri Lanka should take up the matter at a high political level before it becomes an acute political problem for the administration.

Meanwhile, India should address the failure of the project launched in 2017 to remove 2,000 trawlers within three years to ease the pressure on the limited resources available in the Bay.

A comprehensive and collaborative approach promises to address the immediate dispute ensure the long term preservation of the marine environment and sustain the communities reliant on it. Humane treatments of Indian fishermen, most of them are daily wage earners, and existential issues confronting the Sri Lankan fishermen should not be overlooked in finding a lasting solution to the fisheries issue."

Tamil Nadu: 300 artificial reefs to be deployed in Palk Bay

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/deploymentof300artificialreefsinpalkbayto-protectcoastandboostfishspecies/articleshow/110855705.cms>

"Nearly 300 artificial reefs will be deployed in Palk Bay later this month to protect the coast from rough waves and become home to commercially important fish species in less than a year. The 60lakh project, funded by the UNDP and executed by Chennai based NGO Participatory Learning Action Network and Training (PLANT Trust), will ensure livelihood for fishermen in eight coastal villages near Rameshwaram.

John Suresh of PLANT Trust said the reefs made of sand, blue metal, cement, and steel will be deployed at six metres depth nearly six km from the coast off eight villages: Erakadu, Karaiyur, Kudiyiruppu, Mangadu, Olaikuda, Serankottai, Vadakadu, and Sembai. They will be in triangle and circular shapes to attract different fish species such as grouper, snapper, horse mackerel, and barracuda, besides algae, seaweed, and soft and hard corals. "Our deployment will be June 15-20. The incubation period is six to nine months. In less than a year, we can see some biodiversity," he said.

Palk Bay is a protected area with a sensitive ecosystem such as coral reefs, seagrass meadows,

and mangroves with rich biodiversity. Experts said the area where the reefs would be submerged has nearly 25 species of fish.

Experts said bacterial biofilms form on the artificial reefs around six months after they are submerged. Slowly, algae, seaweeds, barnacles, sponges, hard and soft corals, and others settle, after which the reefs become a habitat for fish and vertebrates. Microfauna such as copepods, polychaetes, and cladocerans also increase. They will continuously breed in the artificial reef site, which forms the basic food for the fish.

“Coral reefs globally cover less than 1% of the ocean floor but are home to almost 25% of all marine life. They provide food and livelihoods for coastal communities and protect them from natural disasters such as tsunamis. UNDP continues to work with the government, conservation organisations, and local communities to restore and protect India’s rich marine biodiversity,” said Mariyam Nazra, resident representative, UNDP India.

Suresh said UNDP had funded projects to deploy 100 to 250 artificial reefs at 14 to 16 metres depth eight to nine km off the coast of Cuddalore district and Chennai fishing harbour a few years ago. Underwater surveys in these two locations showed the reefs have become home to more than 50 tonnes of marine species. A similar project funded by Madras Atomic Power Station was also implemented off the Mamallapuram and Kalpakkam coasts."

Tamil Nadu: Trawling in troubled waters, a battle in Palk Bay

<https://www.deccanherald.com/india/tamilnadu/trawlingintroubledwatersabattleinpalkbay3028689>

"For Rameswaram fisherfolk like Muniswaran (47) and Srikanth (48), fishing is no longer profitable. “There is no choice. We have to go beyond prescribed areas, comes what may. It is a matter of livelihood and death,” Srikanth said. He adds that thousands of fisherfolk set out to Palk Bay, a stretch between India and Sri Lanka, hoping for a “good fish catch” that can help them feed their families. Their fishing fields in the Palk Straits, Bay of Bengal, have become a battleground. Fishing expeditions are marked with uncertainty due to the fear of arrest and boat seizure by the Sri Lankan Navy, for crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL).

Muniswaran and Srikanth spent 15 days each in Sri Lankan jails in 2021 and 2022 respectively after their boats entered into the neighbouring country’s waters. Fisherfolk from Ramanathapuram, Nagapattinam, Pudukkottai, and Thanjavur districts of Tamil Nadu, who fish in the Palk Bay area, are also challenged by their kin – ethnic Tamils from across the border in Sri Lanka’s war torn Northern Province. Sri Lankan Tamils resumed fishing in 2009, after the end of the civil war. “These days, fishing is like going to war. We do not know whether we will return to our shores or end up in Sri Lankan jails,” said Muniswaran. “We do not navigate just

the choppy waters of the sea but also have to stay vigilant against the hawk-eyed Sri Lankan Navy personnel in the international waters,” he told DH. Adding to the woes of fisherfolk is the trend of locals from Sri Lanka who allegedly nab fuel, valuables, and fish catch.

The past and the present

Arrests of Indian fishers have been a recurring issue in Palk Bay since the 1980s. Hundreds have fallen prey to the bullets of the Sri Lankan Navy for allegedly “transgressing” into its waters. Until 2009, Sri Lanka claimed that it could not differentiate between Indian fisherfolk and people from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who used the sea route to smuggle arms. Despite these challenges, Indian fisherfolk had a field day, fishing in international waters. However, the island’s return to peace has brought competition. Tamil fishers from Sri Lanka’s northern province have ventured into the sea after a gap of 30 years, following the lift of the ban on fishing. They found that their Tamil Nadu counterparts had begun to use bottom trawlers and fishing nets equipment banned in the island nation.

Thus began the battle for fish between Indian and Sri Lankan fisherfolk – both had in the past found fraternity due to linguistic and cultural links. Their friendship was so strong that Sri Lankan Tamil fisherfolk would set out to Rameswaram to watch late night movie shows of M G Ramachandran and Sivaji Ganesan, to return home the next day after a good fish catch.

For Indian fisherfolk, the tiny islands in Sri Lanka served as a safe haven to rest after long hours, to dry their fishing nets and get their boats repaired. There are several reasons why the Palk Straits has become a troubled zone: India ceding Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka in 1974, the Sri Lankan Civil War, overfishing on the Indian side and bottom trawlers from Tamil Nadu venturing deep into Sri Lankan waters. Katchatheevu is an uninhabited island of 285 acres, sandwiched between the two countries.

Katchatheevu Island

As fishermen from both sides continue to clash, the complex issue has become increasingly politicised in Tamil Nadu. The ceding of Katchatheevu has attained centre stage. The latest politician to hop onto the bandwagon is Prime Minister Narendra Modi. On March 31, he accused the Congress of “callously giving away Katchatheevu.” In fact, every political party in the state posits the retrieval of the island as a silver bullet solution to eliminate the problems faced by Tamil fisherfolk. Chances of the retrieval of the Katchatheevu stretch appear very remote as the 1974 agreement between India and the nation recognises it as the latter’s territory. Even on the off chance that the territory is retrieved, the crisis would continue. At the core of the issue is that Indian fishermen continue to cross the IMBL, beyond Katchatheevu, venturing deep into Sri Lankan waters to fish. Sri Lankan Tamils also continue to oppose Tamil Nadu fishers

due to the widespread use of bottom trawling, irattai madi (double fold) nets, and purse seine net fishing. All these methods are banned in many countries, including Sri Lanka.

Trawl fishing, among the most important fishing methods in India, was introduced in the 1970s and helped the country emerge as a top seafood exporter. About 200 Indian boats have been seized and 1,303 fishermen arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy since 2018 for entering its waters. A total of 11 fishers are yet to return home, reports say a good number of boats have either been auctioned or scrapped by now. Indian fishermen also face a peculiar problem as bottom trawlers and boats that are seized are repurposed or “nationalised” in Sri Lanka through a 2018 Amendment to the Fisheries Act.

No boundary

The reason for the crisis, according to RMP Rajendira Nattar, president of the Indian National Fishermen Union, is restricted areas of operation. The fishing fields for Tamil fishermen shrank to a mere 12 nautical miles from 52 nautical miles, which was the case before the IMBL was demarcated and the Katchatheevu agreement was signed in 1974. “Traditionally, our forefathers enjoyed rights to fish in Katchatheevu, along the Palk Straits and in the Gulf of Mannar. That right should be restored, not Katchatheevu alone. We fish in the waters where we have enjoyed fishing rights in the past. The sea does not have a boundary and fishermen go wherever there is fish,” Nattar said. Putting things into perspective, S Emarick, a boat owner in Tamil Nadu, says that fishing is prohibited in the first three nautical miles from the shore and only rocks are found in the next four nautical miles. “Some of the nets that we throw stretch to several nautical miles.

If I throw a net close to the IMBL, it will end up in Sri Lankan waters. How can we be blamed for this? We get permission to stay in the sea for 24 hours and how many fish can we catch in the small field of five nautical miles?” he asked. M Asan Mohideen, president of the Mechanised Boat Owners, and Fishermen Welfare Association, Kottaipattinam, echoed Bose, saying the Lankan waters were just 18 nautical miles from his coastal village and finding a good fish catch within the prescribed area was close to impossible. “Why will a fisherman waste time in an area where he knows he will not get anything? There is no demarcated area in the sea and the need of the hour is more coral reefs to help fish reproduce,” Mohideen said. Knitting a large fishing net in a shed in Akkaraipettai in Nagapattinam district, 50-year-old M Manonmani is explicit.

“I will be less than honest if I say we do not enter Sri Lankan waters. Yes, we fish there. Because it is a matter of our livelihood,” said Manonmani, who was arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy in 2013 and 2016. “Moreover, it is the conditions in the sea like (water) cycles and (water) currents that lead us to (Sri Lanka). The distance between Indian shores and the IMBL (Sri Lanka border) is not too long,” Nattar added. Fisherfolk in Tamil Nadu also question the BJP’s

silence for 10 years on the issue and wonder whether it is even possible to “reclaim or retrieve” the Katchatheevu territory, which was ceded to Sri Lanka under an agreement signed between Indira Gandhi and Sirimavo Bandaranayake. While Clause 5 and 6 of the 1974 pact say vessels of India and Sri Lanka will enjoy in each other’s waters such rights as they have traditionally enjoyed, the problem began after these clauses were superseded by “Executive Instructions” issued in 1976. “These clauses have to be reoperationalised to begin with. Only when we are allowed access to our traditional waters can we hope for a long lasting solution,” N J Bose said. Fisherfolk are so upset with the arrests that they boycotted the annual festival held at St. Antony’s Church in Katchatheevu this March.

While blaming the Congress government for “gifting away” Katchatheevu, Nattar also sought to know the efforts it took to bring back hundreds of boats seized by the Sri Lankan Navy since 2018. “During the UPA era, arrested fishermen would return home with their boats. Today, our boats are docked at the Kankesanthurai harbour off Jaffna coast which has been renovated using Indian taxpayers’ money. Why didn’t India use its influence with Sri Lanka to get our boats released?” Nattar asked. The nearshore Indian waters are already overexploited due to overfishing, pollution, and environmental degradation. “Sri Lanka still practices sustainable fishing, with most fishermen using gill nets and other traditional methods, while trawl nets are completely banned in its waters. As a result, its waters are more resourceful,” said Dr S Velvizhi, head of the Fish For All Centre of the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF).

Sri Lanka

Across the border, Tamil fishermen are limping back to economic normalcy after the civil war. They are limited by the use of catamarans and fibreglass boats that can cruise at slower speeds. N M Alam, Secretary, Mannar District Fishing Cooperatives Union, told DH that there was no problem between the Tamil fisherfolk of the two countries. The issue only pertains to the method of fishing, mainly bottom trawlers, adopted by their Tamil Nadu brethren. “We are grateful to the people of Tamil Nadu for the support they extended to us in the past three decades. But we cannot accept trawlers scraping through our sea bed and damaging the marine ecology. The problem is trawlers, not fisherfolk,” Alam said. He also alleged that Indian trawlers come like a flotilla, especially in the dark of the night, deep into the Sri Lankan waters to places like Mannar, Jaffna, and Mullaitivu. “Their trawlers also damage expensive nets spread out in the sea by our fishermen.

We cannot see our livelihood being taken away in front of our eyes,” he said. Terming bottom trawling as an “indiscriminate fishing method”, Velvizhi said a wide range of sea creatures, including non-target species such as turtles, and invertebrates, are inadvertently caught as trawling nets are pulled across the seafloor. “This indiscriminate fishing profoundly affects the

ocean and biodiversity, resulting in many species being unintentionally captured and often discarded as bycatch. Deep sea corals are adversely affected by bottom trawling. Trawling in the near shore water also affects the seagrass ecosystem,” she told DH. The repeated dragging of heavy nets over these delicate corals and seagrasses ecosystems leads to their destruction, along with the faunal and floral community that is associated with them.

This not only results in the loss of habitat but also disrupts the ecological balance of these fragile Deep sea environments, the scientist added. Sri Lankan Minister Jeevan Thondaman, who completed his schooling in Chennai, told DH that all stakeholders must understand that equitable justice should be delivered for the fishermen from northern Sri Lanka, who have been affected by the civil war and still reel under abject poverty. “How can our fisherfolk, who just have catamarans, compete with a machine (bottom trawlers) that catch tonnes of fish? A majority of Tamil fishermen from Sri Lanka have one disability or the other due to the war. Their concerns should be addressed along with those of marine ecology, Thondaman, the minister for water supply, said.

Alternatives

N Devadoss, president, Rameswaram Fishermen Association, said fishermen began using bottom trawlers only after the Indian government encouraged its use in the 1970s to export seafood to the world. “We agree it is a bad practice ecologically. But what is the alternative? Is it not the job of the Central and State governments to talk to us and help us embrace ecologically friendly practices, instead of pinning the blame on us?” Devadoss asked. Devadoss also advocated that the Tamil Nadu government regulate the number of trawlers and boats that are allowed into the ocean as several vessels operate illegally. “Several new players have come into the business as seafood export is profitable. About 4,000 boats from Nagapattinam, Pudukkottai, Thanjavur, and Ramanathapuram districts fish in a small area. Should there not be a cap on the number of boats that go into the Palk Bay?” Vijayakumar, a boat owner from Nagapattinam, asked.

The state and Central governments should first acknowledge that Indian fishermen venture into Sri Lankan waters to fish before attempting a solution to solve the issue said V Suryanarayan, former professor (retired), Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies (CSSEAS), University of Madras. “First and foremost, governments here should immediately impose a ban on fishing equipment that is banned in Sri Lanka. That alone will bring confidence among Tamil fishermen there to engage in talks,” Suryanarayan said. “Another idea is to encourage fishermen from both sides to form cooperatives and buy Deep sea fishing boats. The obstacles should be converted into opportunities,” added Suryanarayan. Velvizhi said surface gillnetting, which targets fish near the surface area, could be explored as an alternative. Gillnets come in various sizes and

shapes but they all serve the common purpose of trapping fish by their gills as the fish pass through the net. “The mesh size of the net is crucial in determining the type of fish that can be caught. Common types of gillnets include drift nets, trammel nets, and entangling nets. Initially, a significant investment is required,” she added.

Since converting all the trawlers into gill netting is difficult and requires time consuming measures and effective management strategies, Velvizhi said the best way would be to encourage trawl boat operators to transform their cod end from a diamond shape to a square mesh. “On the west coast of India, Square mesh cod end is mandatory and included in the Marine Fisheries Regulation Act. After carefully reviewing the mesh sizes for fish and shrimp trawling, the same legal protection has to be provided for the East Coast,” she added. Sources in the Tamil Nadu government told DH that boat registrations are issued for fishery purposes in territorial waters. The source added that the administration could not restrict them from venturing into the sea. However, the registration of new trawlers in Palk Bay has ended.

The Ministry of External Affairs maintains that the government attaches the highest priority to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen and that the issue of fishermen has been taken up at the highest level. “Sri Lankan Government has been requested to treat the fishermen issue as a purely humanitarian and livelihood concern, and it has been stressed that both sides should ensure that there is no use of force under any circumstances,” the ministry had said last year. The rising cost of diesel also has a role to play in the crisis. Boat owners say the current Rs.14 subsidy for a litre of diesel given to fishermen isn’t enough, and want diesel at half the price it is sold in the market.

Livelihoods

The nationalisation of trawlers by Sri Lanka is also wreaking havoc in the lives of fishermen and boat owners who are not able to retrieve them anymore. Devadoss, whose boat was the first to be nationalised by Sri Lanka, after it enforced a law in this regard in 2018, said the new rule has forced many people to quit fishing and seek refuge in other professions. “My boat was worth Rs 40 lakh and I spent another Rs 10 lakh in Sri Lanka to get it released, all in vain. How many people can afford to lose a boat worth tens of lakhs of rupees?” he asked. In the fishing village of Jegathapattinam in Pudukkottai on the East Coast, the number of bottom trawlers has reduced to about 110 from over 600 just a few years ago as many boat owners have left the village to their native places. Take the case of Saravanan, who is currently in a Sri Lankan jail after the Navy impounded the boat owned by his father Selvaraj. Inadequate measures The state and central governments have been trying to solve the issue by constituting a Joint Working Group of Fishermen from both sides. A scheme was also introduced in 2017 to convert 2,000 trawlers into Deep sea fishing boats.

Fishermen say these measures are inadequate and demand “greater transparency” in the discussions between the two countries. The Deep sea fishing scheme ended in failure with only 55 trawlers being converted into boats between 2017 and 2023 against the target of 2,000 by 2020. Fishermen said the scheme was not financially viable for them as the actual cost of the fishing boat, including fishing nets, turned out to be Rs 1.30 crore, as against the estimated cost of Rs.80 lakh. Senior journalist R Bhagwan Singh, who had been part of several confidence building measures between fishermen of both countries, said a solution can be arrived at only when both governments sit and talk with an open mind. “Deep sea trawlers from Taiwan and Vietnam come to the Indian Ocean to fish. Fishermen from both countries can earn huge if they form Indo Lanka federations of fishermen cooperatives to source Deep sea fishing trawlers that are partly financed by banks and both governments to harvest the blue wealth that is available in the ocean,” Singh told DH.

Fishers from Tamil Nadu do not seem very keen on fishing in the deep sea but stress that it is for the Indian government to come up with a solution. Nattar suggested leasing a large fishing field in the Indian Ocean after paying a royalty to Sri Lanka. “The Union Government earns millions of dollars in foreign exchange from the seafood that Tamil Nadu fishers export to the global market. Why do not you spend a portion of that to solve the long impending crisis?” Nattar asked. He also said the Modi government should stop using China’s increasing influence in Sri Lanka as an excuse to not talk tough with Sri Lanka. “It is India that helped Sri Lanka in every possible manner to get the country back on its feet after the economic crisis. Why can we not ask Sri Lanka to solve this issue that has been burning for 40 years?” Nattar asked. Devadoss added that fisherfolk from Rameswaram will be happy if they get permission to fish in the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar for 100 days annually after paying royalty to Sri Lanka.

Governments’ burden

“There should be a formula where Sri Lankan fishermen are allowed to fish for three days in a week and Indian fishermen the next three days. The trawlers can be modified into vessels that can assist the mother ship,” said Suryanarayan. Alam, the fishermen association leader from Sri Lanka, said Tamil fishermen are ready to sit across the table with Indian counterparts to discuss the ways and means to coexist but the prerequisite is that the Indian side should not use equipment banned in Sri Lanka.

“We are ready for talks. We have never been rigid. We do not want to fight with our brethren,” Alam added. Sri Lankan Minister Thondaman said it was for the governments of both countries to work out a solution for the decadesold problem. Thondaman added that he has extended an invitation to a team of bureaucrats from Tamil Nadu, with due permission from the Indian

government, to Sri Lanka for a “frank discussion” on the issue. “India and Sri Lanka today share a good relationship and that should be taken advantage of. There needs to be empathy on both sides, and we should not let the situation go out of control,” Thondaman added.”

Tamil Nadu: Talks should resume between fishing communities of Tamil Nadu, Northern Province

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamilnadu/talksshouldresumebetweenfishingcommunitiesoftamilnadunorthernprovince/article68168065.ece>

"The idea of a resumption of talks between the fishing communities of Tamil Nadu and the Northern Province in Sri Lanka to resolve the fisheries dispute in the Palk Bay is again gaining ground. K.S. Radhakrishnan, a writer political activist, in his recently launched, revised edition of the Tamil book Kanavagipona Katchatheevu Katchatheevu that became a dream, expresses apprehension that the dispute might assume bigger proportions.

Recalling the previous rounds of talks between the two sides, the author states that the Tamil Nadu fishermen are conscious that their counterparts in the Northern Province are trying to earn a livelihood after having gone through the trauma of a prolonged civil war.

Emphasising that the current period of a ban on fishing can be used for initiating the negotiation process again, Jesuraj, president, Indian Traditional Fishermen’s Association, says that till the assumption of office by a new government at the Centre, the fishermen of the Northern Province and Tamil Nadu can meet initially, followed by government talks in the midst of representatives of the two fishing communities. The idea of holding talks again has caught the imagination of the fishing community across the Bay.

Annalingam Annarasa, convenor of the Federation of Traditional Fishermen Associations in the Province’s four districts — Mullativu, Mannar, Jaffna and Killinochchi, says his colleagues are ready for talks, and a formal request is to be submitted this week to the Fisheries and Foreign Affairs Ministers of Sri Lanka, in addition to the Consul General of India in Jaffna.

He points out that the last round of negotiations took place in New Delhi in November 2016. Last month, during the campaign in Tamil Nadu for the Lok Sabha election, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party, the BJP, triggered a controversy over the Katchatheevu islet.

Mr. Radhakrishnan, who was formerly with the DMK and the MDMK, refers to the issue concerning the use of trawlers. Tracing the history of the row over the islet, he deals with a host of events, including those in Tamil Nadu, which led to the signing of the 1974 bilateral treaty on the international maritime boundary line, under which Katchatheevu became a part of Sri Lanka.

His work, originally published in 2008, comprises the text of the treaties of 1974 and 1976, proceedings in the Lok Sabha in July 1974, and a resolution adopted by the Tamil Nadu Assembly in October 1991 on Katchatheevu. Details regarding the 1921 agreement between the governments of the then Madras and Ceylon on the delimitation of the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Strait, and the lease deed of 1880 and 1885 also form part of the book."

India and Sri Lanka: Resolving fishing dispute

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/htinsight/internationalaffairs/resolvingtheIndiaSrilankafishingdispute101711623549034.html>

"The prolonged dispute over fishing rights around Kachchatheevu Island in Palk Bay has been a source of tension between India and Sri Lanka for many years. The recent protests by Sri Lankan fishermen from Jaffna, Mullaitivu, and Mannar districts against Indian fishermen are indicative of the severity of the issue. The Sri Lankan navy has seized a total of 18 Indian boats and arrested 146 Indian fishermen since the beginning of 2024. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to address the issue through constructive negotiations with the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Nadu government to bring about a peaceful resolution to the matter.

The disagreement between both parties arose after signing two agreements in 1974 and 1976 on the maritime boundaries. According to the 1974 Indo Lanka Maritime Agreement, the Indian Government ceded Kachchatheevu Island to Sri Lanka. However, Indian fishermen have been crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) unintentionally and have sometimes been apprehended or faced consequences from the Sri Lankan authorities. This situation has given rise to concerns within Tamil Nadu, as the traditional fishing rights of its people have been affected. These occurrences have raised concerns for the safety of Indian fishermen in Palk Bay and the issue of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. Consequently, it is crucial to take swift action to address these concerns and to call on both governments to engage in constructive dialogue to resolve the issue peacefully and diplomatically.

In 2016, the governments of India and Sri Lanka proposed the establishment of a Joint Working Group (JWG) to create a hotline in Palk Bay, which could contribute to better peace resolution. However, it is important to note that the Tamil Nadu state government was not consulted during the negotiations with Sri Lanka, and this could be seen as contradicting the principles of an inclusive federal State. Additionally, the 1983 Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation has exacerbated tensions in Palk Bay by placing constraints on fishermen, allowing them to fish only beyond three nautical miles. As a result, fishermen find themselves compelled to cross the IMBL to engage in their fishing activities.

India and Sri Lanka have both signed the United Nations Convention Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and it is crucial to consider Sri Lanka's claim that Indian fishermen engage in illegal fishing activities after crossing the IMBL. According to Article 19 of UNCLOS, vessels that engage in such activities in foreign territorial seas are considered a threat to the "peace, good order, or security of the coastal State." Additionally, Article 21 allows "coastal states to adopt laws and regulations" to prevent the infringement of their fisheries laws and regulations. It is essential to address these issues diplomatically to promote better relations between the two nations.

Creating a win win situation requires a comprehensive approach and deep negotiation between the coast guards, navy, and other authorities of the Indian and Sri Lankan governments, with proper consultation with the Tamil Nadu government. It is imperative for the Indian government to carefully examine the factors that could be leading Indian fishermen to enter Sri Lankan waters despite the provision of 5,000 GPS devices to them in February 2023. It is equally important to assess the impact of providing GPS to the fishermen and take appropriate measures to address the matter constructively and effectively.

It is worth considering resolving the question concerning the ownership of Kachchatheevu Island in the Palk Bay between India and Sri Lanka through the establishment of a land lease agreement. A potential model for this could be the Tin Bigha case between India and Bangladesh, where the 1974 India Bangladesh boundary agreement granted India sovereignty over Tin Bigha. Still, a lease agreement in perpetuity was later established to allow the Bangladeshis to utilise it for civilian purposes. This approach could be explored as a possible solution for the disputed territory, as it would provide a mutually beneficial outcome for both parties.

The governments of India and Sri Lanka have an opportunity to work together to enhance the maritime security of the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Strait, utilising digital solutions to ensure robust cyber security. This will help to prevent drug trafficking activities by smugglers from the Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle and promote regional peace and stability in Palk Bay. It is important to take measures to prevent misunderstandings that may occur between Sri Lankan authorities and Indian fishermen and to avoid any unfortunate incidents. By leveraging advanced technologies such as satellite imagery and algorithms, fishing vessels can be accurately identified in real time, even in remote areas. This will provide valuable insights for authorities to understand fishing patterns and take the necessary measures to maintain the region's security.

Both countries must approach this matter with sensitivity and a willingness to find mutually beneficial solutions. A comprehensive and holistic approach, taking into account the concerns of

all stakeholders, including the human rights violations of Indian fishermen in Palk Strait, is necessary to resolve this issue."

Sri Lanka: 'Spike in blast fishing' poses renewed threats to marine ecosystems

<https://www.dailymirror.lk/worldnews/newsfeatures/SpikeinblastfishingposesrenewedthreatstoSriLankamarineecosystems/131281225>

"In 2020, six people from Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu, India; were arrested by the Ramanathapuram Police for attempting to smuggle around 5000 explosive materials similar to gelatin sticks, purportedly for blast fishing. According to a Times of India report, one of the groups was contacted by a fisherman from Sri Lanka. Police investigations revealed that the suspects were anticipating gold or other valuable items instead of money in exchange to the smuggled explosives. While many such explosives, including detonators are being manufactured in Tamil Nadu and are being smuggled by boats to be distributed among Sri Lankan fishermen, incidents of dynamite fishing or blast fishing along the Sri Lankan coastal belt has increased by manifold over the recent past, posing a threat to unique maritime ecosystems.

History of blast fishing

Hundreds of dead fish lying at the bottom of the sea bed off the Trincomalee coastline were caught on camera recently, proving the devastating effect of blast fishing. Speaking about the history of dynamite fishing in Sri Lanka, Arjan Rajasuriya, former Marine biologist at the National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA) said that dynamite fishing was done in a small scale using a catamaran during the 1950s and 1960s.

"People put dynamite in areas where larger shoals of fish would gather and later go about picking floating fish in the sea. Blast fishing is common off the shores of the southern coastline including areas such as Rumassala and Trincomalee. It later expanded to shipwrecks where people would use dynamite to collect scrap iron from shipwrecks off Galle for example in places such as Gintota," said Rajasuriya.

But divers and marine experts observe that blast fishing has expanded into an organized operation. "Blast fishing is now more prevalent off the shores of Gulf of Mannar, Arippu, Silavaturai and Vankalai, Vidathalthivu, the Northern side of Mannar, Punkudithivu – between Delft and Punkudithivu, Nilaveli, Kuchchaveli, near Fort Fredrick, Batticaloa, Vakara, Mankerni, a little bit of dynamiting happens in Kalmunai, and then again around Hikkaduwa, Gintota and Boossa. The issue with blast fishing is that nobody sees these incidents as it happens some 45km away from the coastline," he added.

An attempt to maximize the catch

Explaining how blast fishing is being done, Rajasuriya said that fish aggregate around rocks, shipwrecks and reefs that rise above the seabed. “So fishermen tend to do dynamite fishing around these areas to maximize the catch. What people usually do is use a purse sein, a type of net that operates like a purse to catch a large number of fish. In this type of net, the top is left afloat while the bottom has been pursed. Dynamite is used when there’s a larger shoal of fish and there’s a danger of the net breaking due to struggling fish. When dynamite is used it stuns the fish and it’s the vibration that kills the fish. Fish have a specific organ in them called the swim bladder. It basically acts like a buoyancy compensator in scuba diving which allows the diver to alter the pressure. During a blast, the swim bladder and the nervous system in fish gets damaged due to concussion. Therefore some fish will float on water while others would sink to the bottom if their swim bladders burst,” he explained.

Experts opine that fishermen are now equipped with scuba gear, cell phones and other equipment to maximise the catch. He further said that it is difficult to observe signs of a blast in a dead fish. “It could be a broken spine, bleeding gills, but these could be observed if the fish were closer to the origin of the blast. But the impact is less when you go further away from the origin of the blast. As the radius of the blast increase, it is difficult to determine how the fish died,” he added.

What the law states

Dynamite fishing is prohibited under PART IV of the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act No. 2 of 1996. The law prohibits the use or possession of poisonous or explosive substances. It states that “No person shall use or attempt to use any poisonous, explosive or stupefying substance (including dynamite) or other noxious or harmful mater or substance in Sri Lanka Waters for the purpose of poisoning, killing, stunning or disabling any fish or other aquatic resources; carry, or have in his possession any poisonous, explosive or stupefying substance (including dynamite) or other noxious or harmful material (not being a fishing net) or any substance for any purpose referred to in paragraph

An organised operation

However, experts opine that dynamite fishing now takes place as an organised operation. A maritime expert, who spoke on conditions of anonymity, said that authorities need to keep a close watch on how local fishermen get their hands on these explosives, how they are being stored, transported and traded to other individuals across the country. “In order to stop blast fishing in the sea, the distribution of dynamite on land needs to stop immediately.

The Navy had arrested several individuals over the past few years and the operation continues. In the presence of dynamite fishing it is difficult to provide evidence in courts. And if suspects

don't possess dynamite at the time of arrest how can it be proven that they were the actual perpetrators," the source questioned.

The source further said that the law is already in place, but its effective enforcement is required. "The use of explosives against wild animals is already banned. Therefore all these acts are effective to apprehend culprits," the sourced added.

Impact on marine tourism

The Government of Sri Lanka is in the process of drafting a marine tourism master plan. But divers opine that illegal activities such as blast fishing would pose threats to marine tourism initiatives. "Who will pay money to come here and encounter a blast while diving in Sri Lankan waters," Rajasuriya questioned. "There is no data to see what has been done with regards to the perpetrators. The Fisheries Department and Coastguard should be involved in communicating the information to the public," he said.

Tamil Nadu influence

Apart from Trincomalee, many local fishermen resort to blast fishing as an easier method of stunning larger shoals of fish. "Fishermen in Kalpitiya use dynamite to stun schools of medium-sized fish (trevally / paraw) caught in laila nets small mesh surrounding / ring nets,

Operating illegally close to the shore," said Dr. Steve Creech, British Fish Biologist and Fisheries Expert who works along the West Coast, from Kalutara to Jaffna. "Fishermen in Mannar Town use dynamite to stun fish aggregated around brush piles set up in the southern part of the Palk Bay, including within the Vidaththalthivu Nature Reserve," said Creech.

He further observed that dynamite fishing is being done by local fishermen only. Even though local fishermen along the Northern coastal belt have been threatened by the influx of Tamil Nadu fishermen, engaging in bottom trawling for example, Dr. Creech said that it is the local fishermen who engage in this illegal and prohibited activity. "Tamil Nadu fishermen enter Sri Lankan waters illegally, that is without a foreign fishing licence and engage in bottom trawling and mid water trawling using trawlers and gillnet fishing using country boats or vallams," said Dr. Creech.

"Dynamite is used when there's a larger shoal of fish and there's a danger of the net breaking due to struggling fish. When dynamite is used it stuns the fish and it's the vibration that kills the fish,"

Arjan Rajasuriya, former research officer at National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency.

Further explaining the dispute between Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu, over fishing in Sri Lankan waters, Dr. Creech said that the Central Government in New Delhi is not advocating for the rights of Indian fishermen to fish in Sri Lankan waters. “My understanding is that the Government of India in New Delhi respects the agreements drawn up between Sri Lanka and India in 1974 and 1976 and the Exchange of Letters also in 1976 which gives effect to the International Maritime Boundary Line between Sri Lanka and India in the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay and Palk Straits and contains the following;

“With the establishment of the exclusive economic zones by the two countries, India and Sri Lanka will exercise sovereign rights over the living and nonliving resources of their respective zone. The fishing vessels and fishermen of India shall not engage in fishing in the historic waters, the territorial sea and the exclusive economic zone of Sri Lanka nor shall the fishing vessels and fishermen of Sri Lanka engage in fishing in the historic waters, the territorial sea and the exclusive economic zone of India, without the express permission of Sri Lanka or India, as the case may be.” ‘Exchange of Letters’ between Kewal Singh, Foreign Secretary to the Government of India and W. T. Jayasinghe , Secretary to Ministry of Defence and Foreign Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka dated 23 March 1976. ,” he added. “There are more than 5,000 trawlers in Tamil Nadu and if even one of these vessels is given the right (by issuing a licence) to fish in Sri Lankan waters, this will have the same devastating effect on Sri Lankan fishermen as they are experiencing currently, when more than 500 Tamil Nadu trawlers are fishing illegally in Sri Lankan waters every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday evenings,” he said. “But it is the State Government of Tamil Nadu that is advocating for the rights of Tamil Nadu trawler owners (and country boats) to fish in Sri Lankan waters

Arrests and explosives seized in 2024

The Sri Lanka Navy has been providing facilities to the Ministry of Fisheries as well as the Sri Lanka Coastguard to apprehend perpetrators engaged in dynamite fishing. So far six people have been arrested in relation to dynamite fishing including one on land and five at sea. “We have been conducting regular search operations and we conduct patrols using smaller vessels. Once we arrest suspects we handover the cases to the Fisheries Department in the particular area or to the olive to conduct further investigations,” said Sri Lanka Navy media spokesman Capt. Gayan Wickramasuriya.”

Tamil Nadu: Phase out bottom trawlers to protect sea ecosystem

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamilnadu/2024/Apr/19/phaseoutbottomtrawlers/toprotectseaeosystemsamtamilnadufishermen>

"Flagging the practice of bottom trawling by mechanised fishing vessels, Thoothukudi fishermen urged the next union government to look into the issue seriously and put an end to the destructive fishing method in order to protect the marine biodiversity in Gulf of Mannar. According to sources, mechanised fishing vessels sweep the floor of the seabed while catching fishes, and the metal planks fitted for the suspension of trawlers damage the seabed, break coral reefs and deeply disturb benthic organisms, thereby adversely impacting the marine environment.

The application of bottom trawlers have also led to the depletion of marine resources as they recklessly bycatch juvenile fishes, especially in the Gulf of Mannar region which is known for its pristine coral reefs, environmentalists pointed out. It may be noted that coral reefs are a crucial part of the Gulf of Mannar Marine Biosphere Reserve that enriches marine resources. These corals were previously mined for construction purposes in coastal districts during the British era.

Meanwhile, in a bid to restore marine biodiversity and stop erosion, the state government initiated the deployment of artificial reefs at 200 locations off the coast of six districts Chennai, Chengalpattu, Villupuram, Mayiladuthurai, Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli.

Dr Gayes, president of Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli country boat fishermen welfare association, told TNIE that the restoration of artificial corals to improve marine health would not be successful without eliminating the trawlers. Over 72 unregistered mechanised fishing vessels fitted with trawlers are being operated from Thoothukudi fishing harbour, without facing any legal action, he pointed out.

""The bottom trawlers have been existing since the 1970s. Substantial steps were taken to phase out these trawlers in the Palk Bay districts. The abolition of bottom trawling by mechanised boats, pair trawling, use of purse seine fish nets and others would certainly settle down apprehensions between Tamil Nadu fishermen and the Sri Lanka Navy, and also restore marine health"" **Gayes** added.

As per a GO dated March 3, 2017, the Tamil Nadu government had banned the registration of new mechanised fishing boats with trawlers in the Palk Bay districts of Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai, Thanjavur, Thiruvarur and Nagapattinam. ""In order to reduce trawling pressure in the Palk Bay, the state government also initiated diversification of trawling pressure into deep sea fishing. Several subsidy schemes were also provided to replace the trawler mechanised vessels into gill netters and tuna fishing boats,"" said an official.

Furthermore, the state government had earlier prohibited pair trawling or fishing with purse seine nets for both country craft and mechanised boats irrespective of their size and power of engine in the entire coastal areas of Tamil Nadu in order to conserve the fishery (GO dated

March 25, 2000). ""Yet, the use of purse seine nets prevails in the state,"" said **Gayes**, and urged the government to take necessary action.

Meanwhile, Dr Kumaravelu, Vice Chairman, National Fish Workers Forum opined that the use of bottom trawling mechanised vessels continues in Ramanathapuram, Thoothukudi and Kanniyakumari districts owing to lack of scope on other fishing methods. ""The government must look into the issues because of its adverse effects on the sea ecosystem,"" he added."

India: Katchatheevu demands thinking outside the box

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/katchatheevudemandsthinkingoutsidethebox/article68051227.ece>

"In his first term in office, Prime Minister Narendra Modi entrusted to his colleague and then Union Minister of State for Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises, Pon Radhakrishnan, the task of finding a solution to the Indian fishermen's issue with Sri Lanka. Mr. Radhakrishnan had invited 200 fishermen from Rameshwaram to hold discussions with the officials concerned in New Delhi. As he was aware of this writer's work on the subject, Mr. Radhakrishnan invited this writer too. When this writer's turn came, he complimented the fishermen for their lucid speeches. But he added that none of them had touched upon the relevant problem. At this point he asked: "Do the Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen have the right to fish in their waters?" There was stunned silence in the hall.

From the perspective of Tamil Nadu, the root cause of the problem is a conflict of interests. On the one side are the two governments which do not want to reopen the issue of Katchatheevu. On the other side are the Indian fishermen who will not easily give up a means of livelihood which they have enjoyed for several years.

There are two interrelated issues that should be kept in mind. First, the unilateral scrapping of a bilateral agreement will have profound consequences not only on India Sri Lanka relations but also with several of India's other neighboring countries. Bilateral agreements have sanctity of their own and cannot be scrapped based on the whims and fancies of every party in power. At the same time, the Centre should be urged to take immediate steps to ensure the livelihood of fishermen on both sides of the Palk Strait. It would be unwise to attempt to create a Berlin Wall in the Palk Strait. India and Sri Lanka are like Siamese twins. What afflicts one will affect the other.

The quest for a peaceful solution

This writer's research on the subject began in early 1990. The objective was to find a peaceful solution so that the livelihood of the fishermen was not in jeopardy. The greatest problem was

that all the primary sources relating to Katchatheevu had been taken away by New Delhi. At that time there was no Right to Information Act and this writer had to rely on secondary sources and interviews with the lead players.

In 1974, Atal Bihari Vajpayee was in the Opposition. In a debate in the Lok Sabha, he characterised the gifting of Katchatheevu as Bhoodan. He asked BJP leader Jana Krishnamurthy to file a case in the Madras High Court seeking judicial remedy. Jana's appeal was dismissed because he could not produce even a shred of evidence to prove that Katchatheevu was a part of the Zamindari of the Raja of Ramnad and that once the Zamindari was abolished, it had become a part of the Madras Presidency.

After studying the pros and cons, this writer came up with two suggestions. First, get back the island of Katchatheevu on lease in perpetuity — Tin Bigha in reverse. The sovereignty of Sri Lanka would be upheld but India could use the island and the surrounding waters for the purpose of fishing as a result of lease in perpetuity. Those days, Tamil Nadu fishermen did not venture far into Sri Lankan waters. The second suggestion was to allow Indian fishermen to fish in Sri Lankan waters up to five nautical miles. There was a precedent to this. Under the 1976 Agreement, Sri Lankan fishermen were permitted to fish near the Wadge Bank, near Kanniyakumari, for three years. While the Tamil Nadu governments (both the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) accepted this writer's suggestions, the greatest obstacle was in the form of New Delhi refusing to reopen the issue.

Introduction of trawling

Another important point needs to be highlighted. In the 1960s and 1970s, India faced a severe financial crisis. Indira Gandhi gave several incentives for ventures that earned foreign exchange. At that time prawns were a great delicacy in Japan and the European countries. As a result, bottom trawlers were introduced in the Palk Bay. The ethnic conflict was a godsend for the Indian fishermen. The Sri Lankan government had banned fishing and the Tamil fishermen from Sri Lanka came to India as refugees. They were employed by trawler owners and with their guidance, Indian fishermen began venturing deep into Sri Lankan waters. India's foreign exchange earnings went up, but most of it was due to prawns that were caught in Sri Lankan waters.

The use of bottom trawlers did incalculable harm to the sea bed. The trawlers swept away everything from the sea bed, resulting in no fish being available on the Indian side of the Palk Bay. Indian fishermen have to enter Sri Lankan waters to fish. And Sri Lankan fishermen began to complain that Indian trawlers would also destroy their sea bed. What is more, bottom trawlers are banned in Sri Lanka.

The need to have good personal relations with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mrs. Bandaranaike was the main reason guiding India's Sri Lanka policy. By early 1974, Mrs. Gandhi was determined to cede the island. According to S.P. Jagota, then Director of the Legal and Treaties Division, Mrs Gandhi overruled the views of senior officials. What is more, she was even prepared to modify the median line so that Katchatheevu would fall on the Sri Lankan side. The Agreement, however, provided for the continued use of Sri Lankan waters around the island for the purposes of fishing, but this right was also given up under the 1976 Agreement.

M. Karunanidhi's attitude, to say the least, was strange. Before the signing of the Agreement, then Foreign Secretary Kewal Singh visited Madras to hold discussions. M. Karunanidhi should have followed the stance taken by B.C. Roy, who went to the Supreme Court of India on the issue of transfer of Berubari to East Pakistan. B.C. Roy submitted evidence that Beru Bari was an integral part of India and to give away Indian Territory to a foreign country, the Constitution would have to be amended. The Court upheld the claim.

M. Karunanidhi should have filed a case in the Court and prevented the ceding of the island. Instead, he got a resolution passed by the State Legislative Assembly. A resolution on a subject exclusively under the Centre's jurisdiction is not binding, whereas a judicial decision is binding on all concerned. This writer repeatedly asked then Law Minister S. Madhavan why M. Karunanidhi did not follow the West Bengal example. There was no convincing answer. It is reasonable to conclude that New Delhi had blackmailed M. Karunanidhi into submission.

Two interrelated points must be highlighted. Even if India were to get back the island of Katchatheevu, the problems faced by Indian fishermen will continue. And, if the Sri Lankan government were to file a case in the International Court of Justice as the Philippines did against China a few years ago India's image in the comity of nations would take a nose dive. Let us remember that the judgment indicted China. The politicians of various hues in Tamil Nadu who are raising an outcry today about Katchatheevu should realise that the problems Indian fishermen face are the result of Indian fishermen venturing deep into Sri Lankan waters and also the excessive use of bottom trawlers, which are banned in Sri Lanka.

The need for bold decisions

Every challenge provides an opportunity. The problems in the Palk Bay can be solved only if we start thinking outside the box. Here are two suggestions. The Palk Bay is not a barrier but a bridge between India and Sri Lanka. We must convert the Palk Bay from being a contested territory to one that is a common heritage. The first essential prerequisite is for the Government of India to ban all fishing equipment which is banned in Sri Lanka. And then, we should work to ensure that fishermen can equitably enjoy the rich marine wealth. There can be a formula: Sri Lankan fishermen can fish in the Palk Bay for three days, while Indian fishermen can fish on the

other three days. One day can be a holiday. Second, let us encourage the Tamil fishermen of both countries to meet, form cooperative societies, and venture into Deep sea fishing. The trawlers can be modified into vessels that can assist the mother ship. Such joint ventures will also help repair the damage Indian fishermen have caused to the livelihood of their Tamil counterparts. It is only bold initiatives such as these that can lead to a win win situation."

Resolving the India Sri Lanka fishing dispute

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/htinsight/internationalaffairs/resolvingtheIndiaSrilankafishingdispute101711623549034.html>

"The prolonged dispute over fishing rights around Kachchatheevu Island in Palk Bay has been a source of tension between India and Sri Lanka for many years. The recent protests by Sri Lankan fishermen from Jaffna, Mullaitivu, and Mannar districts against Indian fishermen are indicative of the severity of the issue. The Sri Lankan navy has seized a total of 18 Indian boats and arrested 146 Indian fishermen since the beginning of 2024. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to address the issue through constructive negotiations with the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Nadu government to bring about a peaceful resolution to the matter.

The disagreement between both parties arose after signing two agreements in 1974 and 1976 on the maritime boundaries. According to the 1974 Indo Lanka Maritime Agreement, the Indian Government ceded Kachchatheevu Island to Sri Lanka. However, Indian fishermen have been crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) unintentionally and have sometimes been apprehended or faced consequences from the Sri Lankan authorities. This situation has given rise to concerns within Tamil Nadu, as the traditional fishing rights of its people have been affected. These occurrences have raised concerns for the safety of Indian fishermen in Palk Bay and the issue of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. Consequently, it is crucial to take swift action to address these concerns and to call on both governments to engage in constructive dialogue to resolve the issue peacefully and diplomatically.

In 2016, the governments of India and Sri Lanka proposed the establishment of a Joint Working Group (JWG) to create a hotline in Palk Bay, which could contribute to better peace resolution. However, it is important to note that the Tamil Nadu state government was not consulted during the negotiations with Sri Lanka, and this could be seen as contradicting the principles of an inclusive federal State. Additionally, the 1983 Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation has exacerbated tensions in Palk Bay by placing constraints on fishermen, allowing them to fish only beyond three nautical miles. As a result, fishermen find themselves compelled to cross the IMBL to engage in their fishing activities.

India and Sri Lanka have both signed the United Nations Convention Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and it is crucial to consider Sri Lanka's claim that Indian fishermen engage in illegal

fishing activities after crossing the IMBL. According to Article 19 of UNCLOS, vessels that engage in such activities in foreign territorial seas are considered a threat to the "peace, good order, or security of the coastal State." Additionally, Article 21 allows "coastal states to adopt laws and regulations" to prevent the infringement of their fisheries laws and regulations. It is essential to address these issues diplomatically to promote better relations between the two nations.

Creating a win-win situation requires a comprehensive approach and deep negotiation between the coast guards, navy, and other authorities of the Indian and Sri Lankan governments, with proper consultation with the Tamil Nadu government. It is imperative for the Indian government to carefully examine the factors that could be leading Indian fishermen to enter Sri Lankan waters despite the provision of 5,000 GPS devices to them in February 2023. It is equally important to assess the impact of providing GPS to the fishermen and take appropriate measures to address the matter constructively and effectively.

It is worth considering resolving the question concerning the ownership of Kachchatheevu Island in the Palk Bay between India and Sri Lanka through the establishment of a land lease agreement. A potential model for this could be the Tin Bigha case between India and Bangladesh, where the 1974 India Bangladesh boundary agreement granted India sovereignty over Tin Bigha. Still, a lease agreement in perpetuity was later established to allow the Bangladeshis to utilise it for civilian purposes. This approach could be explored as a possible solution for the disputed territory, as it would provide a mutually beneficial outcome for both parties.

The governments of India and Sri Lanka have an opportunity to work together to enhance the maritime security of the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Strait, utilising digital solutions to ensure robust cyber security. This will help to prevent drug trafficking activities by smugglers from the Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle and promote regional peace and stability in Palk Bay. It is important to take measures to prevent misunderstandings that may occur between Sri Lankan authorities and Indian fishermen and to avoid any unfortunate incidents. By leveraging advanced technologies such as satellite imagery and algorithms, fishing vessels can be accurately identified in real time, even in remote areas. This will provide valuable insights for authorities to understand fishing patterns and take the necessary measures to maintain the region's security.

Both countries must approach this matter with sensitivity and a willingness to find mutually beneficial solutions. A comprehensive and holistic approach, taking into account the concerns of all stakeholders, including the human rights violations of Indian fishermen in Palk Strait, is necessary to resolve this issue."

India and Sri Lanka: Joint working group on fisheries will meet soon, Centre tells Madras High Court

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamilnadu/India-Srilankajointworkinggrouponfisherieswillmeetsooncentretellsmadrashighcourt/article67990710.ece>

"The Centre on Monday informed the Madras High Court that though it had proposed to conduct the sixth meeting of the India Sri Lanka Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries in November or December last year, the proposal did not fructify due to internal issues in the island nation.

The Union Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying told the first Division Bench of Chief Justice Sanjay V. Gangapurwala and Justice D. Bharatha Chakravarthy that the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) was taking steps to hold the meeting at the earliest possible date.

The submissions were made in a counter affidavit filed in response to the public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by Fishermen Care, a private organisation, complaining about frequent arrest of fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy and the damage caused to their boats.

Filing the counter on behalf of the Fisheries Ministry, A. Tibertius, Zonal Director, Fishery Survey of India, Chennai, said that a ministerial level meeting between India and Sri Lanka was held in New Delhi on November 5, 2016 to find a permanent solution to long pending issues between the fishermen of the two nations.

The JWG at the secretarial level was set up as per the decisions taken in the ministerial meeting. It was also decided that the ministerial level meeting would be held once in six months, and that a hotline would be set up between the coast guards of the two countries.

Pursuant to those decisions, two rounds of ministerial level talks were held on January 2, 2017 in Colombo and on October 14, 2017 in New Delhi. Further, the secretarial level JWG, too, met on five occasions, and the last meeting was hosted by Sri Lanka virtually on March 25, 2022.

Listing the major issues discussed by the JWG, the Fisheries Ministry said that they included cooperation in patrolling and prevention of incidents at sea; safe passage for Sri Lankan fishermen to the Arabian Sea through the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone; and the status of the hotline between the two coast guards.

Investigation into the death of fishermen; status of apprehended fishermen and their seized vessels; naval patrolling by both countries in the Palk Strait as well as the Gulf of Mannar and

adjoining areas; and environmental damage caused due to bottom trawling were also part of the JWG's mandate.

"During the meetings, the Indian side requested the Sri Lankan side to expedite the release and return of seized fishing boats on humanitarian grounds as they are the only livelihood source of the fishermen," the Ministry said, and listed other measures taken by the Centre for the welfare of fishermen.

It was brought to the notice of the court that the Centre had released ₹300 crore to the Government of Tamil Nadu during 2017-18 for providing assistance to traditional fishers of the State in the procurement of 750 Deep sea fishing vessels which could replace the trawlers from the Palk Bay area.

Money was also allocated for the construction of a fish landing centre at Kunthukal in Rameswaram to promote Deep sea fishing. Further, the Indian Coast Guard had been regularly discouraging Indian fishermen from crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line, the Centre said. After taking the counter affidavit on file, the judges adjourned the PIL petition to June 11 for further hearing."

Tamil Nadu: Stepping up efforts to conserve coral reefs that face many threats in coast

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamilnadu/steppingupeffortstoconservecoralreefs/thatfacemanythreatsintamilnaducoast/article67944312.ece>

"Continuing its efforts at conservation, the Tamil Nadu government will soon formulate a comprehensive conservation and management policy to provide the highest protection to the ecologically sensitive coral reefs and associated biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihood to thousands of fisherfolk living close to the corals. These coral reefs are situated in the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Bay adjacent to the four southern coastal districts of Ramanathapuram, Thoothukudi, Tirunelveli, and Kanniyakumari, encompassing a total area of 107.38 square kilometres. The predominant reef type in this region is the fringing reef. Additionally, there are smaller reef patches along the coastlines.

The marine biodiversity within the Gulf of Mannar is remarkable, with 4,223 species of marine flora and fauna, largely attributed to the extensive coral reefs. The total area of the major reefs in the gulf spans 66.28 square kilometres.

Decline in coral cover

Over the past five decades, these coral reefs have suffered a decline in health and coverage owing to a combination of climatic and anthropogenic factors. These include coral mining,

which was active until 2005, overfishing, destructive fishing practices, pollution, coral bleaching, disease outbreaks, bio invasions, space competition, and algal blooms. As a result, the live coral cover in the Gulf of Mannar decreased from 37.0% to 27.3% between 2005 and 2021, according to a study by the Department of Environment, Climate Change, and Forests and Suganthi Devadason Marine Research Institute (SDMRI).

Similarly, coral species diversity in the Palk Bay is significant, with 63 species recorded in about 20.5 square kilometres. The average coral cover, which was at 30.8% in 2007, dropped to 18.72% by 2019, primarily because of a range of climatic and non-climatic threats. A critical aspect of the Palk Bay's reefs is their location near the mainland. Despite their ecological significance, these reefs do not receive the same level of legal protection as the reefs in the Gulf of Mannar. The absence of formal protection underscores the need for the conservation and management of the Palk Bay's coral reef ecosystems, the study notes.

Coral reefs, comprising an array of marine flora and fauna, are critical to ecological balance as well as economic prosperity. These ecosystems are pivotal habitats, offering sustenance and shelter to numerous species of significant commercial value, including fish and shellfish. Despite occupying a mere 0.1% of the ocean floor, coral reefs are a sanctuary for approximately 25% of all known marine species. Coral reefs function as a natural defence against coastal threats such as waves, storms, and tsunamis.

Climate change

The coral reefs along the Tamil Nadu coast are primarily threatened by coral bleaching, caused by climate change. Coral bleaching occurs when the water temperature exceeds 30 degrees Celsius. This phenomenon has become an annual occurrence during the summer. While the corals recover from bleaching as the temperature drops, the events of 2010 and 2016 were exceptions, with significant coral mortalities.

Furthermore, ocean acidification, another consequence of climate change, is affecting the corals in Tamil Nadu, though the full extent of its impact remains to be quantified. These challenges underscore the urgent need for targeted conservation strategies to protect and preserve the coral reefs amid changing climatic conditions. Other threats include the growing accumulation of marine debris and derelict fishing nets in reef areas that cause a substantial mechanical damage to the corals and their associated organisms.

A threat since 2005

The invasive exotic alga, *Kappaphycus alvarezii*, has been a threat since 2005. Destructive fishing practices, including bottom trawling, trap fishing, and surface supplied diving, are a

significant concern as they cause a considerable mechanical damage to the corals in the Gulf of Mannar. Further threats include pollution, development activities, tourism, and pilgrimage, which contribute to the degradation of the coral ecosystems.

The Palk Bay's coral reefs, facing similar threats, are particularly susceptible to human induced challenges such as destructive fishing and pollution. This situation underscores the critical need for comprehensive management and protection strategies to safeguard Tamil Nadu's coral reefs against these threats, says the study. Government led enforcement and patrolling, coupled with awareness campaigns, provision of alternative livelihood, and community development initiatives, have been pivotal in conservation, says J.K. Patterson Edward, SDMRI director, and one of the authors of the study. Eco development activities, sponsored by the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve Trust, have also played a significant role. These initiatives have empowered the local fishing communities, providing them with additional or alternative sources of income. Such efforts have helped to reduce the pressure on marine resources, particularly on the coral reefs, contributing significantly to their conservation and sustainability, says Jagdish S. Bakan, Wildlife Warden, Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park.

"The protection and conservation of the coral reefs in the Gulf of Mannar is a complex and challenging task as the reef areas are very close to the highly populated coast. Considering the importance of the ecosystem and prevailing climatic and nonclimatic threats, the government, which has been proactive, will formulate a policy for coral reef conservation," says Supriya Sahu, Additional Chief Secretary, Environment, Climate Change, and Forests."

Tamil Nadu: Help us save sea cows: Govt to fisherfolk

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/helpussaveseacowgovttofisherfolk/articleshow/107503482.cms>

"To protect the endangered dugong (sea cow) from being hunted, the forest department in Thanjavur has embarked on a mission to sensitise fishermen on how to release the animal back into the sea if it gets caught in nets.

Just last year, 11 fishermen from Manthiripattinam in Thanjavur were felicitated with cash prizes and certificates for successfully releasing a dugong back into the sea.

Officials from the forest department at Pattukottai in Thanjavur, OMCAR Foundation, an organisation for marine conservation, awareness, and research, and the Wildlife Institute of India have jointly taken up the mission and conducted an awareness programme on Monday at Sambaipattinam panchayat in Sethubavachatram.

"The dugong is an herbivorous mammal and feeds on seagrass," says V Balaji from OMCAR. "It grows to 10ft and weighs about 300kg and lives for 70 years. Dugongs are crucial for marine biodiversity."

Balaji says that as per the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, the dugong is a protected wild animal. “Poaching is a punishable offence. The seagrass bed is spread over 12,458 hectares between Thanjavur and Pudukottai. There are about 150 dugongs in Palk Bay.”

Fishing activities damage the seagrass bed. Also, though dugongs live in water, they cannot stay underwater for more than 11 minutes and then need to resurface for air. “So, when it gets stuck in fishing net, it is unable to breathe. Mechanised boats also tend to wound or kill the mammal.”

“The forest department will reward fishermen who rescue sea cows,” says A S Chandrasekhar, forest ranger in Pattukottai. The Tamil Nadu government has also set up a dugong conservation centre at Manora Fort, a coastal area in Thanjavur.”

Tamil Nadu: 19 fishermen from Rameswaram held by Sri Lankan

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamilnadu/19fishermenfromrameswaramheldbysrilankannavytwoboatsimpounded/article67824015.ece>

"In a fresh case of alleged poaching charge, Sri Lankan Navy personnel arrested 19 fishermen from Rameswaram and Thangachimadam near Neduntheevu in the early hours of Thursday, According to information, the fishermen were said to be engaged in fishing near the islet in the two boats owned by Alex and Anton Sasikumar.

The boats were impounded and all the 19 fishermen were taken to Kankesanthurai Port for further investigation. Only four days ago, 23 fishermen from Rameswaram and Thangachimadam were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy. In protest, the fishermen stayed away from venturing into the sea the following day. Many political parties in Tamil Nadu condemned the arrest and demanded the Union government to get the fishermen released from the island nation.

When The Hindu contacted fishermen leader Jesu Raja, he said “We are looking at the Union government for help in rescuing our 150 impounded boats in the past five years. Such arrests of our fishermen have only pushed us deep into the debts. Moreover, fishing in the Palk Bay has become dangerous,” Mr. Raja said adding that the community members were undergoing mental stress due to this kind of treatment by the Sri Lankan Navy personnel.

“The fisheries sector contributed a whopping ₹50,000 crore to the foreign exchange annually. A major chunk of the produce was from the Ramanathapuram coastal district. Despite this, the fishermen continued to remain as a labour and work in an unsafe environment,” Mr. Jesu Raja said and hoped Prime Minister Narendra Modi intervened at the highest level and brought in respect to the fishing community and ensures there was no threat to our livelihood. The

fishermen associations are likely to hold an urgent meeting in the coastal district on their next course of action."

Tamil Nadu: Sri Lankan Navy arrests 23 Rameswaram fishermen, impound two mechanised boats

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/srilankannavyarrests23rameswaramfishermenimpoundtwomechanisedboatsfishermenassociationsthreatentoboycottloksabhaelection/article67810355.ece>

"Sri Lankan Navy personnel on February 3 arrested 23 fishermen, belonging to Rameswaram and Thangachimadam, and impounded two of their mechanised boats at a point near Neduntheevu on charges of poaching. Protesting the latest arrests, fishermen associations in Ramanthapuram district have called for a boycott of the upcoming Lok Sabha election. The associations also resolved to persuade their members against casting votes in the polling stations in their habitations. According to information available, the Sri Lankan authorities have taken the 23 fishermen to Myliti Port. They are likely to be produced in a court. Following this fishermen associations in the coastal district convened an urgent meeting.

According to Fisheries Department officials, 492 tokens were issued on Saturday from Rameswaram jetty. The boats, belonging to J. Sahayaraj and A. James, in which 23 fishermen were engaged in fishing in the mid sea, were held by the Sri Lankan Navy personnel on Saturday night. Subsequently, they were taken to the Port for inquiry. Meanwhile, fishermen leader Jesu Raja told The Hindu on Sunday that in the recent past, arresting the fishermen along the Palk Bay waters by the Sri Lankan Navy had become a regular affair. Just before the visit of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the temples in the district on January 21, about 10 fishermen were arrested on January 18. However, they were let off in two days, apparently due to the presence of the Mr Modi in the district, he said.

From 2018 to 2024 (till date), the Sri Lankan Navy personnel had impounded 150 boats. Due to the intervention of the Union government, the Sri Lankan authorities had released the arrested fishermen, but not handed over the boats. Each boat, Mr Jesu Raja said, cost around ₹25 lakh to ₹1 crore. By detaining the boats, the livelihood of the fishermen has been impacted. "We don't have any alternative to settle the mounting debts," he said and urged the Union government to immediately intervene at the highest level and help in getting back all the impounded boats.

Resolutions

An urgent meeting convened in Thangachimadam resolved to appeal to the Union government to safely secure the release of the 23 fishermen from Sri Lanka. The meeting passed a resolution to get the 150 impounded mechanised boats lying in Sri Lankan Ports without any delay as it

would rescue the fishermen from the debts. In the case of failure to look into the demands of the fishermen, the fisherfolks would boycott the Lok Sabha election and would also not allow any of their members to cast votes in the polling stations in their habitations, they resolved."

India: Provisions for conservation of marine species

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1987749>

"In order to conserve marine species, Government of India has notified 130 Marine Protected Areas across the Coastal States and Islands; in addition 106 coastal and marine sites have been identified and prioritized as Important Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Areas (ICMBAs) to take care of marine species conservation.

Many threatened marine species have been listed as Scheduled animals in Indian Wildlife Protection Act 1972. Currently, the Government of India has prioritized some of the rare and threatened marine species such as the marine turtles (all 5 species), humpback whale and Dugong for assessing country wide population status and monitoring under the scheme of Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitat (IDWH). Under the Endangered Species Recovery Program (ESRP), the marine mammal Dugong has received special attention with a country wide effort towards conservation of Dugongs and their habitat conservation and about 450 sq. km area in the Palk Bay has been declared as Dugong Conservation Reserve to conservation of Dugongs and seagrass associated marine species.

The Ministry has released a National Marine Turtle Action Plan with the aim to conserve marine turtles and their habitats in India. In addition, under the Project Dolphin, Ministry is expending to include marine dolphins for species monitoring and conservation of marine biodiversity. Also, more species including marine invertebrate will be added for population monitoring/ recovering under the IDWH or Endangered Species Recovery programme.

The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 2019, promulgated under Environment (Protection) Act 1986, has specific focus on conservation and management plans of Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESAs), like Mangroves, Seagrasses, Sand dunes, Corals and Coral reefs, Biologically active mudflats, Turtle nesting grounds, and Horse shoe crabs' habitats and prohibit developmental activities and disposal of wastes in the fragile coastal ecosystems.

The Biological Diversity Act of India, 2002, as amended and the Biological Diversity Rules 2004, and the guidelines thereof ensure the protection and conservation of biodiversity (including the marine species), sustainable use and equitable sharing of its components, Intellectual Property Rights, etc.,

Following financial assistances are provided for the protection of marine species in the country:

i. Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is granting funds under the centrally sponsored schemes to maritime States for the conservation of Corals and Mangroves.

Project Dolphin is the Government initiative to conserve both oceanic and riverine dolphin species launched in 2021.

In order to conserve and manage the declining populations of Dugongs in India, the MoEFCC under the Government of India constituted a 'Task Force for Conservation of Dugongs' to look into the entire gamut of issues related to conservation of Dugongs and implementation of the 'UNEP/CMS Dugong MoU' in India and also to facilitate the country to act as the leading nation in the South Asia Sub region with respect to Dugong conservation.

The Ministry under the National Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) funds the conservation of Dugongs and their habitats in India.

The Ministry funds the monitoring and conservation of marine turtles, marine dolphins and humpback whale under the PAN India: Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitat (IDWH) scheme.

The Centre for Marine Living Resources and Ecology (CMLRE), an attached office of Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) is mandated with the management strategies development for marine living resources through ecosystem monitoring and modeling activities. Based on 24 years of survey studies, it has generated an extensive knowledge base on the biodiversity aspects within India's Exclusive Economic Zone including hotspots for conservation.

CMLRE is implementing a national R&D programme on Marine Living Resources (MLR) with an inbuilt component on Societal Services to support the fisher folks of Lakshadweep Islands. The societal services initiative intends to enhance the ornamental and baitfish stocks in the wild. Under the program, CMLRE has organised a series of hands on trainings on "Marine ornamental fish breeding and rearing at Lakshadweep Islands".

The Government also provides financial assistances to Universities / Research Institutes through research projects that are aimed at conservation of marine species.

The Ministry has released 'Marine Mega fauna Stranding Management Guidelines' in 2021 for actions to be taken during stranding and entanglement events as well as to improve coordination between various stakeholders and better management for these events. In Andhra Pradesh, the

State Forest Department teams are in place to monitor stranding and cause of deaths through necropsies on dead marine animals. Efforts have been taken for conducting awareness drives to educate the local community, fishermen, and other stakeholders about the impact of abandoned fishing nets and ship collisions on marine species. Turtle Excluding Device (TED) has been installed in the fishing trawlers to prevent the bycatch of turtles.

This information was given by Union Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Shri Ashwini Kumar Choubey in a written reply in the Lok Sabha today."

Tamil Nadu: Sri Lanka arrests 37 Indian fishermen for allegedly straying in its waters
<https://www.ndtv.com/indianews/srilankaarrests37indianfishermenforallegedlyfishinginitswatersmkstalinwritestojashankar4526374>

"As many as 37 Tamil Nadu fishermen were arrested and five of their fishing trawlers were seized by the Sri Lankan navy after they allegedly strayed into Lankan territorial waters, a fisheries official in Chennai said on Sunday. He men were arrested during an operation by the Lankan navy on Saturday night. This month alone, 10 fishing boats and 64 fishermen from the state have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan navy.

Taking up the issue with the Centre, Chief Minister M K Stalin urged Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to initiate necessary steps to secure the release all the fishermen and their fishing boats. Drawing the Central minister's attention to the apprehension of the 37 fishermen along with their five fishing boats by the Sri Lankan navy on October 28, the Chief Minister said, ""As you are aware, our fishermen are solely dependent on their fishing activity for livelihood and these frequent arrests are causing immense distress and suffering to the fishermen community."" In a letter to Jaishankar on Sunday, a copy of which was made available to the media here, Stalin said such acts of the Sri Lankan navy have put pressure on fishermen communities in the state, and instilled panic into their minds.

""I wish to state that Tamil Nadu fishermen feel that their voices are on the wane; and I feel that the Government of India should stand more vocally for our fishermen's rights and speak for their safety,"" he said. The chief minister reiterated the demand to protect the traditional fishing rights of Indian fishermen in the Palk Bay region.

Despite the persistent demand to stop the arrests and seizure of boats, the Sri Lankan navy has continued to apprehend Indian fishermen, he said in the letter and called for ""solid diplomatic initiatives without further delay to end the arrests.""

Tamil Nadu: Solar drier for crops, open sea cage fish farming inaugurated in Thoothukudi
<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/solardrierforcropsopenseacagefishfarminginauguratedinthoothukudi/article67393190.ece>

"Chief General Manager of NABARD R. Sankar Narayanan inaugurated the solar drier at Sinnur near Vilaathikulam on Friday for rain fed farmers cultivating chilli and other horticultural crops. The solar drier with 400 square feet area, costing ₹3.05 lakh, can be used for drying chilli quickly without getting polluted by dust and sand. The NABARD has released this fund from its Sinnur watershed restoration programme, costing about ₹1.73 crore.

Mr. Sankar Narayanan said the NABARD, which was funding the watershed development and restoration programmes in the places facing acute water shortage, had created the farm ponds, which were getting water during monsoons. Hence, this initiative had improved the rural livelihood as the farmers were getting improved productivity. After the development of the watersheds, these water bodies were being jointly managed by local watershed management committee so as to make it sustainable.

As part of the silver jubilee celebrations of Vidiyel Trust, which is implementing Sinnur watershed development programme and has installed the solar drier, Mr. Sankar Narayanan handed over country chicken, bio fertilizer and tree saplings to the women self-help groups. He also reviewed the restoration of the Sinnur watershed and approved the proposal to form 'Vidiyel Farm Producers Company Limited for cattle breeding by cattle farmers of Sinnur and adjoining villages.

On Saturday, District Revenue Officer C. Ajay Srinivasan launched the open sea cage fish farming under the 'Integrated multitropic aquaculture (IMTA) farming' at Tsunami Nagar and Pullaveli near Thoothukudi in the presence of Mr. Sankar Narayanan. This programme is being implemented jointly by NABARD and Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute's Thoothukudi Research Station. Under this programme, beneficiary fishermen have been trained in cultivating Asian Sea Bass in two floating sea cages. 1,000 fish seeds, mussel seeds and seaweed seedling were released in each cage on the occasion.

The ICARCMFRI has been promoting sea cage farming of cobia and other high value marine fishes since 2010. Further, CMFRI has developed the IMTA technology successfully demonstrated in Palk Bay, where additional revenue has been generated by integrating fish and seaweeds. It is also an ecofriendly and sustainable option that provides a steady income for the coastal fishers as an alternative livelihood option to generate additional revenue through increased yields. "Based on the success of the trial demonstration support by NABARD through

the Department of Fisheries and Farmers Welfare, Thoothukudi, further expansion of IMTA farming will be provided to the interested fisher beneficiaries,” Mr. Ajay Srinivasan said.”

Tamil Nadu: Women seaweed farmers seek other jobs while India plans industry expansion

<https://india.mongabay.com/2023/10/womenseaweedfarmersseekotherjobswhileindiaplansindustryexpansion/>

“My mother used to collect seaweed from the sea. As a child, I naturally followed her to sea and ever since then, seaweed farming is what I do,” says R. Suganthi, 45, who trains a self-help group on seaweed culture. She makes a living off of the sea, on Rameswaram island (also known as Pamban), located in the Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu.

Seaweed, a naturally abundant resource, is available and accessible to the women on Rameswaram’s coast. While the men venture deep into the sea, the women collect seaweed closer to shorelines, a primary source of income for themselves. Many of these women, who are now in their fifties, began farming seaweed when they were teenagers.

They dive underwater to harvest the seaweed and sell them in two forms – dried seaweed which fetches them Rs.110115 per kilogram, and fresh seaweed which sells for a lesser price at Rs. 60 per kilogram.

“Our day starts early; we walk three kilometres towards the sea till Olaikuda on Palk Bay. We dive and look for naturally available seaweed. We collect anywhere between three to five kilograms of kanji pasi (*Gracilaria edulis*), marikolunthu pasi (*Gelidiella*, a genus of red algae) each day,” says Usha Muniswamy, another seaweed farmer. Palk Bay is a shallow water body between the southeast coast of India and Sri Lanka.

Like hundreds of saree-clad women before them, with a simple plastic sack tied around their waist and basic diving masks, women from the coastal villages in Ramanathapuram still rely on the risky business of seaweed farming for their income.

But what makes seaweed farming a risky profession?

Dhanalakshmi S., a seaweed collector from Mangadu explains, “The water sometimes gets stuck in our diving masks while we are underwater. We also have to walk on sharp underwater rocks. Any slip can be lethal. We do not even have a clinic in our village. The closest hospital is eight kilometres across Pamban Bridge from our house.”

The divers also have to prove their identity to the Indian Coast Guard when questioned. They add that they are also scared of the Sri Lankan navy, due to the long prevailing tensions regarding maritime borders, between the two countries. “The (International Maritime) Boundary with Sri Lanka is an hour away on our boats. Earlier, only the fishermen used to get identity cards. After much protest since 2012, some of the fisherwomen, including seaweed workers, finally received biometric cards last year. We can now prove our identities to the security agencies,” says Lakshmi Murthy, a former seaweed collector, who now runs a self-help group on the island.

The seaweed harvested this way is exported and extracted for its additives, rather than as a sea vegetable to be consumed whole. Currently, seaweed is used in making human food, cosmetics, fertilisers, and to extract gums and chemicals with both industrial and medical use. Ironically, the women who collect the seaweed from the ocean, do not consume any of these products made from seaweed.

By 2025, India hopes to expand seaweed output to at least one million tons annually. The investment is a part of the Blue Revolution scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampadhana Yojayana.

However, more and more women in Ramanathapuram district are discouraging their daughters from taking up seaweed farming after them, as the profession becomes increasingly difficult with different environmental and social pressures.

Reduced sea days

Seaweed farming at Rameswaram is practised according to the lunar cycle. The women work for six days starting from a full moon day, followed by a nine day break. The work then resumes for six days more when it's a new moon, followed by a nine day break again, and so on. Murthy explains that the number of days they collect seaweed in a 30day cycle has also been reduced by six days now. “Earlier we would take a six day break, instead of nine.” The three extra days are now given so the seaweed can grow back healthier.

The numbers of annual working days at sea have also been impacted due increased cyclones on the east coast. Weather experts state that more cyclones impacted the Tamil Nadu coast between 2002 and 2021 than between 1982 and 2001. Cyclones are making landfall in Tamil Nadu more frequently, which also impacts the seaweed farmers.

In addition to this, an annual fishing ban of two months, a lean period during the southern

monsoons, and increased irregularities in the weather leave the women with only seven months of reliable working conditions at sea per year.

Sri Lanka: Illegal fishing by Tamil Nadu trawlers goes from one bilateral to another

<https://www.sundaytimes.lk/230730/news/illegalfishingbytamilnadutrawlersgoesfromonebilateraltoanother526767.html>

"It has been hard not to feel sorry for Indian Prime Ministers and Sri Lankan Presidents ahead of bilateral meetings over the past 10 years or so. The last item on every agenda has almost certainly been 'the fisheries issue and how to solve it?'"

Illegal fishing by Tamil Nadu trawlers in Sri Lankan waters remains the only issue between the two states that stubbornly refuses to go away. The central reason this fisheries issue persists is that a direct solution to the problem lies outside the purview of Indian Prime Ministers or Sri Lankan Presidents to resolve.

Step forward Chief Ministers and the State Government of Tamil Nadu. Fisheries are a devolved subject under the Constitution of India (Item 21). The state legislature has exclusive power to make and enforce laws on fisheries in Tamil Nadu. Indian Prime Ministers can make laws on state fisheries through the Lok Sabha. To do so, the central government requires a two thirds majority in the Rajya Sabha, on the basis that overriding the state legislature is in the national interest.

The problem of illegal fishing by Tamil Nadu trawlers in Sri Lankan waters is clearly not a national issue. It is highly localised, limited to the narrow strip of water that separates India from Sri Lanka in the Palk Strait and Palk Bay. This local fisheries issue becomes a national and thereafter a bilateral issue when arrested Tamil Nadu fishermen become Indian fishermen imprisoned in Sri Lankan jails.

The impasse on this issue is complicated further because diplomatic protocols preclude Sri Lankan Presidents from engaging directly with Tamil Nadu Chief Ministers; hence the fisheries issue persists from one bilateral meeting to the next, ad nauseam.

Last week, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe in New Delhi for another round of bilateral talks. The talks focused on enhancing connectivity, people to people ties and more integrated economic cooperation between the two nations with regard to tourism, energy, trade, education, fin tech and skill development. The last item on the agenda was mostly likely the fisheries issue and how to solve it. The latest solution proposed by the two leaders involves adopting a humane approach and by

demonstrating compassion.

Karunawa and anukampawa (kindness and compassion) are not terms typically associated with international efforts to address illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, but then this is not a typical IUU fishing issue. The principal protagonist—currently Chief Minister M. K. Stalin—operates outside the influence of those who oppose IUU fishing, including his own Prime Minister, the President of Sri Lanka and about 20,000 Tamil fishermen in northern Sri Lanka.

Unusual circumstances call for unorthodox actions, so what would a humane approach delivered with compassion look like in the context of the fisheries issue?

The Sri Lanka Navy has made impressive strides towards apprehending Tamil Nadu trawlers and detaining fishermen humanely over the past 25 years. Incidents of injury and loss of life that occurred during the civil conflict reduced significantly after 2009. Barring one unfortunate incident in 2021 when a fisherman from Kottaiappattinam in Pudukottai District drowned after a collision between a trawler and a Sri Lanka Navy patrol vessel, the navy's current operating procedure minimises the risk of injury or death and maintains the dignity of arrested Tamil Nadu fishermen; fundamental elements of a humane approach.

Magistrates in Kayts, Point Pedro, Kilinochchi, and Mannar have been demonstrating compassion towards arrested Tamil Nadu fishermen since 2019. A legal precedent is now well established under the Fisheries (Regulation of Foreign Fishing Boats) Act to the effect that if an arrested fisherman pleads guilty, he will be convicted. A three year jail sentence suspended for five years is handed down. The convicted fisherman is immediately discharged by the court and handed over to the Indian High Commission for repatriation. The vessel is forfeited.

However, if the fisherman pleads not guilty, but is found guilty he will be imprisoned for three years. The vessel will be forfeited. About 780 Tamil Nadu fishermen have pleaded guilty since 2019 and 137 Tamil Nadu trawlers have been forfeited. The magistrates' thoughtful application of the law ensures that Tamil Nadu fishermen seldom spend more than two weeks in Sri Lankan custody. A decade ago it was not uncommon to find hundreds of Indian fishermen incarcerated in Sri Lankan jails, often for months.

As long as the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister remains peripheral to discussions, a direct solution to the fisheries issue will continue to elude the two countries. Last Tuesday the navy humanely arrested nine Tamil Nadu fishermen. If continuing matters are dealt with compassion, nine Indian fishermen will be repatriated next week. Tamil Nadu's trawler of trawlers will be reduced by two.

Approaching the fisheries issue through Karunawa and Anukampawa leaves the onus on Sri Lanka to be proactive and persistent, but if half a dozen Tamil Nadu trawlers are arrested every month from now on, the mandarins in New Delhi and Colombo may finally be able to delete the fisheries issue from the next bilateral agenda."

Tamil Nadu: Reworking of norms is necessary to make deep sea fishing boat scheme viable for Palk Bay fishermen

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamilnadu/reworkingofnormsisnecessarytomakeDeepseafishingboatschemeviableforpalkbayfishermen/article66710460.ece>

"The number tells the story. As many as 55 deep sea fishing vessels have been handed over to the beneficiaries of a 2017 scheme — aimed at weaning fishermen off trawling — against the original target of 2,000 boats in three years. Tamil Nadu Minister for Fisheries Anitha R. Radhakrishnan disclosed the number in the Assembly a few days ago, giving an account of the progress of the ₹1,600 crore scheme for the Palk Bay districts.

When it was launched in July 2017, the scheme was billed as a solution to the festering India Sri Lanka fisheries issue. "Another 24 boats are in various stages of construction," the Minister said.

Of the total cost of the scheme, the Centre's share is ₹800 crore; the State's ₹320 crore; the beneficiaries' contribution ₹160 crore; and loans by financial institutions ₹320 crore. The Union government framed this scheme exclusively for Tamil Nadu, as the fishermen of the Palk Bay districts were invariably caught by the Sri Lankan authorities for crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line illegally. Besides, trawling has run into opposition for being ecologically unsustainable.

"It has failed to take off, despite the passage of over five and a half years," acknowledges an official. Lack of interest among beneficiaries to make the transition, the "unaffordable cost" of the boats for deep sea fishing, the higher operational cost per voyage and the unwillingness of banks to lend are among the reasons cited.

Primary hurdle

The primary hurdle is the cost. Officials admit that the ₹80 lakh per boat, fixed six years ago, is inadequate now because of the increase in the prices of materials such as steel and fibreglass reinforced plastic over the years, especially after the COVID19 pandemic. "I need to spend ₹40 lakh over and above the sanctioned unit cost," says P. Sesuraja, president of the All Mechanised Boat Fishermen Association. He says many fishermen who opted for the scheme with high expectations are "languishing in deep debt".

In fact, the unit cost of a deep sea fishing boat under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, a Central government programme launched in 2020 for the fisheries sector in the entire country, has been fixed at ₹1.2 crore. There has been no progress despite the assurances by Central government representatives to the fishermen to have the unit cost reexamined.

The duration of voyage for deep sea fishing is around three weeks. This means the cost of operation and labour is higher. But it is 24 hours in the Palk Bay region. The indebtedness of sections of fishermen and their inability to repay their loans have left the banks cautious in lending to new beneficiaries.

Mr. Sesuraja wants the governments to waive the loans and increase the unit cost under the Tamil Naduspecific scheme to ₹1.2 crore.

An expert says stringent enforcement of regulations like the restricted supply of subsidised diesel can help to cut down on the number of trawlers in the region. Marine cage farming can be promoted in a limited way. At the same time, an understanding may be reached with Sri Lanka on the transition period for the fishermen, the expert points out."

India and Sri Lanka: Fishermen issue understanding the conflict and finding solutions

<https://colombogazette.com/2023/03/23/India>

[Srilankafishermenissueunderstandingtheconflictandfindingsolutions/](https://colombogazette.com/2023/03/23/India)

"The India Sri Lanka fishermen issue has been ongoing for decades, but tensions have escalated in recent years. The issue revolves around the fishing activities of both Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen in the Palk Bay area, which lies between the two countries. This has resulted in a dispute over the maritime boundary and access to fishing grounds.

The maritime boundary agreements signed in 1974 and 1976 between India and Sri Lanka were intended to define the international maritime boundary between the two countries. However, these agreements have not been able to resolve the longstanding dispute over fishing activities in the Palk Bay area. Indian fishermen have been fishing in Sri Lankan waters for centuries, and many of them depend on these waters for their livelihoods. However, this is prohibited by the 1976 Maritime Boundary Agreement.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that a large number of Indian fishermen rely on trawling, which is banned in Sri Lanka. Trawling involves dragging a large fishing net along the seabed, which can cause significant damage to the marine ecosystem. The Sri Lankan government has banned trawling in its waters in an effort to protect its marine resources, but Indian fishermen continue to engage in this practice.

Sri Lankan fishermen, on the other hand, do not have adequate boats, nets, and technology to compete with their Indian counterparts. If Indian fishermen were allowed into Sri Lankan waters, the local fishing industry would be severely impacted, and consumers would be forced to buy imports. This has led to a sense of frustration among Sri Lankan fishermen, who feel that they are being unfairly disadvantaged.

The Indian government has taken a tough stance on the fishermen issue and has repeatedly pressured the Sri Lankan government to compromise. However, Sri Lanka has been hesitant to make concessions on this issue, as it fears that doing so could lead to a loss of control over its marine resources. Instead, the Sri Lankan government has called for a negotiated settlement that takes into account the interests of both countries.

Recently, the issue has taken a turn for the worse, with reports of violence against fishermen from both sides. In January 2021, 24 Indian fishermen were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy for allegedly fishing in Sri Lankan waters. This led to protests by Indian fishermen, who demanded the immediate release of their fellow fishermen. The issue was eventually resolved through diplomatic channels, with the Indian government securing the release of the fishermen.

In February 2021, a Sri Lankan fisherman was shot dead allegedly by the Indian Coast Guard. This incident led to a diplomatic row between the two countries, with Sri Lanka demanding an apology from India and compensation for the victim's family. India, on the other hand, denied any involvement in the incident and called for a joint investigation.

The issue of India Sri Lanka fishermen is a complex one that requires a nuanced approach. Both countries must work towards finding a mutually acceptable solution that takes into account the interests of all stakeholders. The Indian government must recognize the concerns of Sri Lankan fishermen and take steps to prevent the illegal fishing practices of Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan waters. The Sri Lankan government, on the other hand, must ensure that its fishermen are not unfairly disadvantaged and work towards improving the capabilities of its fishing industry.

It is imperative that both countries work towards a negotiated settlement that takes into account the concerns of all stakeholders. The issue of India Sri Lanka fishermen cannot be resolved through unilateral actions or aggressive posturing. Rather, it requires a commitment to dialogue and cooperation to find a lasting solution that benefits both countries."

Tamil Nadu: Fisher folk upset over absence of infrastructure projects in budget

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/madurai/fisherfolkupsetoverabsenceofinfraproject/sintnbudget/articleshow/98928964.cms>

"The budget presented on Monday set aside Rs 389 crore to provide special allowance to fishermen in lean months, ban period relief and savings cum relief schemes. Another announcement was to create artificial reefs in Palk Bay for Rs.79 crore. Under environment, climate change and forests head, the finance minister also announced Tamil Nadu Coastal Restoration Mission to prevent sea erosion, marine pollution and conserve marine biodiversity. The mission is to be implemented with World Bank Assistance at an estimated cost of Rs.2000 crores in the next five years.

Coordinator of National Traditional Fishers Federation Senathipathi Chinnathambi said bank for fishermen, Rs.8000 relief for ban period, increase in subsidized diesel from 1,500 litres to 2,000 litres, and groynes to protect coastal villages from sea erosion. "We don't see any mention of them. The World Bank assisted project appears dicey since it could include windmills in the sea too," he added.

R M P Rajendran, Nagapattinam district president of Indian National Fishermen Association, said the government seems to have forgotten fisher folk altogether. "The fact is that the sea has turned barren and there are no fish for 72 kilometres from the coast. Fishermen are struggling for survival on a day to day basis but the government talks about a five year scheme. The lean period assistance looks like alms," he rued. Meenavar Orunginaippu Sangam secretary Johnson Charles hoped that the government will consider their demand to expand the Colachel fishing harbour. Fishermen from Kooduthazhai, Erayumanthurai and Amali Nagar are on hunger strike because sea erosion is threatening their existence, but the government does not seem to care, fishermen leaders added."

Tamil Nadu: Livelihood assistance for fishers hiked by Rs.1000

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamilnadu/2023/mar/21/livelihoodassistanceforfishershikedbyrs10002558079.html>

"Fisherfolk in coastal delta districts welcomed the increase in livelihood assistance from Rs.5000 to Rs.6000. They, however, opined that the government should have announced measures to retrieve fishing vessels impounded by Sri Lanka.

"Announcements could have made to prevent conflict with Sri Lanka and funds allotted to retrieve vessels or give financial assistance to those whose vessels were pounded. More funds could have been allotted for making deep sea fishing boats" said RMP Rajendra Nattar, Fisherfolk representative from Nagapattinam.

M Murugan, a fisher representative from Arukatuthurai said, “The hike in assistance is welcome, but it is for two months of ban period, not for each month. The government should provide for each month considering loss of livelihood.”

Minister Palanivel Thiaga Rajan also announced that a sum of around Rs.389 crore has been allotted to benefit 4.3 lakh beneficiaries in the state for fishermen welfare schemes such as lean period assistance, ban period relief assistance and savings cum relief schemes.

Minister Palanivel Thiaga Rajan announced that around 217 units of artificial reefs would be established at a cost of Rs.79 crore in the Palk Bay and 200 units will be set up at a cost of Rs.64 crore in other districts. The initiative is aimed at improving livelihood of fishers as reefs will improve fish population."

Tamil Nadu: A silent, catastrophic invasion has happened in the Gulf of Mannar; here is how

<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/environment/coralbreachasilentcatastrophicinvasionhashappenedinthegulfofmannarhereishow87837>

"Up close, a dead coral colony looks ghostly. Corals usually come in shades of green, brown, pink, yellow, red or blue. But a snorkeling investigation of three coral colonies adjoining Kurusadai, one of the 21 uninhabited islands that form the Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park along the Tamil Nadu coastline, shows them to be grey and eerie. The 21 islands came under the control of the forest department in 1986, which established the national park a 10,500 sq. km reserve that is a habitat for the rare seacow, dolphin and dozens of coral species the same year.

Being a protected area, tourism was not allowed in the national park until March 2022, when Kurusadai opened its doors to tourists (the other 20 islands are still closed for visitors). The corals, which provide shelter to myriad marine life, protect against storms and support livelihoods through fisheries and tourism could have been the star attraction.

“But they are dead,” says S Mahendran, forest range officer at the Mandapam Forest Range in Tamil Nadu’s Ramanathapuram district, where the national park is located. One of the prime threats that killed the corals near Kurusadai is *Kappaphycus alvarezii*, a seaweed (alga) species deliberately introduced in Ramanathapuram for commercial cultivation some two decades ago. The International Union for Conservation of Nature lists it as one of the world’s 100 most invasive species.

Down To Earth (DTE) visited the national park in October 2022 and accompanied the forest official on a routine undersea check of the corals near Kurusadai. Though there was no *Kappaphycus* in the three colonies, native seaweeds could be seen growing atop the lifeless

corals. This is not unexpected, the officials later explained. Corals and seaweeds are constantly locked in a battle. This dynamic can be compared with trees and weeds growing in a forest. Marine algae seek corals since they provide support for growth. But live corals use their defence mechanisms to prevent a hostile takeover. Though corals can protect themselves from native seaweed, they lose to Kappaphycus. “This exotic species has been accused of outgrowing and outcompeting live corals,” says Naveen Namboothri, foundertrustee of Dakshin Foundation, a nonprofit based in Bengaluru.

The seaweed is dangerous because it grows fast, doubling its size in 1530 days, and seeks out live corals to thrive on — unlike native seaweeds, which typically grow on dead corals. Currently, about 750 farmers are engaged in seaweed farming, primarily Kappaphycus, in 18 villages of Ramanathapuram, says Abdul Kadhira, assistant director, fisheries. Pudukottai, Thanjavur, Thoothukudi and Kanyakumari are the other four districts of the state where the alga is cultivated. As of 2021, Kappaphycus has invaded six of the 21 islands of the Gulf of Mannar, says Bakan Jagdish, Wildlife Warden and District/ Divisional Forest Officer, Ramanathapuram.

Kappaphycus is also likely to be cultivated in Tamil Nadu’s proposed seaweed park, says V Veeragurunathan, scientist at the Central Salt and Marine Chemicals Research Institute (CSMCRI). The Centre proposed this park in its Union Budget for 202122. The park is likely to function as two hubs: a seaweed bank in Valamavoor village in Ramanathapuram and a processing hub for factories for seaweed products in Pudukottai, according to an official who wishes to remain anonymous. More seaweed parks may be set up in other states, says Veeragurunathan.

In 2021, India cultivated around 34,000 tonnes of seaweed, as per the Indian Council of Agricultural Research Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute. That same year, the Centre earmarked Rs 600 crore to increase seaweed production to 11.85 million tonnes by 2025, notes Veeragurunathan. He says researchers have initiated surveys to identify suitable locations and seaweed species, including Kappaphycus and indigenous species, for cultivation in nine maritime states. National research institutes and companies are for increased cultivation of Kappaphycus to improve livelihoods, profits and to reduce India’s import of kappacarrageenan, a polysaccharide extracted from the alga that finds use in industrial gums and as a smoothening agent in ice cream, toothpaste, jellies, medicines and paint.

India produces 100132 tonnes of carrageenan a year and imports 1,8002,000 tonnes, says a paper published in Aquaculture International in May 2022. The forest department, on the other hand, has been fighting to keep Kappaphycus from areas adjoining the protected coral areas. Officials say ocean currents have been transporting fragments of the alga into the Gulf of Mannar islands and would damage corals and their services, potentially robbing the fishing

communities of fish catch — their main source of income.

Sequence of events

Commercial production of *Kappaphycus* began in the 1960s in the Philippines, the native land of the species. It has since been introduced in over 20 nations. Perhaps India should have been warned of the species' invasive nature when it was introduced in Hawaii in the 1970s. Surveys showed that the seaweed spread from Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology — the initial introduction site — to reefs as far as 6 km. The invasive species has also caused considerable damage to Coconut Island in Hawaii, Cubagua Island in Venezuela, Zanzibar in Tanzania, and Almirante and Cristobal in Panama and Costa Rica.

India's tryst with the controversial species began in 1984, when CSMCRI acquired a small part of *Kappaphycus alvarezii* of Philippine origin from Japan. The institute introduced the new species in Okha, Gujarat, and later in Mandapam town, Ramanathapuram, under confined conditions to prevent it from escaping. "For two years, it was in quarantine. It did not grow successfully in Okha; therefore, some fragments were transferred to Mandapam, where it grew," says Veeragurunathan. *Kappaphycus* was successfully cultivated at Mandapam in 1997.

In 2000, the institute transferred the technology of cultivating *Kappaphycus* to PepsiCo. The company introduced it to the northern part of the Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park without a proper environmental impact assessment (EIA), as per a 2015 paper published in *The News Journal of the International Society for Reef Studies*. In the following years, *Kappaphycus* began to be widely grown in coastal Tamil Nadu. Between 2001 and 2013, production of dry *Kappaphycus* jumped from 21 tonnes to 1,490 tonnes, as per a 2018 technical report by CSMCRI.

"Before *Kappaphycus*, we could eat only once a day. But the seaweed provided an annual income of Rs.50000," says Anadamma from Pamban Chinnapalam, a village in Mandapam. In 2005, the adverse impacts of the exotic species began to appear. Scientists from the Goa based National Institute of Oceanography noted signs of bioinvasion, similar to what played out in Hawaii.

They published their concerns the same year in *Current Science*. The Tamil Nadu government acted promptly and, in an order dated December 12, 2005, prohibited cultivation of the species in sea waters between the north of Palk Bay and south of Tuticorin district. The entire coast of Ramanathapuram falls in this stretch.

Until 2008, there were no field studies of the bioinvasion. That changed when researchers from

Thiagarajar College, Madurai, published a paper in *Current Science*. S Chandrasekaran and his team surveyed two sites in Kurusadai island and found that *Kappaphycus* had successfully established itself on corals. The alga forms a thick green mat, cutting off the coral's ability to make food. It was smothering the corals, they wrote. The same year, PepsiCo made its exit, transferring its business to Aquagri Processing Pvt Ltd. In 2008, scientists at the Tuticorin based Suganthi Devadason Marine Research Institute (SDMRI) found the invasive alga in Shingle and Poomarichan Islands.

The following month, the forest department roped in Namboothri, who was then with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, and Kartik Shankar, IISc, to independently assess the situation. "All coral polyps below the algal mat were dead. If left unchecked, and if no immediate remedial action is taken, the alga could spread to other parts of the marine protected area," the duo warned in *Current Conservation* in 2010.

In 2011, the forest department swung into action by manually removing the alga within a 500 sq m area of Kurusadai. These operations, conducted yearly, are funded by both state and Central governments, says Jagdish. Cleanup operations are not foolproof, though. Once *Kappaphycus* establishes itself firmly, it is impossible to separate the alga without damaging the coral colony. There is also possibility of algal fragments drifting off into the sea during removal, says a 2014 study in *Current Science*.

Meanwhile, *Kappaphycus* cultivation in India reached a peak. In 2012-13, Ramanathapuram had its highest yield of 1,500 tonnes dry weight. However, production hit a snag after 2013. In 2014, the yield dropped to 50 tonnes dry weight. High sea surface temperature and bacterial infection were responsible, says Veeragurunathan. Still, the seaweed continued to pose a threat. In January 2014, the invasive species was discovered on a new base, Mulli island, located about 40 km south of Kurusadai, as per a 2015 study in *Reef Encounter*.

Studied denial

Though the seaweed proponents acknowledge that *Kappaphycus* is harmful to corals, they maintain that cultivation in adjoining areas was not responsible for the damage to corals. For example, a 2013 long term assessment by the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management, CSMCRI, and Fisheries College and Research Institute, Tuticorin, did not directly attribute the spread to cultivation sites in Palk Bay. But another long term study by SDMRI, initiated in the same year, recommended halting the alga's cultivation around Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park and Marine Biosphere Reserve areas.

By 2019, the exotic species had extended its range to Valai and Thalaiyari islands. In 2021, a

multi departmental survey found bioinvasion of *Kappaphycus* in both Valai island and the southern part of Kurusadai island. Veeragurunathan, who was also involved in the 2021 field survey, brushes aside the concerns. “Coral sea weed interaction is a natural phenomenon. We found trace amounts of *Kappaphycus*. It is possible for the drifted material from Palk Bay (cultivation site) to move to the Gulf of Mannar,” he says, referring to the 201315 survey. He also counter questions why corals in Palk Bay (cultivation areas) were unaffected from the seaweed.

The 2021 survey suggests that the Tamil Nadu government take appropriate policy decisions by not permitting cultivation of invasive exotic seaweed in and around coral reefs. Instead, it recommends cultivation of native seaweed. “But native varieties provide a yield of only 60 kg per raft compared to *Kappahycus*’ 200 kg,” laments Mohammad Nooju, a seaweed farmer in Munaikadu Besides, industries prefer *Kappaphycus*. The exotic species fetches Rs.5170 per kg while the indigenous varieties get only Rs.45 per kg, says Veeragurunathan.

Livelihoods at stake

Some farmers have given up seaweed farming due to declining quality of *Kappaphycus* resulting from repeated cultivation of the same fragment brought from Japan. Nooju says that the yield has nearly halved in the past decade. Anadamma pulled the plug seven years ago. “The seaweed has lost its vigour and certain fish also eat it,” she says. CMSCRI has taken some steps, by distributing laboratory created elite seaweed to farmers, which Veeragurunathan says show two times higher yield and growth. “Only 2025 kg have been given to farmers. That is not enough for 700 people. The laboratory seaweed fares only slightly better than conventional one. It is also likely that fresh *Kappaphycus* fragments could be reintroduced to India,” Khadir says.

But reintroducing new *Kappaphycus* could be dangerous, says a coral expert, speaking on condition of anonymity. “Once *Kappaphycus* damages the entire coral ecosystem and the fishing habitat, what will the other fishers do?” Cost of seaweed farming is another concern. The Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana scheme has announced a 60 per cent subsidy on bamboo rafts used to cultivate seaweed. The subsidy, which will be given in three instalments, brings down the effective cost of the Rs.1500 raft to Rs.600 for farmers. Panchammal, a resident of Mangadu village, says it has been six months since the first instalment. Without enough support from the government, companies appear to exploit seaweed farmers.

Aquagri pays farmers of Sambai and Mangadu villages roughly Rs.50 per kg even as the market price is around Rs 70. Farmers tell DTE they do not mind the low price as the company gives them raw materials for free. Khadir acknowledges the problem, saying most farmers live below the poverty line and it is better to provide them the full amount in one instalment."

In Sri Lanka and beyond, seagrass key to livelihoods, marine habitats

<https://news.mongabay.com/2023/03/insrilankaandbeyondseagrasskeytolivelihoodsmarinehabitats/>

"The fishers in Illuppaikadawei village in the northern district of Mannar mostly use fence fishery, where they erect a series of poles and tie a net around them during high tide. When the tide retreats, the fish get trapped in the net. "We prefer to set up these traps near the seagrass beds, as there are more fish, crabs and squids," says Angie Thomas, a fisher who practices fence fishery, a family tradition. Thomas and other fisher households in the village get sufficient catch to sustain their daily needs despite their fishing area being quite small, thanks to the seagrass meadows on the coastline. "Seagrass meadows support a great abundance and diversity of fish and invertebrates where a number of commercially and recreationally important species have been linked to seagrass at some stage of their life cycle," says Susantha Udagedara, of the Blue Resources Trust (BRT), an organization that started studying seagrasses more than a decade ago.

In a study that delves into socioeconomic factors across 147 villages in Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Tanzania, a group of scientists including Udagedara report that seagrass is the most preferred habitat for fishing across villages in all the four countries studied due to the reliability of a good catch.

Following a proposal from Sri Lanka, the United Nations declared March 1 as World Seagrass Day, recognizing their importance and creating awareness of this much over looked marine habitat.

A recent fourcountry study including Sri Lanka examines household dependencies on seagrass and highlights how coastal fishers rely on seagrass habitats for higher fish catch.

Similar to several other countries, seagrass habitats in Sri Lanka are threatened by an array of issues and activists are calling for government intervention to prevent new aquaculture and mineral mining projects in close proximity to key seagrass habitats.

Meanwhile, experts are calling for a strategic environmental assessment of Sri Lanka's coastline, especially focusing on the blue carbon ecosystems, including seagrasses.

Poorer households are less likely to own motorboats, and this makes them significantly dependent on seagrasses, as they are unable to fish elsewhere. This highlights the economic reasons, in addition to their other natural values, for protecting seagrass meadows, Udagedara, a member of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Seagrass Specialist Group told Mongabay.

Marine flowering plants

Seagrasses are marine flowering plants that grow in shallow waters found in 159 countries across continents ranging from the tropics to the Arctic Circle, covering more than 300,000 square kilometers (115,800 square miles), according to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) report “Out of the blue.”

Despite covering only 0.1% of the ocean floor, the seagrass meadows are highly efficient carbon sinks, storing up to 18% of the world’s oceanic carbon, according to the report. Seagrass absorbs carbon and assists to buffer ocean acidification, thereby offering protection to coral reefs and helps to absorb wave energy, which provides protection from storms.

Despite many still not being aware of the value of this important ecosystem, the United Nations adopted March 1 as World Seagrass Day following a proposal from Sri Lanka, an Indian Ocean island. “Getting an international day is monumental in raising awareness, and we thank Sri Lanka and numerous individuals for the effort taken that eventually led to adopting March 1 as World Seagrass Day,” says Benjamin Jones of the World Seagrass Association. Global cooperation toward the protection of seagrass conservation and restoration is needed, as seagrass meadows are declining, says Jones. The decline of seagrasses started in the late 19th century, according to UNEP. Some 7% of seagrass meadows are lost each year; an area equivalent to a football field of seagrass is lost every 30 minutes. At least 22 of the world’s 72 seagrass species are in decline at the global level.

Fourteen species of seagrass have been recorded so far in Sri Lankan waters, and out of these, one is categorized as endangered while six other species of seagrasses are categorized as near threatened in the National Red List 2012 of Sri Lanka. The distribution and composition of seagrass in Sri Lanka’s coastal zone are not fully surveyed and the number of species could be much higher, says Prasanna Weerakkody of the Ocean Resources Conservation Association (ORCA). Sri Lanka was among the eight countries of the first coordinated global effort to conserve dugongs and their seagrass habitats with UNEP support. During this project, some areas of the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay were surveyed by Weerakkody and his team.

There is illegal bottom trawling by Indian fishers and this could rake off the seagrass meadows, Weerakkody tells Mongabay. Industrial and agricultural runoff, dredging, illegal fishing activities, tourism activities and port development are only some of the threats to the seagrasses. The concentrated effluents released by aquaculture and mariculture projects can also affect the seagrasses, says Udagedara. Shallow waters in the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Bay are Sri Lanka’s most important seagrass habitats, and many aquaculture projects are mushrooming in

the areas. At present, Sri Lankan environmentalists are fighting to contain shrimp farming in the Vidattativu Nature Reserve, which is close to the rich seagrass meadows of Mannar.

Strategic assessment on coastline

“Sri Lanka urgently needs a strategic environmental assessment of its coastline, specially focusing on blue carbon ecosystems, including the seagrasses, for the interest of multiple stakeholders,” says Sewwandi Jayakody, director of Environmental Foundation Limited, a leading environmental NGO in Colombo. Environmentalists, meanwhile, are calling for the protection of high biodiversity areas, while fishers and other stakeholders want to exploit natural resources for their livelihoods. Government agencies such as the National Aquaculture Development Authority and the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources are already taking large swathes of seagrass meadows for culturing sea cucumber and exotic red algae. There are other development interests, such as shipping and port developments as well as tourism. “Everything happens concurrently in the same landscape, and multiple agencies should have an idea of how to prioritize and work out what is best for that landscape,” Jayakody tells Mongabay.

But instead, exactly the opposite is happening now: behind closed doors different agencies discuss different ideas for the same location and this will create many problems in the future, Jayakody adds. While Sri Lanka may have positively influenced the world to recognize seagrass as an important habitat, it is equally important for the island to carry out a strategic environmental assessment for the blue carbon economy even at a pilot level, setting an example to the world, Jayakody says.

India and Sri Lanka: Why a licence scheme is not an option to resolve India Sri Lanka fishermen dispute

<https://www.orfonline.org/expertspeak/whyalicenceschemeisnotanoptiontoresolveIndiaSrilankafishermendispute/>

"The reported Indian proposal for licensed fishing for southern Tamil Nadu fisherfolks in Sri Lankan waters may have come to a naught following stiff resistance from the nation's Tamil fishers in the Northern Province, backed by their politicians, starting with MPs cutting across party lines. This followed a meeting of fishers from the two countries, at Kachchativu islet during the annual St Anthony's Church feast on 34 March, facilitated by Sri Lankan Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda, with support from both governments.

New Delhi has proposed a licence scheme, and a decision will be taken after internal discussions, both within the officialdom and also the local fishers who may be affected by the same, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Ali Sabry had told Parliament in February. That was after he had discussed the matter with visiting Indian counterpart S Jaishankar. The matter later came up

for discussions when India's Minister of State, Fisheries, L Murugan, met with Minister Douglas Devananda in Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna town. The two were present when President Ranil Wickremesinghe inaugurated the India funded Jaffna Culture Centre recently.

The fisheries issue is a longstanding irritant in bilateral ties, and minister Devananda said the issue would be discussed further when President Ranil Wickremesinghe 'visits New Delhi soon'.

Between them, Ministers Ali Sabry and Devananda had clarified that they could consider any arrangement for permitting Indian fishers to fish in the nation's waters, if and only if India was able to ban 'destructive' bottom trawlers and accompanying gear (like the purse seine nets), and enforce it too. Sabry, in particular, had underscored the need for discussing the issue with local (Tamil) fishers in the country, and also to fix how far the Indian fishing vessels could be allowed in Sri Lankan waters. As an aside, he said, the government could then consider distributing the licence fee collected from the Indian fishers among their Sri Lankan counterparts.

Exhausting local stocks

The fisheries issue is a longstanding irritant in bilateral ties, and minister Devananda said the issue would be discussed further when President Ranil Wickremesinghe 'visits New Delhi soon'. Separately, in Colombo, the Foreign Minister said that while the proposal was being discussed, the interest of the local fishermen was the government's priority.

Over the years, multiple ways have been discussed to try and resolve the fishing issue. At the heart of the problem is the pro-independence history of fishing in these parts, when both nations were under the common British colonial rule and yet, had the issue raging from time to time. Post-Independence, when India began facing a huge economic crisis in the sixties (so did Sri Lanka), the government decided to adopt bottom trawling techniques, that were in vogue in the West, as a way to boost forex reserves through increased marine exports. Norway was ready to help and also train the local fishers across Tamil Nadu's southern coastline as elsewhere in the country.

That was also the time when the two governments began discussing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) under UNCLOS1, leading to the boundary line agreements of 1974 and 1976. In between, the Indian fishers in the southern Rameswaram belt had exhausted the exportable near shore shrimp stocks in their waters and were continuing to fish for the same along the coastal waters of Sri Lanka's Northern Province, going all the way close to the Jaffna shoreline.

The intervening ethnic war in Sri Lanka, with the LTTE having a formidable 'Sea Tigers' wing

and local support, meant that the Colombo government banned fishing for the Tamil fishers of the North and the East.

There was, however, a difference. Though fishers from either country had been fishing in the other's waters from ancient times, with families too settled there, they were artisanal vessels of different kinds, followed in recent times by mechanised fishing boats. The problem cropped up only when the Indian fishers began employing a large number of bottom trawlers, which, using the large purse seine nets, scooped all marine lives, including fish eggs and fish lings, and destroying fish habitats in the process.

The intervening ethnic war in Sri Lanka, with the LTTE having a formidable 'Sea Tigers' wing and local support, meant that the Colombo government banned fishing for the Tamil fishers of the North and the East. From time to time, however, Indian fishers, from Tamil Nadu and Karaikal enclave of the union territory of Puducherry, had a free run of the shared waters, until normalcy was sought to be restored in the years after the conclusive end of the war in May 2009.

Twin issues

There are twin issues here. One, the Sri Lankan fishers from the North and the East charge their Tamil counterparts, respectively, from the southern Rameswaram belt and the Nagapattinam Karaikal zone, with poaching their fish from their waters. They blame it almost entirely on the indiscriminate use of bottom trawlers and purse seine, which affected their livelihoods that they were trying to reconstruct, first after three decades of war and now, in the face of the post Covid economic crisis that has otherwise affected family incomes and lifestyles across the country as never before.

For its part, the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) too sees the alleged violation of the IMBL, notified under UNCLOS1, as a violation of their nation's territorial waters, hence sovereignty, that they are sworn to stall. Over the past decade and more, there have been reported instances of SLN personnel scaring away Indian fishers mid sea, at times leading to deaths and consequent protests in Tamil Nadu. Where they had arrested Indian fishers for such violations, along with their vessels and gear, the Tamil Nadu government, through the good offices of New Delhi, has been able to obtain freedom for them.

The Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) too sees the alleged violation of the IMBL, notified under UNCLOS1, as a violation of their nation's territorial waters, hence sovereignty, that they are sworn to stall.

The release of prisoners used to be a fast track process at the height of the conclusive 'Eelam WarIV'. It has been slowed down since then, also because the Sri Lankan Parliament, at the

instance of Northern Tamil parliamentarian, M A Sumanthiran, made penal provisions for such violations much more stringent and long drawnout during the prime ministerial term (201519) of incumbent President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Livelihood concerns

While in principle New Delhi, and even Chennai, is alive to the realities of the ground situation vis a vis IMBL and the UNCLOS notification, to the governments in India, it is as much a livelihood issue of their fishers as that of the Sri Lankans'. Hence, all attempts at finding a negotiated settlement through the past two decades have centered around sharing the catch one way or the other, even while discouraging the Indian fishers from crossing the IMBL. This is because governments are alive to the reality of fisher communities seldom venturing out to the hinterland in search of new avenues of livelihoods as an alternative trade.

However, a solution has eluded the governments at negotiations at all levels, beginning with fishermen's associations from the two countries all the way up to foreign and fisheries ministry officials, their ministers, and the respective heads of government. For its part, India, as a permanent solution to ending the coastal crisis has begun implementing Deep sea fishing as a sort of pilot project for fishers along southern Tamil Nadu coast so that the local fishers need not have to violate the IMBL or clash with their Sri Lankan brethren, which could have long term sociopolitical consequences for both people, their governments, and nations.

By drawing a crooked line of their own instead of sticking to the UNCLOS norm of following the median line, has ensured that third nations cannot 'trespass' into their shared waters.

It is, thus, that the Indian government has reportedly revived the idea of licensed fishing, which has since come up for discussion at different levels, but mostly within Sri Lanka. Five Sri Lankan Tamil parliamentarians from the northern Jaffna electoral district (as different from revenue districts), cutting across partylines, sat with their fisher association leaders on Sunday, 5 March 2023, when they resolved to work together to ensure that their government did not give into pressures from India.

Greater realisation

According to the Sri Lankan Tamil media reports, speakers at the joint meeting emphasised that the 'umbilical cord' relations between the Tamil speaking peoples of the two countries should not be confused with their own livelihood concerns that are more real. They also underscored the point that in future negotiations, they should insist on the Indian team comprising people with past experience in these negotiations. It was an unstated reference to a fishers' leader from a Chennai suburb who led the Indian team at Kachchativu not having any direct experience with

fishing in the contested areas or in past negotiations.

This notwithstanding, there is a greater realisation now in Tamil Nadu that taking back Kachchativu islet, which falls on the Sri Lankan side of the IMBL under the 1976 treaty, would not resolve the larger dispute. If anything, by drawing a crooked line of their own instead of sticking to the UNCLOS norm of following the median line, has ensured that third nations cannot 'trespass' into their shared waters. The Rameswaram fishers also readily acknowledge the absence of abundant fish resources in the Kachchativu area, thus making a negotiated settlement that much easier.

It is another matter that at the recent Kachchativu talks, the focus was almost entirely on the Palk Bay region, involving Rameswaram fisher. The talks did not involve Nagapattinam fishers and their counterparts from Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, as most pilgrims to the islet came from Northern Province in Sri Lanka and the Rameswaram belt in India. In future negotiations, they too need to be factored in."

Tamil Nadu: Move by Sri Lanka to distribute confiscated boats to its fishermen sparks outrage

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Tiruchirapalli/move-by-sri-lanka-to-distribute-confiscated-tamil-nadu-boats-to-its-fishermen-sparks-outrage/article66311167.ece>

"Fishers in Karaikal-Mayiladuthurai-Nagapattinam belt have been enraged by the latest move by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Fisheries to distribute boats confiscated from Tamil Nadu fishermen to their counterparts in the island nation. The Fisheries Minister of Sri Lanka Douglas Devananda was quoted as saying that the trawlers confiscated from the fishermen who had trespassed from the Indian side of the maritime boundary in the Palk Bay would be distributed among the fishers in Sri Lanka.

"The statement was outrageous. The lack of adequate action from the Indian side to retrieve the confiscated boats in the past has led to this situation," Mahendran, a fisher representative said. Delay in retrieval of the boats causes heavy damage to the idling vessels rendering them unusable, he said.

Tamil Nadu fishermen have been accused by their Sri Lankan counterparts of using bottom-trawling nets to catch fish in the Palk Strait, destroying rich fish-breeding areas. Earlier this year, 135 Indian fishing boats were auctioned in Jaffna, and bought by fishers in Jaffna, Mullathivu, Mannar, Puttlam and Negombo. A special virtual meeting with Tamil Nadu Fishermen organized by the Deputy High Commission of Sri Lanka in Chennai, in which about 10 representatives from Fisheries Associations in several districts of Tamil Nadu participated, to discuss the issue

did not yield the intended results.

Fishers of Tamil Nadu, for their part, had expressed concerns over prohibition of bottom trawling in the region, and auctioning of Indian boats in Sri Lanka. The stand being taken by Sri Lanka to justify the auctioning is that fishers in Tamil Nadu were not serious about retrieval of the confiscated boats during 2020, when an initiative was taken by the Indian High Commission in Colombo for restoration of the confiscated boats."

Tamil Nadu: fishermen protest against arrests by Lankan Navy, seek help from government

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2022/nov/08/tn-fishermenprotest-against-arrests-by-lankan-navy-see-help-from-govt-2516011.html>

"The fisherfolk in Rameswaram staged a strike on Monday, condemning the arrest of 14 fishermen and a 13-year-old boy by the Sri Lankan Navy and urging the Union and State governments to ensure their immediate release. As many as 500 boats remained anchored in the region as part of the one-day strike called by the boat owners' association.

The island nation's Navy arrested the 15 people on Saturday allegedly for crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). Sources said a court in Mannar on Monday remanded the 14 fishermen in custody till November 17.

According to officials attached to the fisheries department in Sri Lanka, the minor boy, who had accompanied his father to the sea, suffered from kidney-related ailments and was provided medical attention. "He is at a relative's house in Pechalai for now, and is under the supervision of the high commission," they added.

Chief Minister MK Stalin on Monday urged External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to secure the immediate release of the fishermen. He also requested the Union minister to seek the release of 100 fishing boats under Lankan custody. "Despite our repeated requests, such incidents of apprehension have continued unabated, causing fear and anger among the fishing community, which depends on their traditional fishing grounds in Palk Bay," he said"

Tamil Nadu: Deployment of square mesh cod-ends in shrimp trawling ops reduces bycatch

<http://www.uniindia.com/deployment-of-square-mesh-cod-ends-in-shrimp-trawling-ops-reduces-bycatch-study/south/news/2847155.html>

"The deployment of square mesh cod-ends in shrimp trawling operations considerably reduces bycatch and improves sustainability of fishing operations – according to studies

conducted by M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in association with the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) Cochin, Fisheries Department, Ramanathapuram, and the Fishermen Associations in Mandapam, Rameshwaram and Kottaipattinam fishing harbours.

A release from MSSRF on Saturday said stakeholder consultation on the 'Use of Square Mesh Cod-end in Shrimp Trawling' was organised by MSSRF on Friday at Thangachimadam Village Resource Centre, here to encourage promotion of square mesh cod-end in shrimp trawling so as to reduce bycatches.

Dr. G. N. Hariharan, Executive Director, MSSRF and chief guest of the programme released the handbook on 'Voluntary Code of Practice (CoP) on Flower Shrimp Management in Palk Bay region.'

Tamil Nadu: Mayiladuthurai fisherman injured as Indian Navy fires 'warning shots' in Gulf of Mannar

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/fisherman-from-mayiladuthurai-district-injured-in-firing-in-gulf-of-mannar/article66039034.ece>

"The Naval patrol ship fired warning shots ""as per standard operating procedure"" after observing the ""suspicious boat"" which failed to heed to repeated warnings to stop, an official statement said

A 30-year-old fisherman from Vanagiri near Poompuhar in Mayiladuthurai district was injured while fishing in the Gulf of Mannar, when an Indian Naval personnel fired a gun in the wee hours on Friday. The Naval ship, which was patrolling in Palk Bay near the India Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL), fired warning shots ""as per standard operating procedure"" after observing the ""suspicious boat"" which failed to heed to repeated warnings to stop. One of the crew on board the boat was injured, an official press release from the Navy said.

The injured fisherman K. Veeravel (30) was administered first aid by the ship crew and evacuated by an Indian Navy Chetak helicopter to INS Parundu at Ramanathapuram. Veeravel was subsequently admitted to Ramanathapuram Government Medical College Hospital for further medical management. He was later shifted to Government Rajaji Hospital in Madurai. His condition is reported to be stable. An inquiry has been ordered into the incident, the release further mentioned."

Tamil Nadu: Notifies India's first Dugong reserve: Here's why it's a crucial step

<https://thewire.in/environment/tamil-nadu-indias-first-dugong-reserve-crucial>

Last week, Tamil Nadu notified India's first ever dugong conservation reserve in the Palk Bay area of the Gulf of Mannar, which lies between Sri Lanka and the southern tip of India. Dugongs are marine mammals that graze on seagrass meadows in the ocean. According to marine biologists, the move to declare the dugong reserve – though 'political' – was long overdue. Notifying such conservation reserves is important because they uphold local communities as important stakeholders, they said.

Dugongs thought to have inspired myths of mermaids among seafarers of yore – are marine mammals that live in small groups in shallow waters. They're also called sea cows: a term that reflects the ecological role they play, being oceanic herbivores that chomp on seagrass in underwater meadows. They can grow up to 3.5 meters long, and weigh around 300 kg.

But though the animals are distributed across many parts of the Indo-Pacific, they are listed as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species due to their decreasing population worldwide. The species is already extinct in China. India's dugong population too is declining: there are just around 200 dugongs left, as per some estimates. In Indian waters, you can spot dugongs near the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and off the coast of Tamil Nadu in the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay. Here, in the Palk Bay, within a small, approximately 450 square-kilometre patch, is where the country's first dugong conservation reserve will come up. In an order published in the state gazette on September 21, Tamil Nadu notified the Dugong Conservation Reserve and delineated the boundaries of the area which will come up off the coastal districts of Thanjavur and Pudukottai.

"We have conceptualised this species-focused conservation reserve with a view to protect this critically endangered marine mammal and its vital seagrass habitats with support from local coastal communities mainly comprising fishermen and their families," Shekhar Kumar Niraj told. Niraj was Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Tamil Nadu, when the decision to designate the dugong conservation reserve was taken. "In [the] long run, the conservation reserve will provide vital support to TN's coastal environmental security."

According to the order in the gazette, protecting dugongs and seagrass beds in this area will also help in the "breeding of commercially valuable finfishes, crabs and shrimps, thereby benefiting thousands of small scale and marginal fishermen, who depend on fishery productivity for their daily livelihood in the nearshore areas".

Notification 'long due'

The move to finally notify a dugong conservation reserve comes more than a year after Tamil Nadu announced its decision to do so. The notification was long due and talks to designate such a reserve have been in the pipeline for three years, said Vardhan Patankar, independent marine biologist who has studied dugongs in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The notification of the reserve assumes even more significance because of the several threats that endanger dugongs in these waters, despite the species being listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 (which gives it protection on par with that of tigers in India). Gill nets are one of them. Being mammals, dugongs have to surface every three or four minutes to breathe. However, fishermen often set out gill nets at night in the shallow waters. Surfacing dugongs get tangled in the nets and die. Bill nets are one of the biggest causes of mortality of dugongs in the area, said Patankar.

The new conservation reserve declared for dugongs is a heavily fished area, he added. However, the state government has conducted extensive consultations with local communities and fisherfolk. “There is buy-in as far as fishers are concerned,” Patankar told. “Because it is a community-based conservation reserve, people can still use the area for fishing even if they have to take measures to protect dugongs from fishing-related mortality.” In such light, the designation of a conservation reserve – which sees people as important stakeholders and responsible for the conservation of dugongs – is a good thing, as opposed to declaring the area as a Marine Protected Area which often restricts fishing activities and thus embitters local communities, Patankar added.

According to him, the newly-declared dugong conservation reserve will also count as an OECM – or Other Effective area-based Conservation Measure. OECMs do not come under the protected area network (unlike wildlife sanctuaries or national parks) but focus on in-situ conservation of biodiversity through sustained, long-term management keeping in mind locally-relevant aspects such as socio-economic and cultural factors too. OECMs are part of the ‘30×30’ target under the Convention of Biological Diversity’s post-2020 global biodiversity framework, which India is also signatory to. The ‘30×30’ target aims to protect and conserve 30% of the world’s terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems. Thus the dugong conservation reserve is in a sense a “political move” that “looks good on paper” and adds to India’s climate change mitigation measures as well, Patankar commented. However, it is still a crucial step for dugong conservation, he added.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen protest attacks by Sri Lankan Navy

<https://www.firstpost.com/world/rameswaram-fishermen-stage-protest-condemning-attacks-by-sri-lankan-navy-10950881.html>

"Fishermen in Tamil Nadu's Rameswaram on Sunday staged a protest condemning the imprisonment and attacks by the Sri Lankan Navy on Indian fishermen. Earlier on 20 July, the Sri Lankan Navy arrested six Indian fishermen and a seized their boat after they had gone fishing from Rameswaram, claiming that they had crossed the border, which had caused consternation among Indian fishermen. Following this, the Rameswaram fishermen have been on a strike for the past three days, condemning the serial attacks by the Sri Lankan Navy on the Tamil Nadu fishermen, and their engagement in the violations of an agreement including the capture of the fishermen, seizure of the boat, and demanding the immediate release of the captured fishermen and their boat.

Fishermen protested in front of the Rameswaram bus stand, condemning the Lankan Navy, which is engaged in violations against the Katchatheevu Agreement with an anarchic trend, and criticised the central and state governments for not opposing it. The protest was led by All Fishermen's Union President NJ Bose. ""We have organized this protest to draw the attention of central and state governments to intervene and solve the problem,"" NJ Bose said threatening that if further action was not taken, their ""protest will take a different form"".

Fishermen's Association President N. Devadas, District Fishermen's Association Secretary Jesuraj, Fishermen's Association President Eamerit, Fishermen's Association in-charge Sagayam and all the fishermen's association executives and a large number of fishermen took part in the Rameswaram protest and raised slogans emphasizing the demands. Earlier, 12 Indian fishermen were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy for allegedly fishing illegally in the country's territorial waters.

Following that, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin requested External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to take appropriate action for the immediate release of 12 Indian fishermen arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy. All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) leader O Panneerselvam also wrote a letter to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar seeking his immediate intervention for the release of 12 Indian fishermen arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy.

On 25 March this year, the fifth meeting of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group on Fisheries was held through virtual mode. The Joint Working Group discussed all relevant issues in detail including the concerns relating to fishermen and fishing boats which have been on the agenda of bilateral discussions between India and Sri Lanka for many years. The Indian side expressed its readiness to work together with Sri Lanka for joint research to enhance the productivity of the Palk Bay fisheries.

The meeting concluded on a positive note, with a commitment toward continued cooperation

and dialogue to solve the fishermen-related issues and to hold the next meeting of the Joint Working Group as per schedule."

Tamil Nadu: Traditional fishermen denounce proposal to give five additional fishing hours for mechanised vessels

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2022/jun/25/traditional-fishermendenounce-proposal-to-give-five-additional-fishing-hours-for-mechanised-vessels-2469682.html>

"Fisheries Minister Anitha R Radhakrishnan's recent announcement about the proposal to provide additional five fishing hours for mechanised vessels has not gone down well with traditional fishermen as well as marine conservationists. As per the Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation Act (TNMFR), 1983, mechanised fishing vessels are allowed to fish between 5 am and 9 pm in the sea within 12 nautical miles (nm) from the shore. The Minister said that the department was considering extending it by five hours from the existing 16 hours. The announcement comes at a time when the Union and the Tamil Nadu government have been working on trawler diversification schemes and extending financial support to fishermen in Palk bay, districts including Nagapattinam, to do away with the trawling method and to purchase new deep sea fishing gill netter cum long liner vessels. They have also ensured not to give new registration for the trawlers since 2017 in the districts Ramanathapuram, Pudhukottai, Thanjavur and Nagapattinam.

The TNMFR Act was drafted for the mechanised vessels having engine capacity of 70 HP to reach the fishing ground in four hours and fish for eight hours. However, the relevant sections were amended four times to legitimate mechanised vessels measuring 24 metre-long and 240 HP for fishing, said advocate Dayan representing country boat fishermen.

Thoothukudi Country Boat Fibre Boat Fishermen Association president Dr SJ Gayes alleged that many mechanised vessels use chinese made engines of more than 600 HP capacity, which helps them to reach out to the fishing ground quickly and do fishing for more than 12 hours. It also attracts Labour Acts, which permits only eight hours work per day for a labour, he charged. Though law permits to fish between 5 nm to 12 nm, in reality it is disregarded as the mechanised vessels trawls right from two nm to as far as 40 nm, which eventually destroys marine wealth and risking livelihood of country boat fishermen, he says.

Environmentalists say, ""More the fishing hours, more the catch, and hence more the destruction of marine wealth. This allows fishermen to catch double the quantity of fish in a single day, which otherwise is done in two days."" The augmentation of time in favour of mechanised vessels may deplete the marine wealth, they say.

Jones, an environmental activist, noted that fishing practice using trawlers is already proven to be a destructive fishing method as it involves dragging or sweeping the sea bed for several kilometres, which wipes out the underwater ecosystem such as corals, reefs, seagrass and other marine life. To find a solution, trawlers should be banned in the terrestrial waters.

""Otherwise, the State government should be empowered to grant license for the deep sea fishing vessels to fish beyond 12 nm, that fall into the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which is a union government domain, so that the mechanised vessel fishing does not affect the traditional fishermen and the sea environment"", he suggested.

Gayes said the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court had set aside an impugned order issued by Kovilpatti Revenue Divisional Officer dated October 13, 2009 extending one hour of fishing for Vembar fishermen. The minister's announcement contradicts the court order and also interest of the State government to phase out the trawlers, he said while seeking intervention of Chief Minister MK Stalin.

Meanwhile, mechanised boat owners were happy. A boat owner told TNIE, ""The spiking fuel price has been a major constraint for us as it has eaten into our profit margin in just a few years. As fishing resources have drastically reduced, they have to go as long as 35 to 40 nm for trawling. ""We depend on the volume of catch to get a profitable income, given that the catch is after all auctioned, which may be profitable or yield loss."" he said.

A senior official said that the mechanised vessels play a crucial role in bringing revenue out of fishing. ""Of the total catch, 70 percent is achieved by the mechanised vessels"", he said.

When asked, Fisheries minister Anitha R Radhakrishnan told TNIE that there is demand among the mechanised vessel fishermen to increase the fishing hours citing spiking fuel cost. ""It will be discussed at the department level with consent from the Chief Minister MK Stalin. It needs to be deliberated with both country boat and mechanised vessel fishermen before amending the Act"", he said."

Sri Lanka: How Indian trawlers & economic crisis create a perfect storm for Sri Lanka's Tamil fishermen

<https://theprint.in/world/how-indian-trawlers-economic-crisis-create-a-perfect-storm-for-sri-lankas-tamil-fishermen/966596/>

"Staring out at the sea, fishermen standing on the shore of Sri Lanka's Palaly North describe the arrival of trawlers from Tamil Nadu as resembling a "kovil thiruvizha" (temple festival).

The men of this small fishing town, 30 minutes from Jaffna, talk about hundreds of boats with bright lights, showing up past 8 pm to ‘bottom trawl’ every species of fish on their way, causing environmental damage and loss of income.

“Even if we are not given assistance to tide over the economic crisis, it is okay. If Indian trawlers are stopped from entering our waters, we will be able to earn a decent living,” said M. Dinesh, president of the Palaly North fisheries cooperative society.

Fleets of trawlers from Tamil Nadu begin their work at Kankesanthurai or KKS and head to Mullaitivu, both 60 kms apart, said Nagarasa Dharmakulasingam, leader of the fisheries cooperative society union in the neighbouring village. “Two months ago, they (Indian trawlers) were barely a kilometre from the shore,” he added.

In fishing hamlets in Sri Lanka’s Northern provinces, especially those adjoining the Palk Strait, soaring tensions with Indian fishermen is enmeshed with the economic crisis. In some respects, it is an even larger preoccupation.

But things have been quiet for a few weeks – fishermen in Tamil Nadu take a break from April 15 to June 15 to allow fish to spawn. Even so, Lankan fishermen are worried about how things will play out when their Indian counterparts are back at sea.

‘Our protest not against people of Tamil Nadu’

“They are also Tamils; we are also Tamils. We will end up fighting it out and all that the governments will do is stand by and watch,” said Dinesh, adding, “Our protest is against illegal fishing and not against Tamil Nadu’s people or its government.” Annalingam Annarasa, president of the Jaffna District Fisheries Union Federation, shares Dinesh’s views. “From 2004 to 2016, we have compromised on many things to bring change, but no change has happened. This has to be resolved at a political level. Especially through the intervention of the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Stalin. We are hoping to meet him soon to discuss a solution.”

Annarasa described the latest informal dialogue held between both sides on 11 March on the sidelines of the annual church festival at St. Anthony’s Church in Kachchatheevu, an island that shares maritime boundaries with both India and Sri Lanka. There were over 20 fishing collective leaders from the Indian side, and 10 of us from Sri Lanka and the meeting went on for three hours. There were two main issues: bottom trawling should entirely stop and both countries’ governments should work out a schedule so fishermen from both sides can go out to sea to earn a living,” he said.

The Sri Lankan fishermen even requested the Indian fishermen to pass on a letter to Tamil Nadu CM M.K. Stalin, but they are yet to receive a reply, Annarasa told ThePrint. Chennai-based V. Vivekanandan, convener of the Alliance for Release of Innocent Fishermen (ARIF), told ThePrint that it was decided after years of negotiations that the Tamil Nadu government will provide Rameswaram's fishermen with alternatives for deep-sea fishing further in the Indian Ocean.

“This was seen as a solution to stop them from going to Sri Lanka. The scheme is still in its early stages, and it doesn't look very promising. Until they go back to the drawing board and come up with better alternatives, it is the Sri Lankan fishermen who will suffer,” he said.

Over the years, efforts such as these have not led to a resolution owing to three reasons: fluid bilateral ties between the two neighbours, the decades-long civil war in Sri Lanka plunging the fisheries industry into neglect and Tamil Nadu fishermen's assertion of a 'historical right' to earn their livelihood through fishing in the bay connecting the two countries.

Disparity, Debt & Death

Fishing remains a primitive profession in Sri Lanka's Northern provinces due to lack of political will to help fishermen acquire new boats or employ latest technologies to navigate the high seas.

In Palaly, for instance, fishermen use smaller boats that run on kerosene – that has been in short supply due to the ongoing fuel crisis – and say they feel intimidated by the bigger fleets operated by their Indian counterparts. The fuel crisis has rendered at least three-fourths of the fishing boats in Palaly out of action, and those that make it out are at risk of losing fishing nets that snap when entangled with Indian trawlers.

“Previously, a group of us would go out and surround a trawler boat but nowadays we are scared for our lives. There is a huge difference in the size and weight of our boats compared to theirs. When we work late at night, there is a genuine fear over whether we'd return home alive,” said M. Dinesh, adding that many fishermen are forced to borrow from private moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates to sustain their operations.

In February, protests had broken out in Palaly and Valalai over the death of two fishermen in a collision with an Indian vessel. Blocking the roads with their fishing boats, locals demanded action against the Tamil Nadu fishermen resulting in the arrest of 21 Indian fishermen and seizure of two trawlers by Sri Lankan authorities. Down the road from Palaly North, a dozen captured Indian trawler boats float in the Myliddy fisheries harbour.

“Most often, people arrested from the Indian boats are labourers and not owners. If the owner shows up to Sri Lanka with the paperwork and engages a lawyer to fight the case, he may be able to reclaim his boat. Otherwise, the boats end up in a legal tangle for years after which they are auctioned off,” said Annarasa. In the coastal village of Gurunagar in Jaffna, J. Dennis won the auction for the green trawler boat that was seized from Indian fishermen. His winning bid was LKR 1,08,000 (1 Indian rupee = 4.57 Sri Lankan Rupee), and it allows him access to a boat that will allow him to stay out at sea for a week instead of having to return in a day.

The fuel crisis has pushed many out of work in this village. Some can be seen gossiping, others playing games on their phones, while some keep themselves busy by untangling large fishing nets. “There is no electricity at home, so we sit out here since the breeze is good,” said a fisherman who did not wish to be named. Many in these coastal villages also talk about Chinese support for a sea cucumber hatchery and food processing factory, apart from fishing gear worth LKR 6 million that China handed over to Lankan fishermen. “If India doesn’t help resolve this dispute with Indian fishermen, we will ask the Chinese to help,” fishermen in Jaffna said jokingly, referring to the Chinese ambassador’s visit to the Northern provinces in December 2021.

Fallout of fuel crisis

Fishing communities in the Northern provinces have faced many difficulties since the Sri Lankan civil war ended in 2009 and the economic crisis is only adding to their woes, said J. Yardsan Figurado, director of the Mannar Social and Economic Development Organisation. “We are slammed by two sets of issues: domestic and international. There is a huge disparity between southern and northern (provinces) in the development of the fisheries industry,” he said.

“In this entire belt of Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, Mannar or Yalpanam (Jaffna), there are no multi-boat facilities, larger boats which allow fishermen to go out to sea for days. There are no universities or research centres to invest in teaching new skills, nothing,” Figurado adds.

The long queues of people waiting for fuel have caught up with Jaffna too. “Even a week ago, the lines outside fuel stations weren’t this long in the North,” Annarasa told ThePrint.

“We noticed that after Ranil (Wickremesinghe) took over as Prime Minister, he has shipped the problem North by curbing allotments. He has to look after the Sinhala people first,” he added. Annarasa says the basic expenses of his family of four have jumped from LKR 15,000 to 45,000 in the last month. Rice, which used to be LKR 90/kg, is now LKR 260-300/kg; white flour was LKR 87/kg and is now LKR 300/kg; coconut oil now costs LKR 900 per litre from the earlier

LKR 280 per litre. "Initially, we were skeptical of the protests in Colombo. But now, it has stretched into the 42nd day, we are starting to mobilise people here to consider joining the protests," said Annarasa."

India and Sri Lanka: Fishing for workable solutions in the Palk Bay

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/fishing-for-workable-solutions-in-the-palk-bay/article65345894.ece>

"After a gap of 15 months, the India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group (JWG) on fisheries held its much-awaited deliberations (in virtual format) on March 25. But between the two meetings of the JWG, a number of events — some of them unfortunate — have occurred in the Palk Bay region that encompasses India's Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka's Northern Province. For instance, seven fishermen — five from Tamil Nadu and two from Sri Lanka — have died in "mid-sea clashes". Just as sections of fishermen from the Palk Bay bordering districts of Tamil Nadu continue to transgress the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL), cases of many of them getting arrested and their boats being impounded by the Sri Lankan authorities continue. What has precipitated matters is that in early February, the impounded boats, around 140 in number, were auctioned despite a bilateral understanding on the matter.

Apart from poaching in the territorial waters of Sri Lanka, the use of mechanised bottom trawlers is another issue that has become a bone of contention between the fishermen of the two countries; the dispute is not just between the two states. This method of fishing, which was once promoted by the authorities in India, is now seen as being extremely adverse to the marine ecology, and has been acknowledged so by India. The actions of the Tamil Nadu fishermen adversely affect their counterparts in the Northern Province who are also struggling to come to terms with life after the civil war. The ongoing economic crisis in the island nation has only worsened their plight.

At the same time, the fishermen of Tamil Nadu experience a genuine problem — the lack of fishing areas consequent to the demarcation of the IMBL in June 1974. If they confine themselves to Indian waters, they find the area available for fishing full of rocks and coral reefs besides being shallow. The distance between Dhanushkodi (Tamil Nadu) and the IMBL is nine nautical miles (NM) while the maximum distance — Devipattinam and the IMBL — is 34 NM. Under the Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation Act 1983, mechanised fishing boats can fish only beyond 3 NM from the coast. This explains the trend of the fishermen having to cross the IMBL frequently. Another factor is that the people of the two countries in general and fisherfolk in particular have common threads of language, culture and religion, all of which can be used

purposefully to resolve any dispute. It is because of this factor as well as the plight of the fishermen of the Northern Province that the two governments have been repeatedly saying that the whole problem has to be looked at from humanitarian and livelihood angles.

Fisher-level talks

With the problem having been discussed by the JWG, and earlier during the visit of India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar to Sri Lanka, in March as well, it is time steps are taken to take the process forward. The present situation, which is otherwise very stressful for Sri Lanka in view of the economic crisis, can be utilised to bring the fishermen of the two countries to the negotiating table. This is because the Indian government's two-month ban on fishing on the east coast of the country began on April 15. It is up to Sri Lanka now to ensure that the talks take place as the Indian side is keen on resuming fisherfolk-level deliberations. As several substantive issues were discussed threadbare in the previous rounds of such meetings — the last one was in New Delhi in November 2016 — only some fine-tuning of the respective positions had to be done.

While Indian fishermen can present a road map for their transition to deep sea fishing or alternative methods of fishing, the Sri Lankan side has to take a pragmatic view that the transition cannot happen abruptly. To elicit a favourable response from the fishermen of the Northern Province, the Tamil Nadu fishermen have to commit themselves to a short and swift transition for which the governments in India (Central and State) have to come forward to perform the role of guarantors. Also, whenever there is a genuine complaint about Tamil Nadu fishermen having damaged the properties of the Northern Province's fishermen, the Indian government can compensate this through the proper channels of Sri Lanka.

Deep sea fishing

In the meantime, India will have to modify its scheme on deep sea fishing to accommodate the concerns of its fishermen, especially those from Ramanathapuram district, so that they take to deep sea fishing without any reservation. The revised scheme has to absorb satisfactorily not only the unit cost of long liners but also the running cost. Also, there is a compelling need for the Central and State governments to implement in Tamil Nadu the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana in a proactive manner. The scheme, which was flagged off two years ago, covers alternative livelihood measures too including seaweed cultivation, open sea cage cultivation, and sea/ocean ranching.

During Mr. Jaishankar's visit, India had signed a memorandum of understanding with Sri Lanka for the development of fisheries harbours. This can be modified to include a scheme for deep sea

fishing to the fishermen of the North. It is a welcome development that the JWG has agreed to have joint research on fisheries, which should be commissioned at the earliest. Such a study should cover the extent of the adverse impact of bottom trawling in the Palk Bay region.

Northern Sri Lankan fishermen seek India's action over disputes

Simultaneously, the two countries should explore the possibility of establishing a permanent multi-stakeholder institutional mechanism to regulate fishing activity in the region. At the same time, Sri Lanka should take a lenient view of the situation and refrain from adopting a rigid and narrow legal view of matters concerning the release of 16 fishermen or impounded fishing boats (around 90 in number). Any delay in this will only increase the bitterness between the two countries at a time when the economic crisis of Sri Lanka is generating empathy in India. What everyone needs to remember is that the fisheries dispute is not an insurmountable problem. A number of options are available to make the Palk Bay not only free of troubles but also a model for collaborative endeavours in fishing."

India and Sri Lanka: Holds fifth working group meeting on fisheries

<https://theprint.in/world/india-sri-lanka-holds-fifth-working-group-meeting-on-fisheries/890714/>

"The fifth meeting of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group on Fisheries was held on March 25 through virtual mode, the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying said on Sunday. The Indian delegation was led by Jatindra Nath Swain, Secretary, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

The other members of the Indian delegation included senior representatives from the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of Tamil Nadu, Government of Puducherry, Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard.

The Sri Lankan delegation was led by R.M.I. Rathnayake, Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries, Government of Sri Lanka. The other members of the Sri Lankan delegation comprised of senior officials from the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Fisheries, Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Navy, Coast Guard, Sri Lanka Police, Department of the Attorney General and National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency.

The Joint Working Group discussed all relevant issues in detail including the concerns relating to fishermen and fishing boats which have been on the agenda of bilateral discussions between India and Sri Lanka for many years.

Jatindra Nath Swain observed that the Indian side is always committed to work constructively with the Sri Lankan side towards the resolution of issues related to fishermen and their livelihoods in a humanitarian manner. He also took up the issue of the early release of Indian fishermen and boats currently in Sri Lankan custody. The Indian side expressed its readiness to work together with Sri Lanka for joint research to enhance the productivity of the Palk Bay fisheries.

Both sides also discussed cooperation between Navy and Coast Guard of both countries in patrolling, existing hotline between the Coast Guards and related operational matters including cooperation in tracking poaching, prevention of environmental damage due to bottom trawling, addressing grievances of fishermen on either side, besides issues relating to investigation on recent deaths of fishermen and status of apprehended fishermen and fishing boats.

The Indian side highlighted the initiatives taken by the Central and State Governments to diversify livelihood options and reduce fishing pressure in Palk Bay. It also informed that infrastructure has been created to facilitate deep-sea fishing and promotion of alternative livelihood through seaweed cultivation, mariculture and several aquaculture activities.

The Sri Lankan side proposed a faster transition to sustainable fishing in the Palk Bay fisheries and also suggested that India can help them develop the aquaculture sector and the associated infrastructure in Northern Sri Lanka. The meeting concluded on a positive note, with commitment towards continued cooperation and dialogue to solve the fishermen related issues and to hold the next meeting of the Joint Working Group as per schedule.

It may be recalled that the First Meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) was held on December 31, 2016, in New Delhi. The Second Meeting of the JWG was held in Colombo on April 7, 2017. The Third Meeting was held in New Delhi on October 13, 2017, while the Fourth JWG met in virtual mode on December 30, 2020.

India and Sri Lanka: Rising tensions in Palk Bay over fishing rights

<https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/rising-tensions-in-palk-bay-over-fishing-rights/>

"Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen have written to M. K. Stalin, the chief minister of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, asking him to find a "progressive" solution to their conflict with Tamil Nadu fishermen. In the letter, they drew attention to their grave socio-economic situation, which is the outcome of bottom trawling by fishermen from Tamil Nadu who are entering Sri Lankan waters, they said.

Bottom trawling involves scouring sea beds for fish. In addition to netting the targeted fish species and shrimps, this method of fishing pulls in a variety of marine life, including coral and

seaweed. It destroys spawning grounds and the marine ecosystem, and thus depletes future catch. While this method of fishing is banned in Sri Lanka it continues to be practiced in India. Bottom trawling has been practiced in the Palk Bay since the 1960s. Indeed it was encouraged, even incentivized with subsidies by the Indian government as is productive and earns foreign exchange.

However, this has damaged the sea bed and depleted catch on the Indian side of the International Maritime Border Line, prompting Indian fishermen to cross into the less ravaged Sri Lankan side in search of fish. This has triggered conflict with the Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen who use traditional forms of fishing. Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen have complained for over a decade about Indian trawlers entering their waters and damaging their livelihoods. Tensions between them and fishermen from Tamil Nadu have simmered for over a decade, even erupting in violence from time to time.

In February this year, Jaffna district in the Tamil dominated Northern Province was roiled in unrest, when the bodies of two local fishermen who had gone missing were washed ashore. Locals allege that Indian trawlers operate aggressively in Sri Lankan waters and believe that the local fishermen were killed in a “mid-sea clash,” even a “deliberate” collision between local and Indian fishermen.

Meanwhile in Tamil Nadu’s southern districts, fishing communities are up in arms over the Sri Lankan Navy arresting Indian fishermen and seizing, even auctioning off their boats. In the early hours of February 7, eight fishermen were taken into custody near Katchatheevu Island and in February alone, some In October last year, an Indian fisherman was killed when a Sri Lankan Navy vessel rammed into a fishing boat, throwing its occupants into the sea. Earlier in January, four fishermen lost their lives when their boat collided with a Sri Lankan naval craft. Hundreds of Indian fishermen have been arrested, tortured and even killed in the India-Sri Lanka conflict over fishing grounds in the past decade.

The fishermen caught in the conflict are ethnic kin. They are of Tamil ethnicity and share strong linguistic and cultural bonds. And although they live on either side of the Palk Bay, for centuries Tamils in India and Sri Lanka lived and worked in harmony.

In fact, bonds between them deepened during the Sri Lankan civil war (1983-2009). With the Sri Lankan state unleashing horrific violence on Tamils in the island, the latter fled to Tamil Nadu for sanctuary.

The Sri Lankan Tamil cause enjoyed much sympathy and support in Tamil Nadu. Indeed, fishermen from Tamil Nadu played an important role in smuggling weapons and other supplies

to the war zone in the Northern Province and in ferrying injured fighters back to Tamil Nadu for treatment. With the end of the civil war and the lifting of restrictions on fishing off the coast of the Northern Province, Sri Lankan Tamils returned to fishing. They found themselves up against Indian fishermen entering their waters in trawlers.

While the conflict appears to be one between Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen and their counterparts in Tamil Nadu, it is really one that is pitting traditional fishermen against the trawler fishing companies. The latter are rich and politically powerful. Indian and Sri Lankan diplomats as well as fishermen from the impacted communities, fishermen's unions and civil society organizations have been involved in talks for several years now. Measures, like allotting Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen different fishing days, to reduce the possibility of clashes have been introduced.

However, comprehensive measures to resolve the conflict have not been taken. The root cause of the conflict is the practice of bottom trawling and although in 2004, the Indian government admitted that this had to be halted, its practice in the Palk Bay continues. The government has put in place schemes for modification and buyback of trawlers to encourage fishermen to shift to deep-sea fishing. These appear to be moving at a snail's pace. Successive governments in Tamil Nadu seem interested in securing the release of detained fishermen only. Beyond that they have been reluctant to push the powerful trawling companies to shift to more sustainable methods of fishing. While India drags its feet on addressing the grievances of Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen, China is extending them support.

It has set up joint ventures, the Guilan Sea Cucumber Hatchery and Farm at Ariyalai and the New Silk Road Foodstuff factory at Mannar in the Northern Province, which are providing employment to local youth. In addition, it has provided Tamil fishermen with nets and dry rations. Prioritizing the lives and livelihoods of Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen is necessary not only for humanitarian reasons but also, to prevent China advance to its southern doorstep."

Troubled waters: On India-Sri Lanka fishing conflict

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/troubled-waters-the-hindu-editorial-on-india-sri-lanka-fishing-conflict/article65084884.ece>

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.

Tamil Nadu: The never-ending problem of fishermen

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/explained-the-never-ending-problem-of-tamil-nadus-fishermen/article65048644.ece>

"The vexatious fisheries conflict in the Palk Bay between India and Sri Lanka, especially between Tamil Nadu and Northern Province, has again acquired intensity with the Sri Lankan Navy arresting 12 fishermen of Rameswaram and impounding two boats on Saturday on the charge of poaching in the territorial waters of Sri Lanka. On hearing this, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, pointing out that this was the "third such incident in two weeks and 41 fishermen and six fishing boats are in the custody of the Sri Lankan Navy". What are the factors that have led to the present round of the problem? More than illegal fishing, the method of fishing, as practised by the fishermen of Tamil Nadu, is the problem.

The fishermen of the southern State of India have been used to mechanised bottom trawling for long whereas the fisherfolk of the Northern Province, which has been extremely hit by a civil war that lasted more than 25 years, still adheres to conventional fishing. Besides, bottom trawling is banned in Sri Lanka. The last couple of weeks saw heightened tension in the region with the reported death of two Jaffna fishermen following "mid-sea clashes with their Tamil Nadu counterparts" on January 27 and 29 and the subsequent protest by scores of northern Sri Lankan fishermen. How many Tamil Nadu fishermen are still in Sri Lanka? Apart from 41 fishermen arrested this year, 47 fishermen, who were rounded up along with 21 others in December, are waiting for repatriation, despite having been released from custody.

Unlike the set of 21 fishermen who had returned to Tamil Nadu, the 47 persons could not be repatriated as they had tested positive for COVID-19 and, since then, completed their mandatory quarantine period. What are the new dimensions to the problem? The move by the Sri Lankan authorities to go ahead with the reported auctioning of 140 impounded boats a week ago caused surprise and concern to the State government and the fishing folk alike. This was because a team from Tamil Nadu, comprising officials of the State Fisheries Department and representatives of fishermen's representatives, was supposed to go anytime now to Sri Lanka for finalising modalities on the disposal of 125 unsalvageable boats, which were said to have been berthed at Kiranchi, Karainagar, Kankesanthurai, Trincomalee and Thalaimannar naval bases. Due to the first two rounds of the COVID-19 pandemic, the visit could not take place earlier. In December 2021, the State government issued a revised order, approving the visit of the team. The Ministry of External Affairs too had consented to the visit. When there were reports in sections of the media about the auction, the Indian High Commission in Colombo, in a release last week, referred to an existing bilateral understanding between the two governments on the matter and sought again "necessary clearance" from the Sri Lankan government for the visit by the team from Tamil Nadu.

To confound the situation further, the Sri Lankan authorities have decided not to allow fishermen-devotees from Tamil Nadu to attend the annual festival of St. Antony's Church, Katchatheevu, citing the pandemic as the reason. Mr. Stalin has written to External Affairs

Minister S. Jaishankar, requesting him to urge Sri Lanka to enable the participation of the fishermen, who had been going to Kathcatheevu for the festival for years. Sri Lanka's Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda, in an interview to this newspaper on February 9, said he had also requested President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to allow fishermen to take part in the festival as a "goodwill gesture." However, Mr. Devananda, who hails from the Northern Province, defended the decision of auctioning the boats as India had not yet provided assistance promised to the fishermen of the Province. At a virtual interaction arranged by the Sri Lankan Deputy High Commission in Chennai a week ago, the Minister discussed the problem with eight fishermen of Rameswaram and Nagapattinam.

What is the way forward? Deep-sea fishing, projected as an alternative method to the Palk Bay fishermen, is yet to gain currency among the intended beneficiaries in a big way. If the Centre gives additional incentives and concessions, there may be more takers than in the past. In the meantime, as suggested by Mr. Stalin in his latest letter to Mr. Modi, the Joint Working Group's meeting, at the level of officials of the two countries, and talks, at the level of fishermen, can find solutions to the long- pending problem that has been consuming energy and resources of the two countries.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen along Nagapattinam-Mayiladuthurai coastline prefer to go in for deep sea fishing

<https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/fishermen-prefer-deep-sea-fishing/article38182619.ece>

"Against the backdrop of mid-sea attack by Sri Lankan Navy at Palk Bay at periodic intervals, fishermen along Nagapattinam-Mayiladuthurai coastline seem to be inclined to avail themselves of the government scheme for deep sea fishing. The Fisheries Department has sought to reach out to potential beneficiaries in the two districts with its 50 percent subsidy scheme for purchase of tuna liner-cum- gill netter fishing vessel. The scheme for purchase of a such a boat that entails 50 per cent subsidy to a maximum of Rs. 30 lakh requires the beneficiaries to contribute the remaining 50 percent of the cost. Fishermen could apply for the scheme in a group of six, or as cooperatives or as individuals.

Factoring in readiness of fishermen in the districts to switch over to deep sea fishing to avoid mid-sea conflicts with Sri Lankan Navy, the Government must broaden the ambit of the 50 percent subsidy scheme to enlist fishermen in large numbers, Mohandas, a fisher representative of Akkaraipettai emphasised. Only through scaling up the number of beneficiaries can the positive impact of deep sea fishing that would, in the long run, reflect in recouping of fisheries resources in Palk Bay, be determined, said Mahendran, a representative of Kilinjalmedu hamlet in Karaikal district, said.

According to a senior official of the Fisheries Department in Nagapattinam district, the scheme has been implemented for beneficiaries at the State-level on seniority basis, and, as such, there was no specific allotment per district. So far, over the last few years 13 boats have been sanctioned in Nagapattinam district under the scheme, he said. While they were game for deep sea fishing, the prospective beneficiaries have desired that their views must also be considered in right earnest by the government before finalising the design of the boat, as per the specifications of Naval architect that is a mandatory requirement. The fishermen in Nagapattinam-Mayiladuthurai belt also emphasised that the same scheme under Central funding was not impressive at the implementation level. Funding under the Central scheme for construction of large deep sea tuna long liners covers a project cost of Rs. .80 lakh per vessel with 50% Central subsidy assistance. But, availing the scheme has become a tough proposition due to the stringent norms in identifying the potential beneficiaries, Mr. Mohandas said. Government must broaden the ambit of the 50 per cent subsidy scheme to enlist fishermen in large numbers Mohandas Fisherman representative of Akkaraipeetai.

Tamil Nadu: Sri Lanka court releases 13 Indian fishermen

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-court-releases-13-indian-fishermen/article38124922.ece?homepage=true>

"A Sri Lankan court in the northern Mannar district on Wednesday ordered the release of 13 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu who were in custody following arrest on charges of illegal fishing. "Happy to learn from our lawyer in Mannar that 13 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu are being released," the Indian High Commission said in a tweet on Wednesday morning. "Soon after the Court verdict, our official from @CGJaffna [Indian Consulate in Jaffna] met with the Indian fishermen and offered sweets. We are taking steps for [their] early return," another tweet from the mission's Twitter handle said. The 13 fishermen were detained in December in one of three arrests made by the Sri Lankan Navy. A total of 68 Indian fishermen were arrested on charges of fishing illegally in Sri Lankan waters, and 10 mechanised boats were seized. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin wrote to the Centre, seeking the early release of the fishermen, while pointing to an "alarming frequency" of Sri Lanka arresting Indian fishermen.

The year 2021 proved a particularly tragic year for Tamil Nadu fishermen. Five fishermen returned home dead after they went fishing in the Palk Strait for a meagre daily wage. Fishermen's associations accused the Sri Lankan navy of attacking them, an allegation that Sri Lankan authorities deny. Further, Sri Lankan arrested 231 Indian fishermen in 2021, the highest number of arrests [of Indian fishermen] made by the navy in a year, since 2017. The Palk Bay fisheries conflict affecting fisher folk of Tamil Nadu and northern Sri Lanka remains a contentious bilateral issue, after many failed attempts by India and Sri Lanka to resolve it in the last decade.

War-affected northern Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen have repeatedly asked their counterparts in Tamil Nadu to stop using the bottom-trawling fishing method, banned in Sri Lanka and considered destructive the world over. Tamil Nadu fishermen are yet to agree to the demand. News of Sri Lanka releasing the 13 Tamil Nadu fishermen comes amid reports that fisher leaders from both sides might soon resume talks. Efforts are on through diplomatic channels to secure the release of the remaining Indian fishermen in prison, official sources said.

Tamil Nadu: ‘Prevent mechanised boat operators from violating norms’

<https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/prevent-mechanised-boat-operators-from-violating-norms/article38104135.ece>

"Stating that a majority of mechanised boat operators violate the norms while fishing in Palk Bay, the Country Boat Fishermen Association led by the CITU (Kadal Thozhilalargal Sangam) has asked the Fisheries Department to put an end to the violation immediately. Submitting a detailed petition to Collector Shankar Lal Kumawat at the Collectorate during the weekly grievances meeting held on Monday, the CITU-led delegation said that mechanised boat fishermen in Mandapam violated the norms and indulged in fishing within five nautical miles. Apart from this, the delegation said that many mechanised boat operators damaged the natural reserves in the sea from Mandapam to Yerwadi. The forest department should conduct surveillance and punish the boat operators, they added.

The memorandum also claimed that many Thoothukudi based boat operators fitted high horse-power motors, which were permitted only for deep-sea fishing boats, and engaged in fishing in Valinokkam, Mundal, Mariyur, Naripayur and Mookaiyur region. Likewise, many of the mechanised boat operators obtained permission for fishing three days in a week but clandestinely fished for the remaining days also without getting tokens. The members also said that many mechanised boat operators from Rameswaram, Pamban and Mandapam had set off to the sea from Monday and were carrying banned fishnets. Later, speaking to reporters, CITU district secretary M. Karunamoorthy said that the district administration should conduct fishermen grievance meeting every month, which was being conducted by Collectors in Kanniyakumari and Thoothukudi. About three years ago, citing some vague reasons, the then Collector had suspended the meeting, he pointed out.

India and Sri Lanka: 1974 Indo-Lanka boundary deal suffers from legal infirmity

<https://thefederal.com/opinion/1974-indo-lanka-boundary-deal-suffers-from-legal-infirmity/>

"The recent arrest of 68 Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Coast Guard for transgressing their maritime boundaries at the Palk Strait and Adam's Bridge area has once again

triggered a renewed debate on the legality and the binding nature of the 1974 Boundary Agreement between India and Sri Lanka. This forty-eight-year-old agreement had sought to resolve, once and for all, the contentious boundary issue between both the countries. However, that has not happened it seems. Immediately after the conclusion of this agreement there has been perceptible tension between the fishermen on either side of the Palk Strait. The exercise of 'historic' fishing rights beyond the national maritime boundaries and its interpretation have given rise to many unclear international legal issues.

Since 2010, on an average, annually, nearly two hundred Indian fishermen are arrested around Katchatheevu island area for fishing in Sri Lankan waters. Sometimes such arrests have resulted in fatalities as well. Since 2009, after the ending of the Sri Lankan internecine civil war, this number has been steadily rising. Each time, after such arrests the Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu dash off letters to the Prime Minister and also to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to review or to rescind the existing 1974 Boundary Agreement between India and Sri Lanka. They have been arguing that on account of the narrow interpretation (or even not making any reference to it) of the term 'historic' and 'traditional' fishing rights of the Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait, has given rise to this recurring problem of arbitrary arrest by the Sri Lankan Coast Guard. For this reason, the implementation of the 1974 Agreement has become a contentious issue. After the most recent incident that occurred last week, Tamil Nadu CM Stalin wrote a comprehensive letter outlining his government's concerns over the plight of the fishermen and the consequent viability of this agreement.

The arrest of the fishermen by the Sri Lankan authorities is followed by the impounding of their vessels under the Sri Lankan civil and criminal code. This has resulted in an inevitable long legal process thereby affecting the livelihood of the Indian fishermen. Some view this as a tactic to deter the Indian fishermen from venturing into the Sri Lankan side of the Palk Strait. Although the government of India, in particular, the MEA, has been elaborating upon the efforts being made by its Consulate to ameliorate the plight of the incarcerated fishermen in Jaffna and other places, tactically, it is silent on raising the concerns relating to the legal and contextual nature of the 1974 agreement. On the contrary, it has been stoically defending the agreement as resolving the long-standing boundary dispute between both the friendly countries.

To a RTI question on the larger issue of resolution of Katchatheevu Island or the Palk Bay issue raised on November 13, 2014, the MEA, (as publicised in its own website) had categorically stated: "The information sought above pertains to delineation of Indo-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). Applicant is requested to note that Katchatheevu Island lies on the Sri Lankan side of the India-Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) that was delineated by the 1974 Agreement". "(The Agreement on the boundary in historic waters between the two countries and related matters (with map) signed at Colombo on June 26, 1974 and at New Delhi on June 28, 1974). Under the Agreement, Indian fishermen are allowed access

to Katchatheevu island for rest, for drying of nets and for the annual St Anthony's festival. The Katchatheevu island issue is, however, currently sub-judice with two writ petitions [Nos. 561 (2008) and 430 (2013) filed in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. It may also be noted that the issue of Katchatheevu and IMBL pertain to the government of Sri Lanka, a friendly neighbouring country.”

The above contention of the Indian government on the contents and interpretation of the 1974 Agreement however is not in consonance with the views of the Tamil Nadu state government. This also raises the larger issue of implementation of an international agreement keeping in mind the federal structure of the Indian Constitution. Article 246 of the Indian Constitution in its Seventh Schedule provides that the central government has the sole prerogative to enter into and implement (under Article 253) any international agreement. However, in matters that affect the interests of state governments it should normally seek their views as well. In this regard, one should recall the unanimous resolution passed by the Tamil Nadu legislative assembly in 2013 opposing the transfer of sovereignty on the Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka. The Tamil Nadu government has also been pointing out that the 1974 agreement being a transfer of sovereignty issue of Katchatheevu Island has not been formally ratified by the Indian Parliament. This essentially raises the issue of adjustment and delimitation of maritime boundaries and accordingly needs the approval of the Indian Parliament as it has the sole prerogative to decide the territorial sovereignty and claims of the Indian state as per Part I (Articles 1 to 4) of the Indian Constitution. For this reason, two writ petitions on the issue of cession of maritime territory in relation to Katchatheevu Island, as noted above by the MEA, are pending before the Supreme Court.

The 1974 Agreement, despite its confirmed finality, continues to raise issues from both the domestic and international legal angles. On the domestic angle about the legality of the transfer of territorial sovereignty by the executive (the Central government) the Indian Supreme Court's decisions have gone through a trajectory of legal ambivalence in different contexts. The important question before the Supreme Court in several cases has been whether the territory could be ceded to another country through an executive decision or whether it should have been done through a constitutional amendment. The adjustment of an undefined boundary through marking was regarded as something that could be effected through an executive act. The adjustment of the boundary or territory pursuant to an order of the arbitral tribunal was regarded as a ceding of the territory, necessitating a constitutional amendment. This resulted in the 9th amendment of the Indian Constitution. The ceding of Indian sovereignty of Katchatheevu Island in a 1974 agreement by an executive action needs legal clarity.

The available official records show that this tiny island was historically part of the Indian territory. Can it be ceded without proper Parliamentary intercession? From the international legal angle, the 1974 Agreement between India and Sri Lanka was concluded at a time when the basic

principles relating to maritime delimitation had yet not crystallised. The negotiations for the third United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) had just been launched in 1973. There was no unanimity among countries on the extent of the limits of territorial sea on which states could have exercised their sovereign rights. The idea of other territorial delimitations such as Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), Continental Shelf and other related maritime zones had not yet crystallised as well. Even the Indian legislation on the maritime zones i.e., the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act, were passed in 1976.

It is not clear as to why India had to cede its sovereignty in 1974 of certain parts of the Palk Strait to Sri Lanka, including a 283 acre Katchatheevu Island without sufficiently preserving and articulating its historic and traditional rights. According to one view, such a transfer at that point of time was on account of a close alliance that existed between the prime ministers of both countries than anything else. Even now, in 2021 perhaps, similar sentiments prevail and accordingly India must find it difficult to overturn the agreement. It is also true that almost ten years after the conclusion of the 1974 agreement, the third UNCLOS had ended in 1983 with more clarity and unanimity on the global scene over the exact delimitation terms for the maritime zones. Despite all this, a silver lining in the 1974 agreement is its repeated reference to 'historic' and 'traditional' rights in its Preamble.

More importantly, it is the scope of Article 6 of the 1974 agreement on which the Central government should seek a broader view and interpretation through a mutual negotiation with Sri Lanka. It, inter alia, states, "The vessels of Sri Lanka and India will enjoy in each other's waters such rights as they have traditionally enjoyed therein". Further, international law, through its codified Vienna Convention on Law of Treaties (VCLT) in Article 31 through its general rules of interpretation clearly allows parties to renegotiate or to re-emphasise the provisions of a treaty through an appropriate addendum or annex. Perhaps, this is the way forward to end the decades of hardships of the fishermen. Along with this, a proper regional fisheries zone agreement as per UNCLOS requirements between both the countries should also be negotiated to optimally and sustainably utilise the available fisheries resources.

Tamil Nadu: Mechanised boat fishermen, family members observe fast

<http://www.uniindia.com/~mechanised-boat-fishermen-family-members-observe-fast/States/news/2599980.html>

"More than 2,000 fishermen and their family members from coastal hamlets of Ramanathapuram district observed a day-long fast at Thangachimadam here on Wednesday demanding the immediate and unconditional release of 68 fishermen from Tamil Nadu arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy for allegedly poaching in their territorial waters. The call to observe the

fast was given by leaders of 11 fishermen associations in Rameswaram. N.J.Bose, President of Rameswaram Port Mechanized Boat Fishermen Association, said the Indian government should take concrete steps to ensure the traditional fishing rights of Tamil Nadu fishermen. The Sri Lankan Navy has been continuously harassing the fishermen in the Palk Bay under the guise of cross border fishing.

The fishermen associations have been demanding to form a joint working group of the fishermen from Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka to solve the issues. The fishermen associations have also decided to resort to block the Chennai Express train at Thangachimadam on January one, if all the arrested fishermen were not released by December 31. A delegation comprising fishermen leaders and families of arrested fishermen will be going to New Delhi to meet External Affairs Minister S.Jaishankar and Fisheries Minister Parshottam Rupala to submit a memorandum, demanding to put an end to the frequent arrest of fishermen by the Lankan Navy.

The Sri Lankan Navy has arrested 68 fishermen hailing from Rameswaram, Mandapam and Jegadhapattinam in Tamil Nadu and confiscated 10 fishing trawlers in three separate incidents on December 18, 19 and 20. Chief Minister M K Stalin had already taken up the matter with the External Affairs Minister seeking his intervention to secure the release of the fishermen. In a letter to Dr Jaishankar, which was handed over to him by DMK MPs in New Delhi, the Chief Minister referred to the three incidents of arrest of 68 fishermen and urged the Centre to prevail upon the Sri Lankan government through diplomatic channels to put an end to the intimidatory tactics of the Lankan Navy. "The alarming frequency at which these incidents of apprehension and attacks are happening warrants urgent attention. The lives and livelihoods of our fishermen must be protected when they fish in the traditional waters of Palk Bay," he said.

Tamil Nadu: 14 more fishermen from the state arrested by Lankan Navy, totally 69 in custody

<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/14-more-fishermen-from-tamil-nadu-arrested-by-lankan-navy-totally-69-in-custody-1890421-2021-12-21>

"The Sri Lankan Navy arrested 14 more fishermen from Pudukkottai, Tamil Nadu, who were fishing in maritime waters. The Lankan Navy also seized two boats, alleging that the fishermen crossed the border. In addition to the two other such incidents that have happened in the last week, this takes the tally of fishermen and boats to 69 and 10 respectively. As a result, fishermen in Pudukkottai announced a strike for the day. Fishermen from Rameswaram are already on an indefinite strike. Third arrest by Lankan Navy in four days On December 18, 43 fishermen from Rameswaram, Ramanathapuram District, were fishing in the traditional waters of Palk Bay, in six mechanized fishing boats. The Lankan Navy arrested them for violating the international border. On December 19, 12 fishermen in two boats were also arrested.

TN CM writes to external affairs minister Alarmed by the frequency of the arrests despite letters from the Tamil Nadu government, Chief Minister MK Stalin wrote a letter to Union Minister of External Affairs S Jaisankar, expressing anguish over these incidents of arrest and harassment. In the letter, he states, "The repeated attempts by the Sri Lankan Navy to prevent the exercise of traditional rights by fishermen of the State by intimidatory tactics must not be allowed to continue further." The letter also states that in 2021 alone, five fishermen were killed in two separate attacks.

Tamil Nadu: Gulf of Mannar corals to face threat if plan to grow invasive seaweed gets nod

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2021/dec/22/gulf-of-mannar-corals-to-face-threat-if-plan-to-grow-invasive-seaweed-gets-nod-2398366.html>

"Succumbing to industrial lobby, Union government is reportedly pushing for large-scale commercial cultivation of invasive alien seaweed - *Kappaphycus alvarezii* - inside the eco-sensitive zone of Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park which is one of the world's richest regions for marine biodiversity and coral reefs. Gujarat-based Central Salt and Marine Chemicals Research Institute (CSIR-CSMCRI) has identified five locations in Gulf of Mannar and two locations in Gulf of Kutch for seaweed cultivation and submitted the proposal for Niti Aayog to initiate pilot-scale cultivation and even received funds. Officials sources confirmed to TNIE Pattinamaruthur and Vellapatti in Ottapidaram block in Thoothukudi; Periyasampuram in Villathikulam block in Thoothukudi, Erwadi in Kadaladi block in Ramanathapuram and Seeni appadharga in Mandapam block in Ramanathapuram are the five locations identified in Gulf of Mannar for *Kappaphycus* cultivation.

Sources said the multipurpose seaweed park announced for Tamil Nadu by Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in last budget is being used as gateway to push cultivation of exotic species, rather than promoting native seaweed varieties. *Kappaphycus*, a fast growing alga known to absorb high amount of nutrients from seawater is already under rampant cultivation in Palk Bay region. Indigenous to Indonesia and Philippines, the exotic seaweed was introduced to India in 1995 for cultivation purpose. The commercial significance of *Kappaphycus* lies in its role in production of an industrially lucrative polymer called Carrageenan. This is highly problematic considering the fact that the global invasive species database maintained by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) placed the *Kappaphycus* in the 'red list'.

The Invasive Species Specialist Group of IUCN has described the *Kappaphycus* as ""destructive invasive species and pose a serious danger to the coral reefs"". There are numerous scientific studies and research papers published over the years by Suganthi Devadason Marine Research

Institute (SDMRI), Thoothukudi and National Institute of Oceanography, Goa hinting of possible bio-invasion corals of Gulf of Mannar islands by Kappaphycus, if left unchecked. A four-year underwater research study done by SDMRI with the funding support of Union environment ministry, whose results were published in 2018, showed that Shingle, Kurusadai and Mulli islands in Mandapam cluster and Valai island in Kilakarai of Gulf of Mannar were invaded by Kappaphycus.

Considering the vast impact on corals, the report recommended that the cultivation of exotic seaweed in and around Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park and Marine Biosphere Reserve areas should be completely stopped. "Government should not grant permission to introduce any alien species in Gulf of Mannar areas including for experimental purposes, as they are capable of altering the ecological balance as well as depleting the health and community structure of key resources like coral reefs and its ecosystem services, and thereby the livelihood of dependent fisher community," the report said. In fact, there is a 2005 Government Order that restricts cultivation of the exotic seaweed only to the seawaters north of the Palk Bay and South of Thoothukudi coast.

When contacted, Commissioner of Fisheries KS Palanisamy told TNIE a consultant has been appointed to prepare a detailed project report for the proposed seaweed park. Feasibility studies are being conducted in Thoothukudi, Ramanathapuram, Pudukkottai, Thanjavur, Nagapattinam and Tiruvarur. Palanisamy distanced himself from CSMCRI efforts to promote Kappaphycus inside eco-sensitive zone of Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park. "I am not aware of it. We will not promote anything in violation of 2005 GO. Cultivation will be carried out outside the notified area." Chief Wildlife Warden Shekhar Kumar Niraj told TNIE: "Kappaphycus is an invasive species and every year the department carries out manual clean-up of coral reefs in the islands invaded by the exotic seaweed. We don't have any problem, if native seaweed species are cultivated, but at no cost Kappaphycus will be allowed to be cultivated inside the Gulf of Mannar. This species can regrow from fragments as small as 0.5 cm making it an extremely difficult to control."

Sri Lanka: Towards sustainable fisheries

<https://www.dailynews.lk/2021/12/13/features/267165/sri-lanka-towards-sustainable-fisheries>

"In a major supermarket in Washington, DC, USA, the seafood section includes a product that comes from far away: the blue swimming crab imported all the way from Sri Lanka. The packaging proudly announces that the product is "Committed to Sustainability" and is a "Product of Sri Lanka." About 9,000 miles (14,500 Km or nearly 24 hours by air counting transit times) away in the island country of Sri Lanka, close to one million people are engaged in the fisheries

sector on a full- or part-time basis, including those fishing and processing blue swimming crabs. Fish make up about 50 per cent of Sri Lankans' annual animal protein intake, a ratio three times higher than the global average.

Thus, sustainable management of Sri Lanka's fisheries is essential for continued food security and livelihoods, and for providing opportunities for new jobs and exports in the country. Blue swimming crab Efforts to sustainably manage Sri Lanka's blue swimming crabs began in 2013 with the launch of the Blue Swimming Crab Fishery Improvement Project as a joint initiative of the National Fisheries Institute Crab Council, an association of North American crab importers, and the Seafood Exporters' Association of Sri Lanka (SEAS). It is being carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Fisheries and more than 70 small scale fishing communities in four districts in Sri Lanka. The project aims to improve the biological and ecological status of crab fisheries and their management in the Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar and make them sustainable in and for the future.

A well-managed fishery forms the basis for consistent catches and steady incomes for fishers as well as the many women working along this labour-intensive value chain. Alternatively, overfishing would erode incomes, creating greater vulnerability among Sri Lanka's coastal fishing communities (Sri Lanka has a 1,340 Km coastline). The analysis first assessed the blue swimming crabs' stock status using an innovative, simple but robust methodology that relies on measuring the length of crabs harvested. The assessment helped determine sustainable catch levels and is repeated periodically to gauge the stock status and adjust the catch levels accordingly.

In January 2018, the blue swimming crab fisheries achieved a 'good alternative' recommendation from the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch, a recognition of the progress made towards improved management. This recognition allowed the Taprobane Seafood Group, Sri Lanka's top exporter of pasteurized crab products, to access new, premium markets in the United States for eco-labelled high quality seafood products. It is noteworthy that at the height of market disruptions induced by the COVID-19 in April-May 2020, Taprobane's only orders in North America were from premier markets for "sustainably sourced seafood."

Sustainability lessons

The success of the blue swimming crab project led to new questions: Can Sri Lanka adopt a similar approach for other fisheries and seafood products? Can similar projects achieve sustainable resource management and better revenue in Sri Lanka and elsewhere? Considering the importance of the fisheries sector for Sri Lanka, the World Bank carried out an analysis between 2020 and 2021 with the Sri Lanka Ministry of Fisheries and its agencies, the National Planning Department, fisheries and processor organisations, NGOs, and academia. The study "Priorities for Sustainably Managing Sri Lanka's Marine Fisheries, Coastal Aquaculture, and the

Ecosystems That Support Them” includes an analysis of coastal and multiday fisheries, coastal aquaculture, and coastal ecosystem services that support these fisheries, partly funded by World Bank-administered trust fund, PROBLUE.

The study’s main recommendations for coastal fisheries centre around data-based and participatory management. For example, it recommends that the Ministry of Fisheries allocate more resources to regular stock assessments, including developing methods for data-poor fisheries, and create sustainable management plans based on these assessments, in close consultation with fishers and other local stakeholders. These plans should incorporate measures to conserve and, where feasible, restore ecosystems such as coral reefs and mangroves that support the fisheries and increase coastal communities’ resilience to weather events and Climate Change.

To ensure these plans are implemented, it will be crucial to provide support to diversify the livelihoods of fishers and their families, as well as transmit to fishers’ part of the sustainability premiums achieved through exports to premium markets. World Bank engagement The study report will be launched at a public event with high level participation from the Sri Lankan Government and the World Bank, which will feature policy and technical discussions. These discussions are an integral part of the exchanges to develop the next Country Partnership Strategy for 2022 - 2026, and will hopefully help Sri Lanka build back better towards a sustainable blue economy.

Tamil Nadu: ‘Rights of traditional fishermen should be protected’

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/rights-of-traditional-fishermen-will-be-protected/article37757904.ece>

"A large number of fishermen leaders from various associations across Tamil Nadu participated in the Fisheries Day celebrations held in New Delhi last week. Fishermen leader Jesu Raja from Rameswaram, who was part of the delegation, on return from New Delhi said that they had an exclusive meeting with the Union Fisheries Minister Parshottam Rupala and discussed various issues including the problems with Sri Lankan Navy personnel, diesel subsidy and enhancement of central subsidy for deep sea fishing boat and among others. Speaking to The Hindu on Monday, he said that after the visit of the Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka to Rameswaram last week, they had high hopes of resolving issues between the fishermen in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

Utilising the opportunity to be part of the National Fisheries Day celebrations at New Delhi, the delegation briefed the Minister and senior officials about the need for direct dialogue with the fishermen in Sri Lanka, which alone, they said, would bring in a permanent solution for fishing in Palk Bay. Union Minister Mr. Rupala, who heard the fishermen from different States for well

over two hours, has assured to visit Rameswaram soon, Mr Jesu Raja said and added that they had jointly presented a 12-point charter of demands which included the impact the Indian Marine Fisheries Bill 2021 will have on fishermen, to declare traditional fishermen as tribes and to recognise them as traditional fishermen, to provide better infrastructure for fishermen at the fish landing centre and enhance financial assistance during the annual ban period.

Sri Lanka: Takes new measures to stop bottom-trawling by Indian fishermen

<https://www.sundaytimes.lk/211031/news/lanka-takes-new-measures-to-stop-bottom-trawling-by-indian-fishermen-460310.html>

"In yet another move that signals that Sri Lanka is toughening its stance against bottom-trawling Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan waters, the Fisheries Ministry has decided not to release any Indian boat involved in the illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Fisheries Director General S.J. Kahawatte told the Sunday Times the move follows the decision to fully implement the amended provisions of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act No 2 of 1996. The 2017 amendments have empowered the authorities not only to prosecute trespassing Indian fishermen but also to confiscate their trawlers and declare them as state property. Earlier, the Sri Lankan authorities released the detained boats on humanitarian grounds or on requests from the Indian government. Under the amended law, the arrested Indian fishermen could be released on bail but their boats would be kept in custody until the cases were determined. If they were found guilty, the boats would become the property of the Sri Lankan state.

"Earlier, the trespassing Indian fishermen were released. In terms of the new provisions, they can be released on bail and allowed to return to their home country, provided lawyers representing them appear in courts when the cases come up for hearing. The fish catch and equipment seized from their vessels will be confiscated," Mr Kahawatta said. To stop bottom trawling, the Fisheries Department last month issued a directive to District Assistant Directors, advising them to implement the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act No 2 of 1996 and Fisheries (Regulation of Foreign Fishing Boats) Act No 59 of 1979 as amended in 2017 and 2018. Accordingly, foreign fishermen who trespass into Sri Lanka's waters can be charged with illegal entry, fishing without a permit, entering into territorial waters without keeping the fishing gear stowed in their vessels and using banned bottom trawling nets towed by a motorised or mechanised boat.

Sri Lanka's tough new measures come in the wake of protests by Northern fishermen seeking compensation for damages caused to their nets and other fishing equipment by Indian trawlers. Northern Province-based fisher federations had called on the Fisheries Ministry to auction the confiscated Indian trawlers to pay them compensation. Asked whether the Government would comply with the Northern fisher groups' request, the DG said no decision had been taken yet in this regard. In July 2018, following an understanding between India and Sri Lanka, an Indian

delegation visited the North to secure the release of 184 boats detained prior to 2015. However, the delegation returned empty-handed since the boats were not in good condition for the India-bound passage. More than 200 detained Indian trawlers have been anchored in jetties in Karainagar, Kankesanthurai and Point Pedro. Due to the long anchorage, a significant number of these boats are beyond repair, officials say. Some 140 Indian trawlers which were seized before 2018 are yet to be retrieved by Indian fishermen.

Legal action against 68 trawlers has been completed and a further directive from the Attorney General's Department is awaited. Four vessels were seized recently and cases have been filed against them. Since 2018, some 89 Indian trawlers have been confiscated. Meanwhile, the Northern fishermen's demand to implement the law against Indian fishermen carrying bottom trawling fishing in Sri Lankan waters, has earned the wrath of local trawler fishermen. They fear that they would also lose their 'livelihood'. On Tuesday, in Jaffna's Gurunagar area, a group of local trawler fishermen staged a counter-protest demanding that they be allowed to engage in trawling. On October 17, more than a hundred black-flagged local fishing boats staged a protest sail from Mulliathivu to Point Pedro, urging the authorities to take tough action against poaching Indian fishermen. The fisher leaders insisted that the recently passed laws should be implemented fully to prevent the Indian fishermen from trespassing into Sri Lankan waters. Local trawler fishermen said their trawling involved gill nets which were less impactful on marine resources compared to bottom trawling practised by Indian fishermen.

They claimed they engaged in such fishing only in selected sea grounds identified by the National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA). They also claimed that unlike the Indian bottom-trawling fishermen, they did not use heavy metals for trawling, but used wooden slabs. Mr. Kahawatte said the department had not issued any licence for trawling although a significant number of local trawlers used this fishing method. He acknowledged that the department had received complaints against this practice by local trawlers. Meanwhile, two Indian fishermen who were arrested last Monday following a chase that ended in a collision between their boat and a Navy vessel were released by the Kayts Magistrate's Court. They are to be repatriated to India. Their boat capsized after the collision, leading to the death of an Indian fisherman. The incident took place three nautical miles off the coast of Kovalam, Jaffna. The body of the fisherman was sent two days later amid widespread protests by fisher communities in Tamil Nadu's Pudukkottai district.

At present, 23 Indian fishermen are being detained at Karainagar Navy camp. They are undergoing a two-week mandatory quarantine process. The Kayts court this week further remanded them till November 10. Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda told the Sunday Times the Government was taking up the matter with the Indian authorities, making use of all available avenues, including diplomatic channels. He, however, said the practice of bottom trawling by Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan territorial waters could not be allowed under any circumstances.

“The reason why they keep coming into our waters is that almost all marine resources in the Indian side have been completely depleted due to their exploitative fishing methods.

If this practice continues in our waters, we would face the same fate,” Minister Devananda warned. When the visiting Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla was here early this month, Minister Devananda met him and raised the fishermen issue. The minister told the Indian Foreign Secretary that Sri Lanka had suffered a loss of Rs 500 million during the last five years alone due to Indian fishermen’s illegal bottom trawling in Sri Lanka’s waters. Mr. Devananda also reiterated his proposal for joint monitoring of the Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar but India asked for more time to study it. The covid pandemic has delayed a dialogue on this initiative. On Friday, Indian High Commissioner Gopal Baglay met Tamil National Alliance (TNA) leader R. Sampanthan and its spokesperson M.A. Sumanthiran to discuss the Indian fishermen issue, among other matters.

India and Sri Lanka: Ending the dispossession of Northern fishers by Indian trawlers

<https://island.lk/ending-the-dispossession-of-northern-fishers-by-indian-trawlers/>

"From the beginning of the early 1980s, trawlers, from Tamil Nadu, have been crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) and illegally fishing in the Palk Bay waters of northern Sri Lanka, damaging the ecosystem by bottom trawling, smuggling fisheries resources, belonging to the northern Sri Lankan fishers, damaging their fishing equipment, and undermining their livelihoods. Diverse types of interventions, by the two governments, dialogues between the fishers of the two countries, involvement of civil society actors, and others, have done little to prevent human suffering, economic losses and the volatile political situation disturbing the relations between two friendly countries that have emerged from this 40-year long story of resource piracy.

The northern Sri Lankan fishers, who suffered 30 years of civil war have had enough and there is an urgent need to end this crisis. Extracting and devastating resources Both Sri Lankan and Indian fishers used to share the Palk Bay waters (historic waters) in the past, which they did in harmony. However, post-war developments saw radical changes in the structure and organisation in fisheries, the expansion of the market and the establishment of borders separating the Palk Bay region, all of which had tremendous influence on fisheries, especially on the type of technology employed (craft-gear combinations), target species, fishing pressure and area of operation. In this process of change, a tremendous increase in Indian trawlers was observed, which finally resulted in a serious decline of fisheries resources on the Indian side of the Palk Bay and crossing of the IMBL by the Indian trawl fleet to fish in Sri Lankan waters.

In northern Sri Lanka, over 37,000 fishers operate more than 11,650 boats, the majority of which are 18 feet FRP boats propelled by outboard engines of 8 to 25hp. Including post-harvest sector employment and dependents, about 200,000 people in the Northern Province are dependent on the sector. They don't stand a chance against the 2500 odd 30-60 feet trawlers from Tamil Nadu propelled by 70-190hp outboard engines. Indian trawl boats are crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (which was established in 1974 and 1976) to fish on the Sri Lankan side of the Palk Bay. These boats are poaching in Sri Lankan waters in large numbers as well as extracting and devastating the resources belonging to Sri Lankan fishers. Although the process of poaching commenced in a situation where Sri Lankan fishers in the North had limited fishing opportunities due to the civil war. Today the issue has become one of the most important economic and political issues in the country, because with the end of the war in 2009, the Sri Lankan fishers in the North has commenced fishing.

The Palk Bay Pirates Trawlers come at night, three days a week, smuggle colossal amounts of fisheries resources, and damage Sri Lankan fishers' nets, causing enormous financial losses. To avoid the trawlers, Sri Lankan fishers often stay at home instead of going out to sea, thus losing valuable fishing time. They are forced to adopt less-profitable, near shore operations and/or resort to destructive fishing practices (trawling, wing nets, purse seining, dynamiting, etc.). The social institutions of the fishing communities, particularly fisheries co-operatives present in every village, have been weakened due to the long decline of fishing incomes, where a fraction of such incomes are normally contributed to run the co-operatives. Thus, participatory management and coastal support for fishing communities have been undermined. The long disruption of fisheries after the war has made it difficult for fishing communities to plan for the next season, and many are slowly moving out of the fishing sector to other forms of day wage labour. In the early years, arrests of Indian trawlers for poaching were made for security reasons, because the Sri Lanka Navy, which was fighting a war, was less interested in fisheries issues.

But since the cessation of the war, the Navy arrested the intruders for illegal entry into Sri Lankan territory. The arrests were made under the Foreign Fishing Boat Regulations Act No. 59 of 1979, Immigration Act of Sri Lanka and the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The impact of the arrests in preventing Indian trawl intrusion was neutralised by the arrests of Sri Lankan multiday fishers for poaching in Indian Territory, and detained in Indian prisons. Often, through the intervention of the embassies of the two countries, the Indian trawler fishers arrested and detained in Sri Lankan prisons were released in exchange for Sri Lankan fishers detained in India. Early Interventions In trying to deal with this escalating crisis, the two governments drew up an MOU in 2005, which made provision for the establishment of a Joint Working Group (JWG), which among other things, would deal with issues of poaching and arrests.

Although several rounds of discussions were held since 2008, no significant developments were reported, other than agreeing that fishers in both countries should be able to pursue fishing

activity in a safe, secure and sustainable manner. However, some progress was achieved in the front of fisher-fisher dialogues. Several such dialogues have taken place in the past, initially organised by ARIF (Alliance for the Release of Innocent Fishermen) and later with the active involvement of the two governments. The most important of such dialogues took place in August 2010, where the Indians agreed to stop mechanised trawl fishing in Sri Lankan waters within a period of one year, during which time, only 70 days of trawling were to be allowed. Unfortunately, the governments failed to back up these decisions, and the promises were not kept. Further dialogues took place under state patronage in March 2011 and January 2014, which did not produce any fruitful results.

Post-2015 developments In April 2015, President Maithripala Sirisena convened a meeting with the various arms of the state and the northern fisher leaders on the request of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). This high level meeting and continued engagement gave the fisher folk the confidence that their plight was a matter of serious concern to the Government, and initiated bipartisan engagement on the issue, leading to significant progress. The Parliamentary debate in October 2015 on the ecological and socio-economic damage by Indian trawlers, growing awareness through media coverage and the greater involvement of actors in Colombo, raised the fisheries conflict to the level of a national issue, rather than a problem confined to the North. Fisher leaders also took their issue to court and actively sought legal recourse towards prolonged confiscation of trawlers, and a ban of trawling in Sri Lanka.

An Amendment to the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act banning bottom trawling in Sri Lanka was passed by Parliament in July 2017. On another front, the Indian Government, in 2015, made unambiguous statements that Tamil Nadu trawlers should stop cross-border fishing. Furthermore, the increased media attention on the devastation caused to Northern Fishers exposed Tamil Nadu's hypocrisy. The Tamil Nadu Government called for INR 1,520 crore (USD 225 million) package to convert the trawler fleet to deep sea vessels under the 'Blue Revolution Scheme', of which INR 450 crore (USD 66 million) was approved by the Government in Delhi, and the rest was to come from bank loans. By September 2019, close to 590 trawlers have applied for this facility.

Although concerns were raised about whether such a conversion to deep sea fishing and buy back is realistic and sustainable, the engagement from Tamil Nadu pointed to an acknowledgement of the unsustainability of trawling and poaching. An important development was the setting up of a Joint Working Group in November 2016 during ministerial talks held between India and Sri Lanka (revitalising what was formed in 2005), which would meet every three months and a meeting between the Ministers for Fisheries every six months. The Terms of Reference for the Joint Working Group (JWG) included: i. expediting the transition towards ending the practice of bottom trawling at the earliest, ii. working out the modalities for the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for handing over of apprehended fishermen, and iii.

ascertaining possibilities for cooperation on patrolling. Both Governments agreed on setting up a hotline between the two Coast Guards. Agreement was also reached on the request by the Fishermen Associations that there should be no violence and no loss of life in the handling of fishermen by the Navies and Coast Guards of the two countries.

They agreed to encourage the Fishermen Associations of the two countries to meet every six months to take further their dialogue. Yet, many of the decisions taken at the bilateral Ministerial talks were not followed through towards a permanent solution. As a result of campaigns of small scale fishers from the North, the work of researchers and activists and engagement with the governments of the two countries, and more importantly, the enforcement of the Foreign Fishing Boat Regulations (amendment) Act, a significant reduction in the incidence of Indian trawlers illegally fishing in Sri Lankan waters was noticed by 2018. Yet, the Northern fishers did not even have a breathing space for a new beginning, because the country was hit by the Covid Pandemic in early 2020. Very little action was paid against the poachers and there has been a resurgence of the incidence of Indian trawlers poaching in Sri Lankan waters, drastically affecting fishing livelihoods, which were already being threatened by the pandemic.

The aggravated current situation, continues to dispossess the small scale fishers of the North; they were devastated by the war until 2009, crippled by the Indian trawlers in the decade after the war and impoverished by market disruptions with the Covid-19 pandemic since March 2020. Moving forward The decision to arrest and retain trawlers that are crossing over the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) by the Sri Lanka Navy, particularly since 2013, places significant pressure on the Tamil Nadu establishment. Yet, the lower levels of arrests over the last two years (71 vessels were arrested in 2017 while only nine were arrested in 2020) is in part due to fears of the Covid-19 virus spreading through arrests. Evidently, expanding deterrence is of paramount importance in dealing with the present crises, which needs strict enforcement of the Foreign Fishing Boats Regulations (Amendment) Act, No. 01 of 2018 to arrest foreign vessels in Sri Lankan EEZ which has provisions for imposing heavy fines on trawl owners ranging from Rs. 4 – 15 million.

The Trawl Ban Act. No. 11 of 2017 should also be implemented. Given that Indo-Sri Lankan relations are currently of great importance, where the priorities for both governments are in furthering trade, investment and defence ties between the two countries, deterrence is to be employed carefully. There is the need for a broader strategy that asserts pressure at different levels to ensure that Tamil Nadu addresses the issue of poaching by their trawlers; particularly given that fisheries is a devolved subject in India. Pushing for joint patrolling operations by the Indian and Sri Lankan Navy could be strategic. The Indian side needs to be convinced to install vessel monitoring devices on their trawlers to track their location.

However, these efforts will prove futile unless the incidence of Sri Lankan multiday boats violating Indian maritime boundaries is brought under control. Raising the issue both by the Sri Lankan Government towards the Indian Government and the TNA and Tamil political actors towards Tamil Nadu would be strategic, given the political realities. Strong emphasis should be made on the devastating impact of resource smuggling on the livelihoods of Northern fishing populations of Sri Lanka. Strategies to work with the newly elected Government in Tamil Nadu in relation to the fishing conflict will be necessary. Engagement by the Tamil fishing community and community leaders from the North will prove important for challenging a change of stance by Tamil Nadu Government and its leaders. Thousands of nets worth millions of Rupees have been lost in the past decade, with no single fisherman ever being compensated and with no insurance being available.

Fishers now deserve financial reparations for their lost assets and for lost fishing days. Financial reparations can also be asked from the Tamil Nadu fishers, the Tamil Nadu government or the Indian government. If such demands, however, are not met in the short term, the Sri Lankan government itself may need to find the required funds. A campaign for reparations for northern Sri Lankan fishers will help consolidate the demand for a permanent solution to the fishing conflict. The larger aim of interventions in the Palk Bay should be to establish a sustainable, comprehensive, and socially just fisheries. Current data on the state of fish stocks in this region are highly deficient. Similarly, very little scientific knowledge on the damage caused to the environment by trawling is currently available. There is an urgent need for NARA to intensify research in the Palk Bay. This can provide the foundation for developing a rational and legitimate framework for fisheries governance.

Such research will also continue to weigh on the need for a permanent solution that ends bottom trawling in the Palk Bay. While the fisher-to-fisher negotiations conducted in Chennai in 2010 were initially widely acknowledged as promising, the follow-up was poor. Similarly, the Ministerial level talks in November 2016 were significant and even led to considerable changes, however, again follow up was poor. There is a need to build on the tremendous gains of those talks, regardless of the change of Government. At the current moment there should be a clear plan recognising the realities in Sri Lanka and India, including the political changes in Tamil Nadu and the Covid-19 pandemic to work through a process of consensus building, but with firm resolve to end bottom trawling.

There should be no setback on issues agreed at the Ministerial level talks in November 2016, and calls for licensing cross border fishing should be rejected outright. Concluding remarks The measures suggested above will be important steps towards resolving the Palk Bay fisheries conflict. Such measures along with the recent national attention on fisheries can also lay the foundation to ensure sustainable governance and management of the natural resource base and the people who depend on it. The establishment of effective interactive platforms (e.g.,

strengthening fisher community organizations, co-management platforms) and clearly laid down rights and responsibilities of participating actors, along with consultation, collaboration and coordination of all concerned actors can lead to effective and sustainable policies. Indeed, sustaining small scale fisheries in addition to solving the Palk Bay fishing conflict will encompass dialogue among relevant actors, capacity development, law enforcement and empowerment of coastal communities.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen federation plans indefinite strike

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/fishermen-federation-plans-indefinite-strike-in-tn/article37165737.ece>

"Setting a deadline of November 10 to the Central and State governments for roll back of diesel prices, the Tamizhaga Anaithu Meenavar Kootamaippu (Tamil Nadu Fishermen Federation) on Monday announced its plan to launch an indefinite strike from November 11 and stage a massive demonstration in Chennai on November 15. Tabling a five-point charter of demands at a meeting held here, in which office-bearers of about 15 associations from Nagapattinam, Karaikal, Thoothukudi, Kanniyakumari and other coastal districts of the State participated, the members of the federation resolved to go on an indefinite strike. Speaking to reporters, fishermen leader Sesu Raja said the diesel prices had touched a new high and fishermen found it difficult to make both ends meet. With poor catch on the one side and a bundle of issues on the other, most of the fishermen experienced mounting debts.

The subsidy component for diesel too from the governments had not been credited properly, he alleged. Besides diesel price, the fishermen also faced threats from the Sri Lankan Navy while fishing in the Palk Bay area. By allowing the fishermen to catch their produce in the traditional Katchatheevu, the issue might be resolved. The Centre should hold talks with its counterpart in the island nation at the earliest and ensure peace prevailed in the fishermen community. Also, the Sri Lankan Navy should not harass the fishermen under the pretext of violation of territorial waters. These and other resolutions were passed at the meeting, which also condemned the Sri Lankan Navy for the death of a fisherman, Rajkiran, 30, from Pudukottai district last week. Another fishermen leader N.J. Bose said there were 6,500 mechanised boats in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry and about 50,000 country boats. "We will keep off the sea from November 11 indefinitely, unless and until the issue was resolved permanently," he said and appealed to Chief Minister M.K. Stalin to immediately intervene in the issue.

India: Seeks to develop seaweed and shrimp sectors

<https://thefishsite.com/articles/india-seeks-to-develop-seaweed-and-shrimp-sectors>

"At a time when climate change is increasingly posing a major threat to human life across the globe, cultivating seaweed, will help to boost the economy and reduce the impact of climate

crisis as well, he said. He was speaking at an interactive meeting with scientists from the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), held at its headquarters in Kochi. “An additional livelihood option, seaweed farming will play a major role in the socio-economic upliftment of traditional fishermen during this difficult time,” the secretary said. Seaweed seedbank He asked the CMFRI to set up a seedbank of seaweeds.

“Marine scientists should come up with ways for capacity development to enhance seaweed cultivation on large-scale,” Swain said, adding that the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) has a special thrust for the promotion of seaweed farming. He was on a visit to Kerala to understand the issues and challenges being faced by the sector after taking over the portfolio four months ago. Apart from those in the Kochi headquarters, CMFRI scientists from various regional research stations across the country also attended the meeting. Elaborating on the country’s ambitious plan in the marine fisheries sector, the Fisheries secretary said that India aims to double its seafood exports in the next five years. “We are hopeful of achieving this target by exploring innovative ways to increase the production that will certainly upscale the country’s per capita income,” he said.

Technological development is crucial in this regard especially for areas such as seed production and other hatchery infrastructure for diversified mariculture activities, he said. Emphasising the need to promote better livelihood options to support traditional fishermen, he said that strengthening of aquaculture and marine fisheries by utilising the technological advancements would help them fetch good income and improve their living standard. “The government is in supportive of promoting the cage fish farming, which is also an alternative source of income, in a big way that would help the traditional fishermen to double their income”, Mr Swain said and lauded the efforts of CMFRI to give a major boost to this practice across the coastal states. Shrimp ranching He added that stocking green tiger shrimp post-larvae into parts of the sea also has great potential, following CMFRI’s successful adoption on the project in Palk Bay. Flagging his concern on resource depletion and ecosystem degradation, he urged scientists to focus on ways to promote responsible fishing and to adopt appropriate mechanisms to improve sustainable fishing.

India: What are dugongs, where is India’s first dugong conservation reserve?

<https://indianexpress.com/article/technology/science/indias-first-dugong-conservation-reserve-7494506/lite/>

"In the late 15th century, Christopher Columbus, sailing near the Haiti islands, wrote about a mermaid sighting. He said they “were not as beautiful as they are represented.” Little did he know that he had seen a marine mammal called the dugong, whose population is now dwindling. What are dugongs? The dugong (*Dugong dugon*), also called the sea cow, is a herbivorous mammal. They can grow upto three meters long, weigh about 300 kilograms, and

live for about 65 to 70 years, grazing on seagrass and coming to the surface to breathe. They are found in over 30 countries and in India are seen in the Gulf of Mannar, Gulf of Kutch, Palk Bay, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Dugongs are listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

The loss of seagrass habitats, water pollution and degradation of the coastal ecosystem due to developmental activities have made life tough for these slow-moving animals. Dugongs are also victims of accidental entanglement in fishing nets and collision with boats, trawlers. Internationally, dugongs are listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which prohibits the trade of the species and its parts. Where is India's first dugong conservation reserve? The Tamil Nadu State government announced last week that a 500-sqkm dugong conservation reserve will soon be set up in the Palk Bay. Dr. Anant Pande, from the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, and Project Scientist coordinating the CAMPA-Dugong Recovery Project, told the indianexpress.com: "We have been surveying the area and currently our rough estimates show that there are about 150 to 200 dugongs in the area.

The proposed conservation area has the highest concentration of dugongs in the country." He added that banning trawling and gill nets in the area would be the way forward. "The local communities can continue their fishing activities in the traditional way," he notes. Awareness programmes are being conducted for fishing communities in the Ramanathapuram, Pudukkottai districts of Tamil Nadu. "We have even given small appreciation awards to fishermen who release dugongs that are accidentally caught. The fisheries and forest departments work together to conduct regular patrols and inspections in the region. Though dugongs used to be previously poached for meat, now with awareness, this has completely stopped. We are now working with the Wildlife Institute of India and village committees in preparing the detailed proposal for the new reserve," said a forest ranger from the region who wished not to be named.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen upset as diesel price reduction brushed aside

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2021/aug/14/tn-budget-fishermenupset-as-diesel-price-reduction-brushed-aside-2344487.html>

"Fishermen expressed disappointment over not finding a mention of any reduction in diesel prices in the State Budget on Friday. They also rued a lack of steps to tackling coastal erosion. While the Finance Minister announced a reduction in effective tax rate on petrol by `3 per litre despite a reported annual revenue loss of Rs 1,160 crore, fishermen questioned why diesel did not get a similar concession. "The diesel subsidy quota per month for mechanised

boats and motorised boats is insufficient. “Boat owners still spend several thousands to a few lakhs per fishing trip after exhausting the quota.

Diesel price reduction is also much needed for transporting fish. With surging fuel prices, the best the State government could have done is reducing diesel price in the Budget. We are thoroughly disappointed about being overlooked,” said N Anjappan, a fishermen representative from Vellapallam. They also sigh at the plan to expedite the special scheme for diversification of fishing trawlers heading to the Palk Strait so that more trawlers can be converted to deep-sea boats (gill netters and long tuna liners). A major portion of the scheme with maximum subsidy, however, remains exclusive to the three Palk bay districts: Thanjavur, Pudukkottai and Ramanathapuram, it is claimed. Fishermen from other districts will only reportedly avail maximum benefit if their boats are impounded by Sri Lankan authorities. Fishermen from Nagapattinam and Mayiladuthurai districts are also facing an equal amount of distress from the Sri Lankan conflict as compared to Thanjavur, Pudukkottai and Ramanathapuram.

India: Why the ban on fishing of seahorses in Indian waters has not been effective

<https://scroll.in/article/1001146/why-the-ban-on-fishing-of-seahorses-in-indian-waters-has-not-been-effective>

"For the past two decades, the catch and trade of seahorses have been banned in India. However, a new study reveals that 1.3 crore seahorses are estimated to have been caught in bycatch annually between 2015 and 2017. Most were caught by nonselective fishing gears operating at the bottom of sea and close to the shore in southern India. A similar study estimated 1.68 crore seahorses were caught prior to the ban. The findings suggest that the ban has not been effective in controlling seahorse extraction and add to growing concerns on the use of bans in the conservation of species accidentally captured in commercial fishing nets and hooks, which are referred to as “incidental catch” or “bycatch”. Study author Tanvi Vaidyanathan says that “while it appears that the ban has been successful in limiting the direct extraction of seahorses through diving, any alleviation in such pressures appears to have been offset by the increased intensity of non-selective fishing such as trawling in recent years”.

In 2001, seahorses were placed in Schedule I under India’s Wildlife Protection Act 1972 banning their extraction and trade. The following year, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora listed all seahorse species in Appendix II, which regulates the export of the species to ensure the protection of wild populations. The bycatch of seahorses occurs around the world. Recent trade surveys estimated that 2.9 crore seahorses were caught annually in Thailand, 1.67 crore in Vietnam and about 17 lakh in the Philippines. Many countries believe the best way to conserve a species is to impose a ban on their extraction and trade, but the situation is tricky when bans are imposed on incidentally caught organisms,

Vaidyanathan explained. “Since the extraction of fishes is rarely managed, fishers find it extremely difficult to identify incidental catch,” Vaidyanathan said.

“The results of my work should motivate the large number of countries that have resorted to bans to consider other measures.” Trisha Gupta, a doctoral student at the University of Oxford, who was not connected to the study, is not surprised by the findings. “If a species is incidentally captured in fishing gear, protecting the species and banning its capture is going to do very little – it will continue to come as bycatch,” Gupta said. Until now, most studies on the impact of bans have focused on larger charismatic species, Vaidyanathan points out. Sharks are also often captured incidentally and bans may be equally ineffective in conserving them, said Gupta, who is studying the conservation of sharks and rays in India. “We need to move away from stand-alone bans in these situations, and towards a more holistic approach to tackle bycatch in fishing and reduce its impacts,” Gupta added. Tamil Nadu’s case Vaidyanathan, a doctoral student at the University of British Columbia, conducted extensive surveys along India’s coastline to gather data on fishers’ awareness of the ban, the number and fate of seahorses caught, method of capture, species caught, prices at which seahorses were sold along with other information. A total of 1,145 structured and semi-structured interviews with fishers were carried out in nine states and two Union Territories during three time periods from July 2015 to September 2017.

The first time period covered the entire coastline of India while the second and third focused on Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu (including Puducherry) emerged as the state with the highest catch where a median of 75% of the annual seahorse catches occurred, followed by Orissa (16.8%) and Andhra Pradesh (3.4%). Most fishers in Tamil Nadu reported selling seahorses. Eighty-nine per cent of seahorses were caught by nonselective fishing gear such as trawls and seine nets (specifically drag nets) operating at the bottom of the sea from shallow waters of the Palk Bay region of Tamil Nadu. In 1999, before the ban, 68% were caught by nonselective fishing gear. Trading of seahorses also occurred primarily in Tamil Nadu where they have traditionally been traded. Most fishers (>90%) in the state were aware of the ban as they brought up the topic without any prompts. While the government has been successful in raising awareness of the ban, it has not converted into conservation actions, explains Vaidyanathan, noting that awareness is likely offset by its profitability for those willing to take risks.

“Illegal trade continues, but this trade has now been pushed underground.” Preventing seahorse bycatch “We need to protect key habitats and constrain fishing pressure, particularly from non-selective fisheries,” said Vaidyanathan. Rather than waiting for “perfect data”, Vaidyanathan said. “It is critical to start at least some measures of conservation as soon as possible.” Presently, critical seahorse habitats such as seagrasses are not protected. “This must be implemented,” she said, adding that “there should also be a strict implementation of no-trawl zones”. In the Palk Bay region, large numbers of seahorses are caught by drag netters, which are traditional modified shrimp trawls, scouring seagrass beds for shrimp. Reducing the bycatch of seahorses may also

affect the catch of economically useful species. “We must work on creating selective fisheries that provide more durable food security and economic resources,” said Vaidyanathan.

To limit the catch of seahorses, Vaidyanathan suggests traditional draggers to establish community-based protected areas over sensitive seagrass habitats, while also curtailing mechanised trawl activities in the state. “Gear modification measures are often recommended as one of the main means of avoiding the incidental capture of organisms,” noted Vaidyanathan. But this measure, she points out, does not consider what happens when the protected species (seahorses) are the same size as the targeted organisms (shrimp). “While it may be possible to develop effective Turtle Excluder Devices, it will be really difficult for gear technology to reduce the bycatch of seahorses, or the many hundreds of other species incidentally caught in fishing nets.” Gupta said, “Any bycatch reduction measure has to be developed alongside the fishing community, with their participation and inputs.”

“Possible solutions can range from releasing live seahorses captured in nets, to modifying fishing gear and grounds to reduce their capture,” she said noting that “as long as it is developed with fisher participation, there is a higher chance of actually achieving the conservation objectives for these species.” Vaidyanathan said, “Ultimately, if we can protect marine resources such as seahorses and their habitats in shallow waters. We might have greater success in extending our conservation aspirations.”

India and Sri Lanka: With a new High Commissioner and strategy roadmap, Sri Lanka seeks to reset ties with India

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/with-a-new-high-commissioner-and-strategy-roadmap-sri-lanka-seeks-to-reset-ties-with-india/article35657225.ece>

"After months of strain over a number of issues including the cancelled port project in Colombo , Sri Lanka is preparing to send its High Commissioner designate to Delhi, along with a ‘roadmap’ to restore ties that includes resolving fishermen’s issues, building connectivity, trade and investment, as well as promoting religious links, Buddhist exchanges and handing over a sacred “Sita temple stone” from Sri Lanka for the proposed Ram temple in Ayodhya. According to a formal proposal presented to Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, which The Hindu has seen, the roadmap will help bridge the “growing trust deficit”. In February, the Modi government expressed its unhappiness over Sri Lanka’s decision to scrap the East Container Terminal project signed in 2019, amidst other signs that China was gaining the upper hand in infrastructure deals in the country.

The Rajapaksa government has been disappointed over the lack of movement on requests it made for India for assistance including a debt repayment waiver for three years and a separate currency swap for \$1 billion, to help with economic crisis, which were made by President Gotabaya and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa to Mr. Modi. Transactional approach “In recent years, the Indo-Sri Lanka bilateral relationship has been increasingly dominated by a transactional approach. This is a consequence of the changes in the geo-political equilibrium in the region, that have resulted in a growing trust deficit,” says the document prepared by a team led by new High Commissioner- to-be Milinda Moragoda, Deputy High Commissioner Niluka Kadurugamuwa and top diplomats at missions in Delhi, Chennai and Mumbai.

The reset in ties is expected to be marked by the arrival of Mr. Moragoda, a former Cabinet Minister, in mid-August. His predecessor High Commissioner Austin Fernando completed his term and returned to Colombo on January 11, 2020, which makes this the longest period the position has remained vacant, even though Mr. Moragoda’s appointment was announced in August 2020. While officials say the COVID situation and the lack of connectivity between India and Sri Lanka during the second wave contributed to the delay, no official reason was given to the Indian side who had processed the diplomatic agreement speedily at the time. An MEA official welcomed news of the High Commissioner’s pending arrival, but said New Delhi had not yet received details of the “Integrated Country Strategy” for India.

In its recommendations, the paper says it is ‘imperative’ that Colombo speeds up the West Container Terminal project that Sri Lanka offered after cancelling the ECT project, as well as the Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm and other pending projects. It also advocates an inter-Agency Committee on Trade, Investment and Tourism to reach Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) goals of \$256 million from India in 2022. While it sets a goal for Sri Lankan exports to India of about \$675 million in 2022, it points out that export prospects presently suffer due to “increasing protectionism [in India], limited market access, a challenging and unpredictable regulatory environment as well as the Make in India Initiative, which prioritises local business and sourcing of local raw materials and products over imports.”

From East to West: Colombo’s ‘compromise’ with New Delhi in Port project The strategy is silent on the Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA), negotiations for which appear deadlocked. In his letter to President Gotabaya introducing the paper, Mr. Moragoda outlines plans for the next two years of his tenure in Delhi, including high-level visits between both capitals. Putting a special emphasis on the role of Buddhism, which he calls “most precious gift that India has bestowed upon [Sri Lanka]” from the time of Emperor Ashoka, he says the two countries are bound by geography, economics, culture, history and democratic values. “Against this backdrop, any setbacks to our relationship however intractable they may appear to be at any given point in time, can only be temporary,” Mr. Moragoda adds. “Velankanni trail”

The strategy paper advises promoting exchanges of Buddhist and Hindu scholars as well as Sri Lankan Catholic pilgrims to the “Velankanni trail” in Tamil Nadu.

In particular, it speaks of handing over a sacred stone from the Sita Amman temple in Sri Lanka for the Ram Temple planned in Ayodhya. Among the problems the paper seeks to address is the conflict in the Palk bay, where Sri Lankan fishermen object to Indian fishermen using bottom trawlers and fishing illegally along their coast, which often leads to arrests of the Indians. Indian fishermen accuse the Sri Lankan Navy of attacking and killing them. The paper suggests that top Sri Lankan diplomats engage directly with the government and fisheries associations in Tamil Nadu. The paper also advises engaging with the MEA, government in Tamil Nadu and the UNHCR to encourage and facilitate the long-pending return of about 1 lakh Sri Lankan refugees living in India.

Proposals to enhance connectivity include resuming passenger ferry services and more air connectivity and new destinations for Sri Lankan flights. The “air travel bubble”, that only began in April was suspended after a few weeks due to the increase in COVID cases. However the country strategy paper is silent on taking forward the India-backed Palaly airport and Kankesanthurai Harbour development projects in Jaffna.

Tamil Nadu: After annual ban ends, fishermen return to shores, but claim poor catch

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/after-annual-ban-ends-fishermen-return-to-shores-but-claim-poor-catch/article35071196.ece>

"After the annual fishing ban ended, the fishermen from the coastal hamlets had ventured into the sea on Tuesday night and returned in the early hours on Thursday. Though the markets were flooded with the catch and crowds thronged to buy them, fishermen leader Jesu Raja said that the catch was not very encouraging. The 61-day annual ban ended on June 14, but the fishermen from Rameswaram, Mandapam and Thangachimadam had not set off into the sea the following day (June 15). For almost a fortnight, the fishermen took time to repair the boats, fishnets and also had to take the Covid-19 vaccine. Above all, the lockdown restrictions, though there were certain relaxations, had made them venture into the Palk Bay for fishing only on June 29 night, he said. On the reasons for the poor catch, Mr. Jesu Raja said that the annual ban period, which was meant for production, was misused by some country boat fishermen, who ventured into the sea.

The Fisheries Department officials should have been more vigilant, he said. On the mechanised boat fishermen venturing into the sea without obtaining tokens from the Fisheries Department, Mr. Jesu Raja said that it was unfortunate. “Our association from five districts including

Pudukottai, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam had passed resolutions urging the fishermen to follow the regulations but they had ventured into the sea on June 29 night itself,” he said. However, a mechanised boat owner Anthony Jesu from Thangachimadam said that only on the first day after the annual ban ended, fishermen set off in a bid to get the best catch from the seas. The CITU fishermen wing district secretary M. Karunamoorthy said that the Fisheries Department officials should take stern action against those fishermen and seize their mechanised boats, who had not obtained tokens. Venturing into the sea without taking tokens was a high risk, especially, when the Sri Lankan Navy was rude with the fishermen.

The State government should determine the price for the fish on the lines of fixation for paddy and other produce, Mr. Jesu Raja said and added that export varieties were being procured by the export firms for a paltry ₹350 per kg, while it was being sold at ₹800 and above by them, he charged. The government should also enhance subsidies for diesel as the price per litre was ₹100. Moreover, the cost of fishnet, repairs and ice had gone up due to several factors, while the export firms procured prawns for a paltry price. The fishermen too had to part with it immediately as they do not have any storage facilities, he pointed out.

Sri Lanka defends move to build artificial reef

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-defends-move-to-build-artificial-reef/article34867767.ece>

"Days after fishermen in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu protested Sri Lanka's efforts to build an artificial reef off Delft island, west of Jaffna peninsula, authorities defended the move "aimed at enhancing fish breeding". Last week, Sri Lanka's Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, with the assistance of Navy, launched a project, dropping around 20 discarded buses into the sea off Delft, as was earlier done in other parts of the island nation, including the eastern Trincomalee district, officials said. "Many countries, including India, have in the past created artificial reefs to facilitate fish spawning. Old train carriages were used in the US, for instance," Cabinet Minister for Fisheries Douglas Devananda, who represents Jaffna district in parliament, told The Hindu. The move was backed by research undertaken by Sri Lanka's National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA), he said. "By objecting to an initiative in Sri Lanka's territorial waters, Tamil Nadu fisher leaders have only exposed themselves as parties interested in fishing illegally in the Palk Strait," he said, referring to the long-persisting Palk Bay fisheries conflict.

Scores of Tamil fishermen living in the war-affected northern and eastern districts of Sri Lanka have, for over a decade now, been protesting Tamil Nadu fishermen's use of destructive bottom trawlers along their coast, severely impacting the marine ecosystem and their post-war livelihoods. Despite ongoing bilateral discussions and several rounds of talks between fishermen of both countries, Tamil Nadu fishermen are yet to meet northern Sri Lankan fishermen's consistent demand that they stop bottom-trawling in their seas. On the other hand, Tamil Nadu fishermen have accused the Sri Lankan Navy of attacking and killing fishermen — allegations that the Sri Lankan side denies. Meanwhile, members of the All-Mechanised Boat Fishermen Association, held a protest in Rameswaram last week, urging Sri Lanka to stop dropping "iron scrap" into the sea, since would "affect" marine ecology in the Palk Strait, and also "damage" their own boats and nets.

In a tweet indicating Sri Lanka sees its recent initiative also as a deterrent to bottom-trawling, State Minister of Fisheries Kanchana Wijesekera said while the artificial reef would boost fish spawning, "it will also act as a shield against bottom line trawling conducted illegally by the Indian fishermen". It is not only the government that defended the move, but also Jaffna-based fisher cooperatives. "This initiative is aimed at helping our livelihoods by increasing fish production, and that is why we have welcomed it. We condemn certain sections of fisher leaders in Tamil Nadu opposing the move," said Annalingam Annarasa, leader of the federation of fisher cooperative societies in Jaffna.

India: Conserving marine ecosystems through the Wild Life Protection Act is not very effective

<https://india.mongabay.com/2021/06/commentary-conserving-marine-ecosystems-through-the-wild-life-protection-act-is-not-very-effective/>

"India is a mega-biodiverse nation. It is home to 7-8% of the recorded species of the world. Its marine ecosystems are equally biodiverse: of the 32 animal phyla known to science, 15 are found in the marine ecosystems of India. In consequence, illegal trade in marine species in India is rampant. The primary Indian law protecting wildlife, including marine wildlife, is the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 (WLPA). It prohibits the hunting of animals listed in its six schedules (lists) and regulates trade in such animals and their parts. It also provides for the declaration of protected areas within which human activities are restricted. These two approaches — banning hunting of and regulating trade in species by listing them in the schedules, and designation of protected areas — have found some success in protecting terrestrial wildlife. However, their efficacy in protecting marine ecosystems is questionable. Marine ecosystems and terrestrially oriented policies The WLPA, in its original form, was oriented terrestrially. For almost 20 years after its enactment, it did not contemplate protected areas in terrestrial and marine ecosystems separately.

The Act did not lay down any separate procedure for the declaration of marine-protected areas, and its Schedules listed very few marine species. However, in light of international developments in marine conservation, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change of India (MoEF&CC) has superimposed the existing terrestrially-oriented policies on marine ecosystems. Over 30 marine protected areas (MPAs) have been declared in peninsular India and over 100 in the Indian islands. In addition to the crocodiles and turtles that found a place in the WLPA schedules during its initial years, a number of elasmobranchs, coelenterates and molluscs, which together constitute a majority of the marine species protected under the legislation, have been added to its schedules since 2001. Of the 41 marine species protected under the WLPA, most are listed in Schedule I. Animals listed in Schedule I, along with those listed in Part II of Schedule II, receive the highest degree of protection under the WLPA. Hunting of animals listed in these schedules is prohibited and licenses to hunt them are granted only in exceptional circumstances. Dealing in, transporting, and buying of such animals is also prohibited.

In contrast, dealing in animals listed in the other Schedules is regulated through a licensing regime. It is unclear whether this approach has effectively reduced illegal trade in marine animals, especially those in Schedule I and Part II of Schedule II. For instance, 173 species of sea cucumbers are found in Indian waters and, of these, around 20 are considered commercially important. In 1982, the MoEF&CC banned the export of all sea cucumbers less than 3 inches in size. Later, in 2001, all sea cucumber species were listed under Schedule I of the Act resulting in an absolute ban on their trade. Despite this, India remains a global hotspot for sea cucumber poaching and smuggling. In a press release, the MoEF&CC described sea cucumbers as some of the major species being smuggled through Indian airports as recently as May 2019. Besides sea cucumbers, protected marine species like sea cows and marine turtles are also widely caught and traded for their meat, blood and carapace in India. That trade and hunting of these animals is rampant despite their inclusion in the Schedules to the WLPA can be attributed to two reasons. Firstly, the Schedules lack direction and are not truly representative of the actual status of species in Indian ecosystems. Originally, the Schedules were organised on the basis of the importance of species as ‘Game.’

The hunting of animals in Schedule I was banned. Those in other Schedules could be hunted after obtaining special game hunting licenses, big game hunting licenses, or small game hunting licenses. Since then, the Act has been amended several times. In his analysis of the schedules over four amendments, S.S. Bist, former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & Head of Forest Force for the Government of West Bengal, observed that the amendments “had not followed any criteria and resulted in making the Schedules unwieldy and unstable.” Further, until 2001, the schedules did not contain any fish species. Even after 2001, fishes have not been adequately protected under the WLPA. A significant reason has been the lack of adequate scientific data. Judicious management of resources needed for marine ecosystems Secondly,

even though marine animals are listed in the schedules for protection, they become subject to a policy that is more suited to the protection of terrestrial wildlife.

This policy of complete prohibition on hunting and strict regulation of trade in such animals disregards their role in the lives of fishing communities. Although the MoEF&CC cited the dependence of fisherfolk on marine life as an inhibiting factor until the inclusion of fishes in the Schedules, no special provisions were added in the WLPA to address these concerns when fishes were included. This transposition seems uninformed by key socio-ecological differences between terrestrial and marine systems. Indian coasts are far more densely populated than its forests. In many fishing villages, poverty is acute and infrastructure is abysmal. Fishing communities are heavily dependent on marine resources for their livelihood and sustenance. Most importantly, even as communities move towards modern forms of fishing, they are known to have traditionally adopted sustainable fishing practices. These include spatial and temporal regulations like fishing zones, seasonal bans, and regulation of type of fishing gear and vessels.

In stark contrast to these practices, the WLPA is based on dualist ideas of humans versus wildlife. It attempts to demolish dependence regimes. The inclusion of marine species in the schedules is rarely preceded by successful drives to provide alternate sources of livelihood to dependent communities. In addition to causing social unrest, this has caused illegal trade in species to flourish. For instance, before the ban in 2001, sea cucumbers served as a source of livelihood for around 2,00,000 fisherfolk in the Ramanathapuram and Thoothukudi districts of Gulf of Mannar and the Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai and Thanjavur districts of Palk Bay. After the ban, the trade value of sea cucumbers rose substantially as the ban reduced supply but demand in the international market remained high. Since wildlife smuggling is a low-risk, high-profit offence, trade in sea cucumbers continued to flourish underground and became unaccounted for as well as more lucrative.

The ban consequently became ineffective. Alternate strategies have been advocated by experts. Vardhan Patankar, head of the marine programme at Wildlife Conservation Society-India (WCS-India), based on his analysis of stakeholders' knowledge of and attitudes towards the WLPA in the Andaman Islands of India, has suggested the use of regulation, preventive community-based policing, constructive engagement with fisherfolk, and the promotion of alternative livelihoods for fishing communities instead of a ban. Similarly, while analysing strategies for conservation of sea cucumbers in India, the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, suggested regulatory methods for conservation supported by proactive measures like resource enhancement of populations through sea ranching in place of a total ban. Terrestrially-oriented area-based conservation measures Besides the species-centric approach represented by the schedules, the Act also adopts a habitat-based conservation mechanism. It provides for the declaration of four types of protected areas: sanctuaries, national parks, conservation reserves, and community

reserves. These are meant to be land parcels with minimal human disturbance that promote in situ conservation of habitats and species.

As one moves closer to protected areas, human activities become increasingly regulated. Within 10 kilometres of any sanctuary or national park, any person possessing arms is required to register themselves. At the border, entry without a permit or entry with a weapon is prohibited. Within protected areas, destruction, exploitation or removal of any wildlife is prohibited. These restrictions affect sizeable communities that are dependent on the areas for sustenance. India has 3.57 million marine fishers spread across 3,305 coastal villages. However, the management of MPAs is marked by a lack of community involvement. The declaration of sanctuaries or national parks outside territorial waters is preceded by a dialogue over community rights. The government first settles claims to any rights over the area. If a claim is accepted, the land is either excluded from the limits of the sanctuary or the subsistence of rights within the sanctuary is allowed. However, sanctuaries or national parks that do fall within territorial waters, can be simply declared through a notification to this effect without any claim settlement process. This ignores the reality of the fisherfolk of India.

Take the Gahirmatha Sanctuary in Odisha for example. It was notified by the state government in 1997 off the coast of Kendrapara district. The sea off the Gahirmatha coast provided business to over 43,000 fishers in 90 villages. A considerable portion of this population lived below the poverty line. Despite this, decision makers did not consult or involve the affected communities in the management plan for the Gahirmatha Sanctuary. At the same time, restrictions on fishing that followed the declaration of the Sanctuary, such as the reduction in fishing days from 240 to less than 100, were not matched by clear evidence of positive ecological impacts. Unsurprisingly, many communities have objected to such approaches that deny local communities' control over and access to resources. This lack of local acceptance has led preservationist policies to fail. Efforts to exclude trawlers from the Gahirmatha Sanctuary, for instance, failed due to resistance from trawling communities.

In fact, conservationists have since accepted that the exclusion of trawlers is not the most effective method of conserving the sanctuary's turtles and that certain kinds of fishing in the area may be benign. A solution: Stakeholder participation and flexible laws Implementing the WLPA without an assessment of its likely socio-economic implications is impractical, especially when communities carry a sentiment of alienation from the process. While communities are expected to participate in implementation, they are not participants in the formulation of management strategies. Thus, fishing communities must be integrated into the implementation as well as formulation of these laws. Fisherfolk should be included in the management bodies of protected areas so they may introduce traditional, sustenance-oriented fishing practices in these areas. From within the system, they can keep policies abreast with traditional knowledge. In respect of modern fishing practices, they can proffer information regarding areas where their

adoption is crucial for the sustenance of fishing communities, areas in which they may be harmful or benign. Flexible laws would be a consequence of community involvement.

The current rigid structure of laws based on the exclusion of humans from natural habitats is grounded in the idea that economic activities and wildlife conservation are antithetical to each other. In part, this is due to the idea, often advocated by conservationists, that fishing communities live in absolute ‘traditional harmony’ with wildlife. In reality, communities themselves are now demanding modern development. Once these developments are accounted for, conservation laws can be designed to vary with landscape in a manner informed by perspectives of fisherfolk. This is likely to develop an ethic that combines utilitarian and conservationist ideas. Thus, the application of the WLPA to marine ecosystems must be guided by scientific data that correctly identifies species that need protection; a regulatory, as opposed to a proscriptive, approach; and sociological impact studies of protected areas.

Tamil Nadu: 23 fishermen who survived Cyclone Tauktae reach Nagai

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2021/may/31/23-fishermen-who-survived-cyclone-tauktae-reach-nagai-2309711.html>

"The 23 fishermen from the district who survived Cyclone Tauktae’s fury in the Arabian Sea on May 15, returned home on Sunday. They have requested relief for the families of their nine missing colleagues whose boat, however, allegedly capsized. The fishermen who returned had set sail in the two deep-sea fishing boats, ‘Rakesh - 1’ and ‘Rakesh - 2’. They had a hard time making their return ever since the fateful day. “We spent three days in the Lakshadweep islands, left from there on May 18 and searched the point where nine of our colleagues in ‘Murugan Thunai’ called us for help for a couple of days. Then, we landed in Cochin on May 21. As our families had wanted to see us soon, we left Cochin for Rameswaram on May 23. We were stuck around Palk Bay from May 25 to May 28 due to heavy rains from Cyclone Yaas. We left Rameshwaram after the Bascule Bridge opened, and we finally got home, “ said S Ravichandran, the owner of ‘Rakesh - 2’.

At least nine fishermen who were onboard ‘Murugan Thunai’ are still missing. The deep-sea fishing boat allegedly capsized in the turbulent Arabian Sea from an approaching Cyclone Tauktae in the wee hours of May 15. ‘Murugan Thunai’ was in the company of ‘Rakesh - 1’ and ‘Rakesh - 2’ till May 15 until the cyclone separated them. ‘Murugan Thunai’ allegedly sustained catastrophic damages and drowned a few nautical miles before reaching Lakshadweep. Search operations to find the missing men are undergoing since then. The fishermen who landed in Nagapattinam alleged that they were made to wait in Palk Bay in rough weather by the Fisheries department until Pamban Bascule Bridge near Ramanathapuram was opened.

It is the only route for vessels travelling towards south India and passing through Palk Strait. If the vessels cannot get through the Bascule, they have to turn back and circle Sri Lanka, which would translate to thousands of nautical miles. The Fisheries department said the Pamban Bascule Bridge could not be opened at will. "The Centre controls the Bascule Bridge's clearance, and multiple departments in the State and the Centre administer it. It opens only once a month. Thus, it took a couple of days to get special clearance for those two boats," an official said. "We request the State government to provide adequate relief for the grieving families of the fishers on 'Murugan Thunai' boat," said S Muthuvel, a crew member of 'Rakesh - 1', who reached Nagai.

Sri Lanka: License to poach: Fishing for trouble in Northern waters

<https://roar.media/english/life/environment-wildlife/license-to-poach-indian-fishermen-to-fish-in-sri-lankan-waters>

"Efforts to end poaching by Indian fishermen in northern Sri Lankan coastal waters have continually failed, despite two decades of talks between the two neighbours, the latest move being reviving a proposal to license Indian fishermen. The trouble today is not caused by traditional fishers, so much as by mechanised trawlers owned by Tamil Nadu businessmen, that use big nets to scoop up everything in their path; bottom-trawling is a method so destructive that scrape marks on the seabed can be seen in underwater videos of the practice. A collaborative, ecosystem-focused approach that has been advocated might yield better results, especially in managing trans-boundary fish stocks and ensuring sustainable fishing and livelihoods for fisherfolk, many remaining impoverished for generations.

Opposition To Licences Noor Mohamed Alam, President of the Union of the Mannar District Fishermen's Cooperative Societies, has said fishers in the area oppose the proposal to issue licences to Indian fishermen. "The government should act more effectively to stop poaching by Indian fishermen," he told Roar Media. Alam wants the government to enforce the law properly and for the Navy to arrest poachers. "If 500 Indian boats come, only one or two are arrested," Alam said. "If the Navy arrests all the poachers, the problem can be solved." Poaching by Indian trawlers has been getting worse," he added. "Fish stocks are declining. Now sometimes, we get hardly any fish." Fish stocks really have declined sharply in Sri Lankan coastal waters, according to the latest marine survey under the 'Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries' management project, called the EAF-Nansen Programme, conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Institute of Marine Research, Norway.

"Overfishing could be one of the reasons. Marine environment degradation, loss of habitats, climate change could be other reasons," explained Dr Prabath Jayasinghe, Principal Scientist of the National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA). Dr. Jayasinghe

was Local Cruise Leader on board the Dr Fridtjof Nansen, one of the most advanced research vessels, during the 2018 survey that covered the entire coastal zone except the shallow Palk Bay. Sri Lanka's fish stocks had not been assessed by independent surveys since four surveys by a Norwegian 'Nansen' research vessel in 1979-1980. Although a single research cruise is not 100% conclusive, the new survey found that north-eastern coastal waters had the lowest biomass of zooplankton, small organisms consumed by larger marine animals, along with the lowest average number of fish larvae and the lowest species diversity.

However, the survey found the Pedro Bank, a shallow water plateau of about 1,000 square miles off Point Pedro, the island's northern tip, was still as rich a fishing ground as it had been for decades. Pedro Bank, and Wadge Bank, the continental shelf off Cape Comorin at the southern tip of India, had been profitable commercial fishing grounds since the 1920s for both Indian and Sri Lankan boats. But Sri Lanka lost access to Wadge Bank and part of Pedro Bank with the establishment of the Indo-Sri Lanka maritime boundary in 1976. Harmonious Fishing
"Historically, both Sri Lankan and Indian artisanal fishers have harmoniously fished in the Bay of Bengal, Gulf of Mannar, and the Palk Bay without any disputes," said Dr Muttukrishna Sarvananthan, Director of the Jaffna-based think tank, Point Pedro Institute for Development Studies, who has studied the poaching issue. "Artisanal fishing is defined as low-capital, low-technology, and small-scale subsistence fishing," he said.

The current fishing conflict between Sri Lanka and India is primarily due to Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing by hundreds of illegal fishing boats called 'bottom trawlers', Dr Sarvananthan explained. "The use of bottom trawlers is internationally prohibited. This IUU fishing is commercial fishing as opposed to traditional subsistence fishing." Giving licences to Indian fishing boats would worsen the pillage of Sri Lanka's fish stock and cause immense undersea environmental catastrophe, Dr Sarvananthan believes. "It would in reality be legalising an illegal practice globally." Minister of Fisheries Douglas Devananda, in March 2021 suggested holding talks with the Tamil Nadu government to issue licences to a limited number of Indian fishing boats to fish in Sri Lankan waters — although bottom trawling would be banned. But Dr Sarvananthan believes that Indian fishing vessels would not be able to pay the annual licence fee in foreign currency.

"Besides, to the best of my knowledge, the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay do not have high-value fish such as tuna to make it commercially viable for Indian fishers to pay the annual licence fee," he said. And, he added, neither the Sri Lanka Coastguard nor the Sri Lanka Navy has the capacity to check each and every boat to ensure whether they have a licence or not. "In theory, the Indian Coastguard could also check the Indian vessels on their side of the border. But I do not believe it will ever undertake that responsibility," he said. Sri Lanka agreed to consider giving licences to Indian fishing boats as far back as 2003, according to V. Suryanarayan, formerly the founding director and senior professor of the Centre for South and Southeast Asian

Studies, University of Madras, who has also studied the issue. The licensing proposal was again taken up in 2016.

The two countries have been engaged in a “fire-fighting exercise”, Suryanarayan believes, with Indian poachers and their boats being detained and released by Sri Lanka with monotonous regularity, only to return to the island's waters. “Fishermen throughout the world are no respecters of maritime boundaries; they move wherever the fish moves. It is a universal phenomenon,” Suryanarayan writes. “Sri Lankan fishermen poach into Indian and Maldivian waters; Indian fishermen enter Pakistani and Bangladeshi waters, and Japanese and Taiwanese trawlers roam around the world.” Artisanal fishing in Sri Lanka. Photo credit: India Today
Indian trawlers began to poach in Sri Lanka after sweeping the seabed clean on their side of the maritime boundary. The island's ethnic war in the 1980s and 1990s led to restrictions on Sri Lankan fishermen, which made it easier for Indian poachers. Also, many Sri Lankan fishermen who fled to Tamil Nadu as refugees found employment on Indian trawlers and guided them to known fishing grounds off the island's coast.

Some of them may still be doing so. In January this year, one of the four fishermen who died when an Indian boat sank after colliding with a Sri Lankan Navy vessel was found to be a person of Sri Lankan origin, who lived in India. Suryanarayan feels only a change of mindset on both sides can resolve the dispute and advocates that the two countries convert the contested territory into a 'common heritage'. He suggests trawlers be withdrawn from the Palk Bay and a ‘Palk Bay Authority’ be set up, consisting of specialists from both governments, representatives of fishermen’s associations and navies. The outfit would “determine ideal sustainable catch, how to enrich the sea jointly, the type of fishing equipment that can be used and the number of fishing days for each country,” Suryanarayan has said. Regional Fisheries Management
However, Dr Sarvananthan, of the Point Pedro Institute, is sceptical of the idea of collaborative, regional management of fish stocks in the region, saying it won't be practical.

“Sri Lanka does not have the scientific competence to assess the fish stock availability in its maritime territory, particularly in the Bay of Bengal, Gulf of Mannar, and Palk Bay. That is why the Sri Lankan government has entrusted Norway to undertake a stock-taking under a bilateral aid programme, which is currently ongoing,” he said. Jayasinghe of NARA points to the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, the main fisheries managing body in the Indian Ocean, as an example of regional cooperation in managing shared fish stocks. NARA has just struck a new deal with Norway's Institute of Marine Research, the second phase of the project to develop fisheries management tools.

It aims for improved and sustainable management of marine resources, which will enable Sri Lanka to better monitor its fish stocks. Jayasinghe says NARA will employ its own research vessel to conduct fisheries surveys in shallow northern waters not covered by the Dr. Fridtjof

Nansen vessel. Norway, which is promoting the ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF) in Africa as well, says it entails a comprehensive and risk-based management planning process, addressing both human and ecological dimensions of sustainability. There may be some apprehension about venturing this far, but the collaborative approach is the one that has not been considered yet, if Sri Lankan and Indian authorities want to end the endless poaching, clashes and jailing of fisherfolk for crossing borders.

License to poach: Fishing for trouble in Sri Lanka's northern waters

<https://roar.media/english/life/environment-wildlife/license-to-poach-indian-fishermen-to-fish-in-sri-lankan-waters>

"Efforts to end poaching by Indian fishermen in northern Sri Lankan coastal waters have continually failed, despite two decades of talks between the two neighbours, the latest move being reviving a proposal to license Indian fishermen. The trouble today is not caused by traditional fishers, so much as by mechanised trawlers owned by Tamil Nadu businessmen, that use big nets to scoop up everything in their path; bottom-trawling is a method so destructive that scrape marks on the seabed can be seen in underwater videos of the practice. A collaborative, ecosystem-focused approach that has been advocated might yield better results, especially in managing trans-boundary fish stocks and ensuring sustainable fishing and livelihoods for fisherfolk, many remaining impoverished for generations.

Noor Mohamed Alam, President of the Union of the Mannar District Fishermen's Cooperative Societies, has said fishers in the area oppose the proposal to issue licences to Indian fishermen. "The government should act more effectively to stop poaching by Indian fishermen," he told Roar Media. Alam wants the government to enforce the law properly and for the Navy to arrest poachers. "If 500 Indian boats come, only one or two are arrested," Alam said. "If the Navy arrests all the poachers, the problem can be solved." Poaching by Indian trawlers has been getting worse," he added. "Fish stocks are declining. Now sometimes, we get hardly any fish." Fish stocks really have declined sharply in Sri Lankan coastal waters, according to the latest marine survey under the 'Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries' management project, called the EAF-Nansen Programme, conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Institute of Marine Research, Norway.

"Overfishing could be one of the reasons. Marine environment degradation, loss of habitats, climate change could be other reasons," explained Dr Prabath Jayasinghe, Principal Scientist of the National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA). Dr. Jayasinghe was Local Cruise Leader on board the Dr Fridtjof Nansen, one of the most advanced research vessels, during the 2018 survey that covered the entire coastal zone except the shallow Palk Bay. Sri Lanka's fish stocks had not been assessed by independent surveys since four surveys by a Norwegian 'Nansen' research vessel in 1979-1980. Although a single research cruise is not 100%

conclusive, the new survey found that north-eastern coastal waters had the lowest biomass of zooplankton, small organisms consumed by larger marine animals, along with the lowest average number of fish larvae and the lowest species diversity.

However, the survey found the Pedro Bank, a shallow water plateau of about 1,000 square miles off Point Pedro, the island's northern tip, was still as rich a fishing ground as it had been for decades. Pedro Bank, and Wadge Bank, the continental shelf off Cape Comorin at the southern tip of India, had been profitable commercial fishing grounds since the 1920s for both Indian and Sri Lankan boats. But Sri Lanka lost access to Wadge Bank and part of Pedro Bank with the establishment of the Indo-Sri Lanka maritime boundary in 1976. "Historically, both Sri Lankan and Indian artisanal fishers have harmoniously fished in the Bay of Bengal, Gulf of Mannar, and the Palk Bay without any disputes," said Dr Muttukrishna Sarvananthan, Director of the Jaffna-based think tank, Point Pedro Institute for Development Studies, who has studied the poaching issue. "Artisanal fishing is defined as low-capital, low-technology, and small-scale subsistence fishing," he said.

The current fishing conflict between Sri Lanka and India is primarily due to Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing by hundreds of illegal fishing boats called 'bottom trawlers', Dr Sarvananthan explained. "The use of bottom trawlers is internationally prohibited. This IUU fishing is commercial fishing as opposed to traditional subsistence fishing." Giving licences to Indian fishing boats would worsen the pillage of Sri Lanka's fish stock and cause immense undersea environmental catastrophe, Dr Sarvananthan believes. "It would in reality be legalising an illegal practice globally." Minister of Fisheries Douglas Devananda, in March 2021 suggested holding talks with the Tamil Nadu government to issue licences to a limited number of Indian fishing boats to fish in Sri Lankan waters — although bottom trawling would be banned. But Dr Sarvananthan believes that Indian fishing vessels would not be able to pay the annual licence fee in foreign currency.

"Besides, to the best of my knowledge, the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay do not have high-value fish such as tuna to make it commercially viable for Indian fishers to pay the annual licence fee," he said. And, he added, neither the Sri Lanka Coastguard nor the Sri Lanka Navy has the capacity to check each and every boat to ensure whether they have a licence or not. "In theory, the Indian Coastguard could also check the Indian vessels on their side of the border. But I do not believe it will ever undertake that responsibility," he said. Sri Lanka agreed to consider giving licences to Indian fishing boats as far back as 2003, according to V. Suryanarayan, formerly the founding director and senior professor of the Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Madras, who has also studied the issue.

The licensing proposal was again taken up in 2016. The two countries have been engaged in a "fire-fighting exercise", Suryanarayan believes, with Indian poachers and their boats being

detained and released by Sri Lanka with monotonous regularity, only to return to the island's waters. "Fishermen throughout the world are no respecters of maritime boundaries; they move wherever the fish moves. It is a universal phenomenon," Suryanarayan writes. "Sri Lankan fishermen poach into Indian and Maldivian waters; Indian fishermen enter Pakistani and Bangladeshi waters, and Japanese and Taiwanese trawlers roam around the world." Indian trawlers began to poach in Sri Lanka after sweeping the seabed clean on their side of the maritime boundary.

The island's ethnic war in the 1980s and 1990s led to restrictions on Sri Lankan fishermen, which made it easier for Indian poachers. Also, many Sri Lankan fishermen who fled to Tamil Nadu as refugees found employment on Indian trawlers and guided them to known fishing grounds off the island's coast. Some of them may still be doing so. In January this year, one of the four fishermen who died when an Indian boat sank after colliding with a Sri Lankan Navy vessel was found to be a person of Sri Lankan origin, who lived in India. Suryanarayan feels only a change of mindset on both sides can resolve the dispute and advocates that the two countries convert the contested territory into a 'common heritage'. He suggests trawlers be withdrawn from the Palk Bay and a 'Palk Bay Authority' be set up, consisting of specialists from both governments, representatives of fishermen's associations and navies. The outfit would "determine ideal sustainable catch, how to enrich the sea jointly, the type of fishing equipment that can be used and the number of fishing days for each country," Suryanarayan has said.

However, Dr Sarvananthan, of the Point Pedro Institute, is sceptical of the idea of collaborative, regional management of fish stocks in the region, saying it won't be practical. "Sri Lanka does not have the scientific competence to assess the fish stock availability in its maritime territory, particularly in the Bay of Bengal, Gulf of Mannar, and Palk Bay. That is why the Sri Lankan government has entrusted Norway to undertake a stock-taking under a bilateral aid programme, which is currently ongoing," he said. Jayasinghe of NARA points to the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, the main fisheries managing body in the Indian Ocean, as an example of regional cooperation in managing shared fish stocks.

NARA has just struck a new deal with Norway's Institute of Marine Research, the second phase of the project to develop fisheries management tools. It aims for improved and sustainable management of marine resources, which will enable Sri Lanka to better monitor its fish stocks. Jayasinghe says NARA will employ its own research vessel to conduct fisheries surveys in shallow northern waters not covered by the Dr. Fridtjof Nansen vessel. Norway, which is promoting the ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF) in Africa as well, says it entails a comprehensive and risk-based management planning process, addressing both human and ecological dimensions of sustainability. There may be some apprehension about venturing this far, but the collaborative approach is the one that has not been considered yet, if Sri Lankan and

Indian authorities want to end the endless poaching, clashes and jailing of fisherfolk for crossing borders.

‘Aphrodisiac’ of the ocean: how sea cucumbers became gold for organised crime

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/apr/12/sea-cucumbers-organised-crime-smuggling-aphrodisiac-biodiversity-sri-lanka-india>

"It's after sunset in Jaffna when Anthony Vigrado dives into the waters of Palk Bay, scanning the seafloor to collect what seems to be prized treasure. What he comes back with are sea cucumbers – long, leathery-skinned creatures that are increasingly valuable and the source of his income for the past 12 years. But after a 10-hour search, his harvest is only a fraction of what it used to be, as the shores of northern Sri Lanka and southern India have become a prime spot for exploitation. "Illegal fishermen are coming across our borders and collecting sea cucumbers in places where we dive normally. We are losing our income and our riches to them," the 31-year-old fisher says. 'Spooning poo': how five Eiffel Towers' worth of sea cucumber poo helps sustain Queensland reef Read more Sea cucumbers are echinoderms with soft, tubular bodies resembling their namesake vegetable.

They are an unusual class of animals but play a vital role in ocean ecosystems. As they feed on the detritus in sediment, they help to recycle nutrients and excrete nitrogen, ammonia, and calcium carbonate, key ingredients for coral reefs. Their feeding also helps to slow the oceans' acidification from human activity. Sea cucumbers are in great demand in China and south-east Asian countries, where they are regarded as a culinary delicacy and used in traditional medicines. They are usually eaten in dried form – known as *bêche-de-mer* or *trepang*. They are also mistakenly considered to be an aphrodisiac by some, especially in China (as well as their penile shape, they can also stiffen and expel their guts as a defence mechanism). This has fuelled an incredibly lucrative trade in the endangered animals, one that has grown steadily in recent decades. In the 1980s, sea cucumbers fetched less than £50 a kilo; now prices have risen to more than £200 a kilo, with rarer species valued at more than £2,500 a kilo.

Over the years, Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar have witnessed extreme overfishing of sea cucumbers. For the most expensive species, global populations have fallen by more than 60%. Now the small tropical island is a growing hotspot for illegal smuggling and poaching. Like Vigrado, more than 10,000 fishing families along the northern coasts of Sri Lanka are worried about the state of the fishery. "Populations are declining due to overfishing. It affects biodiversity, and it also affects the livelihood of the coastal fishers who depend on this activity," says Chamari Dissanayake, a senior lecturer of zoology at Sri Lanka's University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Advertisement With illegal boats destroying the equipment of local fishers to catch the sea cucumbers, Vigrado says some have killed themselves after being unable to repay loans. "Their entire investment was being damaged by this," he says. "These boats do not care

about them, and when they cross into our waters, it's a complete loss for us fishermen.” AM Stanny Lambert, a 31-year-old freediver from Vankalai in Mannar, says he is saddened and angered by the amount of illegal activity.

“It's unethical and we're stuck, because they're collecting everything before we do,” he says, noting that he and his father have been licensed fishers for sea cucumbers for 11 years, and the family's sole earners. Most criminal activity reported takes advantage of differing regulations between the neighbouring countries. While Sri Lanka issues fishing licences and allows exports of sea cucumbers, India has had a total ban on all trade in the animals since 2001. Illicit sea cucumbers are therefore either caught in India and smuggled into Sri Lanka, where they are exported legally to south-east Asia, or exported from India under false labelling. Last August, three men were caught smuggling nearly 1,000kg of sea cucumber – valued by the Indian Coast Guard at £500,000 on the international market – from Tamil Nadu in India to Sri Lanka through the Gulf of Mannar, with a similar case last month. Advertisement “If you have a legal market in that kind of way in proximity to an illegal market, the legal market becomes a huge source for fish laundering,” says Teale Phelps Bondaroff, director of research at OceansAsia, whose recent report maps the arrests and seizures of sea cucumbers in the two countries.

For years, authorities in Sri Lanka and India have been trying to combat this marine crime. But despite the number of arrests and seizures on the rise, new cases show the illegal trade is spreading to previously untouched areas. Now, with the surge in the value of the animals, exploitation is becoming more widespread. Demand for sea cucumbers has led to deadly violence in Mexico, involvement with the yakuza criminal organisations in Japan, and smuggling between the Tanzanian mainland and Zanzibar. According to OceansAsia, organised sea cucumber crime is spreading further away from Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar into the underexploited areas of the Lakshadweep union territory, an archipelago off the south-west coast of India. In the largest seizure of its kind, a tipoff from local fishers in February 2020 led to authorities finding 1,716 sea cucumbers worth nearly £420,000 hidden in coral reefs near Suheli, an uninhabited island. “Resource depletion could be a major reason why these people are searching for new grounds.

Lakshadweep is much more pristine, so that may be the reason why traders are moving there,” says Sajan John, head of policy and marine projects at the Wildlife Trust of India. Realising the severity of increasing levels of crime around the trade, local authorities have stepped up their response, says John. In February 2020, the world's first conservation area for sea cucumbers was created in Lakshadweep, anti-poaching bases were set up across the islands, and the Lakshadweep sea cucumber protection taskforce was formed with the help of India's Central Bureau of Investigation. “The people of Lakshadweep understood the importance of sea cucumbers because their livelihood is largely depending on fisheries.

When sea cucumbers are affected, other fisheries are affected,” says Sivakumar Kuppusamy, a scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India. But as the bulk of the illicit trade continues to be smuggled into Sri Lanka, Kuppusamy agrees that while stopping the criminal supply chain is crucial, helping those fishers taking sea cucumbers illegally to appreciate the importance of the animals is also crucial to their protection. “We have to convince them of the ecological role. If there are no sea cucumbers, then you’re endangering the sea,” he said. “That’s when they start to realise their livelihoods and their kids’ future will be affected. “Breaking that [illegal supply] chain and convincing the fishermen – we have to do both. Otherwise this trade will continuously grow.”

Sri Lanka: Equity, justice, dignity and peace for fishermen?

<http://www.sundaytimes.lk/210404/news/equity-justice-dignity-and-peace-for-sri-lankan-fishermen-438980.html>

"An Indian Government statement read out ahead of the recent vote on the resolution on Sri Lanka at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva said: “India’s approach to the question of human rights in Sri Lanka is guided by two fundamental considerations. One is our support to the Tamils of Sri Lanka for equity, justice, dignity and peace. The other is in the ensuring the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. While an Indian diplomat was making his speech to the UNHRC in Geneva, hundreds of Tamil Nadu trawlers were once again streaming across the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) to fish illegally in Sri Lankan waters; demonstrating scant regard for the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Anarasa The dignity and peace that Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen have worked tirelessly to achieve in their lives since the end of the civil conflict were shattered overnight, by Tamil owned trawlers. And justice? Nine trawlers were arrested in the days that followed, after protests by fishermen and the seafood industry.

But almost immediately the nine vessels and 54 crewmembers were released without charge; allegedly at the request of the Government of India. Are Sri Lanka’s small scale, fishing communities on the north coast, not entitled to the right to freedom from bias or favouritism, too? Must the dice always fall in favour of Tamil Nadu’s semi-industrial trawl net fisheries employing a few thousand labourers as against Northern Sri Lanka’s 29,000 small-scale fishermen whose only source of livelihood is the hugely productive, highly lucrative and thankfully renewable marine resources on either side of the IMBL in the Palk Bay? Unsurprisingly sans a meaningful legal deterrent, Tamil Nadu trawlers continued to fish illegally in Sri Lankan waters throughout last week. Fifty or so trawlers operated within 500 metres of the shore off the islands of Delft, Alanaithivu and Eluvaithivu, according to Eluvaithivu Fishermen’s Cooperative Society president T. Stanislaw. Rameshwaram boat owners had the cheek to call Jaffna District Federation of Fishermen’s Cooperative Societies’ Unions president A. Anarasa

last week to tell him to warn Jaffna fishermen that hundreds of Rameshwaram trawlers were coming.

This surprising development happened because Jaffna (and Mannar) fishermen have come to accept that Tamil Nadu trawlers may cross the IMBL every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday evenings. This is the so-called ‘three day/four day rule’. The ‘rule’ is a consequence of trawler owners refusing to accept — and the State Government’s inability to implement — a Tamil Nadu state law prohibiting trawling within 2.5 km of the shore — that is in the fishing grounds of small scale Tamil Nadu fishermen. A Sri Lankan Navy officer inspecting an Indian trawler loaded with fish caught in Sri Lanka's waters. Instead an ‘agreement’ was reached between trawler owners and small scale fishermen to permit trawlers to operate anywhere they like for three days a week and small scale fishermen to fish in their traditional fishing grounds on the other four. Last week, the ‘three day/four day rule’ applied only in Tamil Nadu.

In Sri Lankan waters Tamil Nadu trawlers felt emboldened to fish anywhere they liked for six days of the week, which they duly did without fear of arrest or legal consequences. According to Anarasa, hundreds of Jaffna fishermen lost thousands of rupees worth of nets over the last two weeks. Last month alone, fishermen and fisher societies in Kayts, Delft and Karainagar lost millions of rupees worth of income due to the sudden upsurge in illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing by Tamil Nadu trawlers. Who is going to compensate these fishermen for their losses, he asked? Who will buy our fishermen new nets to replace those destroyed by the trawlers? Fishermen on the islands off the coast of Jaffna are now fearful about setting their nets, he said. How can fishermen risk going out to fish, if Tamil Nadu boats continue to trawl with impunity in the fishing grounds of small scale fishermen in Sri Lanka, just like they do in Tamil Nadu? The trawlers will continue to come until April 15, he said. This is when the Indian Government officially closes coastal fisheries for 85 days to allow fish stock on the Indian side of the Palk Bay to recover.

A group of Indian fishermen who were released after they were arrested for poaching in Sri Lankan waters. The issue of persistent IUU fishing by Tamil Nadu trawlers in Sri Lankan waters is often couched in language that calls for ‘a humanitarian response’: The semantics of equity, justice, dignity and peace that Indian diplomat in Geneva last week. Northern fishermen and fisher leaders like Stanislaws and Anarasa are not asking anything different. They call for: n Equity for small scale fishermen; the right to fish freely in their traditional fishing grounds without bias or favoritism; n Justice through the rule of law; the implementation of a meaningful legal deterrent under the Fisheries (Regulation of Foreign Fishing Boats) (Amendment) Act No. 1 of 2018; n Dignity for small scale fishing communities; rebuilding livelihoods shattered by civil conflict, creating a future for their families based on the sustainable harvest of the Palk Bay’s rich marine resources. n And peace.

Small scale fishermen on both sides of the Palk Bay want to live and fish peacefully. The ultimate responsibility for delivering equity, justice, dignity and peace for small scale fishermen on both sides of the Palk Bay and respect for Sri Lanka's territorial integrity lies not in Jaffna or in Colombo, but in Chennai and New Delhi.

Gulf of Mannar: Vaan Island: Turning over a new reef

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2021/feb/14/gulf-of-mannars-vaan-island-turning-over-a-new-reef-2263768.html>

"Few years back, scientists thought the Vaan Island, a coral formation in the Gulf of Mannar, would go underwater by 2022. Already, two of the 21 islands in the fragile Gulf of Mannar Marine Biosphere Reserve had been submerged — Vallanguchalli and Poovarasanpatti — and it was only a matter of time before Vaan was also lost. The data showed the coral island to be on the brink of collapse — its area had been reduced drastically from 20.08 hectares in 1969 to 1.53 hectares in 2015; a substantial 23.92 per cent of the live corals on the islands bleached during the global coral bleach of 2016; the live coral cover reduced drastically from 38.86 per cent in 2015 to a mere 22.69 per cent in 2016. Then, a miracle happened over the next few years. Today, the Vaan Island is teeming with colourful marine life. The shallow bright blue waters surrounding it are home to healthy coral reefs. Since 2018, the reef cover in the area has seen a steady increase, with mortality rate dropping to negligible levels.

It is a first-of-its-kind attempt in India that Tamil Nadu undertook to save the drowning coral reefs. With several other islands in the same biosphere facing threats due to the degradation of ecosystem, Vaan could become an example, a model that can be replicated to save the entire area, say experts. So, what exactly did Tamil Nadu do to save the dying island? Decades of plunder The Gulf of Mannar is the first marine biosphere in Asia. Yet, there was no comprehensive data on the morphology of Gulf of Mannar islands since the 1969 Survey of India Toposheet. In 2017, to understand the morphological changes in the islands over the last five decades, the Union environment ministry supported a study in the area, conducted by Suganthi Devadason of Marine Research Institute (SDMRI). The study produced some stark data. It showed that the Thoothukudi group of islands, including Vaan, had experienced the highest percentage of land cover reduction (71 per cent), followed by Keelakarai (43.49 per cent), Vembar (36.21 per cent) and Mandapam (21.84 per cent) groups in the last 49 years. There were multiple reasons why these islands were sinking — unsustainable and exploitative fishing practices, rising sea levels and surface temperature due to climate change, and historic coral mining that went on for decades until it was stopped in 2005.

The most significant of these reasons was mining. The corals were being mined for their rich lime content, which was in great demand in the limestone industry. That apart, it also played a major role in the construction industry. In fact, many old houses in Thoothukudi, that stand tall

till today, were constructed using corals. Vaan itself is made up of calcareous frameworks of dead reef and sand, and was a minefield for coral-hunters. The demand was so high back in the day that in the early seventies, around 25,000 metric tons of corals were mined every year from Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar combined. It was only after a good three decades, in 2001, that the Centre included all corals under the schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act. Subsequently in 2005, the Supreme Court stayed the coral mining activities.

But the damage had already been done. By 2005, the Gulf of Mannar had lost a whopping 32 square kilometres of reef area. Secret of success Armed with this data, the Tamil Nadu government started on a mission to revive these islands. It sought financial support from the Environment Ministry, under the climate change adaptation fund. `25 crore was sanctioned, and Vaan Island was chosen for the restoration project. “The reason was because Vaan is closest to the mainland, barely 5 km from the Thoothukudi coast,” says KV Giridhar, director of the Department of Environment. “Reviving Vaan was crucial because the island acts as a defence against waves, preventing coastal erosion.” To save Vaan from drowning, we had to ensure the reef area surrounding the island is revitalised, says Edward Patterson, director of SDMRI. “Corals need hard substrate to grow. Generally, coral larvae use dead corals as substrate, which unfortunately is not available in many islands of Gulf of Mannar due to decades of mining.

Initially, we deployed artificial reefs with the main purpose of protecting the fast-eroding landmass, but in due course, found natural corals colonising in these artificial reefs. This helped Vaan to grow. Compared to 2015, Vaan’s land cover has increased by a whopping 54.51 per cent from 2.33 ha to 3.60 ha in low tide,” says Patterson. A total of 10,600 artificial reef modules were deployed in three phases. The latest morphological study, conducted by SDMRI in October 2020, shows abundant natural coral recruitment. A total of 10 coral species and 28 fish species were observed around the modules. Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT-M) also had an important role to play. The IIT-M team worked alongside SDMRI researchers to design the artificial reef modules. Prof SA Sannasiraj, head of Department of Ocean Engineering, IIT-M, said: “After many trials, we worked out the design, the build, pattern and place of deployment of artificial reefs based on bathymetric wave studies. The holes in the concrete structure were to achieve good water circulation.

The holes are also required for marine growth. The whole experience was unique and path-breaking as such a project was never tried before in India. It gives us great satisfaction that our efforts materialised and corals are thriving on these structures,” he says. Small success, big lesson Vaan, however, is not a destination but a mere example. There are many islands in the Gulf that need attention. Researchers say Koswari and Kariyachalli islands near Thoothukudi are facing an increased threat and need immediate intervention. “If the current rate of erosion continues, Koswari and Kariyachalli islands are likely to be submerged by 2036; Vembar group (Upputhanni, Puluvinichalli and Nallathanni) between 2064 and 2193; Keelakarai group

(Anaipar, Valimunai, Poovarasampatti, Appa, Thalaiyari, Valai and Mulli) between 2032 and 2180; and Mandapam (Manoliputti, Poomarichan and Pullivasal) between 2140 and 2525,” says K Diraviya Raj, assistant professor at SDMRI. Morphology and geomorphology studies reveal Koswari island has lost 60 per cent of land cover, and has shrunk from 19.59 hectares to 7.70 ha, while Kariyachalli island land mass shrunk by 71.37 per cent from 20.85 ha to 5.97 ha.

The exceptions to this general rule are four islands of the Mandapam group — Hare, Manoli, Krusadai and Shingle — which had their area increased by 16.44 per cent. Hare island is the biggest of all with an area of 152.31 ha. However, Krusadai and Shingle islands face a threat from a newly-constructed fishing jetty by the TN fisheries department. Despite opposition from the forest department, the fisheries department went ahead and finished the construction of the jetty, triggering erosion problems. If the example of Vaan says something, it’s that the other islands too could soon be home to healthy coral reefs, if due attention is paid and action taken. Trap fishing, which damages nearby live and dead corals.

Climate Control Coral reefs in the Gulf of Mannar have shown a great degree of resilience to climate change, but experts say continuous monitoring is needed. As Marimuthu, Wildlife Warden, Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park, says, “Corals here bleach in summer if the water temperature surpasses 30°C. But they recover when the temperature comes down, which usually happens in August. Last April, water temperature reached 31.80°C and partial coral bleaching (less than 5 per cent) was observed. The high temperatures persisted up to May 2020 (the highest level being 31.90°C) when widespread bleaching was witnessed.

This triggered fears of mass bleaching and high mortality.” To measure the prevalence of coral bleaching, SDMRI carried out a comprehensive underwater assessment jointly with the TN forest department from April to June 2020. Eleven islands (Krusadai, Manoli, Hare, Valai, Thalaiyari, Poovarasampatti, Puluvinichalli, Vilanguchalli, Kariyachalli, Koswari and Vaan) representing the three island groups were assessed. Average bleaching prevalence was 28.20 per cent. Thoothukudi group of islands had the highest bleaching prevalence (30.80 per cent) followed by Mandapam and Keelakarai groups. Among the islands, Koswari has the highest bleaching prevalence (38.40 per cent) followed by Vaan (34.80 per cent) and Kariyachalli (34.70 per cent). SDMRI director Edward Patterson said despite such high temperatures, the corals have recovered fully and no mortality was reported. “This is largely because of low pressure and cyclonic storms that brewed in Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal in April and May. The water temperature dropped to 28.60°C in early June, which helped the corals restore their zooxanthellae. The bleached corals would completely recover by the end of July.” Significantly, the reduction in sewage inflow, industrial and human activity and halt of fishing during the lockdown assisted in the improvement of reef health, resulting in enhanced fish population and faster coral recovery, Patterson said.

The dangerous traps that don't just affect fish Trap fishing for ornamental fish is practised near the reef area. Indigenously-fabricated fish traps are set in and around the reefs. To keep these traps safe, nearby live and dead corals are broken. Therefore, the reefs are disturbed when laying and retrieving the traps. Marine biologist G Mathews says, "In most cases, the traps are laid mainly to catch reef-dwelling herbivores such as the parrot fish, which in turn cause the proliferation of algae over live coral colonies due to the lack of predators, leading to coral mortality and ecological imbalances." Parrot fish are colourful and voracious herbivores that spend up to 90 per cent of their day eating algae off of coral reefs with their beak-like teeth. "Though it is not consumed locally, it's exported to China, among other countries," says Mathews. The Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network of IUCN released a report in 2014 on Caribbean corals, which reportedly declined by more than 50 per cent since the 1970s. The report says most Caribbean reefs have been dominated by algae and it was linked to overfishing of parrot fish.

The healthiest Caribbean reefs are those that still have robust parrot fish populations, such as Bermuda and Bonaire, which restricted or banned fishing practices that harm parrot fish, including fish traps. Forest range officer R Raghuvaran said regular patrolling is conducted in reef areas. "Me and my staff are internationally-certified scuba divers. We regularly monitor the health of coral reefs and remove fish traps laid in the reef area. Fishermen are now aware that damaging coral reefs is an offence. Coral mining was completely stopped since 2005, but poaching of protected sea cucumbers still gets reported." How fast are other islands in Gulf of Mannar sinking? The average prevalence of bleaching in the three island groups is 28.20 per cent, according to an underwater assessment by the SDMRI and the Tamil Nadu forest department. The Thoothukudi group of islands had the highest prevalence (30.80 per cent), followed by the Mandapam and Keelakarai groups.

India and Sri Lanka: Fishing in troubled waters

<https://telanganatoday.com/fishing-in-troubled-waters>

"APJ Abdul Kalam, the late President of India, had once suggested a very sensible solution to the long-standing animosity between India and Sri Lanka over the two countries' fishermen's rights to fish in disputed waters. Kalam had suggested that fishermen of India and Sri Lanka may be permitted to fish in the disputed waters of the Palk Bay, Palk Strait and the Gulf of Mannar on alternate days. After him, many other commentators have also sung the same tune. But those have not been able to lift India and Sri Lanka out of their deep slumber. Both New Delhi and Colombo have been affirming their commitment to find 'a permanent solution to the fishermen issue' for a long time. But very little has moved in this direction. A tragic incident occurred in the third week of last month when four Indian fishermen lost their lives after their boat collided with a Sri Lankan navy vessel and then sunk.

There is an unofficial estimate that since the middle of the 1970s when the bilateral crisis raised its head first as India handed over the Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka, more than 700 Indian fishermen have been killed by the Sri Lankan navy. **Deep Rooted Business** The problem has now become a deep rooted one and a piecemeal approach adopted by the Indira Gandhi-led government in the 1970s is responsible for it. New Delhi handed over Katchatheevu to Colombo but India's then External Affairs Minister Swaran Singh asserted that Indian fishermen would continue to enjoy fishing rights in and around Katchatheevu. So how can any government in New Delhi face and deny the assertion made by the fishermen community of Tamil Nadu that Katchatheevu belongs to India?

Let us look at the piquant ground reality surrounding the issue. Tamil Nadu has a large fishermen population depending on deep-sea fishing — the number hovers around 2,70,000. On the Sri Lankan side, the figure is gigantic – nearly 12 lakh. The presence of such a large number of population in the trade indicates that the catches from the sea have a brisk internal and export market. An inevitable corollary is the investment of big capital in the fishing business of the area. So a giant-sized fishing industry has grown in five districts of Tamil Nadu bordering the Palk Bay, which has attracted large investments from several non-fishing communities thus elbowing out many traditional fishermen. Had it been just a case of small-time fishings by the fishermen of India and Sri Lanka, the problem might not have grown into a festering sore in bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka. But the infusion of big capital has changed the scenario altogether.

In 1986, the number of registered trawlers in Thanjavur, Pudukkottai and Ramanathapuram districts of Tamil Nadu was 1,568. But in 2000, this number shot up to 3,339. It is widely believed that Rameswaram alone has more than 1,000 mechanised trawlers today. According to a recent estimate, small coastal stretches of Rameswaram, Mandapam and Pamban have 2,500 trawlers while Kottaipattinam and Pudukkottai have another 400. Add to it the number of trawlers in other coastal locations and the figure becomes stupendous. **Blame Games** Indulging in blame games will serve no purpose because socioeconomic conditions in certain parts of India and Sri Lanka have linkages with the disputed water. Local economies of three districts of Sri Lanka's Northern Province are dependent on fishing. More importantly, the Northern Province of Sri Lanka accounts for more than one-third of the country's marine catch. So the marine products segment of the country's export economy has its stake in this region.

At the same time, the fishermen of Tamil Nadu have also no other way but to cross the International Maritime Boundary Line because resources within the Indian exclusive economic zone are becoming more and more scarce due to the harmful practice of bottom trawling by Indian trawlers. The crisis is no doubt a fall out of the hastily drawn up maritime boundary agreement between India and Sri Lanka in 1974. Neither the then Tamil Nadu government nor the fishermen were engaged by the Government of India in any detailed discussion. The

agreement gives Indian fishermen the right to rest, drying up of nets and participate in the annual St Anthony's festival on the Katchatheevu island but it does not give fishing rights. So Swaran Singh's statement – assuring fishing rights to Indian fishermen — was perhaps an exercise in assuaging wounded sentiments in Tamil Nadu.

But it has made the issue more complex. Solution But where does lie the solution? Well, India will have to take the initiative as the bigger country. First, the use of trawlers in the Palk Bay must be prohibited. Sri Lanka has already done it in their side of the said sea route. Second, the fishermen in Tamil Nadu must be convinced not to cross the International Maritime Boundary Line till a permanent solution is found. This will be easy to achieve as any impounded foreign fishing boat in Sri Lankan waters is now charged a penalty of minimum LKR 6 million, which may reach up to LKR 175 million maximum.

Thirdly, New Delhi must correct its cardinal mistake of allowing mechanised infrastructure of fishing in Tamil Nadu and instead go back to traditional fishing methods. This will be justice for the traditional fishing communities many of whose members have been forced to become wage labourers in mechanised trawlers. Quantity of marine catch within the Indian side of the exclusive economic zone is low due to bottom trawling and New Delhi has to look for an alternative mechanism. A good idea is to set up a Palk Bay Authority which would set up downstream processing industries for limiting the number of fishermen going into the sea. Another fruitful step may be creation of fishermen's cooperatives comprising representatives from both the countries. Through mutual consent, limited fishing days — a 12-hour time limit for each fishing trip, and for the Indian fishermen, a prescribed distance of three nautical miles from the Sri Lankan shore may be introduced.

Tamil Nadu: Proposal of seaweed park in TN gets a thumbs up from industry

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/agri-business/proposal-of-seaweed-park-in-tn-gets-a-thumbs-up-from-industry/article33718806.ece>

"The Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has proposed in the Budget to set up a multi-purpose seaweed park in Tamil Nadu as part of promoting seaweed cultivation. According to the Minister, seaweed farming is an emerging sector with potential to transform the lives of coastal communities and will provide large employment and additional income. Welcoming the initiative, A Gopalakrishnan, Director, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, said the proposed park could be a multi-purpose hub for a variety of economic activities related to seaweed farming, business development and bio-prospecting. Presently, seaweeds are being cultivated by hundreds of fishermen along the Palk Bay coast in Tamil Nadu. The proposal will help the fisherfolk and coastal entrepreneurs in the State, he said.

The commercially exploited seaweed species in India mainly include *Kappaphycus alvarezii*, *Gracilaria edulis*, *Gelidiella acerosa*, *Sargassum* spp. and *Turbinaria* spp. Seaweeds are valued for commercial products such as Karrageenan and Agar besides being used for the production of polysaccharides, fertilizer, sludge and other high-value products such as nutraceuticals and cosmeceuticals for use against various lifestyle diseases. K Riji John, Vice-Chancellor, Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies, said that the development of seaweed park would go a long way in addressing the nutritional security of a large segment of undernourished and underprivileged marginal communities. "India being a tropical belt, we have a number of economically important seaweed species which can be commercially exploited. The operation of this park needs to be extended to Lakshadweep where there is high potential for seaweed farming which is still remain so under explored," he said. Seaweeds are storehouse of essential amino acids, natural antioxidants, minerals and other micro-nutrients. However, awareness of the advantages on the consumption of the seaweeds are not properly penetrated to our community, he added.

Tamil Nadu: Palk Bay fishing dispute: Casting the net in a sea of conflict

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/palk-bay-fishing-dispute-casting-the-net-in-a-sea-of-conflict/article33698525.ece>

"Four fishermen from Ramanathapuram district are the latest casualties in the decades-old Palk Bay fisheries conflict between India and Sri Lanka. L. Srikrishna, C. Jaisankar, R. Rajaram and Meera Srinivasan report on the human cost of the issue touching on bilateral ties, livelihoods, and ecological concerns. Samson Darwin was a toddler when his family fled their home in Jaffna in the 1990s, to escape the civil war that was tearing apart Sri Lanka's north and east. Mandapam camp in Ramanathapuram became their "home". Away from incessant bombing and destruction, they thought they had another chance at life. Last week, 28-year-old Darwin's body was brought back home after he and three other fishermen died in the Palk Strait, in Sri Lankan waters. Darwin's wife (they got married just a year ago) had given birth to their first child weeks before that, and just as their new life as a family was about to begin, his life ended. Darwin fled the civil war nearly 25 years ago but the adversity that began chasing him then came a full circle that fatal night.

"After escaping the battle in Sri Lanka, we came here [Ramanathapuram]... but Darwin died in the hands of the Sri Lankan Navy," a relative says, requesting anonymity. He echoes the grief

that pervades their village following the tragic death of Darwin, along with A. Mesiya (30), V. Nagaraj (52) and S. Senthil Kumar (32), all hailing from Ramanathapuram, on the night of January 18. Outraged by the incident, Tamil Nadu fishermen have accused the Sri Lankan Navy, which was patrolling the seas for “poaching” fishing trawlers, of killing the four men. The Sri Lankan Navy, on the other hand, maintains that the fishermen and their boat “sank” while “resisting arrest” by a Navy vessel. The Indian government conveyed its “strong protest” to Sri Lanka, and insisted it adopt a humanitarian approach in dealing with fishermen. Sri Lanka’s Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda, a Tamil from Jaffna, set up a three-member committee tasked with finding a “permanent solution” to the Palk Bay fisheries conflict, affecting fishermen of Tamil Nadu and northern Sri Lanka.

None of the official statements mentions a probe being sought or agreed to. The four Tamil Nadu fishermen and the Sri Lankan Naval personnel alone were witnesses to what happened late that night, mid-sea, and only one side is alive to tell their story. A long-festering problem “What wrong did my brother do? He was unarmed and he has been brutally killed,” says A. Simon, Mesiya’s older brother, in his thatch-roofed hut in Thangachimadam, a predominantly fishing village in Ramanathapuram. “Whenever we set out fishing we pray that we return home safely, irrespective of whether the catch is good or not.

The innocent fishermen’s end is horrifying.” That too at sea, to which their lives are so intimately tied. Fisherfolk wake up to the sound of the sea, head to the waters for a living, come back to the shore, catch some sleep at odd hours, again with the reassuring sound of the waves. “After fishing for about 30 hours, we return to the shore. On many days, the Sri Lankan Navy, under the pretext of surveillance, chases us. Sometimes they throw stones at our boats or hurl empty liquor bottles,” says another fisherman mourning Mesiya’s death. Fishermen’s representatives in Tamil Nadu accuse the Sri Lankan Navy of injuring hundreds of fishermen over the years. “About 300 of our fishermen have died in the Palk Strait,” says P. Sesu Raja, Rameswaram-based leader of a fishermen’s association engaged mostly in bottom trawling. The Sri Lankan Navy has consistently denied the mounting allegations — through the years of the war and since it ended in 2009.

While the cause of death of the deceased fishermen has never been established in a court of law, the fact that these young fishermen died at sea remains a grim reminder of the human cost of the Palk Bay fisheries conflict. Their distressing death, when they were out at sea to earn a day’s living, is yet another stark reflection of a long-festering problem — of depleting marine resources in the Palk Bay, competing livelihoods of fishermen, and a solution that remains elusive, as the fishermen on both sides are unable to agree on it. Tamil Nadu fishermen are not a homogenous group with the same interests. They are part of a complex ecosystem of moneyed and often politically influential owners of trawler fleets who engage other fishermen; of those who practise traditional fishing in their small, mechanised boats; and thousands of poor

fishermen who have only their labour to sell in order to survive. Depending on who you ask, a different aspect of the problem comes to light. Like Sesu Raja, most owners of the 5,000-plus registered trawlers say that the Sri Lankan Navy “attacked our fishermen”, arrested them, or seized their vessels.

Daily wage fishermen speak of the enormous pressure on them to risk their lives and go as far as it takes to get a decent catch that would ensure a day’s earnings in full. Arockia Sesu, 47, from Thangachimadam, who has been fishing for 29 years, says he makes about ₹700 on a good day. With a family of five, including his elderly mother and two children, making both ends meet is no easy task. “Earlier, it was just poverty which we had to battle. But in recent years, we also have to safeguard ourselves from the Sri Lankan Navy’s aggression,” he says. Straying in international waters Despite the GPS units attached to their boats, the fishermen often stray into Sri Lanka’s territorial waters, across the International Maritime Boundary Line, mutually agreed upon by the neighbouring countries in the mid-1970s. India embraced mechanised fishing using bottom trawlers, after its fishing fleet was “modernised” between the 1950s and the early 1970s, with millions of dollars from the Norwegian government.

In the fishing method of bottom trawling, fishermen drag large nets from the vessels through the sea, virtually scooping out young fishes, shrimps and other organisms from the seabed indiscriminately. Some use thangoosi valai or monofilament nets, widely considered harmful for marine species. The catch, using these methods, has proved significantly higher, boosting the State’s exports. Data from the Fisheries Department show that Tamil Nadu exports about 1.28 lakh tonnes of sea food, amounting to ₹5,591 crore. For the export-oriented governments at the Centre and State, and profit-driven owners of trawlers, the practice gradually became an addiction despite the serious environmental implications along the Tamil Nadu coast, periodically highlighted by scientists. Small-scale fishermen, too, bear the brunt. In Pudukkottai district, further up the coast, small-scale fishermen spoke of how the trawlers have struck a huge blow to their livelihoods.

“They [trawlers] return with huge catches thus depleting the marine resources and depriving the smaller mechanised boat fishermen of Pudukkottai district of good catch,” said B. Balamurugan, president of the Mechanised Boats Association in Jagadapattinam, from where over 200 mechanised boats using traditional fishing practices operate. The trawlers are not just at the centre of an international conflict but have also bred local conflicts, points out Chinna Adaikkalam, President of the Kottaipattinam Mechanised Boat Owners Association. “The longer-sized and higher capacity Karaikal trawlers have resorted to long durations of fishing, for almost 15 days, leaving hardly anything for us in our seas,” he says. Intuitively chasing fish, Tamil Nadu fishermen employed in the larger, mechanised trawlers regularly veer into Sri Lankan waters. The ecological damage is comparatively less on the Sri Lankan side because most Sri Lankan fishermen do not engage in bottom trawling.

It is the prospect of a bigger catch that pushes Tamil Nadu fishermen to risk encountering arrest by the Sri Lankan Navy or worse, death. Strained livelihoods and ties Over time, Sri Lankan fishermen grew more vocal about the adverse effects of bottom trawling along their coastline. Their catches fell, and livelihoods were threatened. Fishermen on both sides speak of a time when they shared cordial ties. “We would call each other machaan and maapilai [brother-in-law and son-in-law]. We would share our porridge, karuvaadu [dried fish] and beedis. They would give us cigarettes and biscuits,” Sesu Raja recalls. Sri Lankan fishermen too reminisce about a time when they took an overnight boat journey to catch the latest M.G. Ramachandran film in Rameswaram and return the following day.

But the Sri Lankan civil war and the growing use of mechanised bottom trawlers in India have strained their ties. For a good part of the nearly three-decade civil war, fishermen in the northern Jaffna peninsula and the Vanni were barred access to the sea, as the Sri Lankan Navy, along with the armed forces, was taking on the LTTE. It is when the war ended in 2009 that the fisherfolk, most of them displaced in the years of strife, returned to their homes, and gradually began to rebuild their lost livelihoods. However, their return to sea was far from smooth: they found their catch dwindling after Indian trawlers ravaged their seas at least thrice a week, and their nets, often bought with huge loans, getting caught and damaged under the trawlers. The Sri Lankan Navy stepped up surveillance, arresting fishermen and seizing trawlers “trespassing” into Sri Lankan waters. Since 2010, more than 3,000 Indian fishermen, all from Tamil Nadu, have been arrested by the Navy. As of today, 12 fishermen and more than 60 trawlers are in Sri Lankan custody. The issue has remained a sensitive bilateral issue, but the Central, State and provincial governments in India and Sri Lanka have achieved little success, besides “paying lip service”, fishermen note with distrust. Sri Lanka banned bottom trawling in 2017, and in 2018, imposed large fines on foreign vessels fishing illegally in its waters. While arrested fishermen have been released periodically, at times after a considerable diplomatic push by New Delhi, the 60-odd trawlers seized since remain in custody.

Their owners in India are yet to come to Sri Lanka, to appear in court and pay the fine, before reclaiming the vessels, say officials in Sri Lanka’s Fisheries Department. Options tried and tested Talks at the governmental level, as well as among fishermen, have not resulted in a durable solution. With heightened surveillance and increased arrests making news in late 2020, India and Sri Lanka resumed bilateral talks, after a three-year gap, in December 2020, through a Joint Working Group with senior officials from both sides. Apart from government-level talks, fishermen leaders from both countries have held discussions several times since 2004. They met at least six times between 2010 and 2015 – in both India and Sri Lanka – when the Palk Bay conflict intensified. Tamil Nadu fishermen could not keep their promise of “phasing out” trawlers, and also refused to agree to Sri Lankan fishermen’s demand that bottom trawling be fully stopped as a goodwill gesture. Talks remain deadlocked since. “It is not possible to find a solution to the five-decades-old vexatious issue in two or three sittings. No follow-up action has

been taken to resume talks for so long. Governments are receptive and react only when fishermen are killed or arrested in Sri Lankan waters,” says U. Arulanandam, Tamil Nadu’s representative of the Alliance for the Release of Innocent Fishermen, a long-time activist based in Pamban, Ramanathapuram.

While a section of fishermen in Pudukkottai and Ramanathapuram districts is for restarting talks, fisher leaders in Sri Lanka remain sceptical. “We are really pained by the recent death of Indian fishermen. We are all fishermen first, only then Indian or Sri Lankan. We fully understand their suffering, we are in solidarity with them and want to put an end to this,” says K. Rajachandran, who leads a fisher cooperative in Karainagar, a small island off the Jaffna peninsula. At the same time, he calls for more sincerity in trying to come up with a solution. “I have been for several rounds of these talks. Despite many assurances to phase out trawlers, they continued coming in trawlers very close to our shore. If they agree to use small boats and traditional fishing methods, we are more than willing to come to the table to work out an arrangement to share our resources responsibly. That is the only way our future generations can live,” he says, insisting that stopping the use of trawlers be a pre-condition for future talks. Unlike the state, fisher leaders do not talk in terms of invisible boundary lines in the sea, or the law that deems their fishing “illegal, unreported and unregulated”.

They appear more inclined towards a humane and practical arrangement that will address their short-term concerns of securing their livelihoods, as well as the long-term interest of preserving the marine organisms in the Palk Bay. “The use of bottom trawlers has to be stopped fully. Northern fishermen here, whose livelihoods were devastated by a long-drawn civil war, are frustrated that despite their struggle over many years, the problem of bottom trawling by Tamil Nadu has not ended,” says Ahilan Kadirgamar, senior lecturer at the University of Jaffna, who researches fisherfolk’s livelihoods in Sri Lanka’s war-affected region. “There could be more rounds of talks and a promise of a permanent solution, but how can you really resolve this crisis without addressing the fundamental problem that is bottom trawling,” he asks. Further, the Indian trawlers have spawned a fleet of relatively smaller, but still destructive trawlers in Jaffna, Rajachandran notes with concern. “We don’t oppose trawlers because they are from India. We oppose trawlers from Jaffna [there are some 500] as well. It is the destructive practice we are against, not the fishermen engaging in it.” Some others like Annalingam Annarasa, leader of the federation of fisher cooperative societies in Jaffna, want to give talks another chance.

“Honestly, this is not an issue between two countries, or one between the Tamil Nadu fishermen and the Sri Lankan Navy. It is fundamentally an issue threatening the livelihoods of Tamil fishermen in both India and Sri Lanka. We need to work together with mutual understanding and solidarity,” says Annarasa. “We need to form an alliance with small-scale fishermen in Tamil Nadu and together raise awareness about the dire consequences of bottom trawling. That could be a starting point for talks.” Solution in sight? Meanwhile, a project of the Indian government,

aimed at weaning Tamil Nadu fishermen off trawlers and diverting them to deep-sea fishing methods, took off in 2017, but has hardly progressed as planned. Both New Delhi and Tamil Nadu, implementing the ₹1,600 crore initiative, hoped to replace at least 2,000 trawlers with deep sea fishing boats with long lines and gill nets.

However, less than a tenth of that target has been achieved, The Hindu reported in December. According to Johny Tom Varghese, Project Director Palk Bay and Additional Director (Fisheries) in Tamil Nadu, deep sea fishing will eventually be lucrative, though it is capital-intensive. “A fisherman who invests his money in a deep sea fishing boat can break even in about 18 months. We are training them. We have signed 103 agreements with individuals under the scheme,” he says. Those grappling with the shift from trawlers to deep sea vessels are also confronted with rising costs. In Sesu Raja’s view, the 70% subsidy, together from the Centre and State, for the deep sea fishing boats, is insufficient. “The governments had worked out the cost at ₹80 lakh per boat, while it is almost ₹1.20 crore today,” he observes. Pointing to the scheme’s “very slow progress,” Arulanandam says, “If it is implemented within a year or two, I hope it can offer a possible solution.

But the governments should make sure of buying back all existing trawlers.” The fishermen in Kottaiappattinam and Jagadapattinam villages in Pudukkottai too complain that while the government is taking steps to introduce deep sea fishing, the old boats are yet to be weeded out. The proposal to shift fishermen of Kottaiappattinam, Jagadapattinam and Rameswaram towards deep sea fishing has not picked up, fishermen say. There have not been many takers for fish farming in the Gulf of Mannar, either. The hype following the successful demonstration of fish farming by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute in Mandapam was short-lived. The Fisheries Department seized mechanised boats used for pair trawling on several occasions, but the punitive actions could not eliminate the practice fully.

The deep divisions among various fishing groups and frequent agitations have put the brakes on enforcing strict regulations, according to fishermen. As the campaign in election-bound Tamil Nadu picks up, the issues of fishermen, who constitute a sizeable electorate in coastal districts, will take centre stage again. “The real challenge for fishermen on both sides is to keep this issue in focus even after the polls,” says Annarasa, reflecting a similar sentiment heard in Tamil Nadu about “not allowing politicians to exploit our situation.” At one level, the problem at hand is historical, complex and layered. At another, it is about sustaining and sharing finite marine resources in the Palk Strait, a narrow strip of water, just over 100 km at its widest, separating south India and northern Sri Lanka. As fishermen repeatedly point out, at the heart of this persisting conflict is their insecurity about their livelihoods and futures. Elections come and go, but that is yet to be decisively addressed.

Tamil Nadu: Sicagen empowers Tamil Nadu's local fishing community by delivering modern deep-sea fishing vessels

<https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/sicagen-empowers-tamil-nadus-local-fishing-community-by-delivering-modern-deepsea-fishing-vessels/2017950>

"The following press release comes to you under an arrangement with Business Wire India. PTI takes no editorial responsibility for the same.) Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India– Business Wire India Thiru. K. Palanisamy, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, launches the vessels in a virtual function. The State Department of Fisheries, Tamil Nadu, awarded the work contract to Sicagen. The project is a part of the Government's scheme to convert 2000 trawler boats into deep-sea fishing and gillnet boats for the fishers in Pudukkottai, Nagapattinam, and Ramanathapuram districts. While the boats were built and were ready for use in early 2020, the handover to beneficiaries was delayed due to the pandemic. The Boat Building division of Sicagen India Limited (Sicagen), a leading integrated, value-added solutions provider for infrastructure, industrial packaging, and specialty chemicals, and part of AM International - Singapore, recently delivered eight deep-sea fishing boats to the Department of Fisheries, Government of Tamil Nadu.

The project is part of the Government's vision to provide better livelihood opportunities to the fishing communities of Pudukkottai, Nagapattinam, and Ramanathapuram districts by converting 2000 trawler boats into deep-sea fishing and gillnet boats. Sicagen's Boat Building division built the deep-sea fishing boats converted from fishermen trawlers in the Palk Bay. They were launched by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Thiru. K. Palanisamy, at the Secretariat, in a virtual function from Sicagen's yard. 50% of the boat costs were met through a Central Government subsidy, while the state government provided financial assistance for 20% of the costs. Another 20% of the price was financed through bank loans, and the users themselves contributed the remaining 10%. Mr. Ashwin Muthiah, Chairman, Sicagen and Founder Chairman, AM International, said, "It is an honour to partner with the Government of Tamil Nadu and the State Fisheries Department for this project. The deep-sea fishing boats are safer, efficient, and enable the beneficiaries to cruise deeper into the sea. In many ways, they are symbolic of a better future that awaits the state's hardworking fishing community. At Sicagen, we're proud to facilitate a progressive transition."

Sicagen was contracted to build eight deep-sea fishing boats due to its rich experience and shipbuilding expertise for the maritime industry. While the vessels were built and were ready for use in early of 2020, the handover to beneficiaries was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chief Minister handed over the registration certificates for seven boats to beneficiaries during the function. Sicagen has now been contracted for the construction of six other deep-sea fishing boats. Besides the Chief Minister, the virtual launch event was attended by the Hon'ble

Minister for Fisheries, Personnel and Administrative Reforms Mr. D. Jayakumar, Chief Secretary Mr. K. Shanmugam, IAS, Principal Secretary of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries Department Mr. K. Gopal, IAS, Director of Fisheries Development and Managing Director of Tamilnadu Fisheries Development Corporation Mr. J. Jayakanthan, IAS, Additional Director of Fisheries Department Mr. Jony Tom Verghese, IAS and other higher officials of Government. Mr. R. Chandrasekar, Whole Time Director represented Sicagen at the event. About Sicagen India Ltd Sicagen is a leading integrated, value-added solutions provider for Infrastructure, Industrial packaging, Power control systems, and Specialty chemicals for water treatment.

With a presence across India and South East Asia, we enable the region's development imperative through a one-stop customer-oriented approach. Part of Singapore's headquartered \$2+ billion AM International group, Sicagen has a presence across six countries with five synergistic business verticals and two wholly-owned subsidiaries. www.sicagen.com About AM International Holdings Pte Ltd AM International is a diversified, multinational group of companies with a federated operating architecture. Headquartered in Singapore, it has been trusted by millions of customers for over six decades. Today, many of the group's businesses are market leaders with footprints across South East Asia, India, and the United Kingdom. The group's business verticals include fertilizers, supply chain, petrochemicals, infrastructure, healthcare, and green energy. www.aminternational.sg To View the Image Click on the Link Below: Thiru. K. Palanisamy, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, launches the deep sea fishing boats in a virtual function.

India and Sri Lanka: Resolving the fishing dispute in Palk bay

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/opinions/2021/jan/18/resolving-the-fishing-dispute-in-palk-bay-2251489.html>

"Three significant aspects of Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's recent visit to Sri Lanka need to be highlighted. First, the timely medical assistance to tackle the problems posed by Covid-19; second, New Delhi's hope that Sri Lanka "in its interest" should fulfil the aspirations of the Tamil community for equality and dignity in a united Lanka; and third, finding a durable solution to the travails of fishermen in the Palk Bay. My focus is on the third subject, which has eluded a solution for the past several decades. The fisheries issue, according to Jaishankar, was discussed in the earlier Joint Working Group in an "open and candid manner". He also had a meeting with the Sri Lankan Minister for Fisheries Douglas Devananda. The outcome of the meeting is not known. The two countries are at present engaged in a "fire-fighting exercise". The Indian fishermen who get detained in Sri Lankan waters are released after a few days; the detained trawlers are also given back. Trawlers and fishermen are back in Sri Lankan waters the next day. What is required is not this sort of fire-fighting; it is essential to

extinguish the causes of fire once and for all. It can be done only if New Delhi and Tamil Nadu recognise the fact that the fault lies with Tamil Nadu fishermen.

Fishermen throughout the world are no respecters of maritime boundaries; they move wherever the fish moves. It is a universal phenomenon; Sri Lankan fishermen poach into Indian and Maldivian waters; Indian fishermen enter Pakistani and Bangladeshi waters, and Japanese and Taiwanese trawlers roam around the world. The only way to find a solution is to change our mindset; we should adopt a new paradigm of thinking. I have been advocating that the two countries can, if they have the will and the determination, convert the contested territory into a common heritage. The roots of the problem can be traced to the mid-1960s when India was facing a foreign exchange crisis. To boost exports, Indira Gandhi introduced trawlers to catch prawns. Prawns were a delicacy in Japan and Europe, and exports went up. But the introduction of trawlers had unfortunate consequences. First, fishermen became wage labourers; non-fishermen, including politicians, entered the fray and became trawler owners. Equally relevant, bottom trawling led to the destruction of marine life. The trawlers swept the sea bed clean. Since there was no fish on the Indian side, our fishermen began to enter Sri Lankan waters. The protracted ethnic conflict was a godsend.

Fishing was banned in Sri Lanka and many Lankan fishermen came to Tamil Nadu as refugees. They worked for the trawler owners and directed the trawlers to areas where there was an abundance of fish. When I visited Pesalai, a fishing village in Sri Lanka's Mannar district, the fishermen told me: "Sir, stay here tonight. Early in the morning you can see Indian trawlers 500 metres away from the shore." The fishermen in Neduntheevu told me that on the three days Indian fishermen fished in Sri Lankan waters, they did not go for fishing because their nets would be cut by the Indian trawlers. The trawlers also muddied the waters; as a result, when they fished the next day, they could not catch much fish. The fishermen argued, with justification, that if bottom trawling continued, there would be no marine life on the Sri Lankan side of the Palk Bay too. What must be highlighted is the fact that bottom trawling is banned in Sri Lanka. The recalcitrant Indian fishermen received solid support from both the DMK and AIADMK governments. During the ethnic conflict, the Palk Bay was the conduit through which the LTTE war machine was fuelled. The DMK and the AIADMK were engaged in mutual mud-slinging, each accusing the other of not protecting fishermen's interests.

A chief minister even went to the extent of demanding the retrieval of Kachchatheevu by peaceful means, if possible, and by force if necessary. What the politicians in Tamil Nadu do not realise is the fact that if the Sri Lankan government approaches the International Court of Justice against India, the image of our country, especially TN, would take a nosedive. The success of diplomacy consists of converting a crisis into an opportunity. New Delhi must embark on deep-sea fishing in a big way. Tamil Nadu fishermen must be encouraged to take to deep-sea fishing.

According to specialists, trawlers could, with some modifications, be converted to small fishing boats catering to the mother ship in the mid-sea.

Simultaneously, the trawlers must be withdrawn from the Palk Bay. With trawlers out of the scene, a conducive atmosphere would be created. A Palk Bay Authority, consisting of specialists from both governments, representatives of fishermen's associations and navies should be constituted to determine ideal sustainable catch, how to enrich the sea jointly, the type of fishing equipment that can be used and the number of fishing days for each country. Let Sri Lankan fishermen fish for three days and Indian fishermen fish for three. The Palk Bay is increasingly becoming a conduit for drug traffic and there could be joint naval cooperation for tackling this menace. Thus the Palk Bay could be transformed from a contested territory to a common heritage, which it was for several centuries.

Tamil Nadu: Mannar's Corals Stand Strong in the Face of Growing Threats – With a Little Help

<https://science.thewire.in/environment/coral-reef-bleaching-gulf-of-mannar-nccr-mandapam-artificial-reefs-climate-change/>

"In spite of global warming and pollution, coral reefs in the Gulf of Mannar have been resilient – a sign that management interventions are helping. It was a sight of “devastation” that met 22-year-old Gilbert Mathews when he dove into the clear waters near southern Vaan, a coral island off the Tamil Nadu coast in the Gulf of Mannar, in 2002. “Broken coral skeletons lay everywhere. And barely any fish,” he recalled. That was because coral mining for limestone, for use as a construction material, was common in the Gulf then – until the government banned it in 2005. Climate change was beginning to take a toll, too: researchers had already begun seeing traces of coral bleaching. Mathews had joined the Suganthi Devadason Marine Research Institute (SDMRI) in Thoothukudi to study how corals were faring under such threats.

But today, you will see corals thriving in this patch, said Mathews, currently an associate professor at SDMRI. The corals now support a diversity of reef fish as well. This recovery – not just around Vaan Island but also in other patches of the Gulf – has come about despite several setbacks. The most prominent of them were destructive fishing practices, marine debris and two debilitating bleaching events in 2010 and 2016. While climate change still remains the chief worry, reefs here are showing immense resilience, researchers said. And this didn't happen on its own. Reviving biodiversity The impact of a changing climate on corals worldwide first came to light in the 1980s and the 1990s, when scientists discovered some reefs bleaching – turning pale as they lost the algae that gave them their distinct colours and helped them photosynthesise. This happens when the ocean warms – and warming oceans is one of global warming's major consequences. This said, bleaching alone is not a danger; algae can regrow on coral given the

right conditions. The real problem is prolonged exposure to warm water, which can kill off corals entirely.

Picture a field of ghostly white skeletons unable to sustain reef fish or other marine life – that’s what it looks like. Scientists have observed both bleaching and coral death in the Gulf of Mannar, which comprises a group of 21 coral islands, since 1998. The most significant bleaching events here happened in 2010 and 2016. In the latter year, scientists reported that almost 50% of corals in a few islands off Thoothukudi had bleached. Some patches across the Gulf displayed similar effects. Ailing corals support fewer species and quantities of reef fish, or drastically affect fish communities. This in turn hits coastal communities. More than one lakh fishers in coastal villages near the Gulf depend on reef-associated fishery, according to J.K. Patterson Edward, the director of SDMRI.

As part of a study to improve biodiversity and enhance fish catch, Edward and his team placed ‘artificial’ reefs underwater near Vaan Island in 2002. These are tent-like contraptions devised out of three cement slabs fused shoulder-to-shoulder. By 2004, plankton, barnacles and a host of other marine life had latched on to these slabs, as did four types (or genera) of corals. In 2017, the team reported 14 types of corals growing on the slabs. “In India, artificial reefs are usually deployed to enhance fish production because fish aggregate at reefs. But they can also aid resilience in coral communities,” Edward said. Currently, they have deployed around a thousand artificial reefs in the Gulf and the adjacent Palk Bay, including near Mandapam town and Thoothukudi port. Since 2002, his team has also been restoring some reefs by attaching live coral fragments to concrete frames. This process, called coral transplantation, has been fairly successful: 80% of the team’s transplants have survived.

Other teams have been monitoring coral health and conducting coral transplantation exercises of their own. In 2018, Chennai’s National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR), affiliated to the Ministry of Earth Sciences, conducted a coral transplantation campaign in six islands in the Gulf. As they grew, the transplanted coral secreted calcium carbonate – or lime, which helps corals adhere to a substrate. The team is considering how they might replicate their success in other Indian reefs, T. Shunmugaraj, an NCCR scientist leading the project, said. Monitoring environmental impacts The coral resilience prevailing in the Gulf today reflects the resilience many reefs around the world have put on display, NCCR director M.V. Ramana Murthy said. Towards supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goal no. 14 – conserving underwater life – his team will study the environmental factors that support this resilience and growth, he added. And there are many such factors.

Resilience can be species-specific: for example, a few coral species seem to be less affected by bleaching. Some branching corals in the Gulf didn’t bleach during a warming event in 2016 while as others did. Even the weather plays a role, per Edward. In the summer of 2020, when the

Gulf experienced more coral bleaching, cyclones, low pressure events and depressions pulled these temperatures down. As a result, Edward said, “all the bleached corals recovered faster than they usually would.” Similarly, a lack of sea currents, which could have displaced warmer sea water and decreased the sea surface temperature, near Hare Island in 2019 could have promoted the bleaching that year, said T. Shunmugaraj. Strong wave action can also erode coral islands.

This is one important reason, together with the coral mining before to the 2005 ban, that Vaan Island was eroding at an accelerating pace, scientists noted. So in a state-backed project in 2015, SDMRI introduced a different set of artificial reefs near Vaan to stem this problem. It worked. By 2017, Vaan island had grown by 2.24 hectares in low tide, as *The Wire* has reported. Sources at SDMRI said this figure has since increased to 3 hectares. Competition between corals and other marine life – and how climate change changes these interactions – could be yet another factor in coral resilience. Sponges and some species of algae, for instance, can easily grow over bleached or injured corals. Scientists at SDMRI have spotted the yellow spot sponge competing with bleached corals off Thoothukudi this way.

But they have also found that a native species of mollusc – the tiger cowry – feeds on this sponge. While corals may have an ally in the tiger cowry, these molluscs are threatened by human activity: the locals harvest them in huge numbers to craft shell jewellery popular among tourists. Protecting or at least regulating these harvests could boost coral resilience to some degree, researchers have said. Protection, enforcement and awareness Edward has been observing the Gulf for more than 30 years. And while coral restoration is a great tool, according to him, the one thing that triggered enormous recovery in the Gulf was the coral-mining ban. “That’s when coral recruits increased. From 2005 to 2009, there was so much resilience until the 2010 global mass-bleaching. We lost some corals then,” he said.

“After that also there was some resilience. After the 2016 bleaching, too, there was resilience – though not as much as before.” Climate change is still very much the primary concern – but sustained law enforcement by the forest department is an important reason many existing reefs still stand, Edward added. The department intensely monitors and patrols the Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park. Anti-poaching sea and island patrols include around a hundred local fishermen as watchers. Separate teams engage in shore patrols to ensure no illegal marine catch is landed, and a mobile ‘forest squad’ helps with daily enforcement activities. Most importantly, community engagement – like the formation of eco-development and marine conservation committees in 252 villages – and awareness programmes have been paying off. Local fishers are cooperating with the department, even informing them of any violations, according to A. Marimuthu, the park’s wildlife warden. “The biggest stakeholders are the local people. Unless they feel that it is an important resource [that] should be conserved for their own well-being, no conservation is possible,” Marimuthu said.

India and Sri Lanka: India calls on Sri Lanka for early release of 40 arrested fishermen

https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/india-calls-on-sri-lanka-for-early-release-of-40-arrested-fishermen-120123100111_1.html

"India on Wednesday called on Sri Lanka to ensure the early release of fishermen arrested recently on the charge of poaching in Sri Lankan waters. According to a statement by Ministry of Fisheries, the Indian side also reiterated the need for releasing all fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody in line with the commitment given by Sri Lankan President during his state visit to India in November 2019. This issue came at the fourth meeting of the joint working group on fisheries through virtual mode, during which the entire gamut of issues related to fishermen and fishing boats was discussed. Referring to the recent 'apprehension' of 40 fishermen and 6 boats by Sri Lanka Navy, the leader of the Indian delegation called on the Sri Lankan side to ensure their early release and till such time, to provide necessary facilitation including consular access and necessary assistance, the release said.

The Fisheries Ministry said that two sides also exchanged views on the status of cooperation between Navy and Coast Guard of both countries in patrolling, existing hotline between the Coast Guards and related operational matters, cooperation in preservation of marine environment as well as the schedule for the fifth meeting of the JWG. The Indian side conveyed its sincere determination to work in a constructive spirit with the Sri Lankan side for convening an early meeting of the Fisheries Ministers on both sides. Earlier this year, during the virtual bilateral Summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa held on 26 September, both leaders agreed to "continue engagement to address the issues related to fishermen through regular consultation and bilateral channels."

The Indian side highlighted the initiatives being taken by India under the new Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana and other schemes of Government of India and governments of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry to diversify and reduce fishing pressure in the Palk Bay. The first meeting of the Joint Working Group was held on December 31, 2016, in New Delhi. The Second Joint Working Group was held in Colombo on April 7, 2017. Meanwhile, the third meeting was held in New Delhi on October 13, 2017.

India: Urges Sri Lanka to release fishermen

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/india-urges-sri-lanka-to-release-fishermen/article33458555.ece>

"India on Wednesday urged Sri Lanka to ensure the early release of fishermen arrested recently on the charge of poaching in Sri Lankan waters, a statement from Sri Lanka's Ministry of Fisheries said. The issue, among others, was discussed at a virtual bilateral meeting on the persisting fisheries conflict, affecting fishermen on both sides of the Palk Strait. Senior officials of both countries, led by their Secretaries of Fisheries Ministries, took part in the discussions that marked the resumption of the meeting of the Sri Lanka-India Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries after three years. Referring to the recent arrest of 40 fishermen and seizure of six boats, the Indian delegation called on the Sri Lankan side to "ensure their early release and till such time, to provide necessary facilitation, including consular access and necessary assistance," a press release issued by the Indian Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying said.

"The Indian side also reiterated the need for releasing all fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody in line with the commitment given by the Sri Lankan President during his state visit to India in November 2019," it added. The meeting comes in the wake of the recent arrests made by the Sri Lankan Navy — after months of no arrests — of Tamil Nadu fishermen, who had allegedly trespassed into Sri Lankan waters. For nearly a decade now, northern Sri Lankan fishermen, mostly in the war-affected, Tamil-majority Northern Province, have voiced concern over Indian fishermen poaching in their seas, that too, using destructive practices such as bottom trawling that is banned in Sri Lanka. The JWG began meeting in 2016, and was set up as a mechanism to address the Palk Bay fisheries conflict through official discussions in New Delhi and Colombo. Talks between fisher leaders of both countries, held several times in the last decade, could not yield a mutually agreeable arrangement.

Moreover, the Sri Lankan delegation conveyed the need to further enhance the joint patrolling and operationalisation of the hotline between the law enforcement authorities of the two countries. It also sought a safe passage for Sri Lankan fishermen to enter the Arabian Sea, the statement from the Sri Lankan Ministry of Fisheries said. "Both sides expressed the desirability to convene an early ministerial meeting to continue the bilateral dialogue," it added.

Tamil Nadu: Sri Lankan Navy resumes raids; 36 Indian fishermen arrested

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lankan-navy-resumes-raids-36-indian-fishermen-arrested/article33337075.ece>

"After months of limiting arrests of allegedly poaching Indian fishermen, fearing they could be carriers of COVID-19, the Sri Lankan Navy has "resumed its raids in the seas, an

official statement said on Tuesday. As many as 36 Indian fishermen have been arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy on Tuesday, and five trawlers and fishing gear seized have been, following special operation carried out by the Sri Lanka Navy and Coast Guard on Tuesday, a press statement issued by the Sri Lankan Navy said. The operations were conducted “adhering to the COVID-19 preventive guidelines, officials said, adding that the apprehended Indian fishermen would be sent for quarantine for 14 days.

“Although operations to prevent poaching by foreign fishermen in Sri Lankan waters have been restricted since March this year due to COVID-19 concerns, the Navy resumed its raids on poaching, considering the impact of this wanton act on the livelihood of local fishing community and to protect the fishing resource of the country, as a result of the surge in the arrival of foreign fishing trawlers in Sri Lankan waters, the Navy said. Sections of Sri Lanka's northern fishermen have recently raised concern over the “return of Indian trawlers, whose numbers had dropped in the last few years, after Sri Lanka introduced stiff fines and tougher laws to curtail foreign vessels in the country's territorial waters.

However, as the Navy reportedly relaxed its surveillance of the northern seas in the wake of COVID-19, the number of Indian trawlers spotted in Sri Lankan waters began increasing, according to a section of fisher leaders in Jaffna. India and Sri Lanka have agreed to hold bilateral virtual discussions on addressing fishermen's concerns on both sides of the Palk Bay, that have persisted for a decade. In its recent resumed operation, the Northern Naval Command of Sri Lanka intercepted three Indian fishing trawlers and held 22 fishermen in the sea area off the Delft Island, while 14 other fishermen were arrested off Mannar, in Sri Lanka's Northern Province.

India: Must demonstrate goodwill in fishermen issue, says SL Minister

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/india-must-demonstrate-goodwill-in-fishermen-issue-says-sl-minister/article33350971.ece>

"Citing India's request for the release of fishermen recently arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy on the charge of illegal fishing, Sri Lanka on Wednesday said it is India that needs to demonstrate goodwill by preventing its fishermen from trespassing into Sri Lankan waters. Addressing a press conference in Vavuniya in the Northern Province, Sri Lanka's Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda said the Indian authorities had approached the Sri Lankan government, requesting the release of the recently arrested fishermen as a goodwill gesture before a bilateral virtual discussion on the persisting conflict involving the fishermen of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka's Tamil-majority Northern Province. The discussion is scheduled for December 30, a statement from the Minister's office said.

“Honestly, it is India that has to demonstrate goodwill by putting an end to their fishermen's trespassing activities. Further, since Indian fishermen use banned fishing practices, it poses a great threat to marine biodiversity in the region, that will affect future generations of both countries, the Minister, who represents the northern Jaffna district in Parliament, said. The Minister's statement comes a day after the Sri Lankan Navy arrested 36 Indian fishermen for allegedly poaching on the Sri Lankan side of the International Maritime Boundary Line, a demarcation of the Palk Strait mutually agreed by the neighbouring countries in the 1970s. The Navy also apprehended five fishing vessels, or bottom trawlers, known to virtually scoop out the ocean bed and destroy marine organisms.

The Palk Bay fisheries conflict has been a dominant bilateral concern, especially since Sri Lanka's civil war ended in 2009 and fishermen from the war-affected areas in the north and the east began returning to the sea which they could not access during the years of strife to rebuild their livelihoods. Three years ago, Sri Lanka banned bottom trawling and introduced high fines for offenders and foreign fishing vessels found in the island nation's territorial waters. The measures, in addition to Colombo's decision to apprehend seized Indian fishing trawlers for long periods, saw a drop in the number of Indian fishermen being arrested, from over 400 in 2017 to 156 in 2018. However, sections of northern fishermen say they are now spotting Indian trawlers along their coast yet again, after the SL Navy reportedly relaxed surveillance of the seas in the past few months, fearing that trespassers who are arrested could be carriers of COVID-19.

India, Sri Lanka and Maldives: Southern Indian Ocean: Securing a common fisheries policy for India and the littoral states

<http://www.ft.lk/columns/Southern-Indian-Ocean-Securing-a-common-fisheries-policy-for-India-and-the-littoral-states/4-706926>

"The Indian Ocean provides a dependency for its Island and coastal nations on their economic and commercial prosperity. Deep sea fishing policies in South Indian Ocean fisheries nations offer excellent scope with more than 20 million population of the Indian subcontinent neighbourhood like Sri Lanka and Maldives along with India's coastal states. A strong ocean policy founded on common strategic partnerships will be a boon to the region's nations for their growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Therefore fisheries as an economic livelihood is particularly evident in the Southern Indian Ocean coastal nations. Fisheries governance is thus vital for the potential to boost economic growth for these neighbouring countries that share the vast expanses of sea spaces. India's National Fisheries Policy The waters of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal meet in Kanyakumari, a small coastal city in the southern tip of the country. Its geographic location provides access to squander sea assets in the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay territory.

In this way, on a more central level, Indian Blue Economy Vision of 2025 will bridge the interest for sea-food consumption in the years to come. These people-centric ocean policies will especially benefit India's 14 coastal states – Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, the islands of Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar, and the many other villages that depend on fisheries-related activities. At present it is an ideal opportunity to reflect and amend the National Fisheries Policy as it is a source of livelihood for more than 20 million fishermen and fish ranchers. This sector contributes Indian Rupees 1.75 trillion every year to the national GDP.

Fisheries advancement in Sri Lanka In the course of recent decades Sri Lanka's fisheries policy initiatives has fortified its emphasis on Ocean resources management.

As a procedure for fisheries advancement in Sri Lanka's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), a Five-Year Fishery Development Plan was dispatched in 1979, pointed towards expanding fish production and raising the income of coastal fisherman. In Sri Lanka, over 2.7 million fishermen from 15 coastal regions rely upon fisheries for their livelihood. They add to a yearly assessed fish catch of 530,920 metric tons accounting for 1.3% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Total number of working fishing boats in year 2016 was accounted for over 60,000. There is ample scope of increasing production by wandering into more profound waters of the EEZ, which holds a capability of increasing of many folds in fisheries harnessing capacities. Sri Lanka needs to further undertake scientific research and studies of special oceanographic features of the Indian Ocean for the benefit of this sector.

Fisheries advancement in the Maldives Historically Maldivian fisheries which contribute 11% to the GDP of the island's economy (FAO) is the second biggest industry in the island country. Statistics reveal that Maldives has an annual fish catch over 48,399 metric tons. The reasons for the increase in fish harvest are due to its geographical setting in the Indian Ocean and the mechanisation of the traditional sailing boats in the mid-70s. Hence the Maldives Industrial Fisheries Company (MIFCO) plays a vital part in the island nations' fisheries improvements. Taking the Maldivian national fisheries plans forward the Maldives Industrial Fishing Corporation (MIFCO) standardised the export oriented fisheries products. Laws and regulations on the ocean The allowable framework administering uses of the sea by individual states was classified in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982 and UN Fish Stocks Agreement in 1999.

The consolidated EEZ of the three neighbouring nations, India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, could be roughly 3.887 million sq. km. Consequently, each coastal state's regional ocean limit is 200 nautical miles from its gauge known as the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Glancing back at probably the most remarkable treaties signed by the neighbouring nations, the 1974 and 1976 arrangements delineating the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) between Sri Lanka and India was one of the huge discretionary grinders that reshaped India's sea strategy

with its southern neighbours. Lately, a prominent fisheries agreement for India was the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA) marked in mid-2006 and upheld in 2012.

Fisheries: India and Southern Littoral States The Indian subcontinent neighbourhood like Sri Lanka and Maldives has the most heavily utilised and impacted coastal region in the South. The neighbouring Southern Indian Ocean littoral states along with the Indian coastal states must pursue a strong ocean policy based on common strategic interests. This could be a step in shaping the direction for a fisheries governance framework in the Southern Indian Ocean. Hence binding this diplomacy between India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives thereby helps in securing a common fisheries policy for India and the littoral states.

Bangladesh, India and Myanmar: Jailing fishers won't save the fish of the Bay of Bengal

<http://chinadialogueocean.net/13955-jailing-fishers-wont-save-bay-of-bengal-fish/>

"Bangladesh, India and Myanmar have agreed their borders in the Bay of Bengal, but neither fish nor fishers are bound by the lines on the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) map. The fish do not know. In the hope of a better catch, fishers cross boundaries, knowingly or not. As more boats chase fewer fish, clashes are common. Fishers based in Cox's Bazar and Patuakhali harbours in Bangladesh say they used to fish alongside vessels from other countries in the deep sea. Now, as it is becoming harder to find fish, foreign fishers are unwelcome competitors. Authorities have seized vessels from Sri Lanka and arrested fishers off the shores of Bangladesh. Sometimes the conflicts are dealt with more directly. The sinking of smaller vessels sometimes goes unreported, said several trawler skippers from Chittagong on condition of anonymity. Conservationists and fisheries managers warn that if countries cannot transform conflict into collaboration it is not just the safety of the fishers at stake: the dwindling number of fish in the Bay of Bengal could disappear. With eight countries bordering the bay, around 200 million people live along its coasts. Most of them depend on the fish for their food and livelihood, and a majority of the fishers are below the poverty line.

But the fisheries of the bay have been under pressure for decades and are now severely depleted. Hundreds of large vessels are overfishing at an unsustainable rate and local fishers say authorities often turn a blind eye. No cooperation The failure of the Bay of Bengal countries to cooperate over fisheries and wildlife risks undermining many conservation measures taken on the national level, experts say. There have been attempts to foster cooperation. India has the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). While, the Global Environment Facility and UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) set up a process to promote sustainable fishing among the eight countries, but not much has changed on the water. Tensions and arrests at sea Bangladeshi fishers view their government's annual 65-day fishing ban as unjust, because they say fleets from neighbouring countries fish in Bangladesh's waters during the ban.

Officials say it is to protect spawning fish and rejuvenate fish stocks. Mahatub Khan Badhon, a lecturer of zoology at the University of Dhaka, said: “The perception of uneven enforcement of the marine fishing ban affects the compliance of fishers and encourages fishers to delegitimise any such management measures. Badhon believes that ramping up enforcement is not the answer. Arresting and putting foreign fishers in jail, whether by Bangladesh, India or Myanmar, only increases human suffering. There is no evidence from past decades that it helps conservation or reduces conflicts over fishing. Overfishing continues While a large number of artisanal or small-scale fishers are locked up in foreign jails for months, overfishing continues in the bay. As Nur Islam Majhi from Chittagong put it: “There are always others who will cross boundaries with a hope that there are more fish in the sea. As a skipper of an artisanal gillnetter, he has two decades of fishing experience and numerous encounters with boats from other countries just south of Mongla port.

Last year, the Bangladesh coast guard arrested over 500 Indian fishers and seized 32 boats off the coast in Patuakhali – more than 125 km inside the Bangladesh EEZ. This was during the 65-day ban on marine fishing, which kept Bangladeshi fishers stuck on land. The Indian fishers were sent back but not all are so lucky. Statistics from the Bangladesh coast guard show that in recent years more than a thousand Indian fishers have been held and spent months in jail before release. It is difficult to find the numbers of Bangladeshi fishers jailed in other countries. When Bangladeshi fishers are arrested in Myanmar, it can take years before they return home. Ignoring international law By jailing fishers countries are not following norms set down by international law, experts say. Yugraj Singh Yadava, director of intergovernmental organisation the Bay of Bengal Programme, says that the international law of the sea clearly directs countries not to jail or deliver other corporal punishment to foreign fishers arrested in EEZs.

Headquartered in Chennai, the body is pushing for closer regional cooperation over sustainable fisheries among the Bay of Bengal countries. Article 73 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) says: “arrested vessels and their crews shall be promptly released upon the posting of a reasonable bond or other security. The law and subsequent international agreements also have provisions for bilateral agreements, information sharing and other sorts of collaboration to avoid the suffering of fishers and protect fish that travel across national maritime boundaries. Yadava said: “International laws provide enough guidance to States to deal with the issue. However, none of the countries in the region are doing so. Mohammed Latifur Rahman, director of Bangladesh's marine fisheries office, agrees. There is no effective collaboration among countries except a few opportunities for dialogues, he said. He hoped that India, which has the longest coastline along the Bay of Bengal, could help neighbours conduct collaborative explorations and studies on joint fish stocks.

“We need processes and mechanisms for data sharing and a functional platform to cooperate in marine fisheries management, he said. Back in 2012, a study commissioned by the UN FAO's

Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem project made several recommendations to deal with the arrest and repatriations of fishers, including joint patrols. The Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project is the only internationally funded initiative to facilitate transboundary collaboration for marine fisheries and environmental issues. But more than a decade after its launch, very few of the recommendations have been accepted by the respective governments. In the long run, countries will need bilateral or multilateral agreements for the repatriation of fishers. The roles of employers, vessel owners, and governments need to be clarified. Countries also need to regularly inform artisanal fishers of the issues involved.

Fish don't do borders Many fish populations regularly move between EEZs of two or more countries to feed or spawn. Yadava explained that a few fish species like the Indian mackerel and the threadfin bream are distributed along the entire bay. Some other species like Hilsa and the Bombay duck are primarily found in specific areas. Smaller pelagic fish, such as anchovies, herring and Hilsa, migrate through the coastal waters of two or more countries. Some small open ocean fish, like the rainbow sardine, are found along the coastlines of all Bay of Bengal countries.

Without harmonised policy by all the countries in the region, conservation by one country alone may have limited benefits. Even bottom-dwelling species such as lobsters, sea cucumbers and reef fish disperse across boundaries during larval stages. For example, lobsters may travel thousands of kilometres from their place of birth to the site of an adult settlement. “Harvesting activities of one country significantly affect the harvesting opportunities of other countries sharing the [same] resource, Yadava said. “No studies have been conducted yet to identify fish stocks straddling across multiple EEZs, said Mohammad Sharif Uddin, principal scientific officer of Bangladesh's Marine Fisheries Survey Management Unit. “During the last joint working group meeting with India there was no progress on fisheries.

Threatened marine animals There may be some hope of this changing. Six Bay of Bengal countries have now joined the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement. The most recent entrant was Thailand, which ratified the agreement in 2017. Myanmar and Malaysia have still not joined yet. The agreement is about implementing UNCLOS provisions relating to the conservation and management of straddling and migratory fish stocks. A significant challenge of managing fisheries is reducing bycatch and conserving highly threatened marine species. Badhon explained that species of sharks, rays and sawfish migrate across large swathes of sea. Migratory species such as whale sharks, hammerhead sharks and sea turtles often get caught in fishing gear along with commercially important fish. Steps taken by one country to protect migratory species won't have the desired results unless other countries in the region follow suit, Yadava explained.

“Some of the countries protect these animals, but the scale of operation is not uniform. Without harmonised policy by all the countries in the region, conservation by one country alone may have

limited benefits, Yadava said. For example, the dugong inhabits the Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar, another transboundary area shared by India and Sri Lanka. The two countries are yet to agree on suitable strategies to protect this iconic species from threats from fishing operations. Yadava added that active collaboration and joint management is essential if the fisheries of the Bay of Bengal are to be sustained. The countries are – in principle – not opposed, but as they drag their feet both the fish and fishers in the Bay of Bengal continue to suffer.

India and Bangladesh: While India and its neighbours spar over Bay of Bengal borders, their fishers languish in jails

<https://scroll.in/article/963165/while-india-and-its-neighbours-spar-over-bay-of-bengal-borders-their-fishers-languish-in-jails>

"Bangladesh, India, and Myanmar have agreed on their borders in the Bay of Bengal, but neither fish nor fishers are bound by the lines on the Exclusive Economic Zone or EEZ map. In the hope of a better catch, fishers cross boundaries, knowingly or unknowingly. As more boats chase fewer fish, clashes are common. Fishers based in Cox's Bazar and Patuakhali fish harbours in Bangladesh say that, traditionally, they used to fish alongside vessels from other countries in the deep sea. Now, as it is becoming harder to find fish, foreign fishers are unwelcome competitors. Bangladeshi authorities have seized vessels from Sri Lanka and arrested the fishers. Sometimes the conflicts are dealt with more directly. The sinking of smaller vessels sometimes goes unreported, said several trawler skippers from Chittagong, Bangladesh. Conservationists and fisheries managers warn that if countries fail to transform conflict into collaboration, there will be more at stake than the safety of the fishers. The number of fish in the bay will also dwindle.

With eight countries bordering the Bay of Bengal, around 200 million people live along its coasts. Most of them depend on the fish for their food and livelihood, and a majority of the fishers are below the poverty line. But the fisheries of the Bay of Bengal have been under pressure for decades and are now severely depleted. Hundreds of large vessels are overfishing at an unsustainable rate and local fishermen say authorities often turn a blind eye. No cooperation. The failure of the Bay of Bengal countries to cooperate over fisheries and wildlife risks undermining many conservation measures taken at the national level, experts say. There have been attempts to foster cooperation. India has the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. The Global Environment Facility and United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation set up a process to promote sustainable fishing among the eight countries, but not much has changed on the water.

Bangladeshi fishers view their government's annual 65-day fishing ban as unjust, because they say fleets from neighbouring countries fish in Bangladesh's waters during the ban. Officials say it is to protect spawning fish and rejuvenate fish stocks. Mahatub Khan Badhon, a lecturer of

Zoology at the University of Dhaka, said, “The perception of uneven enforcement of the marine fishing ban affects the compliance of fishers and encourages fishers to delegitimise any such management measures. Badhon believes that ramping up enforcement is not the answer. Arresting and putting foreign fishers in jail, whether by Bangladesh, India or Myanmar, only increases human suffering. There is no evidence from past decades that it helps conservation or reduces conflicts over fishing. Overfishing continues While a large number of artisanal or small-scale fishers are locked up in foreign jails for months, overfishing continues in the bay.

As Nur Islam Majhi from Chittagong put it, “There are always others who will cross boundaries with a hope that there are more fish in the sea. As a skipper of an artisanal gillnetter, he has two decades of fishing experience and numerous encounters with boats from other countries just South of Mongla port in Bangladesh. Last year, the Bangladesh coast guard arrested over 519 Indian fishers and seized 32 boats off the coast in Patuakhali – more than 125 km inside the Bangladesh EEZ. This was during the 65-day ban on marine fishing, which kept Bangladeshi fishers stuck on land. The Indian fishers were sent back. But not everyone is so lucky. Statistics from the Bangladesh coast guard show that in recent years more than a thousand Indian fishers were held and spent months in jail before release.

On the other hand, it is difficult to find the numbers of Bangladeshi fishers jailed in other countries. When Bangladeshi fishers are arrested in Myanmar, it can take years before they return home. By jailing fishers, countries are not following norms set down by international law, experts say. Yugraj Singh Yadava, director of the intergovernmental organisation of the Bay of Bengal Programme, says that the international law of the sea clearly directs countries not to jail or deliver any other corporal punishment to foreign fishers arrested in EEZs. Headquartered in Chennai, the body is pushing for closer regional cooperation over sustainable fisheries among the Bay of Bengal countries. Article 73 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea says: “arrested vessels and their crews shall be promptly released upon the posting of a reasonable bond or other security.

The law and subsequent international agreements also have provisions for bilateral agreements, information sharing and other sorts of collaboration to avoid the suffering of fishers and protect fish that travel across national maritime boundaries. Yadava said, “International laws provide enough guidance to States to deal with the issue. However, none of the countries in the region are doing so. Mohammed Latifur Rahman, director of Bangladesh's marine fisheries office, agrees. There is no effective collaboration among countries except a few opportunities for dialogues, he said. He hoped that India, which has the longest coastline along the Bay of Bengal, could help neighbours conduct collaborative explorations and studies on joint fish stocks. “We need processes and mechanisms for data sharing and a functional platform to cooperate in marine fisheries management, he said. Back in 2012, a study commissioned by the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organisation's Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem project made

several recommendations to deal with the arrest and repatriations of fishers, including joint patrols.

The Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project is the only internationally-funded initiative to facilitate transboundary collaboration for marine fisheries and environmental issues. But more than one decade after its launch, very few of the recommendations have been accepted by the respective governments. In the long run, countries will need bilateral or multilateral agreements for the repatriation of fishers. The roles of employers, vessel owners, and governments need to be clarified. Countries also need to regularly inform artisanal fishers of the issues involved. Fish and borders Many fish stocks regularly move between EEZs of two or more countries to feed or to spawn. Yadava explained that a few fish species like the Indian mackerel and the threadfin bream are distributed along the entire bay. Some other species like Hilsa and the Bombay duck are primarily found in specific areas. Smaller pelagic fish, such as anchovies, herrings and Hilsa, migrate through the coastal waters of two or more countries.

Some small pelagic fish, like the rainbow sardine, are found along the coastlines of all the Bay of Bengal countries. Even demersal species such as lobsters, sea cucumbers and reef fish disperse across boundaries during larval stages. For example, lobsters may travel thousands of km from their place of birth to the site of an adult settlement. “Harvesting activities of one country significantly affects the harvesting opportunities of other countries sharing the [same] resource, Yadava said. “No studies have been conducted yet to identify fish stocks straddling across multiple EEZs, said Mohammad Sharif Uddin, principal scientific officer of Bangladesh's Marine Fisheries Survey Management Unit. “During the last joint working group meeting with India there was no progress on fisheries. Threatened species There may be some hope of this changing. Six Bay of Bengal countries have now joined the 1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement.

The most recent entrant was Thailand, which ratified the agreement in 2017. Myanmar and Malaysia have still not joined yet. The agreement is about implementing United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea provisions relating to the conservation and management of straddling and migratory fish stocks. A significant part of managing fisheries is reducing bycatch and conserving highly threatened species of marine animals. Badhon explained that species of sharks, rays, and sawfish migrate across large swathes of sea. Migratory species such as whale sharks, hammerhead sharks and sea turtles often get caught in fishing gear along with commercially important fish. Steps taken by one country to protect migratory species won't have the desired results unless other countries in the region follow suit, Yadava explained.

“Some of the countries protect these animals, but the scale of operation is not uniform. Without harmonised policy by all the countries in the region, conservation by one country alone may have limited benefits. The dugong inhabits the Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar, another

transboundary area shared by India and Sri Lanka. The two countries are yet to agree on suitable strategies to protect this iconic species from threats from fishing operations. Yadava added that active collaboration and joint management is essential if the fisheries of the Bay of Bengal are to be sustained. The countries are – in principle – not opposed, but as they drag their feet both the fish and fishers in the Bay of Bengal continue to suffer.

Tamil Nadu: GIS helps reach food to fishing community

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/gis-helps-reach-food-to-fishing-community/articleshow/75955580.cms>

"After successfully using Geographic Information System (GIS) in marine conservation, a team from Omcar Foundation, an NGO, is using the tool to feed fisherfolk in coastal villages of Thanjavur hit hard by the national lockdown. Mapping using GIS allows one to answer questions about data that relate to a location. "When we go to fishing villages, there are chances that we reach areas where we have already distributed provisions. With GIS mapping, we have a ready-reckoner of sorts to check and work accordingly, said marine scientist Vedharajan Balaji, who heads the team. The documentation of relief work using GIS and Google Maps helped the NGO reach out to more people in need of relief material. "We update the GIS map "Omcar Covid-19 Relief Support every day after distributing relief material. The documentation helps us get a clearer picture of who received what, said Balaji.

The team shares its maps with the Covid control room of the collector's office in Thanjavur to help the administration understand the geographical range of donations made by them. Omcar's volunteers, recruited for conservation of dugongs, were deputed to prepare a list of people whose livelihood had been affected due to the lockdown. They found that many fishermen in coastal areas, particularly in Sethubavachatthiram block, had no food or money. "This is the first time we used the map for marking houses. So we had to be careful about identifying the geographic location of each house, unlike in the case of mapping a larger area." Omcar volunteers are not new to using GIS. The team first used GIS to map mangroves and land use patterns in Palk Bay in 2012-14. Between 2014-18, the team used GIS for mapping dugong feeding grounds in northern Palk Bay. The team has donated relief material to more than 20 villages and plans to cover six more.

India and Bangladesh: Lines on water cannot save Bay of Bengal fisheries

<https://www.thethirdpole.net/2020/05/15/going-beyond-boundaries-to-protect-the-fisheries-of-the-bay-of-bengal/>

"Bangladesh, India, and Myanmar have divided the Bay of Bengal, legally, but neither fish, nor fishers are bound by the lines on the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) maps. The fish do not know. In the hope of a better catch, fishers cross boundaries, knowingly or unknowingly.

As more boats chase fewer fish, clashes are common. Fishers based in Cox's Bazar and Patuakhali fish harbours say that, traditionally, they used to fish side by side with vessels from other countries in the deep sea. Now, as it is becoming harder and harder to find fish, things are changing. Fishers come from long distances to find what they can, and are not welcome competitors. Even vessels from Sri Lanka have been seized and fishers arrested off the shores of Bangladesh. Sometimes the conflicts result in less legal action. The sinking of smaller vessels sometimes goes unreported, said several trawler skippers from Chittagong on the condition of anonymity.

Conservationists and fisheries managers caution that this is not just about the safety of the fishers, but how long there will be enough fish in the bay if the countries cannot transform conflict into collaboration. Absence of cooperation among Bay of Bengal countries to manage marine fisheries and wildlife is risking undermining many conservation measures taken on the national level, they say. There have been attempts to foster cooperation. India has the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). The Global Environment Facility started one process, but not much has changed on the water. Tensions and arrests in the sea Bangladeshi fishers view the annual 65-day fishing ban as unjust, because they say fleets from neighbouring countries fish in Bangladesh's waters during the ban. Mahatub Khan Badhon, a lecturer of zoology at the University of Dhaka, said, "Securing little benefits from the market and perception of uneven enforcement of the marine fishing ban surely affect the compliance of fishers and encourage fishers to delegitimise any such management measures. Badhon believes that ramping up enforcement is not the answer.

Arresting and putting foreign fishers in jail, whether by Bangladesh, India or Myanmar, only increases human suffering. There is no evidence from past decades that it helps conservation or reduces conflicts over fishing. While a large number of artisanal or small-scale fishers are locked up in foreign jails for months, overfishing continues in the bay. As Nur Islam Majhi from Chittagong put it, "There are always others who will cross boundaries with a hope that there are more fish in the sea. As skipper of an artisanal gillnetter, he has two decades of fishing experience and 'numerous' encounters with boats from other countries just south of Mongla port. Last year, the Bangladesh coast guard arrested over 519 Indian fishers and seized 32 boats off the coast in Patuakhali— more than 125 kilometres inside the Bangladesh EEZ. This was during the 65-day ban on marine fishing, which kept Bangladeshi fishers stuck on land. The Indian fishers were sent back. But not everyone gets lucky.

Statistics from coast guard show that in recent years more than a thousand Indian fishers were held in Bangladeshi waters and spent months in jail before release. On the other hand, it is difficult to find the numbers of Bangladeshi fishers jailed in other countries. When Bangladeshi fishers spend months in jail, in Myanmar, it can take years of imprisonment before return. The how-to of not jailing fishers Yugraj Singh Yadava of the Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-

Governmental Organisation refers to the international law of the sea, that clearly directs countries not to jail or deliver any other corporal punishment to foreign fishers arrested in Exclusive Economic Zones. Headquartered in Chennai, the inter-governmental body is pushing for regional cooperation among the Bay of Bengal countries.

Article 73 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) says: “arrested vessels and their crews shall be promptly released upon the posting of a reasonable bond or other security. The law and subsequent international agreements also direct to have provisions for bilateral agreements, information sharing and other sorts of collaboration to avoid the suffering of fishers and protect fish that travel across national maritime boundaries. Yadava said, “International laws provide enough guidance to States to deal with the issue. However, none of the countries in the region is doing so. Mohammed Latifur Rahman, Director of Bangladesh's marine fisheries office, is of the same view. There is no effective collaboration among countries except a few opportunities for dialogues, he said in an interview from Chittagong. He hoped that India, which has the longest coastline along the Bay of Bengal, could help neighbours conduct collaborative explorations and studies on joint fish stocks.

“We need processes and mechanisms for data sharing and a functional platform to cooperate in marine fisheries management, he said. Back in 2012, a study commissioned by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation's Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem project made several recommendations to deal with the arrest and repatriations of fishers, including joint patrols. In the long run, countries will need bilateral or multilateral agreements for the repatriation of fishers. The roles of employers, vessel owners, and governments need to be clarified. Countries also need to regularly inform artisanal fishers of the issues involved. The Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project was the only internationally funded initiative to facilitate trans-boundary collaboration for marine fisheries and environmental issues. But more than one decade after its launch, very few of the recommendations have been accepted by the respective governments.

Fish don't do borders Many fish stocks regularly move between EEZs of two or more countries to feed or to spawn. Yadava explained that a few fish species like the Indian mackerel and the threadfin bream are distributed along the entire bay. Some other species like Hilsa and the Bombay duck are primarily found in specific areas. Smaller pelagic fishes such as anchovies, herrings and Hilsa migrate through the coastal waters of two or more countries. Some small pelagic fish, like the rainbow sardine, are found along the coastlines of all the Bay of Bengal countries. Even demersal species such as lobsters, sea cucumbers and reef fish disperse across boundaries during larval stages. For example, the larvae of tropical lobsters may travel thousands of kilometres from the place of birth to the site of an adult settlement.

“Harvesting activities of one country, sharing a fishery resource, significantly affect harvesting opportunities of one or more other countries sharing the [same] resource, Yadava said. “Joint stocks of fish in the bay are still to be identified, said Mohammad Sharif Uddin, Principal Scientific Officer of Bangladesh's Marine Fisheries Survey Management Unit. “No studies are conducted yet to identify fish stocks straddling across multiple EEZs. During the last joint working group meeting with India, there was no progress on fisheries. Yadava confirmed, “In the Joint Working Group meetings such issues are not adequately discussed, and hardly any conclusions reached. Opportunity to conserve charismatic megafauna There may be hope of this changing. Six Bay of Bengal countries have already joined the 1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement. The most recent entrant was Thailand, which ratified the agreement in 2017. Myanmar and Malaysia have not joined yet.

The agreement is about implementing UNCLOS provisions relating to the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks. One of the significant parts of managing fisheries is reducing bycatch and conserving highly threatened species of marine animals. Badhon explained that species of sharks, rays, and sawfish migrate across large swaths of seas. Migratory wildlife species such as whale sharks, hammerhead sharks and sea turtles often get caught in fishing gears along with commercially important fishes. “Since the entire Bay of Bengal makes up the extant range of these species, there is an opportunity to collaborate among all neighbouring countries.

“Some of the countries protect these animals, but the scale of operation is not uniform. Without harmonised policy by all the countries in the region, conservation by one country alone may have limited benefits, Yadava said. He explained the protection of highly migratory sea turtles (leatherback turtle) by any one or two countries will not produce the desired results if other countries in the region do not follow protection measures. The dugong is another species that inhabits the Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar. India and Sri Lanka are yet to agree on suitable strategies to protect this iconic species from mortalities caused by the fishing operations. Yadava added that if the fisheries of the Bay of Bengal are to be sustained, active collaboration and joint management of the fisheries resources is a must. The resources exist, the countries are – in principle – not opposed, but as they delay both the fish and fishers in the Bay of Bengal continue to suffer.

Firing incidents involving Tamil Nadu fishermen have reduced drastically, government tells court

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/firing-incidents-involving-fishermen-have-reduced-draastically-govt-tells-court/article31085993.ece>

"The State government on Monday told the Madras High Court that incidents of alleged firing and attack on Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy had reduced drastically since the

end of the civil war in the island nation in 2009. It expressed its resoluteness to retrieve Katchatheevu and restore the right to fish in traditional waters. In a counter affidavit filed before the second Division Bench of Justices Vineet Kothari and R. Suresh Kumar, Director of Fisheries G.S. Sameeran said 67 incidents of shooting and attack by the SL Navy were reported in the last two decades, leading to the death of 26 Indian fishermen. “Due to steps taken by the State and Central governments, the incidents of shooting and attack have considerably reduced in the last decade. Only five such incidents have been reported, in which two fishermen died and four were injured, the counter filed in response to a PIL petition filed by Fishermen Care, an NGO, read.

The petitioner organisation had filed the case in 2018, seeking financial and other forms of assistance to the fishermen who had suffered due to arrests and seizure of their boats by the SL Navy on charges of having intentionally crossed the International Maritime Boundary Line. The counter affidavit, served on petitioner's counsel L.P. Maurya, said around 6,000 mechanised fishing boats and 9,000 traditional craft were engaged in fishing in the Palk Bay area. Over 60,000 members of fishermen families were directly dependent on these boats for eking out a living and many others indirectly. Claiming that a permanent solution to the problem of cross-border fishing could be found if Katchatheevu, ceded to Sri Lanka by the Centre, is retrieved and included in the confines of Indian waters, the Director of Fisheries said a case filed in this regard by the State government in 2008 was pending in Supreme Court.

Some respite in the Indo-Lankan fisheries conflict

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/some-respite-in-the-indo-lankan-fisheries-conflict/article30951909.ece>

"Depending on the spot along the coast of Jaffna peninsula, resident fishermen share different versions of the familiar story of “poaching Indian trawlers. “The situation is much better now, said K. Rajachandran, a fisher leader in Karainagar, about 20 km northwest of Jaffna town. “I would say the Indian trawlers coming to our waters has reduced by more than 50% after the new laws were introduced, he said. He was referring to the time after Sri Lanka legally banned trawling in 2017 and imposed stiffer fines on foreign vessels found fishing in its territorial waters in 2018. The move came after Sri Lanka's northern fishermen struggled for years, constantly highlighting their falling catch and disappearing livelihoods. The Indian trawlers, usually from Tamil Nadu, not only crossed the International Maritime Boundary Line to fish in Sri Lanka's resource-rich seas, but also used a destructive fishing method that virtually scooped out the seabed, adversely impacting fish production and marine biodiversity.

The Palk Bay fisheries conflict, which intensified after the war ended in 2009, posed a serious challenge to the livelihoods of Tamil fishermen in Sri Lanka, who were trying to rebuild their lives. In fact, trawlers from Tamil Nadu had caused considerable damage to the catch in its own

seas, as it did to the livelihoods of fishermen using smaller boats along coastal Tamil Nadu, particularly in Rameswaram and Nagapattinam. But on the Sri Lankan side, they amplified fisher folk's post-war distress. Many rounds of talks between the Indian and Sri Lankan governments, and among fisher leaders didn't bring a solution any closer. Sri Lanka went for tougher laws. Ever since, both officials and Sri Lankan fishermen have observed a drop in the number of instances of Indian trawlers poaching. Official statistics show that while as many as 453 Indian fishermen were arrested in 2017 they have all been released and repatriated only 156 were arrested on charges of poaching in 2018.

Last year, 210 were arrested and this year, 34 have been held until mid-February. “We have been spotting some species of fish again after many years and the catch is also going up steadily, Mr. Rajachandran said. Trail of destruction When things were looking up for the community, Sri Lanka's own trawler fleet smaller than the Indian ones but destructive nonetheless began expanding. The Indian trawlers' trail of destruction was not only evident in sea, but also in the smaller vessels they had bred in Sri Lanka. A few hundred fishermen in Jaffna saw quick money in these powerful vessels and invested in them.

According to many northern fishermen, the trawlers originated from Gurunagar, located on the southern coast of the peninsula. The village is a 10-minute drive from Jaffna town, but starkly different. The five-storied residential complex is crowded, with each of its tiny apartments, packed to the brim with people and their belongings. Fishing is the main livelihood for men, while women are mostly engaged in daily-waged labour. “It's not us, it's the Indian trawlers, said a young fisherman, who did not reveal his name fearing “repercussions. “Even now, they come thrice a week to our coast. I don't know about other parts, he said, adding the people of the village felt “helpless and hopeless. He claimed that fishermen like him didn't operate smaller trawlers and instead squarely blamed the Indian trawlers for his plight. While Sri Lanka's northern fishermen continue braving conflicts, local and international, the two governments are trying to sort out pending cases.

As many as 130 of the Indian trawlers seized by the Sri Lankan Navy over the past few years will have to be discarded, as they have corroded and are no more fit to be used. During his visit to New Delhi in November, soon after his election victory, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa announced the release of 57 boats in Sri Lankan custody. In a potentially long-term initiative, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and Minister of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Douglas Devananda, who were in New Delhi in early February, have proposed that the two countries set up a joint marine resources management authority, with experts, officials and fisher leaders from either side of the Palk Strait. However, the Indo-Lanka fisheries conflict at least a decade old now cannot be simply “managed, as past efforts have proved. They need to be solved. And that might need greater political will from both sides.

Sri Lanka has stopped releasing seized boats

<https://menafn.com/1099723183/Sri-Lanka-has-stopped-releasing-seized-boats>

"The Indian Government has told the Madras High Court that since 2015 Sri Lanka had stopped releasing boats of Indian fishermen apprehended on charges of trespassing into foreign waters for illegal fishing, particularly through the banned method of bottom trawling, The Hindu newspaper reported. Justices Vineet Kothari and R. Suresh Kumar were told that the decision to not release the boats was taken as a measure of deterrence and that the Sri Lankan government had also amended its laws in July 2017 and January 2018 to prevent illegal fishing and bottom trawling by foreign vessels too. "The Sri Lankan government has been prosecuting the fishermen arrested for fishing in Sri Lankan waters before the Magistrate courts concerned and also the Sri Lankan courts have been ordering the presence of the owners of the boats for the release of the fishing vessels," the counter affidavit read.

It was filed in response to a public interest litigation petition filed by Fishermen Care, a non-governmental organisation represented by its president L.T.A. Peter Rayan, accusing the Centre of not having provided sufficient funds for the rehabilitation of Indian fishermen arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy. Assuring the court that the Centre had been taking continuous efforts to get the boats as well as the arrested Indian fishermen released, the counter stated that the issue had to be sorted out only through diplomatic channels, since the jurisdiction of the Indian courts would not extend to a foreign country. In so far as allocation of funds for rehabilitation of fishermen was concerned, the Centre said that it had released ₹184.93 crore in the last five years to the State government for the implementation of the Blue Revolution: Integrated Development and Management of Fisheries scheme.

Further, another ₹300 crore was allocated for providing assistance for deep sea fishing and constructing a fish landing centre at Kunthukal in Ramanathapuram district. A specific advice had also been issued to the State government to give priority to fishermen, who had lost their boats while granting assistance, it said. The scheme was being implemented specifically for the benefit of the fishermen belonging to Nagapattinam, Thanjavur, Pudukottai and Ramanathapuram and those who fish in the Palk Bay region. They were being provided financial assistance for provision of housing, drinking water and construction of community halls. The fishermen were also being trained in deep sea fishing, long lining and on-board processing of fish and the Centrally sponsored scheme provides for conversion of trawlers into resource specific deep sea fishing vessels through 100% subsidy with a ceiling of ₹15 lakh per vessel, the Centre said. After taking the counter affidavit, filed through senior central government standing counsel J. Madhanagopal Rao on file, the judges directed the petitioner's counsel L.P. Maurya to file his rejoinder in two weeks.

Tamil Nadu: Artificial reefs breathe new life for Tamil Nadu's fishing communities

<https://india.mongabay.com/2020/02/artificial-reefs-breathe-new-life-for-tamil-nadus-fishing-communities/>

"Reefs do not come to mind when one thinks of India's coastline as coral reef establishments are limited to the waters around the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar. However, when fishermen from Poompuhar, Tamil Nadu, reported that their fish catch was declining, the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) and the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation (TNFDC) stepped in with the solution of deploying artificial reefs. Artificial reefs (AR) are man-made structures deployed on generally featureless seabed to create a substratum to support a variety of marine life or where existing natural reefs have been destroyed. An AR can serve several purposes – recreational activities (surfing, scuba diving, snorkelling, tourism), disaster management, coastal protection, managing and promoting marine biodiversity, increasing fish catch, and preventing trawling.

“It is important to identify the needs of the area and the community before installing an AR, as the models can vary with the purpose, explained S. Velvizhi, principal scientist at MSSRF's Fish for All centre. “The AR project here aims to improve fish stocks by creating a sustainable marine ecosystem, thus providing a secure source of livelihood for local, traditional fisherfolk. The demand for such intervention came after villagers from Poompuhar heard of the success of the year-old AR project from the neighbouring coastal villages in Karaikal, Puducherry. Shaktivel, 35, a fisherman from Tirumalairayan Pattinam, Karaikal, said that for some time now even as fish stocks were declining due to various reasons and operational costs of fishing were increasing. Thus the ARs deployed last year by the MSSRF were a ray of hope.

“It has been there for just one year but I have already got four or five large catches, Shaktivel said. “I was lucky to benefit from a bumper catch near the reef just last month. It was worth nearly Rs 30,000. Many a times traditional fishermen like Shaktivel return without a substantial catch, barely covering their expenses, and such bumper catches around the ARs, which support a thriving marine habitat, can save the day. Different structures for different species In its Poompuhar project, MSSRF has laid nearly 60 concrete structures – weighing 800 kg to one tonne – in the compound of the Fish for All centre in Poompuhar. These structures are of three makes and each supports a different species, explained E.Thamizhazhagan, development associate at MSSRF. Some of the 60 will attract lobsters, others small fish (mackerel, small fin fishes, carangrid), and some will be home to groupers and bream fish.

The structures, costing Rs 18,000 to Rs 20,000 a piece, are sunk at preselected spots within 15 nautical miles of the coast. Scientists at MSSRF explained that some basic criteria for site selection include a depth of 10 metre to 50 m on sandy sea bed, and assessing other factors such as tidal action, type of soil, temperature, water quality, water current, dissolved oxygen, other

species in the area, nutrients, benthos and plankton. The sites should not be on clayey sea beds, trawling zones, existing coral area and fish migration routes.

Once deployed, fishing around newly sunk “reefs is banned for at least six months to a year. Over time the ARs develop a healthy marine habitat attracting shoals and other marine flora and fauna, after which fishing can be resumed. Long-lasting habitats “Corals grow at just 1 cm a year, so it will take nearly 5-7 years for it to look like a proper reef, explained Velvizhi. ARs, however, are different from traditional fish aggregating devices (FADs) used by fishermen. While an ARs can be deployed as FADs, traditional FADs built using certain trees, barks, coir or coconut fronds – and more recently tyres, metal structures and other solid waste – are temporary and may pollute the marine environment. “ARs, if done properly, are long-lasting habitat which includes seabed, sea grass, other smaller fishes, nutrients, and so on, explained Hussain Mohamad Kasim, a retired scientist, formerly with the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI). Kasim has advised government departments on AR projects in the past, and has extensively recorded various benefits of reefs.

“It is particularly useful for artisanal fishermen who are marginalised by those operating mechanised boats, and can significantly improve their income. The situation in Shaktivel's village, dominated by artisanal fishermen operating smaller craft, is a case in point. “Unlike larger motorised boats and trawlers, we cannot venture more than 15-17 nautical km away from the coast, he said. “Trawling really impacts our catch also. “Around 10-15 nautical miles is also the ideal zone for AR, thereby protecting the livelihood of artisanal fishermen using hook and line, gill netting and phased fishing on smaller crafts, said E.Thamizhazhagan. Apart from a better catch, other benefits include reduced journey time to and from fishing grounds, hence lesser expenditure on fuel. According to Velvizhi's calculations ARs can boost fishermen's income by 100 percent in the next three to seven years.

Previous research by Kasim and others show that in some instances ARs can increase fish catch and income by anything between 20 and 4000 percent. Multiple impacts ARs aren't new to India. Some of the earliest recorded externally fabricated and traditional ARs in India were created by local fishermen in Kerala in the 1950s, according to this CMFRI bulletin. Interventions by organisations and scientists from Ford Foundation, CMFRI, NABARD, UNDP, fisheries departments of Kerala, Odisha, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu picked up in the 1980s and 1990s. An area of at least 1,97,750 sq km was covered by artificial reef until 2012, according to Kasim's research. AR has also been used to reclaim islands and prevent coral bleaching. The combined effects of ocean warming and acidification may have negative impacts on coral reef cover and marine fisheries, and exacerbate “global inequities, reducing resilience and thereby likely worsening outcomes under all climate change scenarios, the December 2019 report by the High Level Panel on Sustainable Ocean Economy had noted.

Such impacts are evident in Thoothukudi where the destruction of marine life due to warming ocean and coral bleaching threatens the livelihood of over 10,000 fishermen, according to the project report published in 2015 by the NABARD Consultancy Services for the Department of Environment, Government of Tamil Nadu. The AR project off the coast of Thoothukudi district, in the Gulf of Mannar, was started in 2007 with multiple aims of reviving corals and coastal habitats, preventing 21 islands from sinking, reducing trawling as well as protecting the livelihood of traditional fishermen. Not every artificial reef is a success “Not everyone can deploy AR it is a technology and it impacts coastal communities. You can't use the ocean as a dumping ground and call it an AR, warned Kasim. “Several ARs projects in the past have missed two crucial aspects assessing the suitability of the areas and doing it in coordination with the local community, explained Thamizhazhagan.

In Nagapattinam and Karaikal, fishermen said that their fishing nets were often damaged due to ARs which were haphazardly deployed some years ago. Such projects eventually did not support any habitats. The success of the reef also depends on socio-economic factors. ARs are a fishing village's common property resource, and can benefit the community as a whole. Both Velvizhi and Kasim emphasised the importance of empowering local communities in the process of laying, monitoring, management and effective implementation of AR projects. In order to ensure community participation, MSSRF formed village monitoring committees and a project monitoring committee. They held several public meetings with panchayat leaders and fishermen for the selection of the site, models, and so on.

“Since the area where the AR is deployed needs to be undisturbed, involving fishermen makes the monitoring of the sites easy. They collectively manage the resource over time, Velvizhi explained. Shaktivel from Karaikal was part of MSSRF's village monitoring committee last year. He worked with MSSRF and the local panchayat to identify the points suitable for the reef, provide inputs about their needs, and share traditional knowledge about their practices and the region. “The local fishermen said they would prefer the reef to be on the traditional fishing ground, so that the future resources will be bountiful, Shaktivel explained. Today, nearly 48 concrete structures at Tirumalairayan Pattinam's common fishing along the Coromandel coast are now turning into reefs attracting a diverse range of species day in and day out. Recalling his recent catch he added, “It seems to be working already.

Tamil Nadu: NITI Aayog for action plan to promote seaweed cultivation

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/niti-aayog-for-action-plan-to-promote-seaweed-cultivation/article29673793.ece>

"Jitendra Kumar, advisor to member, NITI Aayog, inspected seaweed cultivation in the coastal areas of Mandapam and Rameswaram island on Sunday and held discussions with stakeholders to formulate a 'plan of action' for promotion of seaweed cultivation in the Palk Bay region. A

day after holding discussions with K. Gopal, Principal Secretary, Fisheries Department in Chennai, Mr Kumar inspected seaweed cultivation at Olaikuda and Munaikadu in the island and interacted with the stakeholders. He was accompanied by Collector K Veera Raghava Rao, CMFRI Director A Gopalakrishnan, CSMCRI Director Amitava Das and Fisheries Director G.S. Sameeran among others. Mr. Kumar inspected the seaweed cultivation, the value addition process and seaweed seedling production facility mainly to work out an action plan to promote seaweed cultivation in the region with facilities to produce value added products and providing marketing linkages.

Describing seaweed cultivation as the best economic activity, Mr Kumar said NITI Aayog intended to work with the State government to promote seaweed cultivation for the benefit of people in the region while addressing the ecological concerns. “We will see how best we can utilise the potential to the maximum in a sustainable manner, he said. Pointing that ecology had long time benefits for the people he said the officials would take a holistic view while promoting seaweed cultivation. “We will see both economic benefits and ecological concerns and take a balanced view, he added. Later, Mr Kumar visited the CSIR-CSMCRI Marine Algal Research Station (MARS) and inspected the making of seaweed by-products. Supported by the National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) and Tamil Nadu Fisheries Department has already launched training programme for seaweed cultivation using raft methodology and started distributing bamboo rafts to fisherwomen and groups. The Department had also set up Sap extraction units in tie up with Marine Algal Research Station for making value added products, officials said. Additional Director of Fisheries Johny Tom Varghese, Scientist in-charge, CMFRI, Mandapam R Jayakumar, Senior Principal Scientist, CSMCRI, MARS, Mandapam K Easwaran and Deputy Director of Fisheries E Kathavarayan were among others present.

Tamil Nadu: Rs 300 crore allotted for deep sea fishing

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/rs-300-allotted-for-deep-sea-fishing/articleshow/71250458.cms>

"The Centre has released Rs300 crore to the Tamil Nadu government to implement a deep sea fishing scheme in four districts. In a letter to Ramanathapuram MP Navas Kani, Union minister for animal husbandry and fisheries Giriraj Singh on Saturday said the Centre had introduced a sub-component under the blue revolution scheme and the money was released to the state government. Deep sea fishing boats will prevent fishermen from the four districts crossing the IMBL (International Maritime Boundary Line), thus preventing arrests by the Sri Lankan navy. The minister also promised to provide all necessary support towards sustainable development of fisheries in Tamil Nadu.

“My ministry is implementing a Centrally-sponsored blue revolution scheme, where it provides financial assistance towards distribution of sea safety kits consisting of communication

equipment, GPS facility and life saving appliances to fishermen, said the minister. "Under a sub-component of the blue revolution scheme, Rs300 crore has been released to the state government to provide resource-specific deep sea fishing vessels to traditional fishermen in four districts of Palk Bay, including Ramanathapuram district, said Singh. According to a senior state government official, the government was taking steps to implement the scheme. Deep sea fishing is being promoted as an alternative to bottom trawling by fishermen off the Palk Bay.

"The scheme envisages introducing 2,000 deep sea fishing boats and cut down equal number of trawlers by 2019-20. As of now some boats have been distributed and in the coming months more will follow, said a senior fisheries department official. The total cost of the scheme is Rs1,600 crore, of which the Centre's share is Rs800 crore. The remaining Rs320 crore will be borne by the state, he said. Fishermen in Rameswaram, however, were not happy with the scheme. "The unit cost of each boat under the scheme is high. We have to spend not less than Rs20 lakh for nets. Each fisherman who wants to get a deep sea fishing boat will have to spend Rs44 lakh and majority of this will be only through loan, said Ramanathapuram, a member of a fishermen's association. The fishermen sought financial help from the government for getting the boat.

Tamil Nadu: Blue swimming crab to get marine stewardship council label

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/blue-swimming-crab-to-get-marine-stewardship-council-label/article29214516.ece>

"The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), an international non-profit organisation, which promotes sustainable fishing, has proposed to bring blue swimming crab, one of the major catches in this region, under its label to preserve the species and promote its sustainable fishing. The MSC has identified the species, also known as Flower Crab, in addition to Mandapam Flower Shrimp, the species caught in Mandapam area in Rameswaram island and Kanniyakumari Lobster, officials said at a workshop on 'Blue swimming crab fishery improvement programme and launch of action plan,' organised by Crab Meat Processors Association here on Wednesday. Representatives of MSC, Fisheries department, Central Marine Fisheries Research Centre (CMFRI), Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), Coastal and Marine Protected Areas (CMPA) Fisheries Universities, crab meat exporters,

World Wide Fund for Nature, Country boat fishermen and other stakeholders attended the one-day workshop to draw the strategies for sustainable fishing of BSC. The MSC label, which sets the standard for sustainable fishing, would command good export market and get best prices for the fishermen, the officials said addressing the workshop. The 'Blue MSC label' would ensure a science-based sustainable fishing, they said. The officials also educated the fishermen on the 'dos and don'ts' while fishing the blue crabs. As part of sustainable fishing, the fishermen should

catch crabs which measured above 90 mm carapace length and should strictly avoid catching berried female crabs which carried egg clusters, the officials said.

The fishermen were also enlightened on the fishing method and type of nets used for catching the crabs and getting the MSC label. E. Kathavarayan, Deputy Director of Fisheries, said 30 to 35 tonnes of blue crabs were caught in the district every day and the meat was exported mainly to the western countries. At least seven seafood companies were involved in the export of crab meat and they thrived mainly from the crab catch from Palk Bay, he said. Every year, four million tonnes of crabs, valued at 40 million US dollars, were exported from the country and catch from this region – from Vellapatti in Gulf of Mannar to Adhiramapattinam in the Palk Bay - constituted 90% of the export, he said. The MSC label for blue crabs would go a long way in protecting the livelihood of country boat fishermen, he added.

Tamil Nadu: Fish Marketing Societies to the aid of country boat fishermen

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/fish-marketing-societies-to-the-aid-of-country-boat-fishermen/article29164617.ece>

"Aiming to free country boat fishermen in the southern coastal districts from the clutches of intermediaries and ensure the best price for the catch with marketing facilities, the government has proposed the establishment of Fish Marketing Societies (FMS) in fishing hamlets to procure the catch directly from fishermen. When launching the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD)-assisted Post Tsunami Sustainable Livelihoods Programme (PTSLP) recently, the State Fisheries Department identified 410 fishing hamlets in the districts of Kanniyakumari, Thoothukudi, Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai and Thanjavur for the FMS initiative, and 121 such societies have been formed already. E. Kathavarayan, Deputy Director of Fisheries, said FMS members representing the fishing communities from these districts were familiarised with the programme at the Marine Products Exporters' meet held in Thoothukudi recently.

They directly interacted with exporters and sought clarifications on a wide range of issues, he said. The government came out with the programme to protect country boat fishermen who seek loans from local money lenders, agents and middlemen and are forced to sell their catch at the rates fixed by them. "These intermediaries exploit the fishermen by buying their catch at low rates and make profits by selling them to exporters at higher rates, Mr. Kathavarayan said. Country boat fishermen caught high-quality crabs, lobsters, groupers and sear fish, but were unable to get a good price for their catch. They could now sell their catch at the best price to the FMS which, in turn, will supply the catch to exporters. About 4 million tonnes of crabs were exported from India every year, and 90% of the crabs were caught in the Palk Bay, he said. FMS were being given 70-, 120- and 200-litre-capacity ice boxes at subsidised rates to preserve the catch and had tied up with seafood export companies for marketing, he said, adding that IFAD

was also helping fishermen with financial assistance for buying fishing nets and other paraphernalia.

Tamil Nadu: Restrict contingency fund advances to emergencies: CAG tells government

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/restrict-contingency-fund-advances-to-emergencies-cag-tells-govt/article28629903.ece>

"The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has recommended that the State government restrict the sanctioning of advances from the Contingency Fund to emergencies. The recommendation was made after lapses were found by the watchdog. The CAG's State finance audit report for the year ended March 2018 stated that advances from the fund were sanctioned when there was no immediate need, and hence, the utilisation ranged from 78% to 98%. "Advances from the fund are to be made only for meeting expenditure of an unforeseen and emergent character, the postponement of which, till its authorisation by the Legislature, would be undesirable. The fund is in the nature of an imprest and its corpus is Rs 150 crore, the report said. The CAG found that in 2017, the sanctions made from the Contingency Fund to the departments of Law, Information and Publicity and Governor and Council of Ministers respectively were "fully unutilised.

A sum of Rs 1.14 crore allocated to the Governor and Council of Ministers Department for the provision of cabling for air conditioner at Raj Bhavan was not utilised, and the department had cited administrative reasons, the report said. The CAG said a sum of Rs 3.56 crore sanctioned to the Department of Horticulture as additional assistance for Ockhi-hit farmers in Kanniyakumari district was drawn from the Treasury in February 2018 and kept in the savings bank account of the Director of Horticulture. After incurring an expenditure of Rs 0.76 crore (March 2018), the balance amount of Rs 2.80 crore was retained in the bank account as of March 31, 2018, it said.

Under-utilisation of funds About Rs 19.80 crore, sanctioned to the Fisheries Department in August 2017 for the implementation of the scheme of 'Diversification of trawl fishing boats from Palk Bay into deep sea fishing boats', was drawn in full. But only Rs 0.11 crore was utilised and the balance amount was deposited into the personal deposit account of the Director of Fisheries, according to the report. The CAG also pointed to non/partial implementation of major schemes announced in the Budget for 2017-18. A sum of Rs 2,000 crore allocated in the Budget for the Tamil Nadu Infrastructure Development Fund was withdrawn. Similarly, an allocation of Rs 400 crore to the Chennai Mega City Development Mission and Rs 200 crore in grants to the Tamil Nadu Infrastructure Development Board for the Project Preparation Fund were also withdrawn. Of the Rs 300 crore allocated in the Budget for the Water Resources Management Mission and the Kudimaramathu scheme, Rs 223 crore was utilised, the CAG added.

India-Sri Lanka fisheries dispute: All you need to know

<https://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/explained-india-sri-lanka-fisheries-dispute-all-you-need-to-know/452906>

"Sri Lankan Navy personnel on Friday arrested six Indian fishermen hailing from the state of Tamil Nadu for allegedly catching fish in the Sri Lankan water, India's newly created Department of Fisheries said. The fishermen from Nambuthalai in Ramanathapuram district had begun sailing in a country boat on Thursday and later, were detained near Nedhunteevu for fishing in the Lankan waters, Deputy Director of Fisheries E Kathavarayan said. The Lankan Navy on June 27 allegedly chased away over 3,000 Tamil Nadu fishermen while they were straying into the island nation's waters. As Sri Lanka often detains Indian fisherman over charges of crossing into their territory, here's what you should know about the dispute.

What is this dispute all about? In the 1960s, the government of India decided to promote seafood exports, offering huge subsidies to fishermen. As a result of this move, the fishermen of Tamil Nadu capitalised on the world's rising seafood demand. At that time, there were no clearly demarcated maritime borders between India and Sri Lanka. Finally, in the 1970s, India and Sri Lanka concluded the maritime boundary agreements of 1974 and 1976, delimiting international boundaries in the Palk Bay, the Gulf of Mannar, and the Bay of Bengal, respectively. The agreement was facilitated between the then Prime Ministers of the two nations - India's Indira Gandhi and Sri Lanka's Sirimavo Bandaranaike. However, politicians from the state of Tamil Nadu protested the ceding of the island of Kachchatheevu in the Palk Bay by India to Sri Lanka, without treating the southern state as a stakeholder.

The debate over the sovereignty of the island of Kachchatheevu has been going on since then. Almost eight years after the conclusion of maritime boundary agreements, a civil war between the rebel group of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government broke out in Sri Lanka in 1983. With the advent of the civil war, the Sri Lankan government, taking a security precaution, prevented its fishermen of northern region from fishing in the sea. As a result of this, the catch of the Sri Lankan fishermen declined during the war, which ended in 2009. But, Indian fishermen, during that time, allegedly kept fishing even in Sri Lanka's territory. When the Sri Lankan fishermen again started their fishing activity in 2009 they found large Indian boats fishing on their territory. The Sri Lankan fishermen, dependent on fishing for their livelihood, then conveyed their plight to their government. Apart from the above points of conflict, Sri Lanka also raises the environmental protection bogie against India. Sri Lanka often complains that trawlers used by the Indian fishermen also damage the fragile ecosystem of the sea.

They allege that heavy nets used by the Indian fishermen badly affect the region's marine life. The friction has not died down since 2009 and the Sri Lankan navy personnel have detained thousands of Indian fishermen since then. Sometimes, the fishermen are released upon the intervention by the Indian government but both the sides have failed to find a long-lasting

solution to this problem. The Indian government has also not addressed the concerns raised by its Tamil Nadu region over the issue of Kachchatheevu island. What is the issue of sovereignty of island of Kachchatheevu? When India ceded Kachchatheevu island in the Palk Bay to Sri Lanka, politicians from the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu called the move a big mistake, saying that they were not consulted before deciding on the maritime boundary agreement. The Palk Bay is a narrow strip of water separating the state of Tamil Nadu in India from the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, at the time of ceding, the Indian government did not consider the island a part of India and termed it a disputed territory.

The ceding of the island exacerbated the tension between the fishermen practicing traditional fishing and those using huge modern mechanised trawlers. In order to prevent the conflict, Tamil Nadu government enacted the Tamil Nadu Marine Fisheries Regulation Act in 1983, which required that trawlers or mechanised boats should not catch fish within three nautical miles from the coast. It also stipulated that the three-nautical-mile area would exclusively be reserved for artisanal fishermen (those who practice the trade in a traditional or non-mechanized way). However, the artisanal fishermen claim that the government has not done anything to enforce the three nautical mile stipulation. While both the nation's governments continue to look the other way, it is the fishermen on the southern coast of India who find that they are literally and figuratively fishing in troubled waters.

Tamil Nadu: Exporters find shrimp catch too much to process

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/exporters-find-shrimp-catch-too-much-to-process/article28077484.ece>

"The huge 'first day catch' of more than 500 tonnes of shrimps in Rameswaram on June 16 after the end of 61-day fish ban period became too much for the six fish export companies, including four Thoothukudi-based companies, to process and defreeze. The Rameswaram, Pamban and Mandapam fishermen who had ventured into the sea for fishing after the ban period returned with an unprecedented catch of shrimps and the export companies, which were taken off guard, had a tough time procuring the shrimps, officials said. The catch was beyond their processing capacity. The companies had to transport portion of the shrimps to the processing units in Kerala.

Soon after procuring, the companies began the processing – peeling and deveining the shrimps, a laborious task, and it took three days for the Mandapam-based companies to complete the process. Only expert workers could do the peeling and deveining, otherwise the muscles would come off, leading to weight loss and cut in profit, the officials said. The processed shrimps were de-frozen in minus 20 degree celsius before packed and exported, they said. Nearly 60% of the processed prawns were exported to Japan, 30% to the US and 10% to the Middle East, they said. Three species - white, tiger and brown prawns - were caught in the Palk Bay and the brown

prawns, popularly known as Mandapam Flower Shrimp, commanded a good market in Japan, officials said. The processed shrimps had a shelf life of six months.

Tamil Nadu: Gaja: When a cyclone's wake is worse than the cyclone itself

<https://thewire.in/environment/cyclone-gaja-tamil-nadu-vedaranyam-nagapattinam-panchayat>

"On the night of November 15, 2018, thousands of lives on the Tamil Nadu coast were uprooted by the Gaja cyclone. It laid waste to villages in Destroying villages of Nagapattinam, Thanjavur, Thiruvarur, Pudukkottai, Vedaranyam and Cuddalore, among others, and claimed 45 lives. Apart from damage to houses and the death of cattle, The destruction of crops and marine ecosystems, apart from damage to houses and cattle deaths, were particularly disruptive. In a belt where farmers predominantly grew coconut, mango and tamarind, which take about 5-10 years to mature, people knew getting back on their feet would take a long time after reports that 1 crore had been uprooted. "At present, our agriculture work has stopped because open water ponds are all salty, as are all the bore-wells.

"Earlier, we would take the fresh water from the ponds to water our fields. Now, to even get one pot of drinking water, I walk two kilometres from my house, said Selvi Chandra, 42-year-old a farmer who lives in Manalmedu. The salt producers at Vedaranyam claim sales have fallen by 50%. Women from the fishing community are travelling to distant villages to fetch pots of clean drinking water. The challenges the community faces now is testament to the fact that the wake of a disaster can be just as difficult as the disaster itself. Bad news for fishing Vedharajan Balaji, a marine biologist at Thanjavur's OMCAR Palk Bay Centre, stood with the fishermen on the day of the cyclone, helping them evacuate. Now, Balaji is working closely with the fishing community to find ways to restore normalcy to marine life.

"In the cyclone, a very important part of the ecosystem, the sea grass, which is food for several marine animals, has been uprooted. And that will take at least two years to grow back to the way it was, Balaji said. "Right now, there is an open sea bed. That's why the fishermen are facing a hard time. Other sea animals like sea horses, sea bass, etc. have also gone far away. Kumar Arumainathan, a 38-year-old fisherman from Minavar Colony of Nagapattinam, lives 50 m away from the sea. Thanks to losses and the financial burden he has incurred, he is leaving his village in search of work in Oman. "The biggest challenge right now for us is to get catch. It's next to nothing, so we are sitting ducks, he said. "There's just too much pressure after Gaja. Since Oman provides work on a contract basis, I'll be able to take care of a lot of my debts, including to repair his house. Malarkudi (58), who leaves at 4 am every day to the harbour to collect fish and sell them at the Nagapattinam city market, agreed the catch had fallen – but noted that demand had fallen as well.

“People are spending cautiously. A place where I would easily make a profit of Rs 500 every day is not giving me more than Rs 200 today. Getting back on their feet as fishers is hard now because boats have become very expensive. “I get why people resort to repairs instead buying a new boat, Arumainathan said. “However, a patched-up boat will always be more prone to falling out when the waves are strong, and even a small leak will take everyone down. So every day, they are risking their lives because there's no other option. D. Karthikeyan, a fisheries inspector, conducted one of the first surveys to estimate the number of damaged/lost boats. He said instead that the government has distributed relief to 90% of the affected fishermen and that the 10% haven't been able to submit proof of ownership. But even if they come back with papers, “the Nagapattinam district doesn't have any more funds.

“A lot of fishermen didn't come when the verification was happening, and now they are suddenly appearing out of nowhere. T. Selvarasu, a scientist at the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Nagapattinam, who has been working closely with the fishing community of the district's Poompuhar region, said Gaja had done a fine job of highlighting why the community isn't disaster-proof. Balaji, for one, said fishermen and their practices have to be managed locally. “Mangroves that are protecting the ecosystems are being uprooted for personal benefit. That needs to stop. Fishermen need to be taught long-term sustainable ways of fishing. For example, the sea grass that mitigates and reduces wave energy, and even the force of a cyclone, should be heavily promoted. Apart from restoring long-term resources, the short-term also demands attention. Most farmers desperately seek alternative sources of income to pay for basic needs. R. Murugarajan, a 41-year-old farmer from Vilundamavadi, had over 30 coconut trees, 25 mango trees and five tamarind trees. The coconut and tamarind trees fetched Rs 15,000 a month on average.

In mango season, he'd make an extra Rs 7,000. But now, he makes a little over a tenth of what he used to, which only covers his food. His son had to be shifted from a private engineering college to a public institute after Gaja. “We would earlier spend around 5,000 only on food, but now, we can't afford to do that. We are only thinking about managing tomorrow's meal, nothing more, he said. The story is the same in the surrounding villages. One structural barrier to improving disaster resilience is the fact that Tamil Nadu hasn't held panchayat meetings for the last two years. “We need small resource centres at each level, which can give technical support and archive data. At present, we have officers at district level, village level, but who goes to the villages? R. Manivannan, a project manager from the AVVAI Village Welfare Association, asked. “Because there's no panchayat system, a block development officer [BDO] has almost 30 villages under him. Will he go around and address the problems of each village? No. This in turn is expected to exacerbate recovery.

“The government talks about insurance, but how many will really get crop insurance when so many documents were lost? How will the most vulnerable people like the old, the bedridden, the

physically and mentally challenged speak for themselves? “Earlier I would speak to the panchayat head and get issues like absence of street lights resolved, but now I don't know who will get the job done, said Suresh Kumar, the fishermen community's head in South Vilundamavadi, Nagapattinam. Priya Shankar's toilet broke when the cyclone struck. Without street lights – which she has been complaining about for four months – she now has to walk to another facility half a kilometre away to relieve herself. And “without street lights, my entire area lives in the dark, and I don't feel safe going out to the toilet at night. Salt-pan workers Vedaranyam was a major exporter of salt to Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. After the cyclone, its supply has been cut to half, according to producers in the area. N.V. Kamaraj, a former MLA, owns over 50 acres of land and employs 200 labourers. “We were proud of our exports, which provided salt to so many other states. At present, since we are not able to provide enough salt to our own state, there are traders who are importing salt from Gujarat.

Earlier, I used to take Rs 1,000 for each tonne but now it's only Rs 500, he said. Poor business means worse prospects for those working directly on the pans. One of them, R. Marimuthu (51), said the state government gave Rs 10,000 to each worker after Gaja. “A mixer to make chutney, a grinder to make idli batter, utensils to eat and buckets and pots to get water from – just these cost that much. The cyclone has destroyed trees that were sown by our ancestors. To get our lives back, Rs 10,000 or even 4-5 years of hard work on the field is not going to be enough. Marimuthu has five daughters and is the sole breadwinner. Another worker, N. Veeraiyan (35), from Motandithopu village, said, “Marriages in my house were cancelled, and we don't have enough to arrange for that again. He also said he is yet to receive relief money from the government; according to Kamaraj, the ex-MLA, as many as “60% of the people in Vedaranyam are yet to. As a defence, Selvi Baby, assistant commissioner of the state's Gaja Cyclone Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Rejuvenation Program, said, “If we just give the money to the community, they will spend it quickly. It's not necessary that they will use it to rebuild their houses. “Hence, we have taken the responsibility of construction. She also said many Gaja relief activities had to be pushed back by the Lok Sabha elections. “But we are positive that the long term programs that we have planned will have a positive effect. However, M. Patiyasheelam, a project manager at a local NGO called Bedrock, said there is no reason to help the state will do a good job. “Vedaranyam has over 40 villages; 70% of these were non-concrete houses, so a total washout was inevitable. But at present, out of a 1,000 houses, only 20 are being rehabilitated.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen go for deep sea fishing

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/fishermen-go-for-deep-sea-fishing/article26712641.ece>

"Rameswaram fishermen set out for deep sea fishing from Cochin on Tuesday one and a half months after Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami launched deep sea fishing project. After completing test and trail run and setting right difficulties at the Cochin Shipyard, which rolled out four vessels for fishermen, three vessels left for fishing in the west coast of Arabian Sea. The project, conceived to wean away fishermen who get arrested by Sri Lankan navy when they trespass into Lankan waters while fishing in the Palk Bay, took off one and a half years after Prime Minister Narendra Modi had initiated it in July, 2017. "Thirty three fishermen set out for deep sea fishing from Thoppumpady harbour near Chochin Fishing harbour, with hope, Additional Director of fisheries (Ramanathapuram) Johny Tom Varghese said. The fishermen have taken permission from the Kerala government to operate from there for a couple of months so that they could rectify any issue with the CSL.

Though the vessels had facilities for long liners, the fishermen would use gill netting to catch tuna and dill fish – the export potential species. He and Director of fisheries G S Sameeran had visited the harbour last week and prepared the ground work. Eleven fishermen in the vessel owned by Anand Biava, 12 in the vessel owned by Sesu Iruthayaraj and 10 in the vessel owned by Vinnarasan had set out for 10 to 15 days voyage. All the fishermen were trained by the Central Institute of Fisheries Nautical and Engineering Training and they are expected to sail more than 100 nautical miles. Forming a cluster, they carried one satellite phone for offshore communication. Besides, each boat carried Navtex (navigational telex), Navic sets to get distress, adverse weather condition alerts and VHF sets for communicating among them. Their vessels were fitted with automatic identification system to keep track of vessel traffic. "We are confident of making the fishing successful, said Mr. Baiva. Mr Sameeran and his team of officials were great source of inspiration, he said. T. Yuvaraj and R. Gautham, Assistant Director of fisheries and Inspector of Fisheries (Rameswaram) saw off the boats with the owners.

Sri Lanka: Soft-launch takes some wind out of deep-sea fishing?

<https://www.orfonline.org/research/south-asia-weekly-report-volume-xii-issue-12-49259/>

"The low-profile, soft launch of the joint project for supplying deep-sea vessels in mid-February may have denied yet another occasion for the Government of India and of the southern Tamil Nadu to adequately highlight the continuing efforts at easing 'Palk Bay tensions' involving the State's fishers in Sri Lankan waters. Apart from 'marketing' the scheme more effectively to the affected Rameswaram fishers, a high-profile project-launch would have also sent a message across to Tamil fishers in Sri Lanka and also to their Government and Navy, on what is being attempted in the matter. If much of the local media and all of the national media missed out on Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami handing over the first four deep-sea fishing vessels to the enrolled beneficiaries, they could not be blamed. He did so through video-conferencing from the State Government Secretariat in distant Chennai, the capital city – that too

along with other projects, all costing upwards of Rs 500 cr. Not many, barring possibly the district officials who were at the other end of the VC facility and the immediate beneficiaries even possibly got to know about it.

Given the context and content, a high-profile, on-site ceremony, possibly involving Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Palaniswami at Rameswaram could have done the trick. Nearer home, it would have taken the message to more fishers in the affected neighbourhood, for them to feel convinced about the seriousness that the governments in the country attached to their long-term welfare and prosperity as much as to their immediate safety-at-sea. Given the history of fishers' tensions between the two nations, the national and international media would have extensively covered a VVIP launch of the 'deep-sea vessels' scheme, but it was not to be. A celebratory function would have taken the message even more across the Palk Strait, to their Tamil fisher-brethren in Sri Lanka, the latter's polity, bureaucracy and Navy, that Governments and fishers in India are serious about sorting out the issue as much as possible and as fast as possible. Blue revolution 'Deep-sea fishing' project has been on cards for more than a decade, though the Tamil Nadu Government was reportedly slow in acting on the proposal.

It offered multiple advantages, but individual fishers as also the local industry needed to prepare themselves for the eventual shift from their current fishing methods. The make-over is yet to be completed, and in some cases even taken up but a start has now been made. Deep-sea fishing comes under the Centre's 'Blue Revolution scheme', modelling the earlier successes of 'Green Revolution' and 'White Revolution' on the agriculture and animal husbandry fronts. Under the scheme, the Centre now provides 50-percent funding in the total cost of Rs 80 lakhs, and the state grants another 20 percent. Of the balance 30 per cent, the beneficiary contributes just has to contribute only 10 percent with the rest of it coming from banks, as loans. The Centre and the state government have facilitated bank loans for the purpose and the remaining 20 per cent is funded by banks. When completed over a five-year period, over 2,000 deep-sea vessels would have hit the waters off Rameswaram and neighbouring fishing hamlets, at a total cost of Rs 1,600.

At present, the public sector Cochin Shipyard has been entrusted with building the deep-sea vessels to specifications. It is not unlikely that the private sector too may be encouraged to enter the sector, depending on demand in the coming years and based on strict quality-control. According to state government officials, the state-of-the-art boats, called 'Tuna long lining and gillnetting fishing vessels,' are equipped with modern navigation and communication equipment, besides advanced net hauling and liner winches. Other facilities include galleys, bio-toilet, refrigerated seawater system and stainless steel-clad PUF (polyurethane foam) insulated fish-hold, to preserve the catch. Two fishing harbours, Kunthukkal and Mookaiyur, both in Ramanathapuram district, are also being readied exclusively for the deep-sea fishing boats.

Priority would be given to fishermen whose boats have been apprehended by Sri Lanka and those damaged in their custody, among other categories, a government order said. Public sector Cochin Shipyard is building a total of 16 such boats, besides other shipyards.

Cultural conditioning Much of the off-shore fishing in southern Tamil Nadu is controlled by private sector canning industry in and from neighbouring Kerala. They have their refrigerated vehicles transferring the catch from the TN shores, where individual fishers in groups have been selling their catch, to canning factories in Kerala. At the level of the individual, Rameswaram fishers in particular and many, if not most, of the rest of the community elsewhere in the state are not culturally conditioned to stay in the seas for long periods, as required in deep-sea fishing. For generations and centuries, the Rameswaram fishers in particular have been out at sea only overnight. In the era before motor-boats, they used to spend days together on the other side of the Palk Strait, in northern Sri Lanka, before embarking on their return journey. However, there have been fishing communities in the southern coastal neighbourhood in the state where individuals and groups have been at sea on board deep-sea vessels for days and weeks together.

The Thoothoor fishers in southern-most Kanyakumari district are a case in point. The state government has been encouraging the latter to work with the Rameswaram fishers and others, to prepare them in the matter. However, the 'Ockhi cyclone' that hit southern Tamil and adjoining south Kerala seas and coasts alike in November 2017, led to panic among fishers not only in the region but also in the extended neighbourhood. Many fishers lives were lost in mid-sea, owing to inadequate communication. The state government has since come up with solutions to such problems, though the motivation for more fishers to sign in for deep-sea fishing needs to return in full measure. To address fishing community's concerns regarding deep-sea human losses, Chief Minister Palaniswami also handed over five VHF communication sets to fishermen while inaugurating the deep-sea vessels. It is part of a scheme under the Coastal Disaster Risk Reduction project.

However, much work needs to be done on this score, as well. **Storage & marketing** The erstwhile Government began well by announcing the setting up of a chain of 20 cold-storage facilities across the TN shores, end-to-end, for fishing communities to be able to hold on to their stocks, and sell it to the highest bidder when the prices are relatively favourable. This project itself has not taken off in a big way. Nor has the accompanying marketing mechanism and fishers' education on international pricing put in place, for the state's fishing community to benefit from.

The education should involve identifying new markets for tuna and other species caught in the deeper waters off the TN coast without competing with those of Sri Lankan fishers, thus leading to a price-crash for both. Over time, the government should also design plans and schemes for 'mother-ships' and 'factory-ships', like those being used by fishers from distant Taiwan, who are

encouraged to fish off the Indian waters, in the absence of local competition. In the immediate context, deep-sea fishing could provide an alternative, longer lasting, bountiful fishing fields for the Tamil Nadu fishers than the risky Sri Lankan waters. If successful, it could provide an alternative to destructive bottom-trawling, which Rameswaram and most other TN fishers have got used to. Three, it could help reduce recurring coastal tensions also within the State, as traditional, artisanal fishers too have been resisting invasion into their limited-reach waters by bottom trawlers and other motorised vessels.

Tamil Nadu: To promote tuna fishing, fishermen get subsidy

<https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/to-promote-tuna-fishing-fishermen-get-subsidy/article26434697.ece>

"The Fisheries Department in Nagapattinam has invited applications from fishermen for construction of new tuna long liner-cum-gillnetter utilising 50% subsidy to a maximum of Rs. 30 lakh. The beneficiaries should be joint owners (a group consisting of a maximum of six fishermen) or fisheries cooperative society or individual, an official press release said. Priority will be given to those who have not already availed subsidy under conversion of tuna long liner scheme of Tamil Nadu / Marine Products Exports Development Authority. With a view to diversify fishing operations and promote tuna fishing by the fishermen of Palk Bay area, the government has earmarked 60 per cent of the total subsidy for fishermen in the region. Priority is being given in the following order: group with replacement of trawler (weightage will be given to the replacement of number of trawlers), individual with replacement of trawler, fishermen cooperative society, group without replacement of trawler, and individual without replacement of trawler.

The back-ended subsidy is released in three stages: on completion of construction of hull; on completion and purchase and installation of engine, erection of equipment / machinery; and procurement of fishing gears including gill net and long line and on registration of the craft with completion certificate issued by Regional Scrutiny and Monitoring Committee. The applications could be downloaded from www.fisheries.tn.gov.in or obtained from the offices of JD/DD/AD Fisheries on working days. The original drawing of the model of the tuna longliner obtained from Naval Architect must be furnished. The filled-in applications with the model of the drawing must be sent to the Director of Fisheries, Integrated Animal Husbandry and Fisheries Building, Nandanam, Chennai - 600 015, before March 15, the release said.

Tamil Nadu: Avoid Palk Bay, ICG tells fishermen

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/avoid-palk-bay-icg-tells-fishermen/article26382325.ece>

"The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) Station, Karaikal, has reached out to fishermen in coastal hamlets operating trawlers and motorised boats along the stretch of 87 nautical miles from Poompuhar to Vedaranyam and encouraged them to opt for tuna fishing. The ICG is educating the fishermen about the consequences of venturing into Sri Lankan waters in the backdrop of depletion of marine resources on the Indian side of maritime boundary. "Through our monthly community interaction programmes in the hamlets, we educate the fishermen thoroughly on the consequences and advise them to switch over to tuna fishing in deep sea in groups so that they can be of help to one another in times of distress, Commanding Officer of Karaikal Coast Guard Station S.R. Nagendran said. The Fisheries department insists on installation of GPS devices in trawlers and motorised boats to make sure that the fishermen remain inside the Indian Maritime Boundary. The fishermen, in turn, expect the government to supply them with the devices.

"The necessity of GPS devices is the highest for fishermen in Kodiakarai in Nagapattinam district, which is closest to the Sri Lankan waters. But trespassing by Kodiakarai fishermen into Sri Lankan waters has been found to be unintentional in most cases, Amal Raj Xavier, Joint Director of Fisheries department, Nagapattinam, said. Studies show that bottom trawlers have caused enormous depletion in marine resources on the Indian side and are in a compulsive situation to carry out course correction rather than venturing into Lankan waters. For decades till the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka, commercial fishing vessels operated by dragging multiple nets through water, scraping the sea bed and disturbing the marine environment. The trawlers operating in Palk Bay have turned the sea surface barren, ridding it of even planktons, the very basis for the marine food chain. The trawlers continue to cause destruction of marine wealth as flouting of rules is not linked to cancellation of licences or denial of subsidised diesel, according to marine experts. Citing the sustainable practices being adopted by the Sri Lankan fishermen after the end of civil war in the island nation, the studies have suggested that there must be strong deterrent mechanisms in place to prevent Indian fishermen from crossing the IMB.

Tamil Nadu: Scheme to exchange trawler boats for deep sea fishing boats

<https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/210219/scheme-to-exchange-trawler-boats-for-deep-sea-fishing-boats.html>

"Tamil Nadu fishermen plying their craft in the Palk Straits and frequently facing arrests by the Sri Lankan Navy for alleged bottom trawling in their waters, can now exchange their traditional boats for deep-sea fishing vessels through a government-funded scheme. The scheme - diversification of trawl fishing boats from Palk Straits into deep sea fishing boats - is aimed at encouraging fishermen to take up deep-sea fishing and put an end to disputes arising between the two countries. Bottom trawling, an ecologically destructive practice, involves trawlers dragging weighted nets along the sea-floor, causing great depletion of aquatic resources, including fish hatchlings and corals. Additional Director of Fisheries Johny Tom Varghese told PTI that the

project helps fishermen in the Palk Straits, who are not exposed to deep-sea fishing, to venture deep into the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and other deep sea areas to look for fish like tuna that are in high demand. "It is also to bring an end to issues between Sri Lanka and India," he said, adding that such disputes arise mostly in the Palk Straits region.

"Fish are getting depleted on our side. Also our fishermen practise bottom trawling, which is banned in Sri Lanka. To find a good catch, they go on the other side and get caught," the director said. The scheme, under the aegis of Blue Revolution scheme - is funded by the Centre - 50 per cent and state government - 20 per cent for a boat costing Rs 80 lakh. Of the balance 30 per cent, 10 per cent is contributed by the beneficiary (fisherman), and the remaining 20 per cent is funded by banks. Director Varghese said the project aims to replace all trawler boats and introduce over 2,000 deep sea fishing boats in a course of five years with a cost of Rs 1,600 crore. "Our fishermen in the Palk Bay region are used to only one-day fishing. Deep sea fishing is a 10-30 day affair. They will be given skill development training to learn the trade," he said. Chief Minister K Palaniswami inaugurated the scheme on Tuesday through video conferencing by flagging off the first four boats manufactured by the Cochin Shipyard. The boats were later handed over to four fishermen.

The state-of-the-art boats, called 'Tuna long lining and gillnetting fishing vessels,' are equipped with modern navigation and communication equipment, besides advanced net hauling and liner winches. Other facilities include galleys, bio-toilet, refrigerated seawater system and stainless steel-cladded PUF (Polyurethane Foam) insulated Fish Hold to preserve the catch. Two fishing harbours, Kunthukkal and Mookaiyur, both in Ramanathapuram district are also being readied exclusively for the deep-sea fishing boats. Priority would be given to fishermen whose boats have been apprehended by Sri Lanka and those damaged in their custody, among other categories, a government order said. Cochin Shipyard is building a total of 16 such boats, besides other shipyards.

Kerala: Twenty seven shipyards in the country will build around 800 boats in the coming yeas

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/2019/feb/19/blue-revolution-kerala-gets-the-blues-as-states-fishermen-miss-the-kochi-boat-1940651.htm>

"Kerala's loss is Tamil Nadu's gain. A scheme initially proposed by Kerala to equip fishermen to take up deep-sea fishing is being implemented in Tamil Nadu by the Centre under its Blue Revolution Scheme. The Rs 200-crore sop has left Kerala's Fisheries Department sulking. It was the state which first submitted the proposal in 2016 for a Rs 74-crore subsidised scheme to provide 47 deep-sea fishing boats to fishermen cooperative societies. The Centre rejected the proposal citing the high cost involved as the cost of each boat touched Rs 1.5 crore. Though Kerala submitted a revised proposal, the Centre is yet to respond. According to Fisheries

Minister J Mercykutty Amma, Union secretary in charge of the Fisheries Department has assured to sanction Rs 16 crore under the scheme. “The Centre has allotted Rs 200 crore of the Rs 400 crore earmarked for the scheme to Tamil Nadu. Though they assured to give 16 crore to Kerala, no fund has been allotted till date. This is a biased approach. It's a politically motivated decision in view of the Lok Sabha elections, she said.

On Tuesday, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami will launch the first batch of four deep-sea fishing boats built by Cochin Shipyard. The scheme, aimed at discouraging bottom trawling in the coastal sea, comes with a Rs 40-lakh subsidy from the Union Government. The boats built as per the design created by the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) and fine-tuned by experts at IIT Kharagpur, cost around Rs 1.5 crore. As the Centre has directed to cap the price at Rs 86 lakh, the Cochin Shipyard is digging into its own Corporate Social Responsibility fund to meet the expense for the first batch of 16 boats. CIFT scientists said the Centre has accepted the design developed by it to standardise the fishing boats' specifications. Twenty seven shipyards in the country will build around 800 boats in the coming years to encourage fishermen take up deep-sea fishing in a big way. Tamil Nadu is providing a subsidy of Rs 16 lakh for each boat and has arranged soft loans to the tune of Rs 30 lakh per boat to empower the fishermen.

Around 350 fishermen in four coastal districts of Tamil Nadu have registered under the scheme expressing willingness to replace their trawler boats with the new deep-sea boats. “The Centre has given preference to Tamil Nadu in view of the stand off between the fishermen of that state and Sri Lanka over the exploitation of marine resources in the Palk Bay. It'll be extended to all coastal states in near future, said CIFT principal scientist Leela Edwin. Longlining is a passive fishing technique that involves use of long mainlines and branchlines with baited hooks. As bottom trawling destroys the marine ecosystem, many countries have banned it. India too has decided to regulate fishing practices. The Cochin Shipyard has completed sea trial of two boats and four boats are ready for delivery.

While there are no standard specifications for boats built by local boat builders, the new design will set the standard for deep-sea fishing boats. The hull and deck are made of steel, which makes them strong and sea-worthy. It is 100 per cent watertight and has bunkers for eight crew members. Ergonomically designed, the boats have hydraulic steering wheels, customised winches and bio toilets. The diesel-powered boats can achieve eight knots speed and are ideal for three-week long fishing expeditions. It has an insulated stainless steel fish hold and refrigerated sea water system.

India: 106 coastal and marine sites identified as conservation reserves: Govt report

<https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/106-coastal-and-marine-sites-identified-as-conservation-reserves-govt-report/1478279>

"The Centre has identified over 100 coastal and marine sites as conservation reserves under its National Wildlife Action Plan for 2017-2031, a biennial report released by the government said. As per the second biennial update report (BUR) of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), submitted to the UN body on climate change in December 2018, India is encouraging participation of local communities in governance by recognising the conservation reserves. "India is implementing measures to sustainably harness the potential of blue economy while building the climate resilience of the ecosystems and local coastal communities. Around 106 coastal and marine sites have been identified as conservation or community reserves to increase participation of local communities in governance," it said. Under the National Wildlife Action Plan for the period 2017 to 2031, the government is working towards the conservation of coastal and marine ecosystems from the impacts of climate change, the report said.

The government said in its report that in the last four and a half years, India has not only been able to sustain but also increase its mangrove cover at a time when these ecosystems are disappearing at an alarming rate across the world. "Towards fulfilment of India's commitment to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), several initiatives have been taken to meet the targets set under SDG 14- Life Below Water," it said. As per the report, India has rich coastal and marine wealth along the eastern and western coasts as well as the Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands. "Dense mangrove forests of Sunderbans, which India shares with Bangladesh, world's largest congregations of nesting turtles in Odisha, beautiful seagrass beds in the Palk Bay, enigmatic sea cows in the Gulf of Mannar, majestic whale sharks frequenting the waters of the Gulf of Kutch and some of the world's most magnificent coral reefs in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep are few examples of the rare treasures of India's coastal and marine biodiversity," the report said.

The coastal and marine sector is also a source of valuable fish protein not only for the growing population but also contributes to the global food basket and in turn provides valuable foreign exchange to the country, it said. "India produced 3.8 million metric tonnes of seafood during 2017, valued at Rs 5.28 lakh million at landing centre and Rs 8 lakh million at the retail level. The fisheries sector supports around 9.3 lakh active and part-time fishers, one of the largest workforce of fishers in the world," the report said.

Tamil Nadu: More than Nine lakh Prawn hatchlings released in Palk Bay of Rameswaram to encourage artificial breeding

<https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/more-than-nine-lakh-prawn-hatchlings-released-in-palk-bay-of-rameswaram-to-encourage-artificial-breeding/1460464/>

"With new lease of life given by the government, the breeding programme would not only give a boost to their quantity but also provide a new livelihood to fishermen once the

fishing season starts in Rameswaram. In a bid to encourage prawn business, the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute released over 9 lakh Prawn hatchlings in Palk Bay of Tamil Nadu's Rameswaram. The move is part of the Prawn Fish Artificial Breeding Programme which focuses on promoting the level of prawns in the sea up until there is a fishing ban in place. With new lease of life given by the government, the breeding programme would not only give a boost to their quantity but also provide a new livelihood to fishermen once the fishing season starts in Rameswaram. The quaint town of Rameswaram is situated on the Pamban Island which is in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Known for Ramanathaswamy Temple, a Hindu pilgrimage site with ornate corridors, huge sculpted pillars and sacred water tanks, Rameswaram attracts a lot of tourists. It is also a site where devotees take bath in the holy waters of Agni Theertham, which is situated off the beach in the east of the temple.

Sri Lanka and India: Cost of fishing dispute

<http://www.dailynews.lk/2019/01/18/features/174645/cost-fishing-dispute-between-sri-lanka-and-india>

"Sri Lanka's Northern Provincial economy has been rising from the ashes of the civil war since 2010, and has, as per the latest data available, recorded the highest provincial economic growth rate annually from 2011 till 2015, amongst the nine provinces in the country. However, the growth of the fishing sub-sector has been stifled due to poaching (which is, by definition, illegal), by fisherpersons from India, (particularly from the state of Tamil Nadu) off the northern coast of Sri Lanka, (largely off the districts of Jaffna and Mannar). The fisherpersons of Sri Lanka and India have been fishing in the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay, Palk Strait (the latter two together are also commonly known as the Sethusamudram), and elsewhere harmoniously from time immemorial using traditional equipment and methods of fishing.

However, due to technological advancements (modern fishing vessels including multi-day boats and trawlers, modern fishing nets, etc.), the marine resources on the Indian side of the Palk Bay and elsewhere have been aggressively harvested and overexploited. The fisherpersons of northern Sri Lanka have not been able to avail of such technological advancements owing to the onset of the civil war in 1983 and the resultant severity of restrictions imposed on fishing by the security forces of Sri Lanka. Therefore, due to the relatively greater stock of marine resources on the Sri Lankan side of the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay, and Palk Strait, Indian fisherpersons have been poaching in Sri Lankan waters, and are involved in illegal and unfair practices such as 'bottom trawling' and 'pair trawling'. A growing number of persons involved in such poaching appear to be waged fishing labourers (hired by trawler owners who are big businesspersons), and who do not belong to the traditional fishing communities in Tamil Nadu.

Thus, the dispute of poaching in Palk Bay is NOT about the competing livelihoods of fisherpersons from northern Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu, as is usually reported in the mass media

in Tamil Nadu, but is about the illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, a universally banned activity, by trawler owners and fisherpersons from Tamil Nadu instead. The areas around the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay, and Palk Strait are home to large stocks of marine resources, mainly because of the wider continental shelf here, the mean depth of which is just three metres and runs up to the Indian waters. However, according to Scholtens, the average depth of this area is nine metres. The muddy bottoms of the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay, and Palk Strait areas provide rich grounds for high value shrimp species. The shallow seabed of these areas is also known to possess large stocks of a number of unique, sedentary, demersal fish.

The objectives of this policy paper are to first, make an informed assessment of the magnitude of these fishing disputes that occur between Sri Lanka and India in terms of both monetary and livelihood losses incurred by the country (Sri Lanka), and the people who are directly affected by the same; and second, to explore scientific or technical solutions to this long-running dispute to counter the ineffectiveness of law enforcement and the presumed absence of political solutions. The foregoing objectives are fulfilled using existing data that has been drawn from other researchers, as well as from existing scientific knowledge. Secondary data and knowledge, targeted primarily at the policy communities both in Sri Lanka and India, form the base of this policy paper. The discussion is also targeted at the fishing communities involved in this dispute in order to sensitise them to the alternative dispute resolution mechanisms available, with specific focus on the scientific and technical solutions that are already available.

Post-war development of fishing According to the latest available data, in 2015, there were 48,380 active fisherpersons in the entire Northern Province accounting for 22 percent of the total fisherpersons in the country (i.e. 48,380 out of 221,560). The Jaffna district accounted for almost half of this total (23,480 or 49 percent) followed by Mannar district (with 17,540 or 36 percent). In total, 183,480 persons made up this community's total household population in the Northern Province; of these households, 54 percent (98,230) were in the Jaffna district and 32 percent in the Mannar district (59,530). Over 50 percent of the total population of the Mannar district is a fisher household, which proportion is much lower in the Jaffna district, because its total district population is six times that of the Mannar district. In the aftermath of the civil war, the total 'fish-catch' in the Northern Province has doubled (increased by 116 percent) between 2010 (33,600 metric tons) and 2015 (72,560 metric tons).

However, the total catch in the Northern Province has not yet recovered to the level of 1980 when 88,452 metric tons of fish were caught. In 1980, the Northern Province accounted for 47 percent of the total fish catch in the country, which had declined to just 16 percent by 2015. The growth in the fish catch in the Northern Province in the aftermath of the civil war has not been linear. For example: 1 The Jaffna district experienced a significant drop (34 percent) in fish catch between 2012 (32,400 metric tons) and 2013 (21,380 metric tons); 1 Similarly, the fish catch in the Kilinochchi district declined by 13 percent between 2014 (15,780 metric tons) and 2015

(13,800); 1 The fish catch in Mannar also declined by 17 percent between 2012 (13,450) and 2013 (11,110) and by another 12 percent between 2014 (22,130) and 2015 (19,390).

The plausible cause of this non-linear growth in fish catch in the Jaffna, Kilinochchi, and Mannar districts could be the increase in poaching by Indian trawlers. Such considerable fluctuations are an indication of the extra-territorial restrictions imposed on the fisherpersons and the fishing industry in the post-civil war Northern Province. The fishing sub-sector contributed only 1.7 percent to the national economy of Sri Lanka in 2010, which decreased to 1.4% in 2015. In contrast, the fishing sub-sector contributed 3.7 percent to the Northern Provincial economy in 2010, which significantly increased to 5.6 percent in 2015 (the latest year for which provincial GDP data is available). If not for poaching, the fishing sub-sector's contribution to the Northern Provincial economy might have been even greater. De-development of fishing in the North The estimation of the economic and livelihood losses caused by poaching by Indian trawlers is difficult to calculate.

The fish are not bound in any way by the maritime boundaries between different countries. Further, it is very difficult to physically count the number of trawlers crossing over into the territorial waters of Sri Lanka as these tend to vary from day to day, and information on the types of fish caught by the poachers is impossible to verify. Moreover, the retail and wholesale prices of different varieties of fish change constantly, thus making it impossible to impute values for different varieties of fish affected by poaching. In addition to today's losses incurred due to poaching, the fishing by bottom trawling kills future streams of income due to mass killings of under-grown fish ('by-catch') as trawlers shovel the bottom of the seabed indiscriminately. It is claimed that about 75 percent of fish and residues ('by catch') caught by trawl nets are non-marketable. The trawlers also irreparably damage or destroy fishing nets used by fisherpersons in Sri Lanka, thereby causing the latter to avoid fishing on the days that Indian trawlers are expected to poach in Sri Lankan waters, consequently incurring a livelihood opportunity cost.

In addition to the direct monetary losses incurred by the fishing communities in the Northern Province, there are indirect losses incurred by the entire supply chain of the fisheries sub-sector, ranging from processors of fresh fish (drying, canning, etc.) to wholesalers, retailers, and the exporters of fresh and value-added fish. There have been a few estimates of the economic value of poaching made by Dutch, Indian, and Sri Lankan fisheries experts and researchers in the last decade. These estimates are conjectural and indicative at best. Some of these guesstimates are relatively better than the others. According to this author, Oscar Amarasinghe has undertaken the most systematic loss estimation to-date using 'scenario analyses', and 'sensitivity analyses', over a three-year period (2006–2008). The estimates made by five different experts and researchers range from US\$ 16 million (lowest) to US\$ 56 million (highest) per annum. Interestingly, the foregoing two extreme guesstimates are by persons from Tamil Nadu. The in-between

guesstimates are by Dutch and Sri Lankan researchers. The average of these five different estimates is US\$ 41 million or LKR 5,293 million per annum.

Accordingly, the annual direct monetary loss to each member of the fishing households in the Northern Province is LKR 28,848. This amount is derived by dividing the annual total direct losses due to poaching (LKR 5,293 million) by the population of the total number of fishing household population (183,480). Furthermore, the annual direct monetary loss due to poaching (LKR 5,293 million) was equivalent to 1.4 percent of the Northern Provincial Gross Domestic Product in 2015, which was LKR 390,689 million. The indirect losses in terms of value addition (processing, canning, drying, etc.), wholesale and retail mark-ups, and losses in seafood exports due to poaching by Indian trawlers are estimated by this author to be 50 percent of the direct losses. Hence, the indirect losses amount to US\$ 20.5 million or LKR 2,646.5 million.

The annual direct and indirect losses incurred due to poaching by Indian trawlers (LKR 7,939.5 million or US\$ 61.5 million) amounts to 2.0 percent of the provincial GDP of the Northern Province in 2015 (LKR 390,689 million). The summary of losses as follows: * The annual direct loss incurred by Sri Lanka due to poaching is LKR 5,293 million (US\$ 40.5 million). * The annual direct loss is equivalent to 1.4 percent of the Northern Provincial GDP in 2015. * The annual indirect loss is estimated to be LKR 2,647 million (US\$ 20.3 million) * The annual direct as well as indirect loss is equivalent to 2.0 percent of the Northern Provincial GDP in 2015. A micro level study in selected coastal areas in the Mannar district has been undertaken during 2014–2015 towards an undergraduate dissertation in Sri Lanka, which reveals valuable insights on the impact of illegal fishing on local fishing communities. Envisioning a smart dispute resolution The chances of stopping poaching by way of intensive and effective law enforcement and/or through bipartite (between the GoI and the GoSL or between the leaders of the fishing communities in Tamil Nadu and northern Sri Lanka), tripartite (between India, Sri Lanka, and Tamil Nadu), or quadripartite (India, Northern Province, Sri Lanka, and Tamil Nadu) political negotiations seem to be very remote for a variety of reasons, many of which have already been outlined above.

It is also important that Sri Lanka Navy personnel refrain from firing at Indian poachers in Sri Lankan waters, as has happened several times during the course of Sri Lanka's long civil war, hence severely injuring, (if not killing,) such fisherpersons from Tamil Nadu. There have also been instances of fisherpersons from northern Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu having violently clashed with each other closer to the coastlines of the Northern Province, resulting in at least one Sri Lankan Tamil fisherperson being killed. Given these circumstances, it is high time to explore scientific or technical dispute resolution mechanisms to resolve this long festering 'soft-conflict'. According to media reports, some time ago, there was a proposal to erect electric fences along the maritime borders between India and Sri Lanka. However, this proposal was understandably rejected by the GoI because such an electric fence could be fatal to fisherpersons of both the

countries who may trespass into each other's maritime territory inadvertently, or in an emergency under distress.

A former Principal Scientist and Scientist-in-Charge at the Madras Research Centre of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute of India, Dr. Mohamad Kasim, proposed the construction and deployment of artificial reefs for the restoration of the coastal ecosystems, improvement of biodiversity, and for increasing the biological resources, which in turn would increase the marine fish stock and thereby improve the livelihood of coastal fishing communities. The artificial reefs should complement the natural coral reefs and have already been successfully deployed along the coasts of Kerala state (Calicut, Kannur, and Trivandrum) and Tamil Nadu state (Chennai, Cuddalore, Gulf of Mannar, Kalpakkam, Nagapattinam, Neelankarai, Palk Bay, Pulicat, and various other places) in India. It is claimed that the biodiversity of the bottom living bio-foulers could be greatly increased by increasing the sea bottom substratum. Shinya Otake, a Marine Biologist at Fukui Prefectural University in Japan, claims that some of the artificial reefs built in Japanese waters support a biomass of fish that is 20 times greater than similarly sized natural reefs.

A study undertaken at the Occidental College in Los Angeles confirmed the foregoing claim by revealing that the weight of fish supported by each square metre of sea floor by oil and gas rigs off the Californian coast was 27 times more than that supported by each square metre of sea floor by the natural rocky reefs. The deployment of a three-dimensional artificial reef with dimensions 10 feet by 10 feet by 1 foot in the sea bottom will increase the surface area by 23 times as the bottom substratum increases to 230 square feet. An artificial reef of the size of these foregoing dimensions will cost about INR 2.5 million (US\$ 38,610 or around LKR 5.4 million) and will last for a minimum period of 25 years. Such artificial reefs are most suited for deployment in shallow waters as is the case of Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay, and Palk Strait. In addition to increasing the marine fishery resources, artificial reefs are an effective deterrent against bottom trawling by trawler boats.

The trawlers would not operate in areas with artificial reefs as it would result in severe damage to the trawl nets, and possibly the trawler boats itself. Therefore, the fishing communities in northern Sri Lanka as well as the fisheries authorities should seriously and expeditiously consider the construction and deployment of artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay, and Palk Strait, first, in order to deter the trawlers from Tamil Nadu illegally poaching in Sri Lankan waters, and second, to increase the stock of fish.

These artificial reefs could save the fishing community from dithering law enforcement agencies, inordinate delays of the legal processes, and parochial political haranguing. This scientific and technological approach could potentially result in a win-win outcome (non-zero sum game as per the game theory), for the fishing communities of northern Sri Lanka and indeed the entire supply

chain of the fishing sub-sector in Sri Lanka. (Muttukrishna Sarvananthan (PhD Wales, MSc Bristol, MSc Salford, BA (Hons) Delhi) is the Founder and Principal Researcher of the Point Pedro Institute of Development, Thambasetty, Point Pedro, Northern Province. This is an abridged version of the article published in Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India, Volume.14. No.2, Winter 2018. The full article can be downloaded from the following link <https://doi.org/10.1080/09733159.2018.1564556>. It could also be obtained by making a request to sarvi@pointpedro.org)

Sri Lanka: Upgrade in Seafood Watch recommendation for Sri Lankan crab a milestone for fishery improvement project

<https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/environment-sustainability/upgrade-in-seafood-watch-recommendation-for-sri-lankan-crab-a-milestone-for-fishery-improvement-project>

"The Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch's released new precommendations for several species on Monday, 14 January, and an upgrade in the rating of two Sri Lankan crab fisheries are cause for celebration for the National Fisheries Institute's Crab Council, local producer Taprobane Seafoods, and the fishery improvement projects that have worked to improve the sustainability of the regional crab fishing sector. The blue swimming crab fisheries in the Gulf of Mannar and in Palk Bay both were moved from a red "Avoid ranking to a yellow "Good Alternative rating, five years after parallel fishery improvement projects (FIPs) were created to push the fisheries to implement more sustainable practices. Now, the two FIPs have become the first out of the 14 in Asia to advance a blue swimming crab fishery from red to yellow under Seafood Watch's paradigm, even as many of the other FIPs have been operational for longer periods of time.

"It really is a huge achievement, Steve Creech, the founder of the sustainable Fisheries consultancy Pelagikos Ltd. and the coordinator of both FIPs, told SeafoodSource. "When we started out back in 2013, there wasn't a single scientific paper or report published on blue swimming crab in Sri Lanka, never mind about the fisheries. Now there's a considerable body of research and reports. It has been long journey, but we have finally gotten there and done something that no one else has done for a small-scale blue swimming crab fishery in South and Southeast Asia. The data collection has been an enormous effort, Creech said, but has resulted in 10 individual studies and four annual stock assessment reports. "The body of data and information gathered by the members of the FIP about the fisheries over the last five years means that the fisheries are no longer 'data deficient.'

The new data and information about the fisheries was critical to generating the improved scores for the fisheries for stock status, non-target species, management, and environmental impact, Creech said. "Data generated through the FIP has demonstrated that crab stocks are generally healthy (i.e. at or above a level equivalent to the maximum sustainably yield) in both fisheries.

Furthermore, the status of the stocks has remained at or above a level equivalent to a sustainably managed fishery in each of the past four years. The FIPs are backed by National Fisheries Institute's Crab Council, Taprobane Seafood Group through the Seafood Exporters' Association of Sri Lanka, and the United Nations' International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, the Asia Foundation, and Santa Monica Seafood through FishWise. The FIP represents a USD 450,000 (EUR 392,000) direct investment over the past five years, plus about half that amount in in-kind investments, according to Creech.

“The National Fisheries Institute's Crab Council congratulates the Seafood Exporters' Association of Sri Lanka (SEASL) on its latest fishery improvement project milestone; earning the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Good Alternative rating, NFI Crab Council Executive Director Ed Rhodes said in a press release. “The NFI Crab Council has been proud to support SEASL's Blue Swimming Crab sustainability work since 2013. The dedicated FIP managers on the ground in Sri Lanka and our committed companies have worked tirelessly to improve the ecological status of the stock, advance its management and improve the economic equity of the fishery. The history of crab FIP work, ongoing, in Sri Lanka, and this latest achievement illustrate the power of successful precompetitive collaborations and deserve our sincere applause. While not a formal certification, the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program offers influential recommendations for consumers and businesses based off the degrees of consideration a given seafood source puts into ocean health.

Its new recommendations for amberjack, carp, crab, smelt, and trout and updated recommendations for crab and lobster fisheries were released at the same time the Global Seafood Market Conference is taking place in San Diego, California, U.S.A. Jennifer Kemmerly, director of global fisheries and aquaculture at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, congratulated those involved with the FIPs on the progress. “Engagement with the Sri Lankan government has been critical to advancing fishery improvements in the region, Kemmerly said. “Their efforts have culminated in a more sustainable fishery and now a new relationship with SeaChange Ignite. This relationship, and the resulting market connections, can help incentivize fisheries improvements in other regions.

Creech said local support has been key to making real improvements in the fisheries. Sri Lanka's Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources are have introduced a new code of conduct and other fishing regulations, as well as a new export schedule. And the fishermen of the 70 or so fishing communities along the Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar, off the northern and northwestern coast of Sri Lanka, despite being spread across two provinces encompassing four religions and two languages, are “strongly committed to sustainably managing the blue swimming crab resources in both the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Bay fisheries, Creech said. Creech said the “Good Alternative rating is not an end-point for the FIPs, but rather just a waypoint to reaching even higher levels of sustainability.

In November 2018, the two fisheries were submitted for pre-assessment against the Marine Stewardship Council's fishery standard, and the FIPs are both targeting the green, "Best Choice" rating from Seafood Watch. In order to achieve that, more work is needed to better understand the impact of the fisheries on endangered or threatened non-target species, and more time is necessary to know for sure if the newly implemented management measures will be effective. "To drive this process on, we want [a] green [rating], Creech said.

"We're confident that the NFI Crab Council will continue to meet the cost of funding the FIP over the next and of bringing in more direct funding from the seafood industry in Sri Lanka. Taprobane Seafood Group has already committed to set up an accrual from the sales of its soon-to-be-launched own label, Taprobane Crab Meat. We're confident we can get other crab exporting companies to also commit to financing further improvements to the fisheries, that will take the fisheries from Good Alternative to Best Choice within three years. Taprobane Seafoods CEO Tim O'Reilly said the new Seafood Watch rating will have a significant impact on his business. "It means we will be able to access new markets, which will enable our fishermen to get better prices. It will also stabilize our supply chain, which will enable our workers to earn more income," he told SeafoodSource. Taprobane is working to implement an accrual scheme to ensure that any premium paid for the company's crab products will return to the communities involved in the fisheries, O'Reilly said.

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“The body of data and information gathered by the members of the FIP about the fisheries over the last five years means that the fisheries are no longer 'data deficient.' The new data and information about the fisheries was critical to generating the improved scores for the fisheries for stock status, non-target species, management, and environmental impact, Creech said. “Data generated through the FIP has demonstrated that crab stocks are generally healthy (i.e. at or above a level equivalent to the maximum sustainably yield) in both fisheries. Furthermore, the status of the stocks has remained at or above a level equivalent to a sustainably managed fishery in each of the past four years. The FIPs are backed by National Fisheries Institute's Crab Council, Taprobane Seafood Group through the Seafood Exporters' Association of Sri Lanka, and the United Nations' International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, the Asia Foundation, and Santa Monica Seafood through FishWise.

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Tamil Nadu: Boat owners set to destroy country's marine resources in the North ?

<http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/boat-owners-set-to-destroy-country-s-marine-resources-in-the-North--160486.html>

"Sri Lankan fishermen's leaders from across the north met with Northern Province Governor Reginald Cooray in Jaffna last week to hand over a letter to President Maithripala Sirisena. In their letter the representatives from fishing communities in Jaffna, Kilinochchi and Mannar called upon the President to step up measures to stop destructive fishing practices by foreign and

local fishing vessels in the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar, off the northwestern tip of the island. A resurgence of Illegal, Unreported and Unreported (IUU) by Tamil Nadu (TN) trawlers on the Sri Lankan side of the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar was highlighted by Mohammed Alam, Vice President of the Mannar District Fisheries Cooperative Societies' Union during a seminar on the Fisheries (Regulation of Foreign Fishing Boats) Act (Amendment) No. 1 of 2018 held recently in Mannar.

The seminar for government officers, law enforcement agencies, fishermen's leaders and lawyers conducted by Colombo-based lawyers Chinthtaka Fernando and Subramaniam Kamalayogesvaran highlighted the key amendments to the Act and explored options to use these new provisions to end IUU fishing by TN trawlers in Sri Lankan waters. While welcoming the Attorney General's efforts to review, revise and thereby strengthen the Act's effectiveness as a deterrent to IUU fishing by foreign fishing vessels in Sri Lankan waters, Alam noted that unless the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) is given orders to regularly arrest TN trawlers, the Act's utility is diminished. Civil society leaders participating in a similar seminar held in Jaffna called upon the government to deploy more SLN vessels off the northern coast; issue orders for the navy to regularly arrest TN vessels fishing in Sri Lankan waters and then prosecute the boat owners under the recently amended Fisheries (Regulation of Foreign Fishing Boats) Act. The seminars in Mannar and in Jaffna were co-financed by The Asia Foundation.

The problem of Tamil Nadu trawlers fishing illegally in Sri Lankan waters is a remnant of the civil conflict. For almost 30 years, the SLN was unable to enforce Sri Lanka's sovereignty in the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar. This was due to the active presence of Sea Tiger bases along the northern and southern coast of Mannar District and in Mullaitivu. The vacuum created by the conflict was quickly filled by opportunistic TN boat owners in Rameshwaram, Thondi, Pattukottai and Nagapattinam. Over a period of 30 years, they built up a 5,000 vessel strong armada of mechanized trawlers with the sole intention of fishing exclusively in Sri Lankan waters.

The problem of TN trawlers fishing illegally in SL waters is a remnant of the civil conflict. For almost 30 years, the SLN was unable to enforce Sri Lanka's sovereignty in the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar. Since 2009, successive Sri Lankan governments have slowly but surely recovered and re-asserted Sri Lanka's sovereign right to the sustainable exploitation of marine resources on the Sri Lanka side of the International Maritime Boundary Line. Despite often strident protests from the State Government of TN various politicians, boat owners and civil society groups in TN the Central Government of India and the courts in Chennai have repeatedly acknowledged Sri Lanka's sovereign rights on the Sri Lankan side of the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar, including those associated with the tiny islet of Kachchativu.

And yet for Sri Lankan fishermen in the north the issue of illegal, destructive fishing to ebb and flow, much like the tide. N. M. Alam and Joseph Francis President of the Pooneryn Fishermen's Cooperative Union reiterated this point at the press conference held after the fishermen's leaders' meeting with the Governor last week. As they said, if the government of the day does not remain vigilant and if the President as Head of the Armed Forces refrained from issuing orders to arrest the TN boats, then slowly and but surely they would return to disrupt the livelihoods of northern fishermen; and destroy the marine resources upon which these livelihoods depend.

The destruction of Sri Lanka's marine resources in the north is not unfortunately restricted to the actions of TN trawlers. In what is an ironic twist of fate, the success of northern fishermen's campaign to end IUU fishing by TN trawlers in Sri Lankan waters, has created an opportunity for Sri Lankan boat owners in the north to commence illegal trawl net fishing in their place! According to local fishermen's leaders that I met recently in Delft, more than 400 3½ ton, offshore, one-day fishing boats have been brought to the north and converted for trawl net fishing by local boat owners since 2012. Unless the Governor and the President intervene, one form of destructive fishing looks set to be replaced by another.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen battle to anchor boats

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/fishermen-battle-to-anchor-boats/article25828308.ece>

"Fishermen in Mandapam north area had a tough time anchoring their boats as gusty winds swept the area on Tuesday morning. As trawlers started tilting in the impact of the high speed wind, fishermen hurriedly pulled their boats to the jetty. Some of the boats tilted after water entered into them but fishermen managed to pull them before the sunk. Officials in the fisheries department said they had not received any complaint from the fishermen. The sea turned normal in the evening, they said. Meanwhile, the district administration has announced resumption of 'Fishermen grievance redressal meeting', which remained suspended in the district for the last four years. After several fishermen associations presented petitions, Collector K Veera Raghava Rao convened the first meeting for December 27.

The meeting, scheduled to be held at 11 am, would be presided over by Mr Rao and attended by officials of the fisheries and other departments. Both country boat and mechanised boat fishermen from all the coastal areas in the district are expected to attend the meeting. The monthly grievance redressal meetings were suspended in 2014 when K. Nanthakumar was the collector. Recently, country boat and traditional fishermen staged an agitation, pressing charter of demands, including revival of the fishermen grievance redressal meetings. Mr Rao said fishermen could attend the meeting and seek redressal to their grievances. As the Scherzer's span in the Pamban Rail Bridge remained closed for repair works since December 4, movement of fishing vessels through the Pamban channel came to a halt. This, however, did not affect fishing

activities as those in the south side preferred to fish in the gulf of mannar and fishermen in the north in the Palk Bay, officials said.

Tamil Nadu: Unpredictable seas push fishers away from home

<https://indiaclimatedialogue.net/2018/11/30/unpredictable-seas-push-fishers-away-from-home/>

"Mathimurugan M. of Arucottuthurai village is looking for a job abroad. Born in a fisherman's family, the 34-year-old does not want to venture into the sea, even as he waits for an opening. He does not want to continue the family's traditional occupation. Mathimurugan is not alone. Many young men from traditional fishing communities prefer working abroad as manual labourers to fishing. Arucottuthurai, a coastal village, is part of Vedaranyam municipality in Nagapattinam district, Tamil Nadu. According to municipality officials, the population of the fishing village was 2,592 as of 2017. About 300 young men of Arucottuthurai are believed to be working abroad. Though fishermen from neighbouring coastal villages such as Vizhundhamavadi and Vellapallam also take up jobs overseas, Arucottuthurai, near Kodiakkarai or Point Calimere, has more of its young fishermen abroad. Change in lifework Fishermen quitting their occupation and going abroad is not new, according to the villagers. "My grandfather went abroad but my father stuck to fishing, said 24-year-old Manikandan S.

It became a trend among the youth of the fishing community about 15 years ago. Karpagam Udayasuriyan (50) is candid that her son Prabhu does not know fishing and that she forced him to go abroad. "I didn't want my children's families to experience poverty like I did, she said. Widowed when her son and daughter were toddlers, she survived by doing whatever labour work she could find in and around her village. Mathimurugan, who lost his father at sea during a fishing trip, had decided that he would not take up the traditional livelihood, but would work abroad. With three younger sisters to care for, he felt that fishing was a highly risky occupation. Increased vulnerability Accidents happened earlier as well, but not so frequently. Most often the fishermen managed to come ashore in their wooden catamarans. Over the years, the fishermen started observing a change in wind patterns and ocean currents, making it difficult to navigate their way and reach the shore safely. Manickam V. (75) said that they knew wind direction and ocean current over the seasons earlier, but not now.

Traditional knowledge learnt during fishing trips while accompanying older family members helped them judge the waters and decide whether to venture into the sea or not and where they would net a good catch. The older fisherfolk are not able to judge the sea's characteristics now. Vivekanandan. V, secretary of Fisheries Management Resource Centre (FishMarc), an organisation promoting sustainable resource management, attributes the unpredictable nature of the sea to climate change. According to the fishermen, the changes became more obvious after the 2004 tsunami. "The sea has become more choppy and rough in recent years, said Rajendran

V., who has been fishing for more than 25 years. Though the fisherfolk are not able to attribute the shift to changing climate, they are able to perceive the changes. “Unlike the northern Coromandel Coast, the topography, hydrography, sediments and current patterns are peculiar to this area, Joe Kizhakudan of Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Chennai told indiaclimatedialogue.net. “The wave action and wind impact are severe, making the fishing craft wobbly, leading to nets getting entangled.

While Manickam kept repeating that the tip had disappeared, Rajendran explained that from their village they could see the Kodiakkarai beach projecting into the sea, which they usually referred to as the tip. Kodiakkarai is the last point in the Coromandel Coast, before the coast changes direction into the Palk Bay area, the two having distinct and different ecosystems. “The land must have disappeared about 20 years ago, said Rajendran. A closer look at the satellite maps reveals a shift in a small stretch of the coast between 1984 and July 2018, the furthest and latest period for which images are available.

Rajendran finds waves higher now and increasing suddenly at times. “Also the sea has moved in and so the distance between the village and sea is less now, said Manickam. The sand dunes, the thorny plants on the dunes and the casuarina trees that acted as natural barriers also disappeared during the tsunami. “While the fishermen face risk at sea because of changing weather patterns, the families at the coast are vulnerable because of loss of barriers, said Mathimurugan. Reduction in fish diversity and catch The changing climate has not only made fishing more risky, but has resulted in reduced fish diversity and dwindling fish resources. “Fish such as kooral, kathalai and poovaali are not at all seen these days or we catch them in extremely small numbers, said Rajendran. “The first two are big croakers of Scianidae family and they are definitely scarce, said Kizhakudan.

Nowadays the fishermen do not find uluvai and naangal also – larger and shorter sharks. As per CMFRI's marine fish landings of 2013 and 2017 pertaining to Tamil Nadu, while catch of oil-sardines, croakers and black pomfrets has decreased, that of ribbon fish, snappers and skates has increased. Vivekanandan attributes increased landings to fishermen increasing their fishing area and the use of ring seines. According to Kizhakudan, the coast known for large predatory fishes several decades ago, is giving way to small pelagic fish, caught in large quantities. “When some species decline, others move into the ecological space vacated by them, said Vivekanandan. This means that the fishermen also catch newer varieties of fish. “While the changing ocean currents make navigation difficult, it also leads to shift in species concentration, Vareethiah Konstantine, zoology professor and environmentalist who has been studying coastal ecosystems, told indiaclimatedialogue.net.

“Some disappear, some thrive. Arucottuthurai fishermen claim that no one in their village uses prohibited ring seines and pair trawlers, but other people using these means has led to over-

exploitation and depletion of resources. Loss of traditional fishing skills Unlike the handful from the older generation that went abroad after a few years of fishing, the present generation is as good as non-fishers in their knowledge of fishing. “Among the working population, 20-25% work abroad, said Manimohan R. of FishMarc, who did a recent study about migration of fishermen in Cuddalore. The construction industry attracts the most number of unskilled and semi-skilled migrants from Tamil Nadu, 11.4% of the total, according to the Tamil Nadu Migration Survey – 2015, carried out by the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum. Those who go abroad – even those who have undergraduate degrees and technical diplomas – work as labourers in the construction, oil and shipping industries, referred to as general workers.

Mathimurugan joined as a general worker and managed to become a driver after seven years. The young men's earnings are almost comparable to what the fishermen earn. While Manikandan's father earns a minimum of Rs 12,000 as a helper in a boat, he earns Rs 20,000 abroad and sends home Rs 14,000. Yet, citing uncertainties of earning and inherent risks in fishing, besides social conditions, the young prefer to work abroad.

At the destination, fishing does not figure in the occupation of migrants. Naturally, those who fished earlier lose their traditional skills. This is obvious in the occupation of returned migrants. About 2.4% of the migrants work in the fisheries sector on return. However, according to Manimohan some fishermen going to Gulf countries work in fishing vessels and resume fishing on return after a few years. Kizhakudan tries to get the youth from fishing communities interested in related vocations such as sea cage farming, aqua sports, marine life education and the like, to enable them to be financially independent, but it is a difficult pitch. Manikandan and Mathimurugan are trying again to go abroad, despite having lost money to fraudulent agents and despite tough working conditions. Destruction caused by weather events such as the recent Cyclone Gaja helps them justify their decision. Given the many uncertainties involved in fishing, to the young men from fishing communities, the call of the foreign land is stronger than the call of the seas.

India and Sri Lanka: Reviving Indo-Lanka relations: Reigning in bottom trawling

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/reviving-indo-lanka-relations-reigning-in-bottom-trawling-45299/>

"A study conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) finds out that out of the 600 marine stocks monitored globally, 52% have been fully exploited against a meagre 3% of underexploited fish stock. Mechanised trawlers stand as one of the prominent reasons for depletion of the Indian marine ecosystem. In 2015, the Sri Lankan authorities had claimed to have spotted 40,544 Indian trawlers in their territorial waters, touting them to be solely responsible for the dearth of resources in the Palk Bay region. The ethnic commonality of Indian and Sri Lankan fisher folk is harmoniously celebrated by these two marine allies.

However, frequent poaching in the disputed waters of Katchatheevu, a 285-acre uninhabited island, a rich fishing ground located in the Palk Bay region, has become a source of major conflict between them. One of the reasons of this conflict emerges from the presence of Indian trawlers at the Sri Lankan side of the Palk Bay.

Tamil Nadu has 5,887 registered mechanised boats (as of March, 2016) and 4,500 registered trawlers, half of which, depend on Sri Lankan waters for their catch, after having rummaged all resources on their side of the bay. Trawlers are a source of peril to the Sri Lankans because of their capacity to destroy wide areas of the seafloor. So as to curtail their existence in the bay, bottom trawling must first be regimented. In 2006, the United Nations General Secretary reported that 95 percent of damage to seamount ecosystems worldwide is caused by deep-sea bottom trawling. One of the prominent reasons for such a sweeping impact of this technique is its unselective behavior. Due to a high by-catch to total catch ratio, the practice causes detrimental harm to non-targeted species, and more so to juvenile fish species. Approximately 1,000 by-catch deaths of marine species are witnessed every day through bottom trawling.

The genesis of this Indo-Lankan conflict dates back to late 1960s when the potential of harvesting shrimp resources in the Palk Bay region along with the acquisitiveness for earning foreign exchange from markets of Europe, United States and Japan was realised. The motorised trawlers gradually increased, replacing the old fishing crafts. Domestic governance: The India-Sri Lanka outlook Since pervasiveness of deep-sea trawling emerges as one of the impetuses towards the convulsion of the fishing rights dispute in Palk Bay, it is believed that the contested issue of demarcation of the mutually acceptable international maritime boundary line (IMBL) would reach a substantial resolution only once the existing trawling fleet is downsized in the region. In a move to restrict Indian trawlers in the area, the Sri Lankan Parliament (SLP) promulgated a ban on the practice in July 2017 by unanimously passing an amendment to the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act, along with an increase in fines on foreign vessels found poaching in the country's waters, by passing an amendment to the Fisheries (Regulation of Foreign Fishing Boats) Act, 1979.

While this legislative moves are obviously targeted against the Indian fishing fleet, they have caused collateral damage to Sri Lanka's own interests too, as curbing the disparaging impact of bottom trawling has also affected the livelihood of over 2.5 million fishermen, who, as per the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, contributed a share of 1.3 percent to the GDP in 2016. Alternatively, the Indian government has smartly envisioned a path of regulations over an absolute bar on the practice. With deep-sea fishing being considered as an alternative to bottom trawling, the Centre, under its Neel Kranthi Mission ('Blue Revolution Scheme'), launched a three-phase (2017-2020) project, to make trawlers switch over to deep-sea tuna long-liner-cum-gill netter boats, a measure expected to provide an alternative source of livelihood to fishermen communities, along with unlocking a potential of 1.7 million tonnes of underexploited and unexploited fish. With Tamil

Nadu having a total of 608 marine fishing villages as of 2015, and supporting close to 12 lakh fisher folk (9.64 marine fisher folk and 2.28 inland fisher folk), India could have certainly not afforded this huge loss of livelihood of fisher folk as well as to the industry that contributes 1.07 percent to the national GDP, with the present fish production standing at 6.4 million metric tonnes.

A 2015 report suggested how the use of tuna long-liner-cum-gill netter boats could change the fishing method of Rameshwaram fishermen, thereby reducing their arrests by the Sri Lankan Navy. In 2015 alone, 70 trawlers were confiscated with a prosecution of over 450 fishermen. At least 100 deaths were reported in the same year on account of poaching into Sri Lankan waters. While gill nets and long-liners too have their respective shares of impact on the seabed, one of the studies of the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) finds that bottom trawl fishing stands out as the most detrimental to deep-water corals and other vulnerable species, diminishing marine diversity and productivity. National Policy on Marine Fisheries Aiming to replace as many trawlers as possible, the Indian Government adopted the National Policy on Marine Fisheries (NPMF) in 2017.

While seeking to encourage entrepreneurship and public-private partnership in marine fisheries sector, the policy overlooks sea security, an integral part of the social security and development of fishermen and their vessels. It falls short of addressing the real problems of small coastal fishermen. The deterioration of our territorial sea and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) at the hands of the first-come first-take principle wasn't enough that this policy has further brought in relegation of fisheries management and non-delineation of access rights to marine resources. NPMF only adds fuel to the fire by intending to put private investments in deep-sea fishing at the forefront, thereby allowing back door entry for foreign players, and conveniently ignoring the aspect of protection of small artisanal fishermen and fisheries management. The international diaspora on fisheries conservation is strongly endorsed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14) which advocates elimination of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing practices.

The Council of the European Union revised its legislation in June 2016, imposing a ban on deep sea fishing by bottom trawlers below 800 meters in European Union and Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF) waters. Countries like Brazil, Chile, Germany, the Netherlands, and South Africa along with most Pacific island nations too stand in stern opposition of the practice. However, with bans inviting loss of livelihood of stakeholders, it is vital to introduce a much pragmatic and holistic alternative prior to pronouncing an enforcement measure. Many a times, countries embrace unsustainable forms of fishing to meet the exigencies of foreign markets. More often than not, the jeopardy of these reckless techniques are ignored. Changes in terms of introducing scientifically-tested technology, capable of combating the high

by-catch to total catch ratio, could be brought in, along with timely modifications of existing fishing gears for their contact with the seafloor.

The need for greater people-to-people ties between the two nautical neighbours was pressed during Prime Minister Modi's meeting with the Sri Lankan Parliament (SLP) delegation, where the sentiment once again failed to include the fishermen communities. While the Indian government is successfully diverting its fisher folk towards deep-sea fishing, the fate of coastal fishermen stands dicey. A mechanism concentrated solely on new technology which proliferates private sector participation hampers the welfare of artisanal fisher folk. Cross-country partnerships on conservation of marine ecosystem could procure sturdy benefits, while also maintaining the sanctity of international obligations, if only adopted jointly by India and Sri Lanka.

Tamil Nadu: Isro official apprises HC of transponder to aid fishermen

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/isro-official-apprises-hc-of-transponder-to-aid-fishermen/article25173362.ece>

"A scientist from Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) appeared before the Madras High Court on Tuesday and explained the salient features of a transponder developed by it to keep track of fishing vessels on the high seas using GSAT-6, a geostationary communication satellite built by it. A Division Bench of Justices S. Manikumar and Subramonium Prasad were apprised of the technical details by Rama Murali, Scientist (D) from Isro. After hearing him and Assistant Solicitor General G. Karthikeyan, the judge asked the scientist to put his submissions in writing by Friday. They also directed Additional Government Pleader E. Manohar to find out from the State government as to whether it would be possible to make installation of the transponders mandatory in all boats used to fish in the Palk Bay area where complaints of confrontation with the Sri Lankan Navy galore. Mr. Murali had told the court that Isro had made 1,000 transponders for a pilot project and each of it costed Rs. 40,000.

However, he added that the cost could be reduced to Rs. 25,000 each if orders were placed in large numbers. After recording his submission, the judges wanted to know whether the government would be able to provide any subsidy. Judges' view The judges were of the view that installation of the transponders would not only prevent the fishermen from crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) but also help in finding out the veracity of their allegations of the Sri Lankan Navy trespassing into Indian waters to assault them. In his submissions, the ISRO scientist said, the transponder would help the fisheries department on the

mainland to locate the exact place where every fishing boat was stationed and issue warnings in case they cross the IMBL.

The fishermen could also send SOS through an app installed in their mobile phones. The scientist however, cautioned that the only requirement for uninterrupted communication was that the fishermen should always keep the transponders switched on. "If they switch off the transponders and try to fish beyond the territorial waters, then they would be doing so at their risk. No one can help them, the senior judge said. The submissions were made during the hearing of a public interest litigation petition filed by Fishermen Care, a non governmental organisation represented by its president L.T.A. Peter Ryan. The petitioner's counsel L.P. Maurya claimed that a majority of the fishermen were not averse to fixing the transponders on their boats.

Tamil Nadu: Why haven't you thought of supplying GPS to fishermen? Madras High Court asks Centre

<https://www.news18.com/news/india/why-havent-you-thought-of-supplying-gps-to-fishermen-madras-high-court-asks-centre-1864283.html>

"The Madras high court has directed the Centre to file an affidavit explaining the steps taken by it to prevent Indian fishermen from crossing the international maritime boundary line and enter the Lankan waters. A division bench, comprising Justice S Manikumar and Justice Subramonium Prasad, asked why the Centre has not thought of supplying global positioning system (GPS) to the fishermen to help them know the area and the boundary where they can go fishing. The bench was hearing a plea from Fisherman Care, a non-governmental organisation, on Friday. The petitioner sought to raise the matter of human rights violations committed by the Lankan Navy against Indian fishermen, with the International Court of Justice for taking action against the Lankan Navy for allegedly violating the 1974 pact between the two countries. The bench then posted the matter after two weeks for further hearing.

On August 21, the court had directed the Tamil Nadu government to file the status of the plea filed by former chief minister, late J Jayalithaa, in her capacity as All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) general secretary before the Supreme Court in 2008. Jayalithaa had sought a direction to the Centre to declare as null and void the 1974 and 1976 agreements under which Katchatheevu was ceded, saying the accords were the root cause of the untold misery suffered by the state's fishermen. The additional director of fisheries has submitted before the court the steps taken by the state government on the issue of arrests and attacks on fishermen in the Palk Bay.

India: Policymakers destroying seas around India

<http://indiaclimatedialogue.net/2018/08/29/protect-marine-ecosystems-to-hold-back-climate-change/>

"With nearly 87% of oceans impacted by humans, the urgency to protect marine ecosystems has only increased to safeguard not just livelihoods and wildlife, but to combat climate change as well, says a study by the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society. Ocean and coastal preservation is an untapped, nature-based solution to climate change and should play a bigger role in global climate action under the Paris Agreement, Eliza Northrop, an associate of the World Resources Institute, said in a blog. Northrop wrote that blue carbon ecosystems such as mangroves, sea grass meadows and kelp forests are 10 times more effective at sequestering carbon dioxide on a per area basis per year than boreal, temperate, or tropical forests, and about twice as effective at storing carbon in their soil and biomass. They also play a crucial role in protecting coastal infrastructure and communities from climate impacts, including storms and floods.

Trapping carbon India's coasts and the seas nearby have mangroves and sea grass that play a crucial role in trapping carbon. Also, oceans' carbon sequestration is not limited to marine vegetation. "Marine environments sequester more carbon than terrestrial ecosystems. It is not only vegetation but animal life also sequesters large chunks of carbon, for example coral reefs. Mud flats also recycle large chunks of carbon, Deepak Apte, Director of Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and a marine biologist who has recorded over 5,000 dive hours and studied marine issues of India closely, told indiaclimatedialogue.net. "But with ocean acidification, we are reducing carbon sequestration capacity of our oceans. We must pull all stops to save our oceans. Our land is limited, 90% of which is occupied by ice caps, eight billion people and associated infrastructure. Our real answers for climate change mitigation lie mostly in oceans, considering it covers 70% of earth surface.

Abused oceans Despite the fact that oceans can play a critical role in offering climate solutions, they are being neglected, over-exploited and polluted, and are not considered a priority when it comes to formulating policies or executing them, experts say. On one hand, increasing human pressures, large-scale fishing, coastal development, sea bed mining, underwater noise and marine plastic pollution are posing a grave danger to oceans. On the other, oceans are bearing the brunt of climate change as well. Ocean acidification due to absorption of excess carbon from the atmosphere is causing coral bleaching, resulting in loss of corals that help trap carbon. "Increasing sea temperatures is slowly taking a toll of the marine ecosystem, though there is a lack of studies on the issue in India. Sea grasses are very crucial for local fisheries, and fish catch is declining over the years, so much so that Tamil Nadu has banned fishing for two months every summer season which is also the breeding season for the fish, Vedharajan Balaji, the Director of the Organization for Marine, Conservation, Awareness and Research (OMCAR), who has

studied marine ecology in the Palk Bay that lies between southern India and Sri Lanka, told indiaclimatedialogue.net.

“After the 2004 tsunami, many organisations gave boats to local fishermen. There was a big surge in the number of fishing boats, which is also damaging the sea grass ecosystem and impacting marine life. Sea grasses suffer due to damages from large-scale trawling as well, scientists say. Riches of Palk Bay The 15,000 sq. km Palk Bay is rich in biodiversity and home to species like humpback whales, bottle-nosed dolphins, porpoises and the endangered dugongs. There are five districts in Tamil Nadu on the shores of Palk Bay. Around Rameswaram, a heritage site located in Ramanathapuram district, sea grass is abundant and extends up to 150 km along the coastline and 8 km into the sea. There are 14 species of sea grass in Palk Bay alone. “If you imagine a water column 8 km wide and 150 km in length, that much of area is full of sea grass. It is like a huge paddy field under water, Balaji said.

“These grasses serve as the feeding ground for marine species like dugong, a threatened species. One dugong feeds on 50 kg of sea grass in a day. Threats to sea grasses mean threat for dugongs as well. Balaji, who is working with the local communities on sustainable fishing and livelihoods, has seen first-hand how human pressures on these fragile sea grasses have been increasing. Ignored by policymakers Despite the pressures on marine ecosystems important for slowing down climate change, India's policies are overlooking this important role of oceans. Activists and experts have raised red flags over India's new coastal regulation zone notification. The latest amendments aim to not just regularise existing illegal constructions in ecologically fragile coastal zones, but also aim to throw more coastal areas open for development projects. “We need to speak of impacts due to policy deficiencies. For example, unregulated coastal infrastructure can have severe consequences for near-shore ecosystems, thus directly affecting communities.

The proposed Coastal Zone Notification 2018 will have long-term irreversible impacts on our near shore water and the consequences will spill over to our future generations, Apte told indiaclimatedialogue.net. “The dilution of NDZ (no development zone) to 50 m (from 200 m) is not just risky, it is suicidal. We are aware that sea level rise is a reality and while sea is coming towards land, we are moving close to sea, a sure recipe for disaster. Link with river linking Even India's contentious river-linking projects can have an impact on India's marine ecology. “Every decision maker today is talking about linking rivers and state that we are wasting rainwater by allowing it to go to the sea. By not knowing how vital this runoff is for sea and coastal fishery, we are, knowingly or unknowingly, directly influencing the delicate balance of oceans, said Apte. “The rainwater runoff not only takes fresh water to the sea, it also take nutrients from forests to the sea, thereby helping in sea productivity and assist fish spawning. It is estimated that by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the seas and degradation is already being seen in rapidly declining fish stocks across the globe. There is a need to bring more

marine areas under protection, involve local communities in conservation and robust and skilled management of oceans to conserve these blue carbon ecosystems, experts say.

Tamil Nadu: 'Expedite construction of fish landing centre'

<https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/expedite-construction-of-fish-landing-centre/article24805686.ece>

"Collector K. Veera Raghava Rao on Tuesday asked the authorities to make ready the fish landing centre, being established at Kunthukal near Pamban at a cost of Rs. 70 crore by December, 2019. The fish landing centre was established by the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Department to save fishermen of Rameswaram fishing jetty, who had been fishing in the Palk Bay, from getting arrested by the Lankan Navy on the charge of trespassing into Lankan waters. The centre would have facilities to berth 300 mechanised and 100 country boats and the fishermen could venture into the Gulf of Mannar for fishing. Those who had opted for deep sea fishing could also use the facility. It would have 100 MT cold storage godown and an auction hall. Officials said construction of a jetty inside the sea for a length of 156 metres would be taken up. The project would be fully completed in time, they said. Stating that the reconstruction of Mookaiyur fishing harbour near Sayalkudi had been put on fast track, the Collector said the harbour would be ready by March.

It would have facility to berth about 400 mechanised boats. He checked the facilities for fishermen, safety of fishermen when they ventured into the sea for fishing after inspecting the Mandapam fish landing centre. He asked the fishermen to desist from using single use plastic carry bags, disposable plastic materials and revert back to bio-degradable items. Revenue Divisional Officer R Suman, Assistant Director of Fisheries, Manikandan, Gopinath and Sivakumar, Assistant Director, Panchayats A Chelladurai were present.

Tamil Nadu: Deep-sea fishing scheme fails to draw fisherfolk of Rameswaram

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/deep-sea-fishing-scheme-fails-to-draw-fisherfolk-of-rameswaram/article24605469.ece>

"The deep-sea fishing scheme, billed as the flagship programme of the Union and State governments aimed at preventing bottom trawling by Tamil Nadu fishermen of the Palk Bay, has received tepid response. Launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a high-profile event in Rameswaram in July last year, the Rs.1,600-crore scheme has, since then, only 519 fishermen

joined it as against the target of 750 for the inaugural year. Of these, only 375 fishermen, half of the target, have been able to get official clearance for their applications. The scheme has been billed as a solution to the problem of Tamil Nadu fishermen of the Bay region getting caught frequently by the Sri Lankan authorities for having crossed and engaged in fishing in the territorial limits of the neighbouring country. Under the scheme, the unit cost of each long liner-cum-gillnetter has been estimated at Rs. 80 lakh, of which Rs. 56 lakh would come from the Union and State governments. Of the remaining Rs.24 lakh, the beneficiary has to contribute Rs. 8 lakh with the provision for a loan of Rs.24 lakh from financial institutions.

The Fisheries Department says the response from the fisherfolk has been “encouraging. An official, who has been part of the project for over a year, says “more than anything else, you need to do confidence building among the fishermen as many have been doing single-day fishing. A year ago, opinions were expressed in certain quarters that the project would not take off. If you look at the response in this backdrop, it is quite good, the official says. Pointing out that social mobilisation of the fisherfolk fraternity is the prerequisite to the success of the scheme, the official says the department has been taking steps in this regard. At present, 56 vessels are being constructed. The department expects the 16 vessels, which are being built by Cochi Shipyard Ltd, to be ready by October-end. “Once they are available, we can demonstrate the effect of the scheme, which will trigger interest among more fishermen, the official says, hoping that 2,000 of them will eventually be covered in the next few years. P. Jesuraj, secretary of the Ramanathapuram district unit of an association of fishermen owning mechanised boats and whose brother is a beneficiary of the scheme, says although well meaning, the unit cost of each boat under the scheme is high.

“Apart from the cost of the vessels, we have to spend Rs.20 lakh for nets. Totally, each fisherman will have a loan of Rs.44 lakh, which will be too heavy for him to bear, he says. His association is pleading for allowing two fishermen to own a single boat with the government absorbing the cost of Rs.1 crore per boat and nets. Through this arrangement, the authorities can save a portion of taxpayers' money, set apart for the scheme, while sparing the fisherfolk from the burden of loans, Mr. Jesuraj adds.

Sri Lanka: Swimming with the fish and fishing with the fisher

<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2018/07/22/opinion/swimming-fish-and-fishing-fisher>

"Mechanised bottom trawling - a technique used to catch shrimp dwelling in muddy bottoms of the oceans is quite detrimental to resource sustainability. Sri Lanka became one of the handful of countries to ban mechanised bottom trawling by the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (Amendment) Act No. 11 of July 2017. Yet, this ban is hardly enforced within the country and trawling is practiced in the Northern, Western and North-Western parts of the country, despite protests being made by small scale fishers. The very authorities who banned bottom trawling

have turned a blind eye to the use of this technique. One cannot let the fish swim, while at the same time go with the fisher and catch that fish. You cannot do both. Findings of the Interactive Platform on Bottom Trawling organised by the Sri Lanka Forum for Small Scale Fisheries (SLFSSF): The Issue In bottom trawling, enormous bag-shaped nets are pulled along the ocean floor, catching every rock, piece of coral, and fish in their paths.

It literally scrapes the ocean floor clean of life and is considered to be the underwater equivalent to clear-cutting forests. The major argument against bottom trawling is that, it is quite detrimental to the ecosystem and produces large quantities of by-catch, thus threatening the long-term resource sustainability and livelihoods of small scale fishers who fish in the same area. Trawling for shrimp carried out in Sri Lanka is of two types; wind propelled trawling by traditional crafts in Negombo and, mechanised bottom trawling in Wattala, Hendala and Kalpitiya in the western coast, Pesalai and Pallimunai in the Mannar District and, Gurunagar, Velvettithurai, Mathagal, Mandathivu and Delft in the Jaffna District. Except in the case of age old wind-propelled trawling in Negombo, which is hardly considered as 'destructive', trawling in other areas is done with mechanised bottom trawling which is considered as quite 'damaging'. There are about 300 such bottom trawlers operating in the North and 23 in Kalpitiya. These trawlers are modified versions of the 3.5 ton day boats with inboard engines. In theory, they have been operating 'illegally' because trawling is banned by the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (Amendment) Act no. 11 of 2017.

Many of the trawlers are owned by non-sea going investors who often own more than one boat. Small scale fishers, especially those using FRP (fibre reinforced plastic) boats with outboard engines and those using traditional crafts, such as outrigger canoe (oru), theppam, vallam, kattamaram (catamaran) have been vehemently protesting against trawling on the grounds that they cause severe environmental damage and threaten the livelihoods of thousands of small scale fishers, pushing them into the depths of poverty. This takes place in a context of increased fishing pressure on resources, declining resources and income which holds true for the whole country. However, the other side of the coin is that, trawling is considered as a very efficient technique in harvesting shrimp resources that contribute significantly to the country's shrimp catches and exports, finally strengthening Sri Lanka's economy. The question is, whether we could sustain earning resource rents from the shrimp fishery by completely banning bottom trawling.

Interactive Platform on Trawling In addressing the above issue, the SLFSSF, whose membership consists of academics, researchers, state actors, community organisations and civil society organised an Interactive Platform (IP) aimed at resolving these issues. (The IP is a platform where all relevant stakeholders get together to deliberate upon their knowledge and experience about a certain issue and finally arrive at decisions acceptable to all). This platform was organised at the Social Science Research Center of the University of Kelaniya on May 5th

2018, with the participation of a number of present and past academics of the Universities of Ruhuna, Sri Jayewardenepura, Kelaniya, Wayamba and Jaffna, scientists from NARA (National Aquatic Research Agency) and other private organisations, fisher leaders from the North and the North West and civil society organisations like NAFSO (National Fisheries Solidarity Organisation). The participants deliberated intensively to understand the different facets of the issue to arrive at agreements acceptable to all parties.

As a second step, deliberations were also carried out in the field (at Kalpitiya), with office bearers of fisheries cooperatives, rural fisheries organisations and fisheries officials, to clarify certain additional issues. This article is based on the results of these deliberations, which have several implications for decisions concerning the issue of trawling in Sri Lanka's marine waters. The Deliberations In its deliberations, the IP took two positions which were in direct opposition to each other; (i) strictly enforce the ban trawling and, (ii) allow trawling in areas where trawling can be done without adverse impacts on the ecosystem and the human system. Since it was brought to notice, that trawling by Indian fishermen in Palk Bay has been substantially reduced, the focus of the discussions was on trawling in the Northern and North-Western parts of Sri Lanka and not Palk Bay. The scientists pointed out that mechanised bottom trawling technique is quite efficient in harvesting shrimp that would contribute significantly to Sri Lanka's income from sea food exports. While recognising the adverse impacts of bottom trawling on the ecosystem, it was revealed that with proper demarcation (zoning) of fishing grounds, trawling can be done with minimum impacts to the environment and to the livelihoods of small scale fishermen utilising ocean resources.

It was also recognised that scientific knowledge on the exact impact of trawling on the ecosystem and the human system is imperfect and that more research studies are required to be undertaken to understand these impacts. The participants pointed out that a good technical alternative to trawling to catch shrimp has not yet come into being, and this complicates any decision to ban bottom trawling. In respect of the by-catch issue, the scientists argued that the by-catch produced by trawling varied significantly over the year, depending on the shrimp season and thus huge by-catches reported over the electronic and print media are not realistic in the long run. The fisher stakeholders and the CSOs strongly emphasised that trawling has to be completely banned. Fisher representatives from both Jaffna and Kalpitiya said that there have been serious threats to the livelihoods of thousands of small scale fishers due to bottom trawling of their fishing grounds. The Jaffna fishers have already met the fisheries authorities in Colombo requesting for an immediate ban of this technique.

However, they were of the opinion that bottom trawling could be permitted in other areas where there would be no serious impacts on the ecosystem and to the livelihoods of small scale fishers. The Kalpitiya fishers spoke of the very high by-catch produced by trawlers removing large quantities of non-shrimp resources causing resource degradation and livelihood threats to small

scale fishermen. They suggested replacing the trawl gear with gear used by small scale fishers, such as trammel nets, traps and bottom set gill nets, although some of them are banned now. However, a clear link between ecosystem damage by trawling and threats on the livelihoods of small scale fishers was not clearly established, although they believed that there is a link. They argued against continuing research on zoning to demarcate areas for trawling and against scientific research because they considered trawling as a technique that is bad for the ecosystem and thus needs to be completely banned. Deliberations revealed that trawling has threatened the livelihoods of thousands of small scale fishers in the Mannar and Jaffna districts while the same was not clearly evident in the Puttalam district.

The importance of scientific research and innovations for sustainable use of fisheries resources and sustainable livelihoods was acknowledged, although available scientific knowledge in the area of trawling was recognised as 'weak'. The Implications What came out of the deliberations have several implications for all parties, particularly for the relevant Government authorities who are finally supposed to make decisions on the issue. It is to be recognised that mechanised bottom trawling is an efficient technique for harvesting shrimp resources in muddy bottoms of oceans, in a context where a comparable alternative technique to harvest such resources has not been developed so far. Although technically sound, this technique damages the bottom causing adverse impacts on the ecosystem, which could be quite grave in certain resource areas, where the ocean floor is very rich in bio-diversity and when such trawling areas are also used by small scale fishers. The technique might yield sizeable quantities of by-catch during certain times of the year, consisting of juvenile fish and other fish which could provide nutrition and food security to small scale fishers, some of whom are the poor and the marginalised.

In a situation, where a lack of alternative employment, poor access to livelihood capitals (credit, insurance, better fishing assets, training and capacity building) and weak community organisations, fishers might turn to more intensive use of fisheries resources, which is often done by resorting to destructive fishing practices, degrading the ecosystem and the human system further in the long run. It is also to be noted that, trawling requires a craft and trawl gear, which cost around Rs. 3.5 million. Therefore, most of the trawlers are owned by the rich in fishing communities, some of them own more than 1 craft. As a consequence, income from shrimp is concentrated in the hands of these rural investor class. While this will add to the country's growth, such growth benefits are unlikely to trickle down to the poor at the bottom of the social ladder. The implication of the above for the issue at hand, points not only to the need to base decisions on the best scientific evidence available, but also to adopt a precautionary approach when the available scientific evidence is inadequate.

This points to two important facts. First, further research is needed in Sri Lanka to understand the impact of trawling on the ecosystem and the human system. Second, decisions concerning bottom trawling cannot be postponed until the results of such research are made available. In this

respect too, the best course of action to be adopted at present is to impose at least a temporary ban on trawling in environmentally sensitive and conflicting areas, such as the trawl centers in the north. In other areas with shrimp resources, trawling may be permitted on the grounds that it is an efficient technique to harvest shrimp, if scientific evidence reveal that this technique can be carried out with minimum damage to the ecosystem and the human system. Following the deliberations of IP on trawling, the SLFSSF recommends that, the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (Amendment) Act No. 11 of 2017 banning mechanised bottom trawling be enforced in Mannar and Jaffna districts with immediate effect, where bottom trawling is carried out at present, apart from Palk Bay area where the ban is strictly enforced.

The same cannot be recommended for the Puttlam area due to the absence of any serious conflicts, clear evidence of bottom trawling causing livelihood threats to lagoon fishers and complaints made to authorities by either fisheries cooperatives or by rural fisheries organisations. Yet, following the recommendations of the 1992 Rio Declaration (Earth Summit) and the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995), one should follow a precautionary approach in decisions concerning trawling, because of the flaws in available scientific evidence. Thus, the SLFSSF recommends that the trawl ban act be enforced in the Puttlam-Kalpitiya area at least for a period of one year, to establish the link between trawling and its impact on the resources and the people. This has to be done by rigorous data collection during this study period, on fishing technology, fish catches, fishing incomes, and other scientific studies of marine life. NARA and the universities could take up this initiative and the SLFSSF pledges its fullest support to successfully carry out this assignment.

This will allow an assessment of the situation after one year, with clear implications for the future of bottom trawling in the area. However, there would be issues concerning the families who are dependent on trawling such as the crew labourers and service providers, who are likely to be displaced. These families should be supported by the fisheries authorities, by providing them with a compensation payment during the one year study period. Given the high catch ability and the economic benefits trawling generates, enforcement of the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (Amendment) Act, No. 11 of 2017 for the whole country may not be the optimal course of action. What is important is to identify areas where this technique can be used with minimum damage to the ecosystem, areas where the recovery of the resources are fast and where the threats to the livelihoods of small scale fishers exploiting such areas are minimal.

Thus scientific research in the field of trawling should continue, with special focus on zoning of trawl areas, designing less damaging trawl gear, best practices to follow and other relevant areas.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen get green signal for venturing into the sea

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/fishermen-get-green-signal-for-venturing-into-the-sea-ramanathapuram/article24444705.ece>

"Rameswaram fishermen, who could not get fishing permits to set out to sea due to a warning issued by Meteorological department in the past few days, secured the green signal for venturing into the sea after their leaders met Minister for Fisheries D. Jayakumar in Chennai on Tuesday and told him that denial of fishing permits crippled their livelihood. The warning applied only to those who set out for multi-day deep sea fishing and not to other mechanised boat fishermen, who set out for fishing in the Palk Bay thrice a week, they claimed. Wind with a velocity of 35 to 45 km per hour in the region during July–August was normal and the wind condition never affected their single-day fishing. Last year also similar weather conditions prevailed but they were never denied fishing permits, they said. The fishermen leaders also told the Minister that since June 15, after the end of the 61-day ban period, they had gone for fishing only on five days before they went on a strike, protesting the arrest of 16 fishermen by Sri Lankan Navy.

They ended the strike after meeting Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami in Chennai on July 13, but could not resume fishing due to the weather warning, they said. As they depend on fishing to eke out a living, the denial of fishing permits badly hit their livelihood, they claimed. Fishermen leader P. Sesu Raja said that the Minister explained to them that the officials denied them fishing permits considering their safety and they should avoid venturing into the sea when adverse weather conditions prevailed. Fishermen associations should take a call when the situation was not conducive for fishing, the Minister said. The fishermen association leaders also met Minister for Information Technology M. Manikandan and Director of Fisheries G.S. Sameeran. Meanwhile, Deputy Director of Fisheries E. Kathavarayan said in the absence of weather warning to fishermen, the officials issued fishing permits to 75 fishermen in Mandapam on Tuesday. Rameswaram and Pamban fishermen would be given fishing permits on Wednesday, he added.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen resolve to avoid IMBL trespass and arrest

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/fishermen-resolve-to-avoid-imbl-trespass-arrest/article24168127.ece>

"The last fishing season ended on a sour note, with the Sri Lankan navy arresting more than 100 fishermen on charges of trespass into Lankan waters. As the Rameswaram fishermen gear up for a new season, they are determined to avoid repeat episodes of trespass and arrest. The 61-day ban on fishing, imposed from April 14 to replenish marine resources, ends on Friday midnight and the fishermen in coastal districts are all set to set sail either the same night or the

next morning depending on the weather. After an informal meeting in Rameswaram on Thursday, leaders of mechanised boat fishermen associations decided to set out for fishing on Saturday morning. “But if the fishermen in other districts venture into the sea on Friday night, we will also follow them, they said. More than 7,000 fishermen will set out for fishing in 1,500 trawlers from Rameswaram, Pamban, Mandapam and other areas in the district.

The Rameswaram fishing jetty was abuzz with activity on Thursday with fishermen loading ration items, diesel and other paraphernalia in their trawlers. Deputy Director of Fisheries E. Kathavarayan, who joined recently, said the department would issue fishing permits to boats only after getting clearance from the weather office. He held talks with the leaders and fishers four times in a span of ten days and advised them not to cross the IMBL. “This year the emphasis was more on not crossing the IMBL, he said. After a traumatic fishing season during 2017-18, the fishermen have taken a conscious decision not to cross the IMBL and get into trouble, fishermen leader P Sesu Raja said. If at all they cross the IMBL, it will be because of drifting due to adverse weather conditions, he pointed out and urged the Centre to prevail upon the Lankan government not to arrest such fishermen. As they have opted for deep sea fishing and started building tuna long liners, the government should ensure peaceful fishing in Palk Bay at least for a year or until they ended bottom trawling, he added. During 2017-18, the Lankan navy arrested 464 fishermen, including more than 100 from Rameswaram and neighbouring districts, and confiscated 77 trawlers. The Lankan authorities later released all the fishermen but detained the trawlers. More than 160 trawlers were detained in Lankan ports.

India and Sri Lanka: Making fishing in Palk Bay ‘safe’

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/making-fishing-in-palk-bay-safe/>

"Come 15 June, fishermen in Tamil Nadu will be embarking on a new fishing season. As in past years, there had been a moratorium on fishing activities in the State – 61-day fishing ban to facilitate fish breeding and is expected to increase production. Anxieties still await Tamil fisher folk in Rameswaram and other coastal areas, as they venture back into the troubled waters of the Palk Bay. Their concern isn't misplaced. Three instances of Indian fishermen's arrests in January this year and seven other detentions by the Sri Lankan navy in the month following has created unease in Tamil Nadu's coastal community. While Sri Lankan law enforcement agencies have resorted to heavy-handed tactics, Indian fishermen question the former's right to carry out arrests in a contested sea-space on the pretext of national and maritime security.

Indeed, the Palk Bay, a narrow strip of water separating the State of Tamil Nadu from the Northern Province of Sri Lanka – a rich fishing ground for both countries – continues to be the disputed space. The major issue is the ongoing disagreement over the territorial rights of the island of Katchatheevu. Sri Lanka has accused Indian fishermen of frequent poaching in the island nation's waters, and damaging the marine environment through frequent trawling. Earlier

this year, the Sri Lankan Parliament increased fines on foreign vessels found poaching in the country's waters, by passing an amendment to the Fisheries (Regulation of Foreign Fishing Boats) Act, 1979. The new legislation, which slaps a minimum and maximum fine of 6 million SLR and 175 million SLR – obsessively to deter foreign vessels from fishing in its territorial waters – has been deemed protectionist by Indian fishermen. While the conflict is multilayered, its political dimension has tended to overshadow other important factors.

In particular, Indian analysts say, the trauma faced by the families of fishermen detained in foreign jails hasn't received much attention. It is pertinent that in most cases, the arrested fishermen have been the sole earners for their families. Their incarceration in Sri Lankan jails has inflicted trauma and suffering on their families. Sadly, the Indian agencies have failed to protect the human rights of their fishermen, resulting in the rising anger in Tamil Nadu. The frequent arrests and boat confiscations have strained India-Sri Lanka relations. Even though Colombo has attempted to placate New Delhi and repair the damaged relations, its gestures haven't been fully convincing. Bottom trawling – A marine hazard But Delhi too isn't blameless in the matter. Indian policymakers have been far from diligent in enacting a legislation to discourage the practice of bottom trawling by Tamil Nadu's fishermen, wreaking havoc on the marine ecology of the Palk Bay. The single most detrimental activity for the health of the marine ecosystem, bottom trawling has resulted in severe depletion of marine resources in the Bay's shallow littorals. Rameswaram has been a critical hotspot.

With over a 1,000 mechanised trawlers and a few hundred country boats, many of them motorised, fishermen from the Southern Indian province have been poaching in Sri Lankan waters, devastating the region's marine ecology. Sri Lankan observers say India's inability to enact and enforce a law banning bottom trawling is the main reason things are remaining in a state of crisis. In July 2017, Sri Lanka became the first Asian country to ban the aggressive method of fishing and declared it an offence by unanimously passing an amendment to the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act, attracting a fine of LKR 50,000 with two years of imprisonment. Driven perhaps by the Sri Lankan criticism, Indian officials have introduced a scheme to make 2,000 trawlers switch over to deep-sea tuna long liner-cum-gill-netter boats. The deep-sea fishing project, launched under the 'Blue Revolution' Scheme, has led to a considerable investment of funds, but without much result on the ground.

The problem, apparently, is the competitive nature of Tamil Nadu politics, where the fisheries' dispute with Sri Lanka has become an electoral plank for regional political parties. Local leaders call for a unilateral abrogation of the maritime boundary agreement, even instigating Tamil Nadu fishermen to fish in Sri Lankan waters. With the Central and State governments working at cross-purposes, there has been little consensus on adopting a coherent and lawful stand on the matter. The incongruity between the Union and State government is a major deferent towards a resolution. Leasing Katchatheevu to Indian fishermen in perpetuity while letting the Sri Lankan

counterparts maintain firm ownership of it, was suggested by policymakers, but it only convoluted the dispute surrounding the principal rights over the island. The other proposal where licensed Indian fishermen were permitted to fish in Sri Lankan waters for five nautical miles from the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL), was bolstered by the Tamil Nadu government, but could never be enforced owing to non-conformity by the Central Government. For Indian law enforcement agencies, the focus understandably has also been on the repatriation process, which has not only been delayed, but also actively subverted. The rights of Indian fishermen, some say, are being violated by foreign authorities with the growing instances of false charges of spying and espionage for inadvertent crossing over of the IMBL.

Despite many ministerial meetings involving Indian and Sri Lankan officials, the problem is nowhere near resolution. Even then, there is hope that the matter is moving towards an acceptable solution. The Joint Working Group (JWG) on fisheries and Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) have been working towards expediting the repatriation of the detained fishermen. The Coast Guards of India and Sri Lanka have set up a hotline for better coordination among the maritime forces. Both sides are trying to accommodate each other's concerns and adopt a holistic approach. New Delhi, it seems, is giving some thought to joint patrolling and surveillance in the Palk Bay, as also the possibility of an immediate compensation for affected families. Yet, no measures are likely to be effective unless India and Sri Lanka recognise the need to sensitise the fishing communities about the rights of the 'other', and the sanctity of international and bilateral agreements. New Delhi and Colombo need to recognise that it is only through empathy, understanding and lawful conduct that conflicts such as the one in Pak Bay can be comprehensively resolved.

Tamil Nadu: Fresh impetus for deep-sea fishing

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/fresh-impetus-for-deep-sea-fishing/article23793758.ece>

"The deep-sea fishing project launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in July last to end bottom trawling in the Palk Bay received a fresh impetus on Sunday, when a private firm set up its ship building yard at Kunthukal in Rameswaram for building 'Tuna long liners and gillnetting fishing vessels'. The Tharangambadi-based 'Uma Ship Builder & Repairs Pvt Ltd', one of the 18 companies empanelled by the government for building long liners, became the first firm to set up the shipyard in the island after signing an agreement with fishermen beneficiaries to build 10 long liners. After the Cochin Shipyard Ltd (CSL) signed an agreement with 16 fishermen beneficiaries and the Tamil Nadu Fisheries department for building long liners in January, the Uma Ship Builder entered the fray and became the first to set up the yard in the island. The company has set up the yard on two acres of leased land at Kuzhandai Yesu Nagar in Kunthukal.

On Sunday, the 'first plate cutting' ceremony, marking the making of the long liners, was held at the site in the presence of Minister for Information Technology M. Manikandan, Collector S. Natarajan, Fisheries Director G.S. Sameeran, Managing Director of Uma Ship Builder T. Ranganathan and 10 fishermen beneficiaries. Each vessel was built at the cost of about Rs.80 lakh with Centre providing 50% (Rs. 40 lakh) subsidy and the State government, 20% (Rs. 16 lakh). The beneficiaries make 10% (Rs.8 lakh) contribution and helped to raise 20% (Rs.16 lakh) institutional finance. "We are pleased to be associated in the ambitious project in a small way and we will make the long liners ready in nine months, said Mr Ranganathan.

The company has developed the design of the vessels in consultation with the beneficiaries. The decision to set up the yard in Rameswaram was to help the fishermen in repairs and refurbishing, he said. A few more empanelled private companies were expected to set up their ship yards in the island, Mr Sameeran said. The private ship yards would be required to adhere to the quality assurance protocol, he said. Fishermen who opted for deep-sea fishing were being trained by the Central Institute of Fisheries Nautical and Engineering Training (CIFNET). So far 198 fishermen were trained and the government proposed to train 500 more fishermen, he said, addressing the function. Mr. Natarajan said with marine resources depleting in the Palk Bay, deep-sea fishing was the only option for the fishermen, especially when they faced problems in fishing in the Palk Bay. Deep-sea fishing has been proved successful in many countries, he said. Mr. Manikandan said the deep-sea fishing scheme had been worked out to wean away the fishermen who get arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy while fishing in the Palk Bay and provide them an alternative. Fishermen should avoid venturing into the Pak Bay and take up deep-sea fishing for peaceful fishing, he said.

Tamil Nadu: Officials promise speedy fund release for fishing harbour

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/officials-promise-speedy-fund-release-for-fishing-harbour-ramanathapuram/article23562603.ece>

"High-level officials of the Central government inspected the fishing harbour site at Mookaiyur in the district on Monday and promised to speed up release of funds for completing the work at the earliest to decongest Rameswaram fishing jetty. The officials – Sanjay Panda, Joint Secretary (JS) External Affairs Ministry, Brajendra Navnit, JS, PMO, and Ramesh Kumar, JS (Fisheries), inspected the work at Mookaiyur and expressed satisfaction over the progress. They were accompanied by Collector S. Natarajan, State Fisheries Secretary K. Gopal, Fisheries Commissioner G.S. Sameeran and Commissioner of Fisheries Development Palpandian. The fishing harbour is being built at a cost of Rs.113.90 crore with the Central and State governments sharing the cost on a 50:50 basis, mainly to divert fishermen from fishing in the Palk Bay and getting arrested by Sri Lankan Navy personnel after entering their territorial waters.

After the foundation stone for the project was laid in March last, State Fisheries department put the project on fast track and completed nearly 67% of the work, though there had been delay in release of funds by the two governments. "The Centre has so far released only Rs.18 crore and State Rs.28.5 crore, but we have completed work for Rs.72 crore with the help of contractors, officials said. Construction of 300-metre-long eastern 'training wall' and 418-metre-long rubble mound stone (breakwater) had been completed, officials said. Construction of 370-metre-long western training wall and 495-metre-long diaphragm wall was going on in full swing, they said. After inspecting the facility, Mr. Gopal said the fishing harbour would have facilities to berth 250 mechanised boats and 200 country boats. It would also have facilities such as auction centre, net mending centre, fish drying yard, restroom and radio transmission centre. The officials had been instructed to complete the work by January next, he said. Later, the officials inspected the site at Kunthukal near Pamban, where the government is building a fish landing centre at a cost of Rs.70 crore. At the stakeholders meeting held at the Central Marine Research Institute, the officials interacted with the beneficiaries of deep sea fishing. When some stakeholders pointed out that the cost of a boat exceeded government's estimated cost of Rs. 80 lakh, especially after the introduction of the GST, the officials said their financial concerns would be addressed.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen end yet another fishing season on sore note

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/fishermen-end-yet-another-fishing-season-on-sore-note/article23553070.ece>

"Fishermen of this and other districts, who ventured into the Palk Bay for fishing, ended yet another fishing year on sore note after the Sri Lankan navy had arrested as many as 464 fishermen and confiscated 88 trawlers during 2017-18 on charges of trespassing into the Lankan waters and indulging in illegal fishing. As the 61-day fishing ban period commenced on the night of April 14, the fishermen of Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai, Nagapattinam and Thanjavur looked back to find the 10-month long fishing season from June 2017 to March 2018 yet another traumatic season with lasting solution for their vexatious problem still a distant dream. "Every time we begin a new season, we venture into the sea hoping that officials would be sympathetic to our plight and things would turn for better but end up with tears, said P Sesu Raja, leader of mechanised boat fishermen association in Rameswaram. During 2017, the Lankan navy had arrested 408 fishermen, including about 200 from Pudukottai and more than 100 from Ramanathapuram and confiscated 77 trawlers, officials in the fisheries department said. Till March this year, the Lankan navy has arrested 56 fishermen and impounded 11 trawlers, they said.

The only solace was that the Lankan authorities had released all the fishermen after they staged series of protests highlighting 'inhuman' conditions under which the fishermen were jailed, fishermen said. The detention of more than 160 trawlers had caused a severe blow to the livelihood of fishermen, they said. The fishermen had high hopes when the Sri Lankan and Indian governments formed the Joint Working Group (JWG) to meet at regular intervals and address their problems but JWG seldom met, leave alone addressing their woes, they rued. Asserting that the fishermen were keen on switching over to deep sea fishing, the leaders urged the authorities to ensure trouble free fishing in their 'traditional waters' in the Palk Bay till they switched over. As there was no point in salvaging the trawlers, which had suffered extensive damage, the Centre and State governments should compensate the boat owners and help them take up deep sea fishing, they suggested. Pressing the twin demand, they proposed to launch an agitation with about 100 fishermen in Delhi soon, they said. The leaders felt that the ban on fishing to facilitate breeding would be meaningful only if the officials prevented traditional fishermen, who continued fishing, using high power engines. They suggested that the CMFRI launch large scale sea ranching of important species during the ban period to augment the marine resources.

Tamil Nadu: Governor sails in Palk Bay to study fishermen issue

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/governor-sails-in-palk-bay-to-study-fishermen-issue-rameswaram/article22935854.ece>

"Governor Banwarilal Purohit took a ride in the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) hovercraft in the Palk Bay on Monday. The Governor, who was on a day's visit to the island, spent an hour in the Palk Bay, discussing with ICG officials the distance between Rameswaram fishing jetty and the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) near Katchatheevu and the factors that led the fishermen to cross the IMBL when they set out for fishing. Mr. Purohit, who reached Mandapam station of the ICG at 5.30 p.m., was taken to the Palk Bay in Hovercraft 'H-195'. He was accompanied by Commandant Rajan Bargoitra, Coast Guard Regime, East, and Commandant M. Venkatesan, Station Commander, Mandapam. "This is basically to get a first hand knowledge of the problems faced by the fishermen in the Palk Bay, an ICG official said. On arrival at the Mandapam station at 6.30 p.m., the Governor, accompanied by his wife and family members, visited the photo exhibition depicting the activities of the ICG's Mandapam station. After completing his visit, the Governor left for Chennai by train at 8.15 p.m.

Expressing happiness that the Governor sailed in the Palk Bay to study and understand their problems, P. Sesu Raja, a fishermen leader, said Mr. Purohit would have seen for himself the narrow stretch between Rameswaram fishing jetty and the IMBL near Katchatheevu and why the fishermen were forced to cross the IMBL, risking their lives. "We want the Governor to take up

our issue with the Centre and find a permanent solution, he said. The fishermen wanted to meet the Governor and present a petition, but could not get an appointment, he said, and urged the Governor to take initiatives to secure the release of the fishermen detained in Sri Lanka along with their trawlers.

Sri Lanka: Destructive and unsustainable practice of bottom trawling resurfacing in Sri Lanka?

<http://www.sundaytimes.lk/180304/business-times/destructive-and-unsustainable-practice-of-bottom-trawling-resurfacing-in-sri-lanka-283904.html>

"In July 2017, Sri Lanka became the first country in Asia to completely ban bottom trawling and the use of destructive trawl nets. Six months later, the Department of Fisheries proposed to weaken this ban by allowing 'less destructive' trawling in designated trawling zones. A majority of fishermen in the Northern Province are outraged by this announcement and have protested the non-enforcement of the ban. Eleven representatives from Jaffna and Puttalam-based fisherman's cooperative societies travelled to Colombo on January 17 to meet the Minister of Fisheries and petition him to enforce the ban in full. The Minister has since promised to fully implement the legislation after the local government elections. This article recalls the context in which Sri Lanka's ban on bottom trawling and trawl nets was instituted and presents three reasons for immediately enforcing the ban.

Trawling: easy profit but destructive and unsustainable Mechanised bottom trawling inflicts severe environmental damage. It destroys critical coral reefs and sea grass bed habitats due to the fact that it involves dragging nets across the seafloor. Meanwhile, mechanised trawl nets are indiscriminate and result in high levels of 'by-catch' in which marine mammals, sea turtles, birds and a wide variety of commercially less valuable juvenile species are trapped in these nets, and often perish. By-catch due to trawling has been recorded as high as 92 per cent in Sri Lanka. In this overarching context, the influx of thousands of Indian mechanised bottom trawlers to the Northern coast of Sri Lanka presented an enormous environmental and economic challenge. The combined efforts of Northern fishermen, key political actors including TNA MP M.A. Sumanthiran, and research-based advocacy groups, resulted in the landmark ban on mechanised bottom trawling and trawl nets in July 2017.

Since the passage of the legislation, fewer Indian trawlers have been seen operating in Sri Lankan waters. Yet many Sri Lankan vessels are taking up the destructive and unsustainable practice due to non-enforcement of the ban Need to enforce the ban There are at least three reasons as to why the Government of Sri Lanka including the Ministry of Fisheries should enforce the total ban on mechanised bottom trawling and trawling nets without delay.

1. Developing a sustainable fishing industry Globally, fishing stocks have declined dramatically. A FAO study in 2016 placed 31.4 per cent of fish stocks globally as 'overfished', 58.1 per cent

'fully fished' and only 10.5 per cent categorised as 'under fished'. Sri Lanka is surrounded by rich fishing resources and stands to benefit greatly from high quality, sustainably harvested marine products that fetch a higher price on the global market. This is because global markets often require seafood products to be produced through sustainable fishing practices. For example, many supermarkets in Europe have a policy of selling only eco-labelled fishery products. In Germany, approximately 50 per cent of supermarket shelves are stocked with eco-labelled fishery products.

Moreover, Sri Lanka's biggest exports markets are Europe and the US which already demand adherence to strict health and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities (IUU) requirements. In 2012 and 2013, Sri Lankan seafood export earnings grew at approximately 20 per cent. However, earnings contracted sharply in 2015 (-32.9 per cent) following the one and a half-year ban on Sri Lankan seafood to the EU for IUU infringements. Export earnings are now recovering following reform of the fisheries sector. However, this incident should serve as a reminder of the economic cost of not adhering to IUU requirements. Hence, both overfishing of global fish stocks and an increasing demand for sustainably harvested fish products place Sri Lanka in a position to both sustainably increase its relatively low catch rates and supply a growing niche market.

The continued use of illegal trawl nets and environmentally unsustainable methods may reduce opportunities to access higher value overseas markets for seafood products from Sri Lanka, as well as develop a domestic market for higher quality, sustainably harvested, seafood. 2. Meeting domestic and international obligations Enforcement of the ban will help Sri Lanka meet domestic and international obligations. Based on reports of local fishermen, trawl net fishing continues within an international Ramsar Wetland protected area adjacent to Wilpattu National Park, and the Palk Bay, which is another ecologically sensitive site. Moreover, in Sri Lanka, the by-catch of trawling often includes dugongs and sea turtles (mainly the Olive Ridley), both of which are declared vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. Due to their unsustainable and indiscriminate nature, trawlers violate the Flora and Fauna Protection Ordinance, which protects certain species of wildlife, such as sea turtles and dugongs, and restricts activities within protected areas.

Trawlers also arguably violate at least three international conventions, including the Ramsar Wetlands Convention, the Convention on Migratory Species, and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) for these same reasons. 3.Preventing new incursions of Indian trawlers The enforcement of the ban remains crucial to preventing new incursions by Tamil Nadu trawlers. Tamil Nadu trawlers were compelled to withdraw from disputed traditional waters following the ban. It was on environmental grounds that the dispute was concluded. In fact, the ban has prompted India to taking measures to reform its own fishing industry by considering a ban on bottom trawling in the Palk Bay. Yet, by failing to enforce the ban on Sri

Lankan vessels that operate trawl nets, Sri Lanka now risks losing its hard-fought moral position, and destabilising diplomatic ties with India.

Another emerging argument that lends support to the full enforcement of the law is fuelled by reports of bullying by boat owners engaged in illegal trawl net fishing who are allegedly cutting nets of traditional fisherman. Whether these events are substantiated does not take away the fact that the presence of boats engaged in trawling under any guise, is illegal. Implementation of the ban under the Act serves to quell such emerging issues and focus on supporting positive reform to the fishing industry supported by this government. The Government of Sri Lanka is positioned to transition Sri Lanka's fishing industry into a global supplier of sustainable seafood products. It can also promote Sri Lanka as a global champion on environmental protection and marine conservation. In the face of the clear reasons outlined in this article, the Minister of Fisheries must keep his promise to fully enforce the ban on mechanised bottom trawling and destructive trawl nets.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen strike work ahead of Pamban road bridge siege stir

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/strike/article22753946.ece>

"Rameswaram fishermen struck work on Wednesday and decided to continue the strike in support of the February 16 'Pamban road bridge siege agitation' announced by fishermen leaders in five coastal districts in Tamil Nadu and Karaikal in the union territory of Puducherry to press for their three-point charter of demands. The fishermen launched the strike in support of the 'siege agitation' called to draw the attention of the Central and State governments on the plight of the fishermen in the coastal districts who ventured into the Palk Bay for fishing for their livelihood and get arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy on charges of crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). As the fishermen were not allowed to fish in their traditional waters in the Palk Bay and the arrest continued unabated, leaders of fishermen in Karaikal and in the districts of Nagapattinam, Pudukottai, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Ramanathapuram decided to lay siege to the Pamban Road bridge. "We have decided to lay siege to the Pamban bridge as the arrest of fishermen by the Lakan Navy continued even after Tamil Nadu government repeatedly taking up the issue with the Centre, P. Sesu Raja, Rameswaram fishermen leader, said.

More troubles are in store for them as the Lankan government has amended its Fisheries Act to increase the fine on Indian vessels found fishing in Lankan waters and the Indian government remained silent, he said. The protest was to urge the Centre to secure the release of all the arrested fishermen with their boats, ensure peaceful fishing in the Palk Bay till the fishermen switched over to deep- sea fishing or found alternative livelihood means and urge the State government to further increase the diesel subsidy, he added. Meanwhile, R. Baby, Revenue Divisional Officer, held a meeting with the leaders of Rameswaram fishermen and urged them to drop the 'siege agitation' but the leaders said that the decision was collectively taken by leaders

in six districts and they were helpless. In a bid to resolve the issue, G.S. Sameeran, Additional Director of Fisheries, is likely to hold a meeting with the leaders from the six districts here on Thursday, officials said. In a related development, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police Pradeep Kumar held a meeting with Superintendent of Police Omprakash Meena here on Wednesday and reviewed the security arrangements. He also discussed the siege agitation issue.

Tamil Nadu: Fishing in troubled water is now costly

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/fishing-in-troubled-waters-are-now-costly/article22645151.ece>

"When Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month, voicing concern about Sri Lanka's recent decision to impose steep fines on any foreign vessel found fishing in the island's territorial waters, he was simply following his late leader Jayalalithaa's footsteps. In 2015, she wrote at least 21 letters to the Prime Minister, asking New Delhi to put pressure on Sri Lanka to stop arresting Tamil Nadu fishermen. In 2016, until October, she wrote 22 similar letters, according to officials. Whether it was O. Panneerselvam as Chief Minister, or V.K. Sasikala as the interim general secretary of the ruling AIADMK after Jayalalithaa's passing, the top leadership has been consistent in this matter. However, Sri Lanka appears to be firm in its position. Amending its existing Fisheries Act, Colombo has decided to impose anything between LKR 6 million (approximately ₹25 lakh) and LKR 175 million, as fine on foreign vessels fishing in its seas.

'Fishermen follow fish and fish know no boundaries' is a common refrain in Tamil Nadu, when it comes to taking a position on the highly-contested Palk Bay fishing conflict. But for all practical purposes, the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) demarcates territory clearly, and most vessels used by Tamil Nadu fishermen – often bottom-trawlers known for their destructive technique that virtually scrapes the sea bed – have GPS systems installed, enabling fishermen to follow their course easily. The issue continues to be a talking point in high-level bilateral meetings, in addition to figuring extensively in the discussions of the Joint Working Group set up by the neighbouring countries to resolve the problem that has been dragging on for a decade. Proactive measures Following years of bilateral deliberation and the consistent resistance put up by Sri Lanka's northern fishermen, the two governments came up with some proactive measures. On Tamil Nadu's part, with assistance from the Centre, efforts are on to convert bottom-trawlers into boats suitable for deep-sea fishing.

The State hopes to get 500 deep-sea vessels ready for use this year, according to sources in the Tamil Nadu government. This, along with Sri Lanka's ban on bottom-trawling in July 2017, has had some welcome impact. Both the Sri Lankan Navy and the northern fishermen based in Jaffna and Mannar have observed that fewer Indian trawlers are spotted in their waters. However, that their Tamil Nadu counterparts are yet to completely stop trespassing is worrying the northern fishermen. According to the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources in Colombo, as many 49 Indian fishermen have been arrested from the beginning of this year, and 10 of their boats confiscated. Though some are sceptical about using strong legislation while responding to what is fundamentally a livelihood issue, others feel that is the only option in the absence of other safeguards for fishermen in the war-affected regions in the north.

It is in this context that the northern fishermen welcome the higher fines. Experts have put forth a range of other suggestions, including setting up an autonomous international authority to manage the Palk Bay and its depleting marine resources initiatives that will warrant much thought, time and effort from both ends. As for northern fishermen, they only wish that Tamil Nadu will take a more honest and comprehensive look at the problem, while making a case for the livelihoods of the fisher-folk in the State.

Kerala: Cochin Shipyard signs contract for Tuna Long Lining & Gillnetting Fishing Vessels

<http://www.uniindia.com/cochin-shipyard-signs-contract-for-tuna-long-lining-gillnetting-fishing-vessels/business-economy/news/1121897.html>

"Cochin Shipyard (CSL) said that company has signed on January 29, 2018, contracts for construction of 16 nos Tuna Long Lining & Gillnetting Fishing Vessels under the diversification of trawl fishing boats from palk bay into deep sea fishing boats under Central sector on Blue Revolution Scheme of with financial assistance from Government of India and the Government of Tamil Nadu. This is CSL's first entry into the fishing vessel construction segment. CSL, known for its capabilities in construction of big & high-end specialised vessels wishes to bring in quality, modern and efficient products to this currently unorganised sector thereby benefitting not only the fishing community, but also partnering in the effort to sustain the ecology by promoting long lining & gillnetting activities as against the highly damaging trawling that currently exists in this space, company said in a filing with BSE. The current order for 16 boats, has been construed by CSL as a Pilot project as part of its attempt to venture into and understand the requirements of this sector. CSL is partnering with the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) in this endeavour with inspection under Indian Register of Shipping.

Kerala: After Palk Bay trawling ban, India invests in deep-sea fishing vessels

<https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/supply-trade/after-palk-bay-trawling-ban-india-invests-in-deep-sea-fishing-vessels>

"India's largest shipbuilding yard, Cochin Shipyard Limited, has developed a prototype for a deep-sea fishing vessel and has set a goal of beginning production in the next five to six months. The project began after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a ban on bottom-trawling in Palk Bay and asked fishermen there to consider a switch to deep-sea fishing as an alternative, according to the Hindu. Initially, the shipyard will build 22 vessels, which fisherman ordered through a government program at a reduced price tag of INR 8 million (USD 125,009, EUR 105,025) per vessel. The vessels will be delivered in the second half of 2018, the newspaper reported.

The prototype vessel was developed in consultation with India's Central Institute of Fisheries Technology and fishermen based in Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu state. This is the first time an Indian government-owned ship building firm has become involved in building a deep-sea fishing vessel, the newspaper reported. Based on its work, the fisheries department has also floated the possibility of expanding the program to an additional 20 ship-builders, including yards in Ahmadabad, Mumbai, Mangalore, Chennai, and Puducherry. The government has also arranged for a corresponding training program with the Central Institute of Fisheries Nautical and Engineering Training (CIFNET) in Chennai, designed to train prospective deep-sea fishermen. The training program was developed in coordination with the National Institute of Fisheries Post-Harvest Technology and Training, and funded by National Fisheries Development Board.

After Palk Bay trawling ban, India invests in deep-sea fishing vessels

<https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/supply-trade/after-palk-bay-trawling-ban-india-invests-in-deep-sea-fishing-vessels>

"India's largest shipbuilding yard, Cochin Shipyard Limited, has developed a prototype for a deep-sea fishing vessel and has set a goal of beginning production in the next five to six months. The project began after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a ban on bottom-trawling in Palk Bay and asked fishermen there to consider a switch to deep-sea fishing as an alternative, according to the Hindu. Initially, the shipyard will build 22 vessels, which fisherman ordered through a government program at a reduced price tag of INR 8 million (USD 125,009, EUR 105,025) per vessel. The vessels will be delivered in the second half of 2018, the newspaper reported. The prototype vessel was developed in consultation with India's Central Institute of Fisheries Technology and fishermen based in Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu state.

This is the first time an Indian government-owned ship building firm has become involved in building a deep-sea fishing vessel, the newspaper reported. Based on its work, the fisheries department has also floated the possibility of expanding the program to an additional 20 ship-

builders, including yards in Ahmadabad, Mumbai, Mangalore, Chennai, and Puducherry. The government has also arranged for a corresponding training program with the Central Institute of Fisheries Nautical and Engineering Training (CIFNET) in Chennai, designed to train prospective deep-sea fishermen. The training program was developed in coordination with the National Institute of Fisheries Post-Harvest Technology and Training, and funded by National Fisheries Development Board.

Sri Lanka: Navy apprehends 13 Indian fishermen along with two trawlers

<https://mumbaiirror.indiatimes.com/news/india/sri-lankan-navy-apprehends-13-indian-fishermen-along-with-two-trawlers/articleshow/62371182.cms>

"The Sri Lankan navy apprehended 13 Indian fishermen along with two boats for allegedly fishing in Sri Lankan territorial waters in the seas of Katchatheevu on Thursday morning. The fishermen were later produced in a court and remanded to custody. With this incident a total of 84 Indian fishermen and 159 boats, apprehended since November, 2017, continue to remain in Sri Lankan custody. On Thursday there were also reports of Sri Lankan navy causing damages to fishing boats and implements belonging to fishermen from the state. Meanwhile chief minister Edappadi K.Palaniswamy wrote to prime minister Narendra Modi seeking his personal intervention to secure the release of all the fishermen and boats. All the 84 fishermen apprehended along with 14 fishing trawlers in 8 incidents recently were fishing in their traditional fishing waters of Palk Bay, Palaniswamy claimed. Recalling that the late leader J.Jayalithaa had challenged the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement of 1974 in the Supreme Court of India, Palaniswamy requested the Centre not to treat the issue of IMBL (International Maritime Boundary Line) as settled. He said the state government is committed to take all possible steps with the support of the Centre to diversify trawl fishing in the Palk Bay to deep sea fishing as a way forward to put an end to the sufferings of our fishermen in the Palk Bay.

Tamil Nadu: Rehabilitating seagrass in Gulf of Mannar

<https://m.timesofindia.com/city/chennai/rehabilitating-seagrass-in-gulf-of-mannar/articleshow/61745647.cms>

"Concerned at the near decimation of seagrass off the state's coast, researchers have begun a vital rehabilitation programme. They planted saplings in a 200sqm area off Thanjavur and Pudukottai districts, part of the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve, between March and May this year and are thrilled to find that about 75% of the colourful plants "are now growing well". Seagrass communities, vital for the survival of the marine ecosystem, including coral reefs, once covered more than 60,000 hectares in the Gulf of Mannar, but various marine activities almost sounded their death knell and the efforts now being taken seem minuscule given the magnitude of the destruction. The damage has not been limited to Tamil Nadu, with researchers saying as much of

35 % of seagrass beds in the country have been destroyed in the past 35 years. Besides, very little study has been done on the plants.

After taking up the three-month rehabilitation project, for which the state forest department sanctioned Rs 4 lakh for each of the two districts, Organisation for Marine Conservation, Awareness and Research (OMCAR) scientists, who possessed scuba diving skills, began extensive fieldwork and planted the saplings. OMCAR founder V Balaji told TOI the 400 sprigs of seagrass species *Cymodocea serrulata* and *Syringodium isoetifolium* were planted in each square metre field formed by burying PVC frames and tied with jute ropes. "We have been monitoring the growth of the transplanted seagrass (as they have vegetative reproduction) periodically. Last month, the buried PVC frames were taken out of the sea to prevent pollution," he said. While admitting that some of the frames had been damaged by fishing nets, Balaji, however, appeared optimistic that the rehabilitation project would flourish and help convert dead seagrass sites into healthy, thriving beds in the near future.

On the seagrass habitat, Balaji said the most extensive beds occurred on soft substrates such as sand and mud. Seagrass meadows were found in coastal waters of both tropical and temperate regions, but were more abundant in tropical seas in comparison to temperate zones, he said. The project, Balaji said, was part of the conservation action plan drawn up by the forest department under the TN Biodiversity and Greening Project to protect the dugongs, medium-sized marine mammals largely dependent on seagrass communities for subsistence. Seagrass, former Zoological Survey of India director K Venkataraman said, had high productivity and provide great ecological and economic services. The ecosystem engendered by seagrass communities is conspicuous and often a dominant habitat in shallow coastal waters. Seagrass meadows are primary producers that contribute large quantities of fixed carbon to the entire coastal ecosystem, he said. But indiscriminate fishing activities, including operation of trawlers, have been wreaking havoc on their already threatened habitat. In the Palk Bay, vast swathes of seagrass beds have been practically ripped out by trawlers and push nets used by country boats. Seagrass generally grow in an area around 8 km off the shoreline, an active fishing area in the Palk Bay, he added.

Tamil Nadu: The deep sea voyage beckons

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/the-deep-sea-voyage-beckons/article20553204.ece>

"A number of options are being worked out to accelerate the implementation of the Rs.1,621-crore deep sea fishing project whose goal is to resolve the vexatious Palk Bay dispute between the fishing communities of Tamil Nadu and the Northern Province in Sri Lanka. The State Fisheries Department and the Cochin Shipyard, billed as the country's largest shipbuilding and maintenance utility that comes under the control of the Union Ministry of Shipping, are currently engaged in developing a suitable type of deep sea fishing boat. The project, envisaging

the conversion of 2,000 trawlers into tuna liner-cum-gillnet fishing vessels, is expected to help transition the fishermen to deep sea fishing, benefiting nearly 14,000 fishermen. To be implemented over three years, the project will, initially, pave the way for the production of 500 such vessels. About 10 days ago, when Madhu S. Nair, Chairman and Managing Director of the central undertaking, was in Chennai, State government officials led by K. Gopal, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries Secretary, had a detailed discussion with him.

“At present, the priority is to come up with the right prototype boat at the earliest. Once this is done, other aspects will fall in place. It is expected that in three to four months, at least 25 boats will be ready, says a senior official in the Fisheries Department, adding that these boats, when used by fishermen, may serve as “demo pieces and expedite project execution. Besides, the State government is planning to assemble a section of the total requirement of vessels. While it has proposed to empanel boat builders, it is also getting in touch with suppliers of accessories such as marine and auxiliary engines, refrigeration unit and slurry ice units. In addition, a training programme on deep sea fishing has been initiated for the fishermen. In the first batch, as many as 76 fishers took part in the training. They were among the 250 fishermen chosen for the project. As part of giving forward and backward linkages, the State fisheries officials are mulling providing arrangements for the export of fish catch.

The target catch for deep sea fishing will essentially be tuna and mackerel, which enjoy a huge demand in the international market. An official makes it clear that there would be no relaxation of the main stipulation, which is the conversion of trawlers into deep sea fishing vessels. Also, there will be little change in the composition of shares of institutional finance (20%) and beneficiary (10%) in the vessel's unit cost, which is ₹80 lakh. The remaining 70% will come from Central and State governments. Bright future Pointing out that several fishermen of Kanniyakumari district have mastered this method and that they are providing their technical expertise to other countries such as Maldives, another official in the State Fisheries department says, “let them [Ramanathapuram fishermen] involve themselves fully in the project as they will increasingly be catering to the international market once they migrate to deep sea fishing.

Tamil Nadu: When protectors turned attackers

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/when-protectors-turned-attackers/article20553171.ece>

"For the doughty fishermen of Rameswaram island, the blue seas beckon no more. The recent 'firing' by the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) is a case of the fence eating the crops, they feel. They will now set out to the sea, because fishing puts food on their table, but they will sail with more trepidation because they fear the onslaught of not just the Sri Lankan navy, but of forces they thought were their “own guardians. The Coast Guard officials have tried to allay their apprehensions but a feeling of insecurity lingers in the minds of the fishermen. Caught unawares

After a week-long strike following a stand-off with the fisheries department over payment of assistance, the fishermen had ventured into the Palk Bay for fishing on November 13, dreading the aggression of the Sri Lankan navy. The fishermen don't hide the fact that they crossed the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) to fish in their "traditional waters (Lankan waters) though the danger of getting arrested and attacked by the Lankan navy loomed large. On that day, at least 30 trawlers, making 15 pairs, forayed into the Lankan waters for 'pair trawling', the destructive fishing method banned both in India and the island nation, but were chased away by the alert Lankan navy.

As the fleet of four Lankan navy vessels stood guard at the IMBL, the fishermen beat a hasty retreat to the Indian waters to find 'Rani Abbakka', the Coast Guard's patrol vessel from Chennai. The fishermen thought the vessel was there to prevent them from crossing the IMBL but became terrified when 'Rani Abbakka' took a different 'avatar' and started chasing them right from 29th nautical mile, adjacent to the IMBL. The chasing continued till it targeted two trawlers to book them for pair trawling. Scared, the fishermen on board the two trawlers tried to get away, as the boat owners would be fined ₹30,000 each if they were caught for pair trawling. They ignored the warning to stop and the chase became more intense and resulted in the 'firing.' After cornering one trawler, four personnel entered the boat and reportedly beat the fishermen with sticks and iron rods for not stopping despite repeated warnings. The fishermen had earned their wrath for not learning or speaking in Hindi, they said. As the fishermen called their leaders onshore and informed them about the incident, word started spreading.

The Coast Guard version started changing as time went on. They first denied firing had happened but later admitted they had fired warning shots from a very low calibre gun to stop the fishermen. Fisheries officials rushed to the fishing jetty to provide medical assistance to the injured fishermen, but hardy folk that they were, the fishermen chose to continue fishing as the injuries were minor. The fishermen rued that there have been attacks by the Coast Guard in the past, though there was never any firing, but they would take it in their stride as they did not want to antagonise the security agency. The fishermen feared that if the ICG checked their identity cards, fishing permits, and registration certificates of boats, most of them would not be able to venture into the sea for fishing.

"If the ICG had admitted that they fired warning shots by mistake and clarified that they never intended to hurt the fishermen we would not have led the issue flare up, said fishermen leader P. Sesu Raja. And when the Coast Guard officials at the Mandapam station called the leaders for conciliatory talks and expressed regret for the 'firing', the leaders extended their cooperation. The fishermen did not want to take a hostile stand against the Coast Guard, though some "external elements tried to foment hatred between the two. The fishermen were well aware they need the assistance of Coast Guard. Coast Guard personnel discriminate against the fisher people, talking in Hindi even if they knew Tamil, alleges Emirat, a fishermen leader. The ICG

should be sympathetic to the cause of the fishermen, who eke out a living, risking their lives, says U. Arulanandham, president of the Alliance for the Release of Innocent Fishermen (ARIF). When Rameswaram and Pamban fishermen were released after months of incarceration in Lankan prisons, the ICG used to bring them to Rameswaram fishing jetty or the Mandapam station so fishermen would go home to waiting families quickly. But, of late, the Coast Guard is taking them all the way to Karaikal, he says.

After failing to assert their traditional fishing rights in the Palk Bay and with a permanent solution to their problems still in the future, the fishermen have been inclined to take up deep sea fishing. They were enthused by the scheme that Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently unveiled with attractive subsidies. “The fishermen are willing to switch over to deep sea fishing but should be given at least two years to phase out bottom trawling, says fishermen leader N. J. Bose. The way forward In the absence of an alternative livelihood to fall back upon, fishermen are persuading their children to look for other careers, says Mr. Bose. The children of many of the fishermen were encouraged to pursue higher studies and the fisheries department organised a coaching programme for the wards of fishermen who wished to appear for civil service examinations. The fisheries department heaved a sigh of relief as the firing issue was quickly resolved.

The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute has chipped in with a training programme on open sea cage farming of select species of fish. But the fisher folk insist on more time to phase out bottom trawling. Concerned over the reported incident of firing, the State government has asked Coast Guard to hold an “impartial probe into the incident and submit a report.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen from different areas have different skills

<https://www.newstodaynet.com/index.php/2017/11/16/fishermen-from-different-areas-have-different-skills/>

"The alleged attack on the fishermen crew from Olaikuda hamlet, near Rameswaram, by personnel of the Indian Coast Guard, set off a train of thought on why the fishermen can't stay off trouble. News Today tried to figure out the traditional and historical background of the trawling methods of the fishermen of Rameswaram and rest of Tamilnadu, that subjects them to these cross-border problems. Whenever a fishermen crew from Nagapattinam, Ramanathapuram or Karaikkal is arrested or attacked by Sri Lankan navy at mid-sea, the first accusation is why should they cross the border having a vast ocean here to fish. “The Coromandel coast of India is long and vast. Having such a resource on hands, the fishermen from Tamilnadu still converge at Palk Bay for fishing where the problem actually arises, said a source from the Fisheries Department of Tamilnadu. The Government of India has made a lot of alternatives for the Tamil fishermen to trawl in deep sea. “Already, the Government of India has set up an Exclusive

Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Bay of Bengal, that stretches for 200 nautical miles from the coast of India. It also includes the coast of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the source said.

The Fisheries Department and the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) are ready to support the fishermen trawl in this deep water. “The Fisheries Department will be releasing subsidy for trawlers of Tamilnadu to fish in EEZ and stay safe from the foreign armed forces, the source added. The problem is that the traditional bloodline of the fishermen from the central coast of Tamilnadu do not have the skill for deep sea fishing, say ocean researchers and marine archaeologists. “It is not as easy as suggested. Genetically, the fishermen from Nagapattinam, Karaikkal and Ramanathapuram have been raised with skill for shallow water fishing for over 10,000 years. Their skill set is exceptional in catching passing fishes than deep sea fish, says S Balasubramani aka Orissa Balu, a marine archaeologist and ocean researcher. According to Balu, “Deep-sea fishing is done only by fishermen from Kanyakumari that, too, from a set of nine fishing hamlets between Thengapattinam and the Kerala border. Not all Tamil fishermen can do deep-sea fishing. So, we cannot impose deep-sea fishing on a fisherman from Ramanathapuram or Nagapattinam. Balu said the depth of EEZ in Bay of Bengal is about 4,000 metres from mean sea level and it is very dangerous.

“For a fisherman from Kanyakumari, their gene has the ability to travel for thousands of miles and so they can go till Iran and the Red Sea for fishing, while fishermen from Kodiakarai or Dhanushkodi will be an expert in trawling fish that pass Palk Bay. In this particular incident, the fishermen from Rameswaram would have been trawling the passing fishes. “The geographical reason for this is that the ocean currents pass from Kodiakarai to Indian Ocean through Palk Bay through which the fishes travel and get caught in their nets. It is their tradition and it is not fair to break it. Be it the Sri Lankan navy or the Indian Coast Guard, stopping the fishermen from practising their tradition is not right. At the same time, when we ask a fisherman to trawl in EEZ, the assurance of fishes getting caught is very minimum for their skill set. For one trip of trawling, he has to spend around Rs 3 lakh. The returns have to be just as good. Will this be possible is the first question, Balu elaborated. Fishermen from the area raise the same question. When News Today approached David Arockiyaraj, a fisherman from Rameswaram, and asked why are they not ready to leave their traditional fishing waters, he said, “First for us shallow water fishing is more feasible in terms of our skills and economics. We have been doing this for thousands of years and it is in our gene.

Tamil Nadu: 3,000 fishermen from Rameswaram keep off the sea to protest Coast Guard action

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/3000-fishermen-from-rameswaram-keep-off-the-sea/article20461579.ece>

"About 3,000 Rameswaram fishermen struck work on Wednesday, registering their protest against the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) for allegedly opening fire and injuring two fishermen when they were fishing on the high seas in the Palk Bay on Monday. More than 700 trawlers were anchored at the Rameswaram fishing jetty as the fishermen resorted to a one-day token strike demanding action against the Coast Guard personnel, who allegedly opened fire on fishermen and for beating up five fishermen after boarding the trawler. "We have decided to observe a day's strike and stage demonstration on Thursday to draw the attention of the authorities to put an end to such attacks by the Indian Coast Guard and the Indian Navy, fishermen leader P. Sesu Raja said. It was very disturbing that the ICG, which was supposed to protect the Indian fishermen, has resorted to firing for the simple reason that the fishermen failed to heed to their caution and stop the boat, he said. Condemning the alleged firing and beating up of the fishermen, U. Arulanandham, president of the Alliance for the Release of Innocent Fishermen (ARIF), and M. Ilango, president of the National Fisherfolk Forum, demanded a high-level enquiry into the incident by the Defence Ministry.

Pointing that Coast Guard officials made contradictory statements an official stating that they never opened fire and another saying that they fired warning shots the fishermen leaders said this clearly showed the Coast Guard tried to cover up the incident but were forced to reveal the truth after the injured fishermen produced the bullet and a doctor certified the wounds as gun shot injuries. The Coast Guard and the Navy had attacked the fishermen in the past but no action was taken against the personnel. "This time, Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman should order a high-level inquiry and fix responsibility, the leaders demanded. If the fishermen were involved in the banned pair trawling, the Coast Guard could have noted down the registration number and reported the matter to the Fisheries Department, they said. This was a clear case of human rights violation, Mr Ilango said and demanded the NHRC to initiate suo motu action.

India: Wildlife Action Plan: More work ahead from a marine conservation perspective

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/wildlife-action-plan-more-work-ahead-from-a-marine-conservation-perspective/story-mAEynEFPUnqNGEN3cF8bL.html>

"Across the world, the history of marine regulation is traced to approaches and worldviews emerging from terrestrial domains. In India, the protection of marine 'wildlife' and spaces which are protected is mainly through the creation of marine protected areas under the

various categories of the Wild Life Protection Act, 1972 (WLPA), or by categorising various species on the protected species lists or 'schedules' of the WLPA. Nearly half a century of WLPA-style protection has passed, but few can claim that marine habitats and species have been well-served by this legislation and its approaches to conservation. Marine conservation perspectives have always been on the margins of the conservation narrative. The new National Wildlife Action Plan (NWAP), in an attempt to change that, suggests some bold steps towards new and inclusive approaches. But how these suggestions are implemented will depend on changing many of the historical attitudes of wildlife conservationists, the forest department, development planners, and the legal edifice of the WLPA.

Marine perspectives The terrestrial approach of the WLPA is based on a foundation that firstly fails to recognise the fluidity of marine species and ecosystems. Nearly all marine species, either in their early life stages or as adults disperse several miles across the oceans and are inherently in a state of flux. Managing such a dynamic system necessitates an ability to think beyond conservative fortress approaches and adopt protection measures that are spatially and temporally dynamic. Nearly all marine species, either in their early life stages or as adults disperse several miles across the oceans and are inherently in a state of flux. Managing such a dynamic system necessitates an ability to think beyond conservative fortress approaches and adopt protection measures that are spatially and temporally dynamic. The second major shortcoming is the inability to perceive marine wildlife as a resource that can be sustainably harvested. This approach is in stark contrast to the perspectives of coastal communities and fisheries departments, thereby bringing the four million fisherfolk who depend on these resources in direct conflict with the WLPA. Bans on the trade of species like seahorses and sea cucumbers persist, despite evidence that shows that the trade has merely gone underground in regions like the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Bay, and that prices have shot up and trade in these items continues in neighbouring Sri Lanka which has not introduced such bans.

Further, the WLPA has few mechanisms to address impacts to habitats from practices like bottom trawling, shipping or marine dredging. The NWAP's call for greater coordination with the ministry of agriculture indicates that there is recognition of the problem. But the proposed action (that calls for immediate amendments to the fisheries laws rather than broadening the scope of the WLPA itself) indicates a hesitancy to reflect upon the limitations of the WLPA. More important, India's coastal and marine habitats today are first and foremost threatened by industrial developments that are already changing entire inter-tidal habitats, mangrove forests and estuarine flows across coastal India. The political decision that will fuel the desired institutional coordination hinges on the Indian government embracing a philosophical turning point on the question of growth and development.

Indo-Lanka ministerial fisheries talks decides to stop bottom trawling

<http://www.sundaytimes.lk/article/1033171/indo-lanka-ministerial-fisheries-talks-decides-to-stop-bottom-trawling>

"During the Third Indo- Lanka Ministerial level talks on poaching issue, both countries decided to stop issuing fresh permits for bottom trawling practice in each other's waters as an initial step to find longstanding solution for the dispute between two countries. According to the Joint Press Communique recent initiatives taken by the Government of India to end bottom trawling in the Palk Bay area were shared with the Sri Lankan side. ""While acknowledging the efforts taken by India to end bottom trawling, the Sri Lankan side informed about the measures taken by Sri Lanka in order to prevent illegal fishing,"" India and Sri Lanka held Ministerial level talks on Fishermen's issues on last Saturday where Radha Mohan Singh, Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India met with Mahinda Amaraweera, Minister for Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development of Sri Lanka.

The talks followed the 3rd Meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries held in New Delhi on October 13. The Joint Working Group was co-chaired by Secretary (Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries), Government of India and Secretary (Ministry of Fisheries & Aquatic Resources Development), Government of Sri Lanka. These include launching of a programme on diversification of bottom trawlers into Deep Sea Fishing Vessels for tuna long lining under Blue Revolution Scheme, construction of Mookaiyur and Poompuhar fishing harbours, capacity building programmes for fishermen of Palk Bay area in deep sea tuna long lining. Besides, fresh registration for bottom trawlers in the Palk Bay area has been banned by the Government of Tamil Nadu.

In addition, alternative livelihood opportunities for the fishing communities in Palk Bay area are being offered through open sea cage farming, seaweed farming and other allied coastal fisheries activities. The co-Chairs of the JWG briefed the outcome of the issues discussed during the 3rd JWG meeting for consideration of the Ministers and for further directions. The Ministers agreed that a permanent solution to the fishermen issues should be found at the earliest. The Indian side was satisfied with the progress on release of apprehended fishermen and detained fishing vessels in the recent past, while reiterating the release of all the remaining Indian fishermen and fishing vessels in Sri Lankan custody.

India and Sri Lanka: Acts against bottom trawling

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-acts-against-bottom-trawling/article19863478.ece>

"India on Saturday informed Sri Lanka that it has taken measures to stop bottom trawling by its fishermen in the waters near the Sri Lankan coastline. During a weekend meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) in Delhi, officials expressed satisfaction over the release of Indian

fishermen by Colombo, and reiterated the need to bring the rest of them back to India. “Recent initiatives taken by the Government of India to end bottom trawling in the Palk Bay area include the launch of a programme on diversification of bottom trawlers into deep-sea fishing vessels for tuna long lining under the Blue Revolution Scheme, construction of Mookaiyur and Poompuhar fishing harbours, and capacity-building programmes for fishermen of the Palk Bay area in deep sea tuna long lining. Besides, fresh registration for bottom trawlers in the Palk Bay area has been banned by the Government of Tamil Nadu, said a joint press communiqué issued after the Ministerial meeting held on Saturday.

The Ministerial meet was attended by India's Minister of Agriculture Radha Mohan Singh and his Sri Lankan counterpart, Mahinda Amaraweera, which came after the third JWG meeting on October 13. India also informed that schemes promoting seaweed farming and sea-cage farming have begun in the Palk Bay area to wean away fishermen from deep-sea trawling. Bottom trawling by Indian fishermen had emerged as a major issue because of the disruptive impact it left on the coastal communities of Sri Lanka. Earlier in July, Sri Lanka banned bottom trawling, increasing the chances of interception of more Indian bottom trawlers. Indian plea The JWG was co-chaired by Secretary-level officials of India and Sri Lanka, in which the Indian delegates praised Sri Lanka for releasing fishermen from Tamil Nadu and urged the release of the fishermen remaining in the custody of the Sri Lankan government.

The JWG mechanism commenced on November 5, 2016, to find a permanent solution to fishermen's issues between the two countries. In Saturday's meeting also, both the ministers emphasised the agenda of the JWG and asked it to find a permanent solution soon. From the beginning, the JWG has been dealing with the twin problems of arrest of Indian fishermen and boats by Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka's complaint against Indian fishermen for using “bottom trawling which erodes aquatic resources in the Palk Bay area. Sri Lanka also updated India about the measures it has taken to stop illegal fishing.

Tamil Nadu: Is ‘deep sea fishing’ the silver bullet?

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/is-deep-sea-fishing-the-silver-bullet/article19834939.ece>

"On September 8, the Tamil Nadu Fisheries University (TNFU) organised a one-day workshop in Chennai on deep sea fishing, the aim being to promote deep sea fishing as an alternative to trawling in the Palk Bay. Proponents of deep sea fishing argue that the lure of better catch in far-off seas and avoiding the risks of cross-border fishing in Sri Lankan waters will ensure its success. But is it as simple as that? Deep sea fishing has always been an integral part of the country's Blue Revolution vision to exploit fishing resources to the maximum within the 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The present plan in the Palk Bay is to extract 2,000 trawlers from the bay and replace them with deep sea vessels that fish in the Bay of

Bengal and Gulf of Mannar. The time period for this transition is three years (2017-2020), with 500 boats to be replaced in the first year alone.

The Central and Tamil Nadu governments have committed ₹800 crore and ₹320 crore, respectively, to the plan. Each vessel will be fitted for tuna long-lining and/or gillnetting, and have a unit cost of ₹80 lakh. Of this unit cost, trawl owners have to only pay ₹8 lakh upfront and ₹16 lakh through a loan from the Pandyan Grama Bank. The balance ₹56 lakh will be a subsidy shared by the State and Central governments. Complex issue The Palk Bay fishing conflict has figured prominently in high-level meetings between India and Sri Lanka. The origins of the conflict are complex and it is difficult to resolve. The main issue is what to do with the oversized fleet of Tamil Nadu trawlers that fish regularly in Sri Lankan waters, often damaging the boats and gear of small-scale Tamil fishers from the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government has not only passed a legislation banning trawling but its navy has also been vigilantly patrolling the International Maritime Boundary Line, 'capturing' Indian trawl boats and fishers.

The plan (as foreseen in G.O. (Ms) 139 (Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries Department, Tamil Nadu, July 14, 2017) is to remove as many trawl vessels from the Palk Bay as possible. Prospective beneficiaries of the deep sea fishing project should possess a registered, seaworthy trawl vessel of over 12m in length that must be scrapped or disposed of outside the Palk Bay. The disposed vessel should also have been physically verified. Equally important, new replacement tuna long liner boats cannot trawl or operate in the Palk Bay. The government is now creating a new deep sea fishing harbour at Mookaiyur, located just south of the Palk Bay in the Gulf of Mannar, where many of these vessels are likely to be berthed. Priority is to be given to owners who have had their boats apprehended or damaged in Sri Lanka. Beneficiaries are not allowed to sell their boats within five years of obtaining them though it is unclear how that will be enforced.

A slippery slope Administrators and scientists alike have raised questions. First, are there sufficient stocks of fish in the adjacent waters of the Bay of Bengal and Gulf of Mannar to make deep sea fishing economically viable for a large and new fleet of vessels? And do Palk Bay trawl fishers, who are used to one-day fishing, have sufficient skills and an interest for deep sea fishing? The Indian government report of the Working Group for Revalidating the Potential of Fishery Resources in the Indian EEZ suggests that oceanic regions have a maximum potential yield of 208,000 tonnes. Importantly, however, while the report highlights that oceanic stocks are not fully exploited, it does not state where the remaining oceanic stocks in the Indian Ocean exist nor whether this might be in the Bay of Bengal or the Gulf of Mannar.

Moreover, the report warns that oceanic resources are transboundary and hence are targeted by a number of other countries too. In fairness, the authorities have taken note of training needs and

are setting up special facilities in collaboration with the TNFU and the Central Institute of Fisheries Nautical and Engineering Training. Applicant trawl owners also expect to employ a few specialised workers from the operational deep sea fishing fleet of Thoothoor, at least for the initial period of operation. The question of what will become of trawl crews remains largely unaddressed, potentially jeopardising the local economy of the region. For trawl fishers, the main concern is whether deep sea fishing is a sound investment or not. Trawl owners are also either rich or have a hand-to-mouth existence. Some fishermen have expressed doubts about the high operational costs of deep sea fishing and the loan repayment schedule imposed by the Pandyan Grama Bank.

Therefore, they have been pressurising the government to minimise the applicants' financial contribution. Monitoring is important. Whether deep sea fishing will reduce the Palk Bay fishing conflict depends entirely on the downsizing of the existing trawl fleet. On paper, the necessary safeguards are in place: participant trawl owners have to surrender their boats while deep sea fishing vessels will not be allowed into the Palk Bay. But rules are not always followed. The government will have to ensure that remaining vessels are not upgraded in size or engine horsepower, as many trawl owners in the Palk Bay have been increasing their engine capacities surreptitiously, well beyond legal limits.

Equally of concern is the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Department's capacity to monitor, control and carry out surveillance (MCS) of the process of decommissioning. Regulations have always existed but have rarely been implemented judiciously. The deep sea vision, moreover, is monomaniacal with no other solutions to trawling offered. The Palk Bay conflict requires a multi-dimensional approach. Various other solutions such as buy-backs, alternative livelihoods and skill development need to be rolled out with a simultaneous focus on a strong MCS system. Only then can this intransigent fishing conflict be finally resolved.

Tamil Nadu: Deep sea fishing project gets a boost

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/deep-sea-fishing-project-gets-a-boost/article19815374.ece>

"The deep sea fishing project, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on July 27 to end bottom trawling in the Palk Bay, received fresh impetus as 52 shipyard companies, including 13 IRS (Indian Register of Shipping) class shipyards, evincing interest in building tuna long liners-cum-gill netter boats. The Tamil Nadu Fisheries department floated tenders in August, and 52 shipyards, including the premier Cochin Shipyard, Tebma shipyard, Mahindra Marine Private Ltd., Master Shipyard and Shoft Shipyard, have shown interest, official sources said here.

“A good number of 13 IRS class shipyards have evinced interest in building the long liners and this is very encouraging, an official said. Cost sharing Under the project, the cost of a long liner is fixed at Rs.80 lakh. The Centre provides 50% subsidy and the State government 20% subsidy. The beneficiaries would be helped to raise 20% (Rs.16 lakh) through institutional finance after their contribution of 10% (Rs.8 lakh). The process of shortlisting the companies has begun and some of these shipyards have been given time to fulfil the required parameters, he added. Pending finalisation, the department has floated fresh tenders for supplying components such as engine, refrigerator and steel for the long liners, the sources said. Meanwhile, the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT) has designed the model of the long liners after entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with the public sector Cochin shipyard.

A batch of fishermen, committed to deep sea fishing, will visit Cochin shipyard next week to take a look at the 3D model of the boat and give their suggestions for any modification. After the design gets finalised, the Cochin shipyard would make available at least three types of boats and the fishermen would have the option to select boats as per their requirements, the sources said. The boats would be built after signing a tripartite agreement with the beneficiaries and fisheries department. Stating that the agreement would be signed within this month, officials here said the Cochin shipyard has been asked to ‘handhold’ Tamil Nadu government in this project and come out with the first lot of 25 to 30 boats at the earliest. “We are aiming to send the first batch of Rameswaram fishermen to deep sea fishing by March next year, the sources said.

India: Union Minister reviews deep sea fishing project

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/union-minister-reviews-deep-sea-fishing-project/article19706698.ece>

"Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Krishna Raj has reviewed the progress of deep sea fishing project, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on July 27 and interacted with fishermen beneficiaries. Ms. Raj, who was on a day's visit to the district to take part in ‘Swachhta Hi Seva’ campaign, interacted with the beneficiaries at an event organised by the Tamil Nadu Fisheries department at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) near here on Sunday. The beneficiaries, who were given work orders to construct the Tuna long liner trawlers under the blue revolution scheme and were new to the project, expressed varied concerns – right from fishing method to marketing and the Minister was receptive to their concerns.

Fishermen were given subsidy by the Central and State governments to construct long liners, each costing Rs. 80 lakh, she said and appealed to them to make use of the project. While the

Centre offered 50% subsidy per trawler, the State offered 20% and helped them to mobilise another 20% from financial institutions and the beneficiaries have to contribute Rs. 8 lakh per boat, she said. The Centre and State governments had unveiled the project to prevent fishermen from 'trespassing' into Sri Lankan waters while fishing in Palk Bay. The project aimed at diversifying 2,000 trawlers from Palk Bay into deep sea Tuna long liner-cum-gill netter boats in a phased manner over a period of three years. Officials explained that the response to the project was good and about 350 fishermen have so far applied for the long liners. The project was aimed at finding a permanent solution to the fishermen issue in the Palk Bay, they said. The Centre has allocated Rs. 200 crore and the State Rs. 86 crore towards subsidy for 500 fishermen to switch over to deep sea fishing in the first phase during 2017-18, they said. The interaction was coordinated by Fisheries Director V. P. Dhandapani and Additional Director G. S. Sameeran.

Tamil Nadu: Plea to secure release of fishermen, 130 boats

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/plea-to-secure-release-of-fishermen-130-boats-ramanathapuram/article19582907.ece>

"Leaders of Rameswaram mechanised boat fishermen associations have urged External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to prevail upon the Sri Lankan government to secure the release of fishermen and 130 boats, detained in the island nation when she visited Colombo on August 31 for two-day Indian Ocean Conference. Thanking the Centre and State government for securing the release of more than 70 fishermen and 42 boats, including 36 boats of Tamil Nadu fishermen, P. Sesu Raja, leader of a fishermen association, urged Ms. Swaraj to secure the release of the remaining 130 boats. Mr. Raja, who was part of the seven-member team, which recently inspected the 42 trawlers berthed in Kankesanthurai, Karainager, Mannar and Trincomallee in northern Sri Lanka, said the boats have suffered extensive damage as they were berthed for more than two years without any care. Similar fate should not fall on the remaining 130 boats, he said and urged Ms Swaraj to take up the issue with Sri Lankan president and secure the release soon.

These boats would become useless if they were not salvaged before the onset of the north east monsoon in October, he said. He said the Centre should accord permission to salvage 42 boats released by the Lankan government. The team headed by Mr. G. S. Sameeran, Additional Director of fisheries, had said that only 31 boats could be salvaged by towing, that too after carrying out repair work. Pointing that the Rameswaram fishermen were gearing up for deep sea fishing after Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the scheme here on July 27, Mr. Raja said the revised subsidy scheme received good response from the fishermen and they were eager to take up tuna long liners. As it would take one or two years for majority of the fishermen to join the scheme, Ms Swaraj should talk to the Lankan president and ensure that they be allowed to

fish in the Palk Bay peacefully till then. The Centre should ensure that fishermen would not be arrested by the Lankan navy during the period, he said.

Tamil Nadu: Deep Sea fishing project receives good response

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/deep-sea-fishing-project-receives-good-response/article19537620.ece>

"The 'deep sea fishing project', launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on July 27 to end bottom trawling in the Palk Bay, has evoked good response with more than 300 fishermen evincing interest in the venture. The ambitious project, implemented jointly by the Central and State governments with 70% subsidy for constructing a vessel at the cost of Rs. 80 lakh, has gained momentum with 337 fishermen applying and the fisheries department issuing work orders for 62 of them, official sources here said. The governments have chalked out the project to prevent fishermen from trespassing into Sri Lankan waters while fishing in the Palk Bay and getting arrested by the Sri Lankan navy. They propose to diversify 2,000 trawlers from Palk Bay into deep sea Tuna long liner-cum-Gill netter boats in a phased manner over a period of three years.

Fishermen, facing problems in the hands of the Lankan navy for several years, have responded well to the project, and the department is hopeful of weaning away 500 trawlers to deep sea during 2017-18, the sources said. Priority is being given to fishermen whose boats were impounded by the Lankan navy. Under the scheme, the Centre provides 50% (Rs. 40 lakh) subsidy and the State government, 20% (Rs. 16 lakh). The beneficiaries will be assisted in raising 20% (Rs. 16 lakh) institutional finance after their contribution of 10% (Rs. 8 lakh). The Pandyan Grama Bank (PGB) has come forward to provide financial support for the fishermen under its 'Meenavar Thozhan' scheme. The fisheries department is now focussing on capacity building and has floated global tenders to bring in the best boat builders. When the vessels are constructed, the fishermen will be trained in deep sea fishing, the sources said adding that a batch of fishermen will be sent to the Central Institute of Fisheries Nautical and Engineering Training for 15 days practical and theoretical training.

Besides, a group of 50 fishermen will attend the workshop on "Deep sea fishing in Tamil Nadu – challenges and opportunities conducted by the Tamil Nadu Fisheries University, Nagapattinam, on September 8. G.S. Sameeran, Additional director, fisheries, John Chembian, senior scientist, Fishery Survey of India, and Dilanti Koranlagama from University of Ruhana, Sri Lanka, will address the workshop.

Tamil Nadu: Destroying oceans and livelihood

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2017/aug/06/destroying-oceans-and-livelihood-1639052.html>

"They were the sweepers of the British Navy, which helped remove mines planted on the sea floor targeting its submarines during World War II. Then, sometime in the 1970s, the government introduced the fishermen to bottom trawlers that could maximise their income. The effect was felt in just a few decades, a frighteningly short time for ecological disasters to pan out. "That is the most destructive among all methods of fishing, which would wipe out marine ecosystem in the long run. It is already forcing our fishermen to cross the boundary and enter Lankan waters, pointed out B Sundaramoorthy, professor and HOD, Fisheries Technologies, Tamil Nadu Fisheries University. Trawlers are indiscriminately devastating, not only catching the fishlings but also destroying the whole ecosystem and preventing breeding. Most damaging of these is the disappearance of coral reefs. On this side of the sea, these reefs are the perfect habitat for fishlings to flourish. But a study by Madurai Kamaraj University revealed that the coral reef cover across the Palk Bay and the Palk Strait has gone down to 19.2% from 26.7%. Similarly, the reef cover across the 21 islands in the Gulf of Mannar has reduced to 36% from 48.5%.

The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami had a role to play. But that was a one-time act. More damaging, according to experts, is relentless bottom trawling. The damage to the habitat has resulted in depletion of fish and other marine animals. According to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the State's coast is facing a 30% shortfall in Primary Production Rate the amount of food required for fishlings to grow in the sea. In other words, there is no fish here because we kill their young, destroy their home and leave them with nothing to feed on. The Lankan ban, while particularly terrible for the fishermen here, is equally applicable to the fishermen there. The navy has intensified patrol, and sources said the navy and coast guard detained at least half-a-dozen Lankan fishermen for pursuing banned methods.

"It is impossible for any government to prevent apprehension of fishermen from coastal districts of Tamil Nadu. But while Lankan government are arresting their own fishermen for not pursuing sustainable fishing practice, our government is not acting tough, said U Arulanandam, president of Tamil Nadu Alliance for Release of Innocent Fishermen, a key person in the negotiations between fishermen from both countries. The extensive use of bottom trawlers was felt first not by the Lankans but the artisanal fishermen here who use country boats and catamarans to fish. "These days, we often return empty handed. Such adversities push fishermen to shift jobs and migrate to work as labours, said M Murugaiyan, a fisherman from Aarkatthurai in Nagapattinam. Hundreds of poorer fishing families, who could not afford mechanised boats, have turned to jobs that they have never heard of, often in Middle East.

Sri Lanka: Indian Govt. should also take action to prevent illegal fishing

<http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/-Indian-Govt-should-also-take-action-to-prevent-illegal-fishing--134497.html>

"Prof. Alfred H.A. Soons is an Emeritus Professor of Public International Law at the Utrecht University. He is an expert in the Law of the Sea. Currently he is a member of the Advisory Body of Experts on the Law of the Sea of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC/ABE-LOS) of the UNESCO. He also serves as Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Council of the Netherlands Defence Academy and is an Adjunct Professor of International Law at the University of Curaçao. Soons has been involved in international litigation at the International Court of Justice and arbitral tribunals. He has served as chairman of two ICC arbitral tribunals, and was a member of the Arbitral Tribunals in the Iron Rhine Railroad (Belgium/Netherlands) and the South China Sea disputes (Philippines v. China).

In his recent visit to Sri Lanka- at the request of the Moragoda International Law Trust- to deliver a series of lectures on the 'Law of the Sea', he sat with the Daily Mirror to share his expertise on illegal fishing by Indian fishermen, traditional fishing rights, piracy, sea level rising and other concerns. Excerpts of the interview: Q: In this day and age what are some of the intricate issues that have arisen in the area of the Law of the Sea? Fishing, in particular, 'high seas fishing' is a major issue because there is a really serious problem of overfishing resulting from illegal and unlawful fishing. The fish stocks in many parts of the world are seriously threatened. Another issue that is being addressed, but rather inadequately, is related to genetic resources. The Law of the Sea Convention doesn't cover this area. This pertains to the making use of certain resources in the deep sea bed, an area where pharmaceutical companies are interested in with regard to the production of medicine. This doesn't include mineral resources.

However, negotiations are taking place regarding the making of laws to cover this area. There is also the problem of human trafficking; illegal migrants at sea. At the moment it's an urgent problem in the Mediterranean Sea with people trying to get to Europe from North Africa. There is the problem of piracy in the Indian Ocean. This problem has grown on the West coast of Africa, and is sometimes visible in the South China Sea and the surrounding areas. There are also strategic issues in the background. For instance what the US is concerned about is some countries trying to ensure the freedom of navigation in this part of the sea. This type of navigation might be threatened by the actions of certain coastal States. A good example is the confrontation you see between the US and China in the South China Sea.

There is a series of bigger issues relating to the Ocean including the law of the sea. In my workshop here we are addressing all these issues, hopefully from a Sri Lankan perspective. * They can only fish if they have a licence. * Going for International Arbitration is regarded more as a confrontational action in Asia. * The 1974 treaty at first sight seems to indicate that there are no traditional fishing rights left. * If India doesn't take reasonable measures that can be expected from such a country to prevent this, it can be held responsible. The area in a territorial sea is under the full sovereignty of the State. * I don't think that 'sea level rise' as such is a major issue for a country like Sri Lanka. * They exploited- more or less jointly- the fishery resources of

Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar, for centuries * We could make an analysis based on the treaties in force and the practice of the past decades * If Sri Lanka is entitled to refuse these Indian fishermen, you (Sri Lanka) could arrest them There is, for instance, the claim made by Sri Lanka for an extended continental shelf- a huge area of sea bed to the east and South of Sri Lanka where perhaps, in the future mineral resources may be found. We don't know yet. But Sri Lanka has made its submission.

In two or three years' time that will be taken up by the Commission. That is a development that is potentially relevant for Sri Lanka- the extension of the area where it has jurisdiction or control over resources. Q: Despite agreements in 1974 and 1976- which clearly demarcate the International Maritime Boundary Line- Tamil Nadu fishermen continue to poach in Sri Lankan territorial waters. Can they still enter our waters and fish? No. They can only fish if they have a licence. There are no explicit provisions in the treaty to allow fishing. At least not in what I've seen. I know it's a complex issue because if someone from Tamil Nadu was here, he/she would explain why a person thinks he/she has traditional fishing rights. But I don't know what the basis of that assertion is. If you look at the text- where there is agreement- the areas as far as I know, were used for fishing by artisanal fishermen from both countries.

They exploited- more or less jointly- the fishery resources of Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar, for centuries or even longer. But this was artisanal fishery-the small scale fishery. When fishing Vessles used for commercial fishing entered the area, I think mostly from the Indian side, the situation changed. Q:How do you think the two governments should address this issue? In the background you have the political relationships between the two countries. Then there is the complexity within India where the states have a stronghold-Tamil Nadu in this case. There are all kinds of political and diplomatic complexities here related to the relationship between the two countries. You can view this strictly from a legal point. We could make an analysis based on the treaties in force and the practice of the past decades. And then say whether it's lawful or unlawful for these Indian fishermen to continue fishing. If the conclusion would be, that it is unlawful, then the next question is how do you go about this? In theory you could say that we want an authoritative decision from a judge from an International Arbitrary Tribunal.

In theory it's possible. May be it is even possible without the agreement of the two States, so either Sri Lanka or India could unilaterally start this. This is how many European countries would ultimately handle the matter because in Europe the legal approach would not be considered necessarily as a confrontational way of solving problems. In Asia this is not the case. As far as I understand, in Asia it's regarded more as confrontational action. You can send coastguards and the Navy there and arrest all Indian fishing vessels on the east side of the line. You arrest them. You fine them. Confiscate their ships. That is possibly the most effective way India is a powerful country and Sri Lanka perhaps less. So there you could get all these factors about power relationships. What do you want to achieve? But that is a political process. If Sri

Lanka is entitled to refuse these Indian fishermen, you (Sri Lanka) could arrest them. You can send coastguards and the Navy there and arrest all Indian fishing vessels on the east side of the line. You arrest them. You fine them.

Confiscate their ships. That is possibly the most effective way because then you are preventing them from returning. This is what the Indonesians seem to do with illegal fishing. They bring the illegal fishing vessels. Take the crew off and sink the ships. The crew is then repatriated to where they came from. These are harsh measures. But in theory if you have an adequate coastguard you can take all kinds of measures. But the question is do you really think it's good for the overall relationship with your neighbour? Q: You just mentioned that Sri Lanka could go for International Arbitration. In the South China Sea dispute the Permanent Court of Arbitration- in which you were a member of the Tribunal- found(among other things) that China had violated Philippine's sovereignty rights in its Exclusive Economic Zone(EEZ) by failing to prevent Chinese fishermen from fishing in the zone. Does this decision mean that China is bound to take action to prevent this kind of thing happening again? What are the implications of this decision? This is somewhat different from the Sri Lanka-India scenario because here it is fishing in the historic waters, in the territorial sea.

May be there is also illegal fishing in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), but that is a different matter. The Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar are internal waters of the territorial sea. In the South China Sea case, the tribunal came to the conclusion that China- as the flag State of Chinese fishing vessels- had unlawfully refrained from preventing its fishing vessels from continuing to fish. The simple fact that a fishing vessel under the Chinese flag would fish in the EEZ of another State isn't necessarily an unlawful act by China or the flag State in general. Things can change when things go on and they are reported. The Government of India should also take action to prevent illegal fishing. What the Tribunal said in its award in the South China Sea case on this particular issue was that China should have taken more action to prevent its nationals from fishing there. In fact it looks like China was protecting Chinese vessels against the Philippine Government's law enforcement vessels. That isn't allowed.

QLast month when the Fisheries and Aquatic(Amendment) Bill was tabled in Parliament, which reportedly had severe penalties including increased fines on vessels which trespassed on Lankan territorial waters, Tamil Nadu fishermen opposed the Bill vehemently. They urged the Indian authorities to discuss the matter with Sri Lanka, so that their livelihood isn't destroyed. Is such a reaction justifiable? It all depends on the legal determination of the situation- whether there is an entitlement of Indian fishermen to the fishery resources. Do they indeed still have traditional fishing rights allowing them to fish? If so under what conditions? It can't be an unconditional right. Even if an Indian fisherman would have some entitlement to fish in the Sri Lankan part of the waters then surely they have to comply with Sri Lankan conservation measures. The Indians have only some authority even while possessing fishing rights when they are protesting against

Sri Lanka's new national legislation. Otherwise it doesn't make any sense. They must have said that based on their view that they have historic rights.

Q: Does International law provide any recognition to traditional fishing rights? Yes, there are provisions in the Law of the Sea Convention Treaty. The answer in general is that there have been some decisions by arbitral tribunals where this was recognized. In certain conditions, traditional fishing rights can exist in areas under coastal States' sovereignty, not in the exclusive economic zone, but in the territorial sea or archipelagic waters or historic waters. Q: Does this right exist between India and Sri Lanka? That's my point. In theory they can exist. But the 1974 treaty, to me, at first sight seems to indicate that there are no traditional fishing rights left. There is no provision in that treaty about the continuance of traditional fishing rights. There is only a provision on navigational rights. Traditional navigation doesn't encompass fishing.

I don't have the full records of the negotiations. If traditional fishing rights had been discussed in the negotiations explicitly and not taken care of in a provision, then I think they were extinguished in 1974. If they weren't discussed, the matter could be different, in the sense that India could indeed say that this is the boundary, but it leaves unaffected the reciprocal traditional rights of local fishermen. These are highly complicated legal issues that you can only determine with a thorough study of the record of what happened in the past. I have read a little bit about it, but only from the Sri Lankan side. I haven't looked at any material from the Indian side. If that is the Indian position then you have a clear dispute between India and Sri Lanka on the existence of traditional fishing rights notwithstanding the 1974 agreement. Q: Is the Government of India bound by the International Law to take action against poachers who are arrested in Sri Lankan waters and subsequently released? Along the lines of the awarding of the South China Sea case, a flag State (India) is obliged to take action to prevent vessels from flying its flag during poaching.

That doesn't mean that India is responsible for each and every case of poaching. But if India doesn't take reasonable measures that are expected from a country like India, to prevent this, India can be held responsible. The least a country could do, and that is of course the Indian government and not Tamil Nadu, is to take the decision that these vessels are unlawfully arrested because they were exercising traditional fishing rights. If that is the Indian position then you have a clear dispute between India and Sri Lanka on the existence of traditional fishing rights notwithstanding the 1974 agreement. But the least India could do if this isn't the case is to take a few measures including telling its fishermen to stop, but also make a reasonable effort by the Indian coast guard to prevent these activities.

Q: A few months back a Tamil Nadu fisherman was shot dead allegedly by the Navy (The Navy has denied this claim). Is a State allowed to exercise violence to protect its resources within its territorial waters? Unless in self-defence, if the Tamil Nadu fishermen were attacking the Sri

Lankan coastguard or Navy, killing fishermen isn't something one is supposed to do. It depends on the circumstances. What you can do is warn and arrest. You don't shoot a burglar who isn't threatening you, even if the burglar is in your house. If he surrenders you have to arrest him. Q: The Port City Project on reclaimed land has raised concern among environmentalists that it affects the marine eco system and coastal belts. When The Port City is built within territorial waters does that mean that the State can do whatever it wants within territorial waters? The area in a territorial sea is under the full sovereignty of the State. So for this purpose it's just like any activity on land. But the State has to respect its international obligations.

You can't allow activities which would harm nature and environment, in a way that is prohibited by nature conservation treaties the State is a party to. Any activities by the Government here should respect the State's international obligations, just like respect for human rights. Q: In March this year Somalia pirates seized an oil tanker with eight Sri Lankan crew members on board. It's reported that Nigeria experiences nearly one pirate attack a week. Why is it so difficult to control piracy in sea waters? That's more a policy question than a legal question. I say because it's about the operation capabilities of States to counter piracy or even the policies of the State to prevent piracy at all, like in Somalia. It is said that in Somali, pirates were originally fishermen who started to become pirates because they couldn't fish anymore due to the fish being taken by European trawlers. If the Nigeria police effectively controlled the coastal areas, perhaps, piracy wouldn't take place there. It's a huge coast and it's difficult to control. You need a lot of police and that costs money. Sometimes people who conduct these piratical acts do them because they are poor and it's the only way available for them to raise money.

This is organized crime. We don't want people to become pirates at all. But if you have pirates, to have counter piracy operations you need a coastguard, Navy and Police. Q: In the face of rising sea levels resulting from global warming, what are the possible effects a country- an Island- like Sri Lanka could face? Sri Lanka is an Island with high elevated territories. In some areas you have low-lying areas. You may have even some very low lying islands off the coast. If the sea level rise in this century becomes more than 1 metre that could seriously affect the coast. The coast will retreat landwards. You will lose some land, or islands. I don't think that sea level rise as such is a major issue for a country like Sri Lanka. Sea level rise is a major issue for the Maldives. There is an existential problem for them. They will lose half their islands. Their future is seriously threatened. By losing islands you not only lose lands. They will also lose maritime areas, the exclusive economic zone generated by those islands. If the coast vanishes your entitlement to the territorial sea or the exclusive economic zone vanishes under the current rules of the Law of the sea.

India: All you need to know about Sri Lanka's bottom trawling ban and India's deep-sea fishing plan

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/sri-lankas-bottom-trawling-ban-indias-deep-sea-fishing-all-you-need-to-know/article19396217.ece>

"The Sri Lankan Parliament unanimously passed an Amendment to the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act on July 6 that declared the method of fishing by bottom trawling an offence. It is aimed at curbing local trawlers as well as deterring trawlers from Tamil Nadu. Here's an explainer on bottom trawling and deep-sea fishing, and the impact of the ban on fishermen from Tamil Nadu. What is bottom trawling? Bottom trawling, an ecologically destructive practice, involves trawlers dragging weighted nets along the sea-floor, causing great depletion of aquatic resources. The net is spread along the sea-floor to catch shrimp and fish like halibut and sole; however, bottom trawling also captures juvenile fish, thus exhausting the ocean's resources and affecting marine conservation efforts. What is the punishment for violators? According to the amended Act, a violation will now attract a possible two-year prison term and a fine of Rs. 50,000 (Sri Lanka). Did Tamil Nadu fishermen alone engage in such practice?

This practice was started by Tamil Nadu fishermen and actively pursued at the peak of the civil war in Sri Lanka. But after the decimation of the LTTE and its Sea Tigers in 2009, a small section of the northern Sri Lankan fisher folk too began using trawlers to maximise profits. Hence, it would be right to say that Tamil fishermen from both sides are engaged in this practice. What is the initial reaction from fishermen to the amended Act? Tamil Nadu fishermen have termed the amendment "draconian and aimed at crushing the livelihood of the fishers once for all. They have urged the Union government to prevail upon the Sri Lankan government to withdraw the Bill. But N.V. Subramanian, secretary of the Association for Northern Province Fisher People's Unity, says "A complete ban on bottom trawling is an important and very positive step. It will not only deter Indian fishermen but also prevent local trawlers from engaging in the practice. Were there any talks between India and Sri Lanka for a solution? The Joint Working Group on Fisheries, formed by the two countries in November 2016, stated that it would meet every three months while the Ministers of Fisheries on both sides would meet every six months (from Jan. 2017) along with the Coast Guard and naval representatives to discuss the protracted issue.

Then, what made Sri Lanka hasten the Bill? Fishermen of both countries have been in talks for a long time to resolve the conflict. While the Sri Lankan fishermen want an immediate end to incursions by Indian trawlers, those from Tamil Nadu insist on a three-year phase-out period. The proposal to ban bottom trawling is two years old. What is the solution? The solution lies in transition from trawling to deep-sea fishing. The Central and Tamil Nadu governments plan to provide 500 deep-sea fishing boats with long lines and gill nets this year as part of a plan to replace 2,000 trawlers in three years. What is deep-sea fishing? The activity of catching fish

that live in the deep parts of the sea/ocean is called deep-sea fishing. The boats are designed in such a way that fishermen get access to the deeper parts of the ocean and fish species.

It is practiced worldwide, especially in the coastal areas with no ecological damage. Has the project been launched? Yes, last week Prime Minister Narendra Modi formally launched the project to promote deep-sea fishing among Ramanathapuram fishermen by handing over work orders to five fishermen for the construction of tuna long-liners with gill nets. As per the project, 2,000 deep-sea fishing boats, costing Rs. 1, 600 crore, will replace trawlers in three years. How many fishermen will benefit from the transition? Nearly 14,000 fishers from the Palk Bay will be benefitted by the transition. So far, more than 1,000 fishermen from Kanniyakumari and Nagapattinam districts have registered with the authorities for deep-sea fishing. What is the cost factor of tuna long-liners with gill nets and its yield? A boat costs Rs. 80 lakhs. The Centre's contribution will be 50% and the State government will pitch in with 20% share. Of the remaining 30%, 20% will comprise institutional finance and 10% will be the beneficiary's contribution.

The duration of the deep-sea voyage would be between 15 days to four weeks and the yield from each voyage is expected to be 8-10 tonnes of high value catch. This will work out to a profit of Rs. 7-8 lakh a voyage. Are there any apprehensions about this scheme? Rameswaram fishermen say the beneficiary contribution of Rs. 8 lakhs (10% of the cost of a tuna long-liner) is very high. They want that to be reduced considerably, if not waived. However, the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Department said the beneficiary contribution was finalised after holding discussions with the fishing community. The department also clarified that fishermen have to pay their contribution only at a later stage. It promised to "fine-tune the project if there are any hurdles in its implementation.

Tamil Nadu: Deep-sea fishing no solution: Fisherfolk

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/deep-sea-fishing-no-solution-fisherfolk/article19392410.ece>

"Last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi formally launched the project to promote deep-sea fishing among Ramanathapuram fishermen by handing over work orders to five fishermen for the construction of tuna long-liners with gill nets. Deep-sea fishing, a project of the Central and State governments, has been touted as the remedy for the problems faced by fishermen of Ramanathapuram district in the hands of the Sri Lankan Navy. Recently, Sri Lanka had passed a law banning bottom trawling in its territorial waters in the Palk Bay. But many fishermen are apprehensive that the assistance package being offered for them to transition to deep-sea fishing does not address all their concerns. P. Jesuraj, a prominent leader of the fisherfolk of Ramanathapuram, feels that the norms of the project regarding beneficiary contribution are not realistic.

“We have been hit very badly because of Sri Lankan authorities frequently arresting our fishermen and impounding our boats. Fishing days in the Palk Bay have gone down drastically over the years. Under such circumstances, it would be a huge burden for us to make the contribution of ₹8 lakh, accounting for 10% of the cost of every tuna long-liner cum gill netter boat, he said. Discussion held Pointing out that his brother is one of the beneficiaries chosen for the deep-sea fishing project, Mr. Jesuraj says that the fishermen would find it extremely difficult to provide collateral security to banks for loans as they do not have high value immovable assets. Fishermen will also find it difficult to adhere to the stipulation of selling their trawlers and meeting their contribution, he said. Responding to the concerns of the fisherfolk, Fisheries Minister D. Jayakumar told The Hindu that “the project will be fine-tuned if our attention is drawn to hurdles in the implementation of the project.

A senior official in the State Fisheries Department explains that the share of beneficiary contribution is a mere 10% of the cost of every boat while the Central government will meet 50% of the cost and the State government, 20%. The remaining 20% will be through institutional finance or loan component. Originally, the loan component was 30% and the share of the State, 10%. The changes have been made so that fishermen-beneficiaries are not put to much hardship. No collateral needed Besides, the fishermen have to chip in their contribution only at a later stage. The norms on beneficiary contribution were finalised after holding discussion with the fishing community, he said. As for collateral security, the State Level Bankers' Committee has clarified that banks need not insist on this form of security as the loan component is only a small portion of the total cost. The department official adds that as part of the “de-escalation of the conflict in the Palk Bay, no new trawler will be allowed to be registered in the Bay. This follows a “request from fishermen from five districts including Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai and Nagapattinam.

Tamil Nadu: Open Letter: Why Is Tamil Nadu Neglecting Its Artisanal Fishers?

<https://thewire.in/162578/artisanal-fishers-tamil-nadu-sri-lanka-trawling/>

"To, Minister of Fisheries, Tamil Nadu Fisheries Department Tamil Nadu has been facing its worst drought in 140 years. But what does that have to do with fisheries? Let me explain, since you are probably busy planning the construction of harbours and fish-landing centres all along the state's coast. When it rains, the water flows as rivulets and then as a river. These rivers empty into estuaries, which go on to flush rich nutrients into the sea. Such an influx invites small fish to forage in near-shore waters, which then attract larger fish from deeper waters. These processes do not occur during a drought thanks to the paltry water that flows down to the sea, resulting in a drop in fish numbers and catch. In drought years, fishers invest more effort to catch fish, even resulting in conflicts among themselves.

Tamil Nadu's near-shore fisheries are already burdened by intensive fishing activities. Now the lack of rains makes for more reasons to prepare ourselves for an uncertain climatic future. I write this letter to share the stories of agony of artisanal fishers who have been neglected over the years. When I speak to fishers, they ask me what I am going to do by talking to them. Is anything going to change for good? I ask them to remain hopeful. I tell them as a researcher that I am trying to do my best to resolve the issues of fisheries management, by taking their message across to concerned officials. But a part of me cringes when I speak to them. As researchers who educate ourselves to enhance social and environmental well-being, I think we have failed, and I accept this failure as will many researchers. And it is out of this failure that I write this letter to you, to highlight the aspirations of thousands of artisanal fishers who look up to you in the hope that, someday, your scales of justice might swing in their favour.

In recent months, the Tamil Nadu government has been projecting deep-sea fishing policy as a potential solution that will end all fishing woes. The decline of near-shore fishing has clearly impacted both artisanal and mechanised fishing sectors in Tamil Nadu. Both sectors are intensifying fishing operations to make ends meet from the negligible catch, which has long-term effects on the marine environment, especially in the near-shore areas. So what solution does the government offer for the artisanal fishers who depend entirely on fishing in near-shore waters of the state's coast? Katchatheevu island and cross-boundary fishing It has become a weekly ritual these days – when Tamil Nadu's chief minister writes to the prime minister requesting the release of fishermen arrested or boats impounded by the Sri Lankan navy. An important request placed by the chief minister has been to retrieve Katchatheevu Island and redraw the international maritime boundary line (IMBL) between India and Sri Lanka, finalised in 1974. Since then, the Katchatheevu and cross-boundary fishing issues have become to represent the entire fishing population of Tamil Nadu. This is far from the truth. The boats that engage in cross-boundary fishing are primarily mechanised bottom trawlers that target fish for export markets, originating from the coastal districts of Palk Bay.

The demands of this group cannot represent the demands of an entire fishing population. Cross-boundary fishing is a sensitive issue that deserves immediate resolution. But blindly supporting the actions of fishermen for political reasons cannot be justified. For instance, assume that Sri Lanka decides to give up Katchatheevu. About 2,000 bottom trawlers operate in the Palk Bay three days in a week. It wouldn't take few days to fish out the entire Katchatheevu Island with the sort of power 2,000 trawlers can deploy. What will happen after that? Fishermen in Rameshwaram, Pamban and Mandapam in Ramanathapuram district say that there is not as much fish around Katchatheevu Island today as there was a decade ago. The only way to make profits, against investments in fuel and labour, is to enter into the coastal waters of Sri Lanka and poach marine resources available there.

Fishers entering Sri Lankan waters are well aware that they are poaching – but that's what the situation demands. The fish resources on the Indian side of the boundary have been decimated already. Instead of blaming Sri Lanka for arresting Tamil Nadu's fishers and impounding their boats or demanding the IMBL be redrawn, we need to ask what the state of Tamil Nadu has done to manage its fisheries resources. As you should be aware, bottom trawling is a destructive fishing practice carried out in Tamil Nadu since the late 1950s. Artisanal fishers have been vehemently protesting the use of bottom trawlers by the mechanised sector as they destroy near-shore fisheries and damage artisanal fishing gear as well. News about the impacts of Tamil Nadu's bottom trawlers for Sri Lankan fisheries has been making the headlines lately, after Sri Lanka banned bottom-trawling in its territorial waters.

This move stemmed from failed talks between India and Sri Lanka and unfulfilled promises that Tamil Nadu's bottom trawlers will be phased out soon. Sri Lanka intends to protect its already-burdened artisanal fisheries sector from Tamil Nadu's bottom trawlers that engage in cross-boundary fishing. So in an effort to stop Indian trawlers engaging in cross-boundary fishing, the Tamil Nadu government came up with two solutions. First: to push for deep-sea fishing, where bottom-trawling nets could be replaced with long lines and gillnets that target high-value species of fish like tuna. Second: to displace trawl boats, especially from Rameshwaram in the Palk Bay to Mookaiyur harbour (currently under construction) and on to the proposed Kunthukal harbour in the Gulf of Mannar, a marine protected area since 1986. The proposed policy intends to convert mechanised trawlers into deep-sea vessels subsidised by the central and state governments.

Clearly, the deep-sea fishing policy is targeted only at a subset of fishers: trawl owners who can afford to pay for converting their boats to deep-sea fishing vessels. The reason why trawlers from the Palk Bay and, to some extent, the Gulf of Mannar enter Sri Lankan waters on a daily basis is because near-shore fish catch is negligible, especially high value resources like shrimp. Bottom trawling for fish or shrimp in coastal waters is quite different from deep-sea fishing, where fishing boats have to stay for many days at sea to catch enough fish and turn profits. How many boat owners will actively opt for something that is as challenging as deep-sea fishing in comparison to the ease of unregulated trawling? Only time will tell. But what about artisanal fishers in Tamil Nadu? Is the problem of trawling recognised only if Indian fishers affect artisanal fishers in Sri Lanka? Why are the artisanal fisheries being neglected in Tamil Nadu? And are export-oriented mechanised trawlers only worthy of developing fisheries policies? What are the solutions to revive near-shore fisheries that millions of artisanal fishers depend on? Need for a comprehensive near-shore fishing policy .

The Tamil Nadu Marine Fisheries Regulation Act of 1983 was put in place to balance the export-oriented mechanised fisheries and subsistence-based artisanal fisheries. It has hardly ever been enforced. Instead of planning more harbours and fishing landing centres, the Tamil Nadu

government must look for options to rejuvenate near-shore fisheries. The cries of mechanised fishers are heard by the government as they seek funds for deep-sea fishing – but those of the artisanal fishers seem to fall on deaf ears. This is because the former helps earn foreign exchange. Bottom trawlers can be converted into deep-sea fishing boats and they can move to where the government asks them to, but it is not possible to do the same with an artisanal fishing village. We need to give up the prevailing rhetoric and grand plans and focus instead on what is already on the plate. Artisanal fishers are independent enough to take care of their livelihoods; that is how they have been for many generations.

Fishers look forward to the days when the fisheries department will enforce laws and ensure their form of fishing can be carried out without any hindrances. Engaging in resource conservation, such as the protection of near-shore fish stocks, can ensure employment opportunities for millions of artisanal fishers that depend on it for subsistence and food security. The decline of near-shore fisheries has made fishing an unreliable economic source. But unlike their parents or grandparents, the new generation of fisher youth are looking forward to diversifying their employment opportunities. By replenishing near-shore fish stocks, two generations of fishers will benefit. Ways forward Here are some ways to ensure the sustainability of near-shore fisheries: * Scientific management of fisheries: What we require is a scientific response to the environmental and societal issues that our fisheries sector is facing rather than knee-jerk emotional responses. For this, we need to engage in proper data collection to know how much fish is caught, how much could be caught and what gears to use to catch fish.

Even though such surveys are ongoing, their findings are not available for immediate public scrutiny. * Change the governance of fisheries: Scholars who have worked with fishing communities in Tamil Nadu have argued that the government's ears are turned to the mechanised sector, which helps export seafood, rather than towards artisanal fishers who are willing to take proactive steps to ensure environmental sustainability. * Fish are food, too: The government needs to understand that fish are not goods that can only be exchanged for money. They are an important source of protein, apart from food security, for thousands of fishers along the Tamil Nadu coast. * Preparing ourselves for a climate-uncertain future: Unpredictable monsoons, intensifying cyclones and eroding shorelines are all a sign of the looming effects of climate change. The construction of coastal infrastructure will only make near-shore areas and people more vulnerable to the vagaries of climate change. Artisanal fisheries are not without flaws and they too cause impacts on the marine environment. But it is important to remember they offer more hope to achieve the goals of sustainable fisheries along the Tamil Nadu coast. Yours truly, Rahul Muralidharan.

Tamil Nadu: Inland fish production too affected by NE monsoon failure

<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-inland-fish-production-too-affected-by-ne-monsoon-failure-2511094>

"The failure of the North East monsoon in Tamil Nadu last year has not spared the fisheries sector too, with the state witnessing a steep decline in inland fish production. Fisheries department statistics put inland fish production reduced from 2.42 lakh tonnes in 2015-16 to 1.97 lakh tonnes the next year. ""The failure of north east monsoon during 2016 resulted in scarcity of water in all water bodies which affected inland fish production of the state,"" it said. The failure of northeast monsoon, besides the scanty rainfall received in the earlier southwest monsoon also, had resulted in an unprecedented drought, with the government declaring all 32 districts as 'drought-hit.' Tamil Nadu had 3.83 lakh hectares of ""effective"" inland water resources, which included reservoirs, major and minor irrigation tanks, ponds and short seasonal tanks, Fisheries department said. The potential of inland fisheries sector was estimated at 4.50 lakh tonnes during normal rainfall, it added. It said the state's total fish production in 2016-17 was about 6.69 lakh tonnes and that about 79,400 tonnes of marine products worth Rs 3,914 crore were exported.

Marine fish production was an estimated 4.72 lakh tons, it added. The department was also taking up a slew of initiatives to benefit fishermen, including those affected by the Sri Lankan Navy by way of apprehension. ""During the year 2017-18, Rs 286 crore has been allocated as subsidy assistance for construction of 500 Deep Sea Tuna long liners cum gill netters. In this scheme, priority will be given to fishermen who were affected by the Sri Lankan navy,"" it said. In this scheme, the Centre will contribute Rs 200 crore while the rest will be the state's share. Fishermen will also get 70 per cent subsidy assistance for diversification of trawl fishing boats of Palk Bay into deep sea fishing boats. The Centre will contribute 50 per cent while the state will share 20 per cent, the Fisheries department added. Further, the World Bank has sanctioned Rs 321.30 crore for implementing various initiatives, including improvements to civil infrastructure under Coastal Disaster Risk Reduction Project (CDRRP), it said.

Tamil Nadu: Proposed Sagarmala project will destroy livelihood of fishermen

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/protest-rally/article19285540.ece>

"The National Fish Workers Forum (NFF) has expressed apprehension that the proposed Sagarmala project, promoting port modernisation, new port development and port-linked industrialisation in the coastline and the Marine Coastal Regulation Zone (MCRZ), would destruct the coastal environment and destroy the livelihood of the fishermen. Making a brief halt here on Saturday after launching the protest rally at Neeodi in Kanniyakumari on July 10, visiting coastal hamlets, R.V. Kumaravelu, Vice-Chairman of the forum, said the Sagarmala and the draft MCRZ posed a serious threat to the livelihood of fishermen and urged the Centre to abandon the 'anti-fishermen' activities. He said the rally had been launched to sensitise the fisher folk to the impending threats and bring to the fore the problems faced by fishermen. The

22-member team so far covered 60 hamlets and proposed to cover over 200 hamlets, including 30 in Puducherry, before ending in Chennai on July 27.

They carried a banner 'save the coast, save the fishermen' and sought a new dawn. The team comprising folk and stage artists and orators staged programmes creating awareness on the need to protect coastal environment, preserve marine biodiversity and oppose industrial activities, he said. Fishermen in Kanniyakumari were opposed to the Enayam port and those in Idinthakarai, the epicentre of protest against the Koodankulam nuclear power plant, lived in constant fear, he said. Condemning the Sri Lankan Navy for arresting the fishermen and confiscating their trawlers when they ventured into the Palk Bay for fishing, he appealed to the fishermen to phase out bottom trawling and stop pair trawling and use of banned fishing nets. A. Palsamy, the forum's national secretary, said the MCRZ was totally against the fishing community.

As the entire coastline in the country would be thrown open for development, fishermen would face a large-scale evacuation from the seashores, he said. The Sagarmala and MCRZ notification would also affect the eco-system and marine bio-diversity, he added. Debasis Shyamal, another national secretary from West Bengal, who was part of the rally, said similar rallies would be taken out in other coastal States in the country. The executive committee would meet in Chennai and chalk out the future course of action, he added.

India and Sri Lanka: Healing The Sea: India must learn from Sri Lanka's ban on bottom-trawling

<http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/healing-the-sea-sri-lankan-parliament-fisheries-and-aquatic-resources-act-indian-tamil-fishermen-conflict-arrest-4749452/>

"The Sri Lankan Parliament's unanimous amendment of its Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act last week to ban trawling is a bold step from both political and ecological perspectives. It will have an impact on the conflict between Indian Tamil fishermen and the fishermen of Northern Sri Lanka who fish in the Palk Bay, a highly productive but spatially limited marine ecosystem. During the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka's northern districts, Colombo had prohibited all coastal fishing in a bid to curb the LTTE's naval prowess. The Indian fishermen in the Palk Bay took advantage of the cessation of fishing on the Sri Lankan side and expanded their trawler fleet. They also made risky fishing ventures into Sri Lanka's Exclusive Economic Zone. Their clashes with the Sri Lankan Navy often resulted in the impounding of trawlers, arrests and jail terms for fishermen.

The civil war in Sri Lanka ended in 2009. When the fishermen of northern Sri Lanka set out to restart their lives, they found the coastal ecosystem significantly damaged. It was attributed to incessant bottom trawling by Indian fishers. Requests were made to their Tamil brethren in India to stop this manner of fishing. Negotiations yielded little in terms of a sensible compromise from

the Indian side. Politicians and fishermen were unwilling to give up trawling due to large profits. However, from a marine ecological standpoint and socio-economic and justice perspectives, trawling must be banned in coastal waters of all tropical Asian countries. Trawling more specifically bottom-trawling is a fishing technique where a heavy bag-shaped net is dragged along the sea bottom using a mechanically powered boat. The technique, originally applied in fishing nations in the temperate waters, was introduced in Asian tropical waters on a commercial scale after World War II. In India, it was popularised in the late 1950s by the Indo-Norwegian Fisheries Project in Kerala to take advantage of the demand for prawns in the international market.

During that time trawling was banned in Norwegian coastal waters. Small-scale fishermen in Asia catch prawns using selective fishing nets during the season when the prawns moved up to the surface waters. Trawling, a more efficient and active technique, could “plough out prawns from their marine habitats at the sea bottom, resulting in a manifold increase in output. The bonanza from this “pink gold rush resulted in another sea change in Asian fisheries. The need for large investment and the huge profit potential of prawn exports saw new capital entering marine fisheries in Asia. Foreign exchange earnings from prawns meant that trawlerisation got state support. In India, prawns was the top commodity in our foreign trade basket during the 1970s and '80s in terms of net foreign exchange earnings. Extensive trawlerisation engendered conflicts in Asian waters. In Indonesia, conflicts took racial overtones as trawlers were owned by Chinese capitalists. The widespread and violent protests by local small fishermen forced the military dictatorship to pronounce the first-ever trawler ban in Asia in 1980.

In India, the National Fishworkers Forum started protests against trawling in 1978. Monsoon trawl ban was introduced in Kerala in 1984. Other maritime states followed. Trawling was developed in the temperate marine waters, which are home to fewer species. Inter-species interactions are limited there, while each species is available in millions of tonnes. In such an ecological context, trawling is not overly destructive. In tropical marine waters, there are thousands of species, exhibiting phenomenal inter-species interactions, but each in limited quantities. Trawls used in such a milieu damage the ecosystem. Trawling of the sea bottom is akin to clear-felling of tropical forests. Trawling is not an ecosystem-neutral technology. Every technology carries the code of the ecosystem and the society in which it is created. Merely changing the ownership pattern does not solve the ecological issues. The Sri Lankan trawling ban is bound to upset the calculations of trawler owners on the Indian coast of the Palk Bay. But in the long run, this bold measure will be a source of healing for the marine ecosystem and a blessing for the small scale fishers on both sides.

Healing the Sea: India must learn from Sri Lanka’s ban on bottom-trawling

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Tamil Nadu: Kunthukal to get fish landing centre

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/kunthukal-to-get-fish-landing-centre/article19261545.ece>

"Kunthukal near Pamban in the Gulf of Mannar will get a Rs. 59 crore-fish landing centre, Minister for Finance and Fisheries D. Jayakumar told the Assembly on Tuesday. He said it would help prevent congestion in the Palk Bay. Sources explained that around 400 boats have begun fishing to the other side of the Pamban bridge where there is access to the open sea. The Minister also announced construction of other fish landing centres at a cost of Rs. 30 crore. These centres would help anchor the boats closer to the shore. A corpus fund of Rs. 1.30 crore would be created in each coastal district where the respective Collectors could sanction funds in times of emergencies, he said, adding fishermen cooperative societies would get priority when it came to fishing rights in inland waterbodies. Mr. Jayakumar said Fisheries University would set up a Deep Sea Technology Training Centre to develop the required manpower for the project to replace trawlers with deep sea vessels in southern coastal districts.

An official source explained that an off-shore centre would come up at Thoothukudi and a field centre at Thuthur in Kanniyakumari district. The university would also provide entrepreneurship training to members of self-help groups and the youth in fish processing in Nagapattinam. He announced that the State government would obtain assistance from Green Climate Fund for the protection of Tamil Nadu's 1,067- km-long coastline. It had sought over Rs. 1,000 crore for projects in the first phase.

Tamil Nadu: Rameswaram fishermen call off strike

"Rameswaram mechanised boat fishermen, who were on strike and had announced to stage a 'self-immolation' stir on July 14 in protest against the Sri Lankan legislation imposing fishing restrictions in the Palk Bay, have decided to call off the strike and defer the proposed stir. Leaders of mechanised boat fishermen associations decided to resume fishing from Saturday after G. S. Sameeran, Additional Director of Fisheries, held talks with them here on Tuesday and assured to take up their demands with the government and do the needful. "Based on the assurances given by the Additional Director, we have decided to defer the self-immolation stir and call off the strike, P. Sesu Raja, one of the fishermen association leaders, said. The officer seemed to be genuinely concerned and they decided to suspend the agitation reposing faith in him, he said. The leaders said the Lankan legislation would severely affect their livelihood and sought breathing time before they switched over to deep sea fishing or shifted their fishing base to other areas to avoid venturing into the Palk Bay.

They wanted the Centre to prevail upon the Lankan government to reconsider the legislation. They were also aggrieved at the levy of GST on fishing nets and wanted the government to withdraw the tax. Mr Sameeran said efforts were already on to divert a section of fishermen in Rameswaram to Mandapam and Erwadi. Once the Mookaiyur fishing harbour and Kunthukal fishing jetty were ready, the Rameswaram fishing jetty could be decongested to a large extent, he said. The leaders requested him to arrange meetings with Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to directly air their grievances. The leaders were assured that they could meet the Chief Minister after the end of the ongoing Assembly session.

Tamil Nadu: State plans to establish fish landing centres at 10 coastal villages

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2017/jul/12/state-plans-to-establish-fish-landing-centres-at-10-coastal-villages-1627583.html>

"Tamil Nadu Fisheries Minister D Jayakumar on Tuesday announced that fish landing centres would be established at 10 coastal villages with all required facilities. "The fish landing centres in 10 villages will be set up at a cost of Rs 89.50 crore, he told the Assembly at the end of a debate on the demand for grants for his department. One of the centres will be at Kunthukal village in Ramanathapuram district with a view to decongesting fishing vessels at Palk Bay, a fish landing centre which will have boat berthing facility, T-jetty and other facilities. The other places are: Kodiakarai, Chinnangudi, Kameshwaram, Pushpavanam (Nagapattinam district), Vempar (Thoothukudi), Kattumavadi and Ponnagaram (Pudukottai), Soolerikattukuppam

(Kancheepuram) and Thazhanguda (Cuddalore). In order to help fishermen, who use catamarans, to purchase fibreglass boats, the government will provide 50 per cent subsidy.

As many as 100 fishermen will be provided with a combined sum of Rs 2.12 crore during the current financial year. Similarly, Rs 1.60 crore would be distributed to inland fishermen as subsidy to help them purchase fishing net and fibreglass coracles. Meanwhile, the Policy Note on Fisheries department said that the government had issued orders to diversify trawlers from Palk Bay into deep sea tuna fishing long liner-cum-Gill netter boats in a phased manner in three years with funding assistance from the Centre and the State. The estimated unit cost of the new Tuna long liner cum Gill netter is Rs 80 lakh per boat. The scheme will be implemented with 70 per cent subsidy assistance subject to a maximum of Rs 56 lakh per boat and 20 per cent institutional finance and 10 per cent beneficiary contribution. Diversification of trawlers will prevent Tamil fishermen from straying into Sri Lankan waters. The Fisheries minister said a comprehensive scheme with a combined estimate of about Rs 2,000 crore was under study to protect coastal villages in the State. The scheme will be implemented with funding from the Centre. He also said steps would be taken to resolve the strife between Kasimedu fishermen and fisherfolk in Andhra Pradesh over fishing along the peripheries of Exclusive Economic Zone.

India: Targeting trawling: the need for transition to deep sea fishing

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/targeting-trawling/article19253228.ece>

"Sri Lanka's legislative amendment to prohibit bottom trawling, a destructive fishing practice, is a welcome move despite its likely near-term consequence of deepening the fisheries conflict in the Palk Bay region. Bottom trawling in the island nation's territorial waters will now attract a possible two-year prison term and a fine of 50,000 Sri Lankan rupees. The practice, which involves trawlers dragging weighted nets along the sea floor, is known to cause great depletion of fishery resources, and curbing it is in the interest of sustainable fishing. The initial reaction from Tamil Nadu has been one of concern and consternation. Political parties claim the amendment is draconian, and that it is targeted at the State's fishermen who regularly use hundreds of trawlers in Sri Lankan territorial waters.

This criticism is way off the mark. In recent years, some fishermen in northern Sri Lanka have also adopted bottom trawling. If this practice continues to gain ground even among local fishermen, the long-term consequences on fishing resources in the contested Palk Bay region will be irremediable. The amendment is aimed at curbing local trawlers as well as deterring trawlers from Tamil Nadu. An appropriate response from Tamil Nadu would be to expedite the conversion of its trawlers to deep sea fishing vessels, and not merely condemn Sri Lanka. Fishermen from both countries have been in talks for a long time to resolve the conflict. Sri Lankan fishermen want an immediate end to incursions by Indian trawlers, and those from Tamil Nadu insist on a three-year phase-out period. The proposal to ban bottom trawling is two years

old, but the amendment has come at a time when a Joint Working Group set up by both countries last year is in place.

Tamil Nadu fishermen are arrested from time to time by the Sri Lankan Navy, and their vessels seized. If more are arrested and slapped with two-year jail terms after a summary trial, as the law now envisages, it may create new flashpoints. Ultimately, the solution lies in the transition from trawling to deep sea fishing, for which a beginning has been made. The Central and State governments plan to provide 500 deep sea fishing boats with long lines and gill nets this year, as part of a plan to replace 2,000 trawlers in three years. However, the question is whether Sri Lanka can be expected to wait for this plan to be fully implemented before enforcing its bottom trawling ban. Even while bracing for an escalation as a result of protests from Tamil Nadu, both countries should ensure that the situation does not disrupt regular meetings of the JWG. Besides the fisheries conflict, they need to discuss marine conservation, thus giving equal importance to protecting livelihoods and sustainable fishing.

Tamil Nadu: Rameswaram fishermen plan ‘self-immolation’ protest

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/protest-planned/article19240918.ece>

"Rameswaram fishermen have resolved to stage ‘self-immolation’ protest on July 14 and decided to abstain from fishing from Sunday, as they have been peeved at Sri Lanka's legislation, banning bottom trawling in Palk Bay, their traditional fishing base, and warning of two years imprisonment and fine for violators. Condemning the legislation as harsh and aimed at debilitating their livelihood, leaders of 11 mechanised boat fishermen associations met in Rameswaram on Saturday and resolved to commit self-immolation with others, stating “if the governments could not protect our livelihood, they better allow us to die. “The entire fisher folk in the island would gather in front of the post office in the island and commit self-immolation, P. Sesu Raja, a fishermen association leader, said. When the State and Central governments were not forthcoming to protect their livelihood, there was no point in living, he said. The Sri Lankan government's legislation was a direct threat to them, they said. They had been fishing in Palk Bay, their traditional waters for centuries, and the Lankan government had no right to impose restrictions, the leaders said.

They were forced to enter Lankan waters only after India ceded Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka and failed to implement the 1974 agreement, they said. They would confine themselves to Indian waters, if the Centre retrieved the island, they argued. The leaders urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to directly take up the issue with the Lankan government and ensure peaceful fishing in Palk Bay till they switched over to deep-sea fishing or given an alternative livelihood. After young fisherman Britjo was shot dead, allegedly by the Lankan navy, the Centre promised them peaceful livelihood, only to deceive them, they charged. The legislation should be kept in abeyance as they were preparing to switch over to deep-sea fishing. As it would take a couple of

years to phase out bottom trawling, they should be given time till then, they said. The leaders also urged the Centre to secure the release of more than 60 fishermen detained in Lankan prisons. The more than 160 boats, which were detained in Sri Lanka for about two years, suffered an extensive damage and there was no point in getting them back. Instead, the governments should pay compensation of ₹50 lakh each to the boat owners, they said.

Tamil Nadu CM expresses concern over Sri Lanka's new fisheries bill banning bottom trawling

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_17A/Jul07_1499436519CH.php

"The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu state Edappadi K. Palaniswami has written to the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressing 'deep concern' about the new Fisheries bill passed by Sri Lanka parliament yesterday prohibiting illegal fishing methods including bottom trawling. In his letter to Prime Minister Modi, the Chief Minister said the passing of the "ill-advised" Bill at a time when the Ministers of India and Sri Lanka as well as Joint Working Group on Fisheries have met only recently to resolve the Indo-Sri Lankan Fishermen issues is shocking. Sri Lanka parliament on Thursday unanimously passed Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (Amendment) Bill banning the destructive fishing practice of bottom-trawling in the island waters, and imposing heavy fines on the violators.

The Bill will affect thousands of Sri Lankans and Indians fishing in the sea between Sri Lanka and India, and will particularly hit Tamil Nadu and Puducherry fishermen as these are the biggest offenders as far as bottom trawling in Lankan waters is concerned. He said the unilateral move by the Government of Sri Lanka will definitely hamper the joint initiatives taken by the Government of India as well as the Government of Sri Lanka. "The legislation proposed is, in fact, a severe setback to the diplomatic efforts being taken to resolve the issue amicably," Palaniswami wrote. "The move by Sri Lankan Government to introduce the Bill at this crucial juncture of transition towards a permanent solution is nothing but a harsh step to undermine the diplomatic efforts being undertaken by the Government of India to sort out the sensitive issue," he said.

Pointing out that there are 50 Tamil Nadu fishermen and 143 fishing boats belonging to Tamil Nadu fishermen in Sri Lankan custody since 2015, the Chief Minister said the move by the Government of Sri Lanka has caused great disquiet and anguish to the fishing community in Tamil Nadu. The Chief Minister urged the Prime Minister Modi to direct the Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian Mission in Sri Lanka to "immediately, appropriately and effectively" respond to the latest move by the Sri Lankan side both by registering India's strong protest against the move and ensuring that necessary provisions are made in the new legislation to exempt the traditional waters of Palk Bay from its purview. The Tamil Nadu government, which does not recognize the International Maritime Boundary Line, considers the Sri Lankan

waters in the Palk Bay is their fishermen's traditional fishing grounds and insists on fishing in the area.

Tamil Nadu: As Tamil Nadu gets ready to switch to deep-sea fishing, is it the end of the row with Sri Lanka?

<https://scroll.in/article/841512/as-tamil-nadu-gets-ready-to-switch-to-deep-sea-fishing-is-it-the-end-of-the-row-with-sri-lanka>

"The Palk Strait, a narrow strip of water in the Indian Ocean that separates Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu in India, is a hotly contested area between the fishing communities of the two countries. Indian fishermen are often arrested, sometimes even shot at, by Sri Lankan authorities for allegedly venturing into their waters in their mechanised trawlers. Last week, too, nine fishermen from Tamil Nadu were arrested for fishing in Lanka's waters. In May, the Tamil Nadu government came up with a plan to reduce the number of trawlers in Palk Bay by converting 2,000 such boats into deep-sea fishing vessels by 2020. The Central and state governments would contribute Rs 286 crores in financial subsidies for this. In the government order, the Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries Department said: ...frequent apprehension of fishing boats by the Sri Lankan Government is causing a sense of anxiety and insecurity among the fishermen community of Tamil Nadu as a whole. During the Fishermen level talks, the Fishermen of Tamil Nadu have expressed that they are willing to diversify the trawling operations into deep sea fishing operations in a phased manner over a period of three years provided that the Government of India provides financial support for the same.

The shift from trawling to deep-sea fishing would mean that fishermen would be able to move out of Palk Bay and fish in the waters of the Bay of Bengal. The fishing community in Tamil Nadu has welcomed the move. "We don't really have another option if we want to avoid getting in trouble with Sri Lankan authorities, said M Ilango, chairperson of the National Fisherfolk Forum and one of the fishing community leaders to propose the shift to deep-sea fishing. But uncertainty remains about whether the fishing community will adapt to deep-sea fishing and if this will de-escalate tensions in Palk Bay. Deep-sea fishing Under the joint project of the Union and state governments, 500 large trawlers will be converted into deep-sea fishing vessels, with gills nets for tuna fishing in the Bay of Bengal, by 2018. By 2019, another 500 will be converted, and 1,000 more by 2020. A sum of Rs 80 lakhs will be spent on each boat – half of which will come from the Centre, 20% from the state, another 20% through institutional finance and 10% from the boat owner. The Centre has already released Rs 200 crores for the conversion of 750 trawlers in the first phase. The state government will be contributing Rs 86 crores to the project, including a subsistence allowance of Rs 5,000 for each family for the last three months of construction.

“Only traditional/artisanal fishermen and their societies/associations/SHGs/FPOs are eligible for the benefits under this component, said a letter from the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries dated March 9. G Ramakrishnan, leader of the fishing community in Pudukottai district, said his fellow fishermen were ready to start deep-sea fishing if they received the money. “Fishing is our livelihood, so we can adapt easily to deep-sea fishing if we need to, he said. “Many of us from Pudukottai may move north to Karaikal for better access to the ocean. Trawling and its effects The planned switch to deep-sea fishing comes over 60 years after the government introduced trawling technology along India's coasts in 1954 in partnership with Norway. The heavy trawl nets, however, damaged the sea bed ecosystem by scooping up centuries-old corals, plants, turtles and marine mammals along with the targeted fish. They are banned in Sri Lanka. “At that time, we were not aware that trawling was harmful to the environment, said Ilango.

“One cannot help but think the Norwegians purposely dumped the worst technology they had on us to damage our marine ecosystem. In the following decades, artisanal fishermen took to mechanising their boats and equipment. Since bottom trawling was lucrative in the short term, it was used extensively till the waters were overfished. “Today you can barely find any fish close to shore, said Rahul Muralidharan, a PhD candidate at the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, Bengaluru. In the 1980s, fishermen from Ramanathapuram, Nagapattinam, Pudukottai, Tanjavur and Thiruvarur districts in Tamil Nadu and Karaikal in Pondicherry started moving further into Sri Lankan waters. “The area is very easy to fish in since the water is only 10 meters deep in the bay, said Muralidharan. This coincided with the start of the civil war in Sri Lanka, between the government and the militant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam demanding a separate state in the country's north.

As the conflict grew more violent, thousands of people were killed and the livelihoods of artisanal fishing communities were disrupted for years. However, the trawling of Palk Bay by Tamil fishermen continued uncontested till 2009, when the war ended. According to Ilango, while fisherfolk in Sri Lanka's south used technology “way more advanced than what we use, their counterparts in the north still took out their wooden catamarans and gill nets to sea. And it was when they realised the difficulty of fishing in the heavily trawled waters that tensions with Indian fishermen started. According to reports, Indian fishermen stole their nets and equipment. Several altercations between Sri Lankan authorities and Tamil fishermen later, bilateral talks were held where Sri Lanka said it would not allow Indian trawlers in its waters. “For many years, Tamil fishermen had argued that since they traditionally crossed the bay to fish, they would continue to do so, said Ilango. “But my organisation and some others have been trying to convince the fisherfolk that we are only going to face more problems if we continue to stray into their territory. After meetings, they have agreed that deep-sea fishing in the Bay of Bengal is a conflict-free and lucrative option. Slow adaptation Though the leaders of fishing communities in Tamil Nadu seem optimistic, there is scepticism among people who work closely with the

community about whether this scheme will help resolve the Palk Bay conflict. Roosevelt, a marine conservation activist in Rameshwaram, said fishermen in his area have not shown much interest in the deep-sea fishing project. This is because most fisherfolk here are adept at using the gill net while they will need to be trained in the commercial fishing technique of long line, which is used in the deep sea, he said.

Moreover, the industry, like any other, is profit-driven. “In deep-sea fishing, you have to be at sea for weeks or even months, only then you can break even, he said. “Currently, people using mechanised boats come back from sea in two or three days. Things will take a long time to change. People will naturally want to go to the nearest point to catch fish. S Vaidyanathan, a researcher at the Foundation for Ecological Research, Advocacy and Learning, meanwhile, pointed out that since the government order made no mention of regulation of the boats, it was unclear how it would solve the problem of fishing in Sri Lankan waters. “Everybody is fishing everywhere, whether you are a small fisherman or a trawler, he said. “Nothing in the current policy framework says that only certain kinds of boats should fish in certain waters. We don't know how this scheme is going to be regulated. Vaidyanathan also said that as each boat owner is required to put in Rs 8 lakhs to convert his trawler into a deep-sea fishing vessel, the scheme would only benefit the well off while smaller fishermen would be left out.

Depleting fish stock The assistance provided by the government for deep-sea fishing is part of the Centre's larger “Blue Revolution: Integrated Development and Management of Fisheries scheme. Yet, the push for deep-sea fishing has led to concerns about depleting fish stocks. In 2015, after the B Meenakumari committee – set up to review the deep-sea fishing policy and guidelines – in its report recommended allowing foreign vessels to fish in the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (the marine zone over which a country has exclusive rights to explore and use its resources), fishing communities along the Bay of Bengal protested, saying this would deplete their catch. This despite the fact that deep-sea fishing or tuna fishing has not yet been developed in India's east coast. Tuna is a high-value commercial sea food. Since it is not a staple along the east coast and eaten only in parts of Kerala and Karnataka, most of the catch would be exported, earning foreign exchange.

However, concern remains with studies showing a drastic fall in fish stocks in oceans across the world. In the Bay of Bengal, there is still plenty of catch in the deeper waters than in the waters closer to the shore. But the deep sea is also characterised by slow-growing organisms, which, once fished, may take a long time to recover their stocks. As Senthil Babu of the People's Coastal Rights Movement put it, “The deep sea is the last resort for fishing.

Sri Lanka: Lanka imposes jail term for bottom trawling

<http://www.sundaytimes.lk/170528/news/lanka-imposes-jail-term-for-bottom-trawling-242805.html>

"A two-year jail term or a fine will be imposed on those found guilty of bottom trawling in Sri Lankan territorial waters, the government has decided. For this purpose, an amendment to the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act was gazetted this week. It seeks to prohibit fishing operations utilising trawl nets towed by motorised fishing boats and the sale, import or transport of such nets and the issuance of licences. Bottom trawling, an illegal and harmful fishing method for marine resources, uses a towing net with a cone shaped body and bag (madiya) connected to the other end to drag along the sea bed for maximum catch. The new amendment comes after several years of poaching and bottom-trawling by Indian fishermen in Sri Lanka's waters. The amendment sets out clearly that "no person can engage in or cause any other person to be engaged in fishing operations utilising trawl nets, including nets without two wings or using vertical poles at the two free ends of the net, to be towed by motorised or mechanised fishing boats.

Accordingly, the Fisheries Director General, who is responsible for issuing fishing permits, cannot issue fresh licenses or renew past licences to carry out fishing using trawl nets in Lankan sea. Meanwhile, on the same day the Sri Lankan Government published the gazette, the Tamil Nadu state government published an order detailing funding measures taken in concurrence with the Indian central government to convert Tamil Nadu fishermen's bottom trawlers to deep-sea vessels. As an initial phase, the Indian Central government approved Rs, 200 crore (SL Rs 2,000 million) to convert some 750 bottom trawlers to deep-sea vessels. The project is expected to begin this year. The new development to introduce deep sea fishing as an alternative for poaching in Palk Strait came as India's Fisheries Commissioner noted in the order that the Sri Lankan Government's frequent seizure of Indian fishing boats was causing "anxiety and insecurity among Tamil Nadu fisher community. During the fishermen level talks, the Indian fishermen have expressed that they are willing to diversify the trawling operations into deep sea fishing operations in a phased manner over three years, provided that the Indian government funds such a programme. The Commissioner also noted that about 2,000 large trawl fishing boats would be replaced with new deep sea fishing gill netter cum long liner and moved out of Palk Bay in a phased manner.

Tamil Nadu: 2,000 trawlers to be converted to deep sea vessels in 4 years

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/madurai/2000-trawlers-to-be-converted-to-deep-sea-vessels58814335.cms-in-4-years/articleshow/>

"The state government on Tuesday issued a government order for the implementation of a scheme to convert trawl boats operating from Palk Bay into deep sea fishing vessels at a cost of Rs 80 lakh each. A joint project of the Union and state governments, the plan is to convert 500 trawlers to enable deep sea fishing (tuna liner and gill netter) in 2017 - 18, another 500 in 2018 - 19 and 1,000 more trawlers by 2019 - 20. The order comes in the backdrop of the simmering

dispute between Sri Lanka and Indian fishermen over fishing in traditional fishing grounds for over three decades. This was also a major bone of contention between the two sides during the recent fishermen talks with the Indians accused of resorting to destructive trawl fishing destroying the sea bed and marine wealth. During the talks, Indian fishermen appealed for a period of three years to move to deep sea fishing and sought the assistance of state and Union governments in this regard.

Based on this demand, Commissioner of Fisheries had written to the Union Government seeking financial assistance. The plan was to convert 2,000 large size trawlers from the Indian side at Pudukottai and Ramanathapuram districts and move these deep sea fishing vessels out of Palk Bay. Government of India responded promptly providing the administrative sanction for replacing 750 trawler boats from Palk Bay in the first phase and released a sum of Rs 200 crores. Union ministries of finance and agriculture released the sum in two installments of Rs 100 crores each. Under the plan, Union government will contribute 50 % of the fund to construct the boats - which means Rs 40 lakh will be given by Centre while the state government will provide 20 % or Rs 16 lakhs including boat insurance, the beneficiaries - fishermen - have to contribute 10 % (Rs 8 lakhs) and the remaining Rs 16 lakhs should be raised as institutional finance.

To lessen the beneficiary's burden further, the state government has suggested that 10 % contribution could be met by scrapping the trawler in hand and it will provide subsistence allowance of Rs 5,000 per family. As many as seven families including that of the owner depending on the trawler to be scrapped will be provided this allowance for three months in the last phase of boat construction. With the Rs 200 crores sanctioned by Union government and itself contributing Rs 86 crore including the component of subsistence allowance, the state government has proposed to build 500 deep sea fishing vessels in the first phase, the government order stated.

India and Sri Lanka: Deep Sea Fishing Seems Working To Ease Issues With Sri Lanka – Analysis

<http://www.eurasiareview.com/18052017-deep-sea-fishing-seems-working-ease-issues-sri-lanka-analysis/>

"Barring stray and uninformed political demands to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take up the fishers' row with his hosts during his Sri Lanka visit last week, southern Tamil Nadu coast was mostly silent on what was a sensitive, livelihood issue. This was because of the clear signs of a fast-tracked internal solution to the problem, which has remained a constant irritant in the bilateral relations over the past decade and more. According to the welcome solution, the Centre and the State Government are now launching the much-delayed ₹1,500 crore scheme for Rameswaram fishers to take to deep sea fishing, ending their destructive practice of bottom trawling, that too illegally in Sri Lanka waters.

They are also taking initiatives to create attendant common infrastructure and facilitating training for these traditional, Palk Bay fishers to familiarise and acclimatise themselves in deep sea fishing. After halting responses to the Centre's suggestions on previous occasions, the Jayalalithaa Government offered 25 percent subsidy for the conversion of bottom trawlers into deep sea liners in the Budget-2011, and raised it to 50 percent in 2013. In between, she also sought ₹1,500 crore grant in this regard from the Centre. Now, however, with greater realisation, including the affected fishers, there is all-round enthusiasm for taking forward the scheme. By encouraging deep sea fishing in the Rameswaram area, the authorities in India hope to reduce the pressure on the neighbourhood seas, both of India and Sri Lanka.

Indications are that over the medium and long terms, more and more Tamil Nadu fishers would take to deep sea fishing while in the short-term those among them with non-trawling mechanised boats within Indian waters. With deep sea fishing proving to be profitable and sustainable, expectations are that more and more fishers on the Indian side would move away from their trawling methods, which the government had encouraged in the 1960s, as a major forex earner. Infrastructure needs Deep sea fishing involves the creation of additional infrastructure. The 2011 budget provided for the setting up of 20 cold storage plants across coastal Tamil Nadu for fishers to sell their perishable produce in international markets at a time of their choosing for a price that is favourable to them. The human infrastructure also includes training in deep sea fishing, identification of fishing fields on a daily and hourly basis, using GPS and other technological innovations, and habituating them to stay put in sea for days together, which the Rameswaram fishers are not accustomed to.

The civil infrastructure also includes three fishing harbours at Mookaiyur and Kunthukal, for fishers from Rameswaram and down south, and at Poompuhar, for Nagapattinam fishers, now wading into Sri Lanka's eastern waters. The Kunthukal harbour would especially help the Rameswaram region fishers, who otherwise would have to take a detour along the Pamban bridge for going deep sea, costing extra time and on-board cold storage space, required for diesel storage, instead. The Tamil Nadu authorities have also reportedly fast-tracked boat-building efforts and tried to slash the required time from nine months to six. Similar attention requires to be given to the work on the fishing harbours, which should not suffer for want of funds. In the absence of a coordinated strategy, there is every possibility that the vessels and fishers would be ready, but not the required harbour facilities for them to land with their catch.

Over time, however, the Tamil Nadu authorities would have to ensure that new trawlers do not hit the near waters, and more especially the Sri Lankan waters. According to international studies, the success rate of conversion in terms of discouraging bottom trawlers from returning to the seas in one form or another has only been five percent. Sustained joint action by the fisheries and revenue authorities, coastal police and the coast guard may be required over a substantial period to make this happen. Involving the traditional fishers' village panchayat may also help as

they have a near-full control over the lives and livelihoods of the members in individual hamlets. Fast-tracking review Problems could arise at times over the deep-sea fishers 'trespassing' into the Gulf of Mannar Bio-sphere, which the Centre had unilaterally declared as a 'protected area'. These too need to be addressed through the existing mechanisms in a fisher-friendly atmosphere. Likewise, the Tamil Nadu Government too should fully re-activate the intelligence committee, which used to meet at regular intervals, to review the case of Sri Lankan (Sinhala) fishers arrested in Indian waters.

The Centre should also follow-up with other south Indian States, especially along the east coast up to Odhisa, and also the Andamans administration for fast-tracking the review process for arrested Sri Lankan fishers. This would also give India a moral high ground to demand similar fast-tracked return of arrested Indian fishers and their boats. It needs to be recalled that the first detention of fishers' boats and high-cost penalties for freeing arrested fishers and boats were imposed by a court in Andhra Pradesh. The Tamil Nadu fishers alone ended up suffering along with their Puducherry counterparts as other east coast fishers do not fish in the Sri Lankan waters to be caught. For Sri Lankan authorities courts and navies it was trespass by Indian fishers and one-sided punishment by Indian courts. The Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) possibly re-oriented its tactics to discourage Indian fishers to 'trespass' into the waters that they were mandated to protect and secure.

Sri Lanka 'no-no' still Despite demands by the Tamil Nadu fishers and claims to 'historic waters' and 'traditional rights' by successive Governments in Tamil Nadu, the Sri Lankan side has not relented an inch, even while going through the process of multi-layered discussions to no avail. In more recent times, the Tamil fishers of Sri Lanka's post-war northern province are among the most vociferous of the opponents to any sharing of their sea wealth with their Tamil brethren from across the Palk Strait. More recently, the Sri Lankan Fisheries Minister Mahinda Amaraweera said that they could not release the detained Indian boats without consulting the Northern Tamil fishers in that country. Tamil Nadu fishers resort to bottom-trawling, which is acknowledged as a destructive method and is banned in Sri Lanka. They also swarm the Sri Lankan waters in numbers and speed which their Tamil brethren out there cannot match. While Sri Lankan Tamil fishers have sought a time-frame on India's conversion plans, a clear-cut idea could encourage them, as also their government to seriously reconsider their current opposition to let a limited number of licensed Indian fishers to fish in their waters minus bottom trawling. There have also been other suggestions for cooperative fishing of other types on their side of the Palk Bay. Such ideas would have to wait until they are all convinced that the current Indian plans are serious and sustainable from the implementation point of view.

The success of deep sea fishing on the Indian side could also help in resolving Tamil Nadu's current concerns over letting Sri Lanka have the tiny Katchchativu islet through the bilateral accord of 1974. This is even more of a sensitive political and strategic concern in bilateral

relations, if allowed to fester for longer than already. Late Jayalalithaa and her DMK rival predecessor, M. Karunanidhi, had challenged the accord in the Supreme Court, both in their personal capacities. The two nations having notified the 1974 and 1976 accords under the UNCLOS (UN Conference on the Law of the Sea), there is no way India could unilaterally retrieve Katchchaativu, as is being demanded by the political class in Tamil Nadu. Any unilateral initiative by any Indian stake-holder could only strain bilateral relations. Given the complexities of the sea-centred security situation when the LTTE was around and its dreaded 'Sea Tigers' arm was active, it still has problems plenty awaiting for India, if the pending court cases are also left unaddressed, far too long.

Tamil Nadu: Shrimp seeds released into sea

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/shrimp-seeds-released-into-sea/article18432678.ece>

"In a bid to increase shrimp production and promote the livelihood of fishermen fishing in Pak Bay and Gulf of Mannar, the Mandapam regional centre of Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) on Thursday launched a sea ranching programme by releasing seeds of 'penaeus semisulcatus' (green tiger shrimp) species. On noticing that over-fishing of brooders (parent shrimps) and juveniles had resulted in drastic depletion of shrimp resources in the region, CMFRI launched the sea ranching programme, releasing about two lakh shrimp of 50 days old post larvae shrimp seeds in the Palk Bay at Thonithurai, near Mandapam on Thursday. The seeds, which were already 50 days old, would be available for harvest in four months time, Mr Abdul Nazar, CMFRI Scientist in-charge said. "We expect 30% to 40% survival rate and each shrimp will grow to 18 to 20 gms in the next four months, he told reporters. Officials from the fisheries department and fishermen leaders, including U Arulanandham, P Sesu Raja and N J Bose, were among those present.

The CMFRI proposed to make series of sea ranching of this shrimp species and crab species of 'portunus pelagicus' (blue swimmer crab), he said. The sea ranching would take place every month with the involvement of the local fishermen, he said adding the local fishermen had identified three or four locations for release of the seeds. The CMFRI, as part of its activity, proposed to continue the ranching for a year to ensure replenishment of natural stock. CMFRI had raised the two lakh shrimp seeds at the cost of Rs. 40,000, he said. After a year, CMFRI would decide on continuing the programme after studying the funding availability, he added. Sea ranching would also help to conserve and maintain sustainable shrimp stocks in the wild, he said. In this connection, CMFRI was conducting research on hatchery production of shrimp seeds, the scientist added.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen demand enhanced subsidy

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/fishermen-demand-enhanced-subsidy/article18421424.ece>

"Rameswaram fishermen welcomed the financial package for deep-sea fishing but wanted the Centre and the State government to enhance the subsidy component. "The scheme will take off only if the Central and State governments provided long-liners with maximum subsidy without insisting on any initial contribution from the fishers, said U. Arulanandham, a leader of the community. As the fishermen are accustomed to 24-hour fishing in the Palk Bay, they could be persuaded to take to deep-sea fishing only if the governments stepped in with enhanced subsidy, fishermen said. The beneficiaries could be asked to bear a token amount, they add. Demonstrate benefits "The government should first send a batch of fishermen to deep-sea fishing after offering them training, long liners and necessary fishing paraphernalia to demonstrate the benefits of deep-sea fishing, suggested Mr. Arulanandham. As most of them were lukewarm to the idea of deep-sea fishing and were in a position to just meet the expenses towards the voyage for multi-day fishing, the State fisheries department should make the scheme attractive, he said.

"Most fishermen who owned trawlers can raise a maximum of ₹10 lakh, that too by forming a group, he said. The fishermen would require at least three years to completely phase out bottom-trawling, fishermen leaders P. Sesu Raja and N. J. Bose said. They suggested that the government should begin the construction of long liners immediately without expecting contributions from the beneficiaries. The State government's 50% subsidy scheme, launched in 2013, failed as the fishermen could not raise the balance 50% even by forming a group or on behalf of cooperative societies, they said. Every year, the government invited applications but there were very few takers, they noted. Mr. M Ilango, chairman of the National Fisherfolk Forum (NFF), said if at all the government insisted on contributions from the beneficiaries, it should arrange them loans without collateral security.

Tamil Nadu: TN looks to kick start deep-sea fishing project this fiscal

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/tn-looks-to-kick-start-deep-sea-fishing-project-this-fiscal/article18421422.ece>

"The Tamil Nadu government is keen that the proposed deep-sea fishing project should start yielding benefits to fishermen during this financial year (2017-18). Even as it awaits the full details of the Centre's approval of its deep-sea fishing project, the State government has drawn up broad plans for its implementation. The project was submitted to the Centre nearly four years ago when Jayalalithaa was the Chief Minister. As per the project, 2,000 deep-sea fishing boats with long lines and gill nets will replace trawlers in three years. Initially, 500 such boats will be given. "Normally, the production of deep-sea fishing boats takes nine months. But, our idea is to

compress the period into six months so that we can hand over at least 100 boats, this year itself, said an official of the Fisheries Department. Pointing out that the State has the capacity to produce the boats, the official said currently, there are 6,500 boats in the State, and all of them were manufactured locally. “We need to engage the private sector in a big way for the project, the official said, adding that the entire coastal belt of the State, spread over 1,016 km, is full of facilities to produce the deep-sea boats.

Motivating fishermen Conscious of the fact that it is the Ramanathapuram fishermen who are invariably affected because of the Palk Bay fishing dispute, the government is hoping to motivate all of them to migrate to the new practice. Of about 3,600 vessels engaged in fishing in the Palk Bay region, Ramanathapuram accounts for about 1,730 boats. To make things easier for the fishermen, the authorities have proposed to have a fish landing facility in Kunthukal, near Pamban, at a cost of ₹60 crore, and a ₹114-crore fishing harbour in Mookkaiyur, near Sayalkudi, both located in the district. Work on the fishing harbour has commenced, the official said. Meanwhile, fishermen of the district, while welcoming the development, felt that the authorities must ensure remunerative returns for their catch. “We have good fishing grounds where fishermen from Kerala stay for 3 - 4 days and catch fish. But they have good export houses and processing facilities that buy their catch for good rates. Here, the prawn we catch goes to Tuticorin and we have no say in the prices, said R. Arogyadas, a fisherman from Pamban. Fredrick Nathan of Thangachimadam, who was once caught by the Sri Lankan Navy, said without the right kind of training, subsidies to buy boats alone would serve no purpose.

Tamil Nadu: Deep sea fishing: Applications invited from fishermen

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/deep-sea-fishing-applications-invited-from-fishermen/article18366380.ece>

"The district administration has invited applications from active fishermen, who wish to take up deep sea fishing by availing themselves of 50% subsidy for constructing new tuna longliner-cum-gill-netter. Seeking to wean away fishermen engaged in single-day mechanised boat fishing into multi-day deep sea fishing, Collector S. Natarajan called upon them to avail themselves of the subsidy to the maximum of Rs. 30 lakh. He said joint owners of a group comprising a maximum of six fishermen, fisheries cooperative societies or individual fishermen could apply for the subsidy. The applicants should be active fishermen and members of fishermen cooperative societies based in the State with biometric identity cards. Interested fishermen could download the applications free of cost by visiting www.fisheries.tn.gov.in and send the completed applications with the design of the new longliner to the Fisheries Commissioner, Chennai, by June 16. The design of the longliner, in original, should be certified by a naval architect, he said. Official sources said 60% of the total subsidy had been earmarked for fishermen from Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai, Nagapattinam, Thanjavur and Tiruvarur

districts, who were fishing in the Palk Bay. Since they get arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy personnel after entering Sri Lankan waters, top priority had been given to them in the subsidy scheme. The back-ended subsidy would be released in three stages, they added.

Sri Lanka and India: Fishers detention attempt to derail talks

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2017/may/03/fishers-detention-attempt-to-derail-talks-1600355.html>

"The latest arrests of Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy is an attempt to derail diplomatic efforts between the two countries, Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami said on Tuesday. For, they were artisanal fishermen on a small boat using traditional fishing tools and not on a mechanised boat, he reasoned in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Palaniswami urged the Centre to immediately secure the release of fishermen and equipment now in Lankan custody. Late on Sunday night, Lankan Navy detained five fishermen who had set off from the Pamban fishing base in Ramanathapuram. While fishermen who use mechanised boats are often charged with poaching in Sri Lankan waters, these were "artisanal fishermen who were fishing in a small traditional (vallam) boat, in their customary fishing grounds in the Palk Bay. They were taken to Jaffna and reportedly remanded in judicial custody.

"Such incidents can only be seen as an act to derail the attempts to sort out the issues relating to fishing in the traditional waters of Palk Bay through diplomatic efforts of the respective governments, Palaniswami said. Pointing out that this demoralised the community here, the Chief Minister said it was important that the Centre puts the message across to the neighbour, "in firm, clear, unequivocal and unambiguous terms that these trends have to be reversed. There are now 134 boats in SL custody, Palaniswami said expressing disappointment that no decision had been taken on releasing them even during the recent meeting between the PMs of two countries. The indefinite detention of equipment had seriously affected the livelihood of fishermen, he said requesting Modi to direct the ministries concerned to sanction at the earliest the comprehensive special package that the State had sought. The Centre should also annul the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement of 1974 to restore the traditional fishing rights of Tamil Nadu fishermen in the Palk Bay, he said.

India and Sri Lanka: MoU signed on cooperation on economic project

<http://bdnews24.com/neighbours/2017/04/26/india-sri-lanka-sign-mou-on-cooperation-on-economic-projects>

"India and Sri Lanka have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on "Cooperation in Economic Projects during the on-going visit of the Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to India. Wickremesinghe and his Indian counterpart, Narendra Modi, welcomed the signing of the MoU on Wednesday and expressed satisfaction over the implementation of projects already agreed upon. They hoped that the various projects mentioned in the MoU would also be executed expeditiously. Controversial Though the draft of the MoU signed on Wednesday was approved by the Sri Lankan cabinet, it became controversial with petroleum sector trade unions going on a crippling strike on Monday, a day before the departure of Wickremesinghe to India. Indian officials regretted that the Sri Lankan public were not made aware of the fact that the projects are "Joint Ventures between Indian and Sri Lankan government entities and are not outright sales to Indian entities.

Trincomalee oil tanks issue For example, the proposed deal between India and Sri Lanka on the management of the 99 oil tanks in Trincomalee, envisages a Joint Venture between the state-owned Indian company Lanka Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and the Sri Lankan public sector entity, Ceylon Petroleum Cooperation (CPC). But the agitation against the deal was based on the wrong notion that the tanks were to be given away wholesale to India on a throw away fee of \$100,000 per annum. The Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe government did not think it was necessary to correct this impression. In fact, to get the unions to call off the crippling strike, the Prime Minister assured that he will not sign any agreement on the tanks during his four-day visit to India beginning on Apr 25.

However, the areas for cooperation envisaged in the MoU signed in Delhi are: A Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) fired 500 Megawatts capacity LNG Power Plant as well as LNG Terminal or Floating Storage Re-gasification Unit (FSRU) in Kerawalapitiya. India will assist Sri Lanka in the enhanced use of Natural Gas, including the setting up of a piped gas distribution system in Colombo and in suburban areas in Sri Lanka; help set up retail outlets for the supply of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) to the transportation sector in Sri Lanka; and convert fuel-based power plants to LNG power plants. All this will be done jointly with the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC). India will set up a 50 MW (extendable to 100 MW) Solar Power Plant in Sampur; form a Joint Venture to develop the 84 oil tanks in the Upper Tank Farm in Trincomalee, and sign a land lease agreement for 50 years in favour of the Lanka Indian Oil Corporation (LIOC) Ltd. India will also make joint investments in the development of ports, a petroleum refinery and other industries in Trincomalee.

India will set up Industrial Zones or Special Economic Zones in identified locations in Sri Lanka. It will also develop the Dambulla-Trincomalee road as an Expressway through joint investments with Sri Lanka. The development of the Mannar-Jaffna and Mannar-Trincomalee highways is also on the cards. India will help develop the railway sector in Sri Lanka through projects relating to track upgrading and the purchase of rolling stock. India and Sri Lanka will encourage

Indian companies to invest in a container terminal in Colombo Port (the Eastern Terminal), considering that 70 percent of the Colombo port' business is Indian trans-shipment. Ethnic and fishing issues Prime Ministers Modi and Wickremesinghe touched on two other controversial issues. Modi requested his counterpart to see that Sri Lanka deals with Tamil Nadu fishermen who stray into Sri Lankan waters in the Palk Bay in a humanitarian way. In turn he explained to Wickremesinghe the steps taken by India to wean Tamil Nadu fishermen away from shallow water fishing and get them to do deep sea fishing. Modi congratulated Sri Lanka for co-sponsoring the resolution on the human rights situation in his country at the last session of the UN Human Rights Council and hoped that the commitments made therein will be met in the given time period of two years.

Sri Lanka: Long-term solution to Palk Bay conflict elusive: Sri Lankan fishermen

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/long-term-solution-to-palk-bay-conflict-elusive-sri-lankan-fishermen/article18152000.ece>

"Although New Delhi and Colombo have expressed satisfaction over recent bilateral talks on the Palk Bay fishing conflict, northern Sri Lankan fishermen say a much-needed long-term solution remains elusive. Following resistance from the fisherfolk and some efforts taken by the two governments, the number of Indian trawlers coming into Sri Lankan waters has reduced, observe fishermen. However, fully resolving the crisis requires greater political will from the two governments and sympathy from fisher leaders in Tamil Nadu, they emphasise. "The talks are simply dragging without any major decision. This delay is only to the Indian fishermen's advantage, because they somehow get the extension they wanted, says Mannar-based fisher leader Mohamed Alam, referring to Tamil Nadu fisher leaders' earlier demand for three more years to phase out bottom trawling, which Sri Lanka rejected.

"Our brothers in Tamil Nadu must realise that the sea is our only means to livelihood. Unless they appreciate our plight, nothing will change, says Mr. Alam, sounding dejected. His pessimism is not without reason. Having tried to negotiate with his Indian counterparts since 2010, he has only seen discussions proving futile. The Tamil Nadu trawler owners refuse to stop using the destructive fishing practice, pointing to the many thousands that it feeds in their community. Emerging from the ashes of a brutal civil war and trying to rebuild their lives, the Sri Lankan fishermen find their Tamil Nadu counterparts' economic interests competing fiercely with theirs. In yet another attempt to solve the problem, the two countries set up a Joint Working Group in November 2016, and appear to be taking steps to tackle it. India has assured Sri Lanka of phasing out bottom trawling. The central and state governments have begun investing in fishing harbours in Tamil Nadu to help fishermen switch to alternatives. Following the latest round of talks in Colombo earlier this month, officials from both sides expressed optimism in solving fisheries crisis facing the region.

“The positive initiatives are welcome, but they may not be sufficient. We cannot get carried away, stresses Mr. Alam, speaking to The Hindu at his home in Mannar town. Releasing trawlers On Tamil Nadu fisher leaders' demand that their trawlers detained by the Sri Lankan Navy be released, fisher leaders here say they have conveyed their views to the Fisheries Minister. While fisher leaders appear agreeable, although with some conditions, sources in Colombo say a final decision is likely to be taken before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to Sri Lanka in May. There are currently 151 Indian vessels in Sri Lankan custody, seized since 2014. The Sri Lankan Navy is inconsistent in seizing Indian trawlers found poaching, says Mullaitivu fisher leader Antonypillai Mariyarasa. “Even if we spot Indian trawlers near our coast and report it to the Navy, they don't take action at times. They say there is no place to park the confiscated boats.

The fishermen here are under great financial pressure, as trespassing Indian trawlers are not the only troublemakers in this war-battered district. More recently, fishermen here are facing stiff competition from the island's south and western districts, with some fishers seasonally migrating to their north-eastern coast. “No fisherman is our enemy. All we are saying is, let us fish in our waters, let us live, Mr. Mariyarasa says, at his cooperative's newly-renovated building in Mullaitivu. Caught in-between While the concern over vanishing livelihoods binds nearly 2 lakh fisherfolk of Sri Lanka's Tamil-majority north some, like fisher folk in Delft, face peculiar challenges. Off Jaffna peninsula and connected by a ferry, Delft island or Neduntheevu is possibly one of the closest inhabited islands to Rameswaram. “Almost all of us went to Tamil Nadu as refugees after supplies to our island were cut in the 1990s during the war, says V. Anton Thayagaran, who leads a fishermen's association in Delft.

It is around Delft that Indian trawlers would often be found, prompting the Sri Lankan navy to arrest the fishermen and confiscate vessels. The number of such trawlers trespassing has come down, say fishermen. At least they are not as regular as before. But they have bred a new problem locally. Some Jaffna and Mannar fishermen have started operating banned fishing vessels, citing Indian trawlers as reason. “Small-scale fishermen like us get crushed from all sides, he says, watching his friends mend fishing nets at a dim-lit shelter by the sea.

India and Sri Lanka: ‘Politics playing impt role in marine fisheries governance’

<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-politics-playing-impt-role-in-marine-fisheries-governance-2406784>

"Politics, rather than science, is playing an important role in marine fisheries governance, especially in South Asian countries, according to a Dutch scientist. Maarten Bavinck, a Dutch scientist specialising in capture fishery of India and Sri Lanka, said the dispute between India

and Sri Lanka over fishing activities in the Palk Bay still remained unsolved, mainly due to political reasons. Delivering a lecture on 'Tropical Marine Fisheries Governance: The Way Forward' at the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute today, he opined that Tamil Nadu government should take action to reduce the size of fleets used for fishing in the Palk Bay to resolve the conflict in the region. The lecture was organised by the Marine Biological Association of India (MBAI). ""Trawling needs to be contained in the Palk Bay, where trawling operations across the international boundary line have not only been causing social and economic hardship for 25,000 small-scale fishers and their families in Northern Sri Lanka, but high-level political tensions between India and Sri Lanka"", he was quoted as saying a CMFRI release here.

Bavinck, however, said that science-based guidelines are needed to ease the tension in the region. For this, India's CMFRI and Sri Lanka's National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA) should take joint studies and a coordinated approach towards finding a science based solution, he said. ""In India, fisheries governance has a political dimension. Norms and priorities are not being established by science, but is being debated in the public domain"", he said adding that unwanted political influence in fisheries should be contained. He also said solid ecological and marine biological studies are required to estimate what damage was occurring to the rich resources in the Palk Bay due to intensive trawling, and to restructure the fisheries to maximise benefits of these resource.

""In our research project,we have advocated the possibility of introducing a buy-back programme which would work only if government is able to prevent the 'leakage' of new trawl fishing effort into the Bay,"" he said. The scientist said while trawling has helped boost India's catch and export revenue, it has also proven to be the bane of the fisheries, destroying valuable marine habitat and causing decades of intense conflict with small-scale fishers on the inshore and fishing grounds. Bavinck said co-management was the need of the hour to preserve the potential resources in the country. India should link up the science-based governance with user-based governance to preserve the fishery resources in the Indian waters, he added.

‘Politics playing impt role in marine fisheries governance, especially in South Asia’

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/politics-playing-impt-role-in-marine-fisheries-governance/articleshow/58255247.cms>

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India and Sri Lanka: Increase Palk Bay patrol, Colombo tells New Delhi

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-seeks-more-patrolling-of-palk-bay/article17891997.ece>

"Sri Lanka on Friday asked India to increase the patrol of the Palk Bay to prevent Tamil Nadu fishermen from trespassing into Sri Lankan waters, even as it expressed positive signs on the likely release of detained Indian trawlers. "The meeting was very useful. We are happy that India is really committed to its assurance of phasing out bottom trawlers and has taken constructive steps. We are very hopeful of finding a permanent solution together, a senior officer from the Sri

Lankan delegation told The Hindu after official teams from the countries met here as part of an initiative to jointly address the Palk Bay fisheries conflict, involving fishermen of Tamil Nadu and northern Sri Lanka. After the island's civil war ended in May 2009, fisher folk living in the Tamil majority Northern Province have been expressing serious concern over the loss of livelihoods due to relentless bottom trawling a destructive fishing method practised by Indian fishermen, reportedly, in the Sri Lankan waters.

The long-running conflict has resulted in the arrest of several hundred Indian fishermen since 2009, and at times, sparked violence at sea. The Sri Lankan Navy has also confiscated trawlers used by the fishermen. Britjo's death At Friday's meeting, the Indian side expressed deep concern over the fatal shooting of Rameswaram fisherman K. Britjo who set out fishing in the Palk Bay on March 6. Tamil Nadu fishermen have accused the Sri Lankan Navy of opening fire at him and the Navy has denied the charge. The Indian officials sought a detailed report on the investigation carried out by Sri Lankan agencies and reiterated that no violence should be used against fishermen under any circumstance, sources at the meeting said. Officials from New Delhi and Tamil Nadu also updated the Sri Lankan side on the initiatives taken, including the construction of two fishing harbours in Mookaiyur and Poompuhar in Tamil Nadu at a cost of over Rs. 250 crore, to phase out bottom trawling and encourage fishermen to consider alternative methods.

Release of trawlers To the Indian side's request for the release of the seized trawlers, numbering nearly 150, the Sri Lankan officials expressed the willingness to consider it soon. "Recently, our Ministry sought the opinion of northern fishermen on this matter, they seem agreeable. But since this is a political decision, it would have to be taken at the highest levels. We are considering the India's request very seriously, a top Sri Lankan official said. The release of trawlers remains a contentious issue facing the two countries. Owners of the vessels, based in Tamil Nadu, have been demanding that the Sri Lankan authorities release them. However over the last few years, Sri Lanka has followed a policy of retaining seized Indian trawlers, while releasing arrested Indian fishermen swiftly. It appears that Colombo may release at least some of the trawlers, especially those seized in 2015, in the near future. Friday's meeting was the second of the ongoing discussions between senior officials from both sides, an initiative running parallel to the ministerial level bilateral talks.

Tamil Nadu: Give 100% subsidy for deep-sea fishing

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/give-100-subsidy-for-deep-sea-fishing-pt/article17896876.ece>

"Stating that retrieval of Katchatheevu islet alone would help to resolve the fishermen issue, Puthiya Tamizhagam leader K. Krishnasamy said that the Centre should secure the traditional rights of the fishermen in the Palk Bay till it retrieved the islet. Addressing a demonstration here

on Saturday, organised by the party in support of 70 lakh fisher folk living in hamlets along the 1000-km-long coastal stretch in the State, he said Rameswaram fishermen had lost their traditional fishing rights in the Palk Bay only after India ceded the islet to Sri Lanka. On the Centre mooted deep-sea fishing for addressing the issue, he said for fishermen it would be possible only if fishermen were provided with vessels with all facilities and a channel between north and south sea here. As each vessel would cost ? One crore and the Centre should provide the vessels with 100 % subsidy.

Sri Lanka: Protecting Sri Lanka's Dugongs

<http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2017/03/26/protecting-sri-lankas-dugongs/>

"Fishing communities in Puttalam, Kalpitiya once practiced illegal methods, especially when it came to fishing gear that threatens Dugong—a large marine mammal, and sea grass habitats have chosen a number of alternatives thanks to the conservation initiatives of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The Sunday Leader spoke to a cross section of the community on the progress in their latest initiatives. Twenty two year-old, Upeka Thanamali says she is very happy to see her father and brothers giving up illegal fishing methods. Asked how it was possible, she says it is due to the initiatives of some non-governmental organisations by providing sewing machines, assisting the ornamental fishing industry and other small business ventures. "Apart from teaching at a primary school, I also do sewing during my extra time that fetches some Rs. 10,000 per month apart from my salary. So I can help my family with it.

Respecting mother nature Husband and wife duo, W. Pradeep Prasanna and Niluka Damayanthi say they have tremendous respect for mother nature. "We never use methods that would have a negative impact to ocean resources. We went through hard times but as a family we work hard and cut down on unnecessary expenses. Contrary to popular saying that most fishermen drink and smoke, the majority of them here are neither under the influence of liquor and they do not smoke, says Prasanna. Damayanthi says that since she was married some 20 years ago, she takes part in all her husband's activities. "I think as a family . We should work together it goes a long way. Likewise my two children apart from their school work help us in the day to day activities, she says. Forty-year-old K. B. Nilmini says illegal fishing in the area is less now with more women focusing on sewing.

However, she says during the off seasons they do have problems in selling their products. "I wish there is a system or method where we could sell it to outsiders. Government institutions could do their role here, she added. Seventeen-year-old, Asela says his father had stopped fishing but his ornamental fishing business is doing well. "Now my father makes fishing tanks as he has sufficient orders , he adds. Wildlife Department Deputy Director of Conservation Research and Training, Dr. Lakshman Peiris says the major aim of the project is to reduce the impacts of destructive fishing practices on sea grass habitats and provide income generation opportunities to

local communities. Education and awareness programmes have been implemented targeting specific areas of the lagoon to enhance and promote alternative livelihoods. Alternative livelihood projects for fishing communities will include batik, sewing, packaging of dry fish, production of coir mats, ornamental fish breeding, etc.

In addition, marketing, branding and finance management training will be provided for community members to improve their products. Selected communities were given some self-sustaining employment, i.e. Batik, sewing machines, ornamental fish rearing, crab farming, etc. Legally authorised fishing nets were distributed among the fishermen to avoid using illegal fishing nets. They aim to reduce fishing pressure to the lagoon and thereby protect dugong and dugong habitats. This can be considered as a trial for community involvement and conservation while getting some incentives. Conservation of dugongs Recognising threats on the survival of the globally endangered dugong population found across the Indian and Pacific Ocean Basin, a global effort was made under the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS) while establishing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). In Sri Lanka the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) has entered into an MoU with CMS.

The MOU that has an understanding that the country strengthens the conservation of dugong and their habitat with financial support from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and with the technical support from United Nation Environment Project (UNEP). With this background, the project – Enhancing the Conservation Effectiveness of Sea grass Ecosystems Supporting Globally Significant Populations of Dugongs across the Indian and Pacific Ocean Basins, was launched in 2015 executed by the Mohomad Binziard Species Conservation Fund (MBZ). Eight dugong range countries i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia, Timor-Leste, Madagascar, Mozambique and Sri Lanka are involved with the project through various means of activities from community level to policy level stages. Community participation and ownership of dugong and sea grass conservation, introducing sustainable fisheries practices and innovative financial incentives, establishing Locally Managed Marine Protected Areas (LMMPA), and mainstreaming dugong and sea grass conservation priorities into national and regional policies and planning are prominent among global project objectives.

This is especially in the North western sea from the Puttalam to Jaffna districts of Sri Lanka where dugongs have been sighted. Due to lack of concern for conservation and a high demand for their meats results in high mortality and a reduction of population. The project comprises eight components working with local communities in north-west Sri Lanka by providing relevant education on the importance of dugongs and their habitat to discourage direct hunting of dugongs as well as negative fishing practices. Establishing a marine conservation coordination centre in north-west Sri Lanka, featuring computerised communication systems to overcome the current lack of communication among relevant stake holders is important. LK4 is component involving the preparation of a multiple community-based management plan in conjunction with the

government, fishing communities and the tourism industry. Programmes also involving Baseline Sea grass maps with the distribution and abundance of sea grass in Palk Bay, the Gulf of Mannar and Kalpitiya must be established. Other areas includes conducting field surveys of the Bay of Bengal/Palk Strait area using divers and being supported by community interviews to identify dugong and sea grass hotspots.

The other project being attempted is to reduce the impacts of destructive fishing practices on sea grass habitats and provide income generation opportunities to local communities in return for their commitments to wise habitat and natural resource use. LK8 is the facilitating body for coordinate the work carried out by the six other project partners by establishing a National Facilitating Committee. Actual field activities of the projects commenced in mid-2015 and are being continued to date. Global Project A Global Project was initiated to improve the conservation status of dugongs and their sea grass habitats across the Indian and Pacific Ocean to enhance the effectiveness of conservation efforts for dugongs and their sea grass ecosystems across the Indian and Pacific Ocean basins. The national project goal is to improve the conservation status of dugongs and their sea grass habitats in the Gulf of Mannar. The objective of the Palk Bay National is to enhance the effectiveness of conservation efforts for dugongs and their sea grass ecosystems in the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay.

Tamil Nadu: Sri Lanka Navy arrests 10 Indian fishermen and seizes boat in Rameshwaram

<http://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/sri-lanka-navy-arrests10-indian-fishermen-and-seizes-boat-in-rameshwaram/596329/>

"The Sri Lanka navy has arrested 10 Indian fishermen and have seized a boat from the sea area north of the Delft island in Ramanathapuram, Rameswaram, according to a report in ANI. Earlier in the month on March 6, an alleged open firing by the Sri Lankan Navy resulted in the killing of an Indian fisherman identified as 22-year-old Bridgo, while 3 others were injured. This incident took place when a group of Indian fishermen who were fishing off the Tamil Nadu coast between Danushkodi and Katchatheevu were allegedly fired upon. After the killing of the fisherman, people protested against the killing of the Indian fisherman by the Srilankan Navy in Rameswaram. Thamizhaga Vazhvurimai Katchi party workers climbed towers as a sign of protest, people have gathered around in villages and want the government to take quick steps.

The deceased was identified as a 22-year-old man and his body was brought to the Rameshwaram Government Hospital. Meanwhile, a case had been registered in the local police

station. According to reports, around 3 more fishermen have suffered injuries in the firing which occurred in Adambalam, that comes under Indian territory. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K Palaniswami in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi asking him to look into the conditions of the Indian fishermen prior to the killing incident, he wrote, “Unfortunately, even before the sense of relief following the release of the 51 fishermen could fully set in and the released fishermen reached our shores, the Sri Lankan navy has yet again resorted to its harsh and unjust tactic of apprehending Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu while peacefully pursuing their avocation in the traditional fishing waters of the Palk Bay.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen leaders to meet Foreign Secretary on March 21

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/fishermen-leaders-to-meet-foreign-secretary-on-march-21/article17467289.ece>

"A delegation of fishermen leaders will meet Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar in New Delhi on March 21 to discuss the fallout of the killing of Rameswaram fisherman K. Britjo allegedly in the firing by Sri Lankan Navy on the night of March 6 when he was fishing on the high seas. Union Minister of State for Road Transport, Highways and Shipping Pon. Radhakrishnan, who had persuaded the fishermen to suspend their seven-day-long protest along with his ministerial colleague Nirmala Seetharaman, secured the appointment with Mr. Jaishankar. Mr. Radhakrishnan and Collector S. Natarajan informed the fishermen of the appointment, fishermen leaders U. Arulanandham and P. Sesu Raja said. The delegation would be finalised after consulting fishermen leaders in Pudukottai, Nagapattinam and Karaikal, they said.

The delegation would explain the plight of the fishermen fishing in the Palk Bay, and impress upon the Foreign Secretary to ensure that there was no such firing in the future. They would also urge him to ensure that those responsible for the killing of Britjo were brought to book, they said. As the continued detention of more than 130 boats in the island nation had put the fishermen in a state of despondency, they would urge Mr. Jaishankar to secure the release of the boats at the earliest. India should secure an assurance from Sri Lankan government that it would not arrest the fishermen when they ventured into ‘their traditional waters’ in the Palk Bay till a lasting solution was found to the problem, Mr. Sesu Raja said. Mr. Arulanandham said the delegation would present a list of 187 fishermen killed in the firing by Lankan navy since December 13, 1984 and 363 injured in the firing and the attacks by the Lankan navy since July 13, 2013, and seek compensation to the affected families. The fishermen who had been protesting against the killing of Britjo since March 7 suspended their agitation on Monday after the Union Ministers assured them that they would secure an appointment with Mr. Jaishankar to enable the leaders to present their case before him. Local BJP leaders D. Kuppuramu, Suba. Nagarajan and K. Muraleedharan would accompany the delegation.

India and Sri Lanka: India, Sri Lanka repatriates 89 fishermen

<http://news.webindia123.com/news/Articles/India/20170314/3073623.html>

"India and Sri Lanka today repatriated 89 fishermen from each others custody, in a major step towards defusing tension aftermath the killing of an Indian fisherman allegedly by the naval personnel of the Island nation. Official sources said while Sri Lanka repatriated 77 fishermen, hailing from Ramanathapuram and Pudukottai districts of Tamil Nadu, India repatriated 12 Lankan fishermen as a reciprocal move. The Sri Lankan Navy handed over 77 Indian fishermen to the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) at the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) in the Palk Bay this afternoon. The ICG in turn handed over 12 Lankan fishermen to the Sri Lankan Navy. The Sri Lankan government recently released 77 of the 85 incarcerated Indian fishermen after the Ministry of External Affairs held negotiations with the Island Nation. The remaining Indian fishermen were also expected to be released soon. India released 12 of the 19 Sri Lankan fishermen in its custody. The repatriated fishermen were likely to reach Karaikkal port in Puducherry this evening. Later, they would be taken to their respective native places. The fishermen were arrested by the maritime forces of both countries for cross border fishing on different incidents between February 1 and March 9. Fisher-folk of coastal districts of Tamil Nadu were on protest to condemn the killing of K Britjo (21) by Sri Lankan Navy on March 6, 2017.

India and Sri Lanka: India, Sri Lanka must find solution to Palk Bay fishing dispute

<http://www.dnaindia.com/analysis/editorial-dna-edit-india-sri-lanka-must-find-solution-to-palk-bay-fishing-dispute-2345650>

"The protests in Tamil Nadu over the alleged shooting of a fisherman by the Sri Lankan navy has snowballed into a bilateral issue with India raising the incident with its neighbours. Such shootings have occurred with alarming frequency due to Indian fishermen ignoring Sri Lanka's diktats to not cross over to its side of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). In March 2015, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wikremasinghe warned that Indian fishermen intruding into Sri Lankan waters would be shot. He gave the analogy of a thief entering a house and the owner being allowed to shoot in self-defence. However, such simplistic and cavalier rhetoric also serves to exacerbate a problem that has its origins in geographical, historical, ecological and economic reasons.

India and Sri Lanka share a very proximate maritime boundary which is as less as 12 nautical miles on the Palk Strait. The Palk Bay is a fertile fishing ground and for centuries Tamil fishermen from the Indian and Sri Lankan sides have cohabited peacefully in this area. The attempt to settle the Katchatheevu dispute, which was claimed by both India and Sri Lanka, with India ceding its rights over the island in 1974, was not accepted by the fishing community.

Though the agreement did not affect fishing rights, India and Sri Lanka agreed in 1976 not to fish in each others waters. However, fishermen refused to pay heed. Throughout the Sri Lankan civil war it was mostly Indian fishermen, or Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka's northern districts to India who had more freedom to fish in these waters.

The onset of mechanised fishing and trawling in the 1990s led to a depletion of catch and complaints from the Sri Lankan side that trawling by Indian vessels was damaging the marine ecology. While Sri Lanka demanded a complete ban on mechanised trawlers, India has preferred regulation. The Tamil Nadu Marine Fisheries Regulation Act of 1983 mandated that mechanised boats should not fish three nautical miles from the coast, and the area was reserved for traditional fishing boats. But there is no clarity on which “coast, and anyway, traditional fishermen rue that this Act is being violated even on the Indian side. Meanwhile, traditional fishermen, unable to compete with the mechanised trawlers, have been forced to work on the mechanised trawlers and the multi-day boats on both sides.

A return to the more sustainable traditional fishing methods is practically impossible now. Mindful of the impact the issue can have on bilateral ties, Sri Lanka has resorted to temporarily detaining fishermen and their boats. In 2014, 787 fishermen were released from Sri Lankan jails along with 158 fishing boats while in 2015, 23 boats and 151 fishermen were apprehended by the Sri Lankan navy. But this has not proved to be a deterrent as the call of livelihood forces them to return to the troubled waters again. But firing on unarmed fishermen is not the solution and the Indian and Sri Lankan governments must sit together and sort out the issue before emotions boil over in Tamil Nadu where a weak state government is in power. In February 2016, following foreign minister Sushma Swaraj's visit to Colombo, both sides agreed to “find a permanent solution to the fishermen issue. Over a year later, the delay in ironing out a solution has taken another precious life and put Tamil Nadu on the boil again.

Exploring the world of India's women fish workers

<https://thewire.in/114433/women-fish-workers-aarthy/>

"Over the years, Aarthy Sridhar has learnt to be decisive and insistent, to sound confident about being out at sea. It's the only way she will be allowed on a fishing boat. “I've been out at sea on a boat with fishermen before. I don't get seasick. If I went on a boat I'd be forced to jump into the water to pee, so that's why I can only make short trips. But look, I need to do this. I've done this before, really. It's not new to me. Aarthy Sridhar, a social scientist, has learnt to confidently say this to fish workers every time she needs to go out on a boat with them for her research on fisheries. “I have to prove that I'm not a ‘frail' woman. In this field women feel compelled to be men. It is a macho industry, Sridhar says. She is almost 40 years old now, and Sridhar is one of the trustee-founders of the Bangalore-based NGO Dakshin Foundation. They work on natural

resource management and promote sustainable livelihoods, and Sridhar heads the Communities and Resource Governance Programme there.

It undertakes projects based on conflicts over conservation measures. Over the years, she has learnt to be decisive and insistent, to sound confident about being out at sea. It's the only way she will be allowed on a fisher boat. Sometimes they do allow her. Sometimes, they don't. Nearly three million fish workers along India's coastline depend on fishing for their livelihood and many more are engaged in inland fishing in rivers across the country. Setting out by boats to fish is almost always a man's job. "It's a strange relationship, Sridhar says. "In places like Tamil Nadu, the sea is worshipped as mother, but the sea is seen as unaccepting of women in its domain. A new documentary, 'Fishing Palk Bay', which Sridhar both researched and produced, looks at the role that men in the fishing industry play in the narrow stretch of shallow, warm sea between India and Sri Lanka. Palk Bay was also where traders used to find natural pearls. The documentary shows us beautiful shots of men under water catching fish.

In Olakkuda, a small fishing hamlet in the southern tip of the Palk Bay, men lay out box-like woven fish traps on the seabed. In another scene, they swim through the sea, bringing up chank (molluscs) and other living organisms with them. The only time we hear a woman speak in the documentary is when it's about making nets. In 'Fishing Palk Bay', we never see women out in the water in the way that women in Orissa catch crabs or row boats like in Sridhar's 2016 documentary titled 'Chronicles of Oblivion'. There the women are everywhere – on the boats, in the markets, and being auctioneers. They worry about forest guards finding them fishing, and one woman says that if she has more than 2 kilograms of crabs to sell, she needs to rely on men in the market to figure out how much money she needs to get. The only time we hear a woman speak in the documentary is when it's about making nets. In 'Fishing Palk Bay', we never see women out in the water in the way that women in Orissa catch crabs or row boats like in Sridhar's 2016 documentary titled 'Chronicles of Oblivion'.

There the women are everywhere – on the boats, in the markets, and being auctioneers. They worry about forest guards finding them fishing, and one woman says that if she has more than 2 kilograms of crabs to sell, she needs to rely on men in the market to figure out how much money she needs to get. Usually though, women in fishing communities take care of everything in the industry except actually going to sea. If women aren't selling their fish in markets early in the morning, they are usually processing it. Thirty year old Mahima Jaini, a marine biologist and diver, says that in Minicoy, the southernmost atoll of Lakshadweep, women sit on the beach ripping apart the fish heads from its bodies with their hands (fishers usually use knives for this in other places). Then they boil the fish in pots and leave them to dry on the roofs of their houses, before smoking them indoors.

Women fish workers in Goa were protesting on February 24, asking to be involved in decisions on policy. Marianne Manuel, who works extensively on law and fisheries in Tamil Nadu, says that problems that women fish workers face aren't always heard about. She works on the impact of coastal laws and policy about traditional fishing communities, and says, "Issues facing women don't always get addressed. Even basic facilities such as toilets at fish markets need to be lobbied for, since they are not automatically created. All researchers always need to work at breaking the initial barrier of being a stranger in the area. The only way to do this is to spend enough time there to build credibility, but where you're allowed to do this varies. If male researchers can go out and get a drink with the fishermen after a long day at sea, as women, Sridhar says, they don't have access to these places. Instead, they have access to the markets, and occasionally, their houses. Boats have always been off limits to women. Sometimes it's considered bad luck to have a woman on the boat.

There are stories of these superstitions – that they would anger the sea gods and cause bad weather, or a bad catch. Male researchers wouldn't be asked as many questions as women (not only because they could pee off the boat easily), but because as Sridhar says, there is the sense that if you're a man, you should be able to deal with difficulties. "Women need to negotiate harder and be innovative to make this kind of research happen, Sridhar says. This means jumping through more hoops. Jaini, who is currently working on community monitoring in the Lakshadweep and also looks into protocol for recreational divers in the Andamans, can't remember the number of times she had to ask to be allowed on a fishing trip. Her first fishing trip was 12 hours long. She was only allowed because a local fish worker she had befriended vouched for her. "She doesn't get seasick. She's a diver; she can just dive off and pee, her friend told the other hesitant fishermen – the same things that Sridhar has come to say confidently.

If he hadn't been coming with them, Jaini is sure that even his convincing wouldn't have been enough. The only time Jaini was really scared in her four years in the Andaman Islands was when she saw a huge cockroach in the boat. "What is wrong with you? You're not scared of diving but you're scared of a cockroach, the eight men on the boat teased her when she screamed. They had just spent nine hours on a small wooden boat catching needlefish, the slender fish with a long, narrow sharp-teethed beak that swims near the surface and leaps out of the water. Jaini was curious about how they were caught. "It involves a complicated procedure of ensuring that the line encircled them, she says. When they had finished their patchy conversations, because the fish workers spoke Malayalam and Jaini didn't, she would dive into the sea with the men to get underwater footage of them catching fish. As a woman researcher, it is easier to speak to women in the industry, says Sridhar.

They are more curious, and always demand to know why the researchers are interested in fishing practices somewhere so far from home. "Why this job? they ask. "How come you don't have a husband? "Is it alright to travel alone? "Why these clothes? The questions come over and over

again the longer they stay in the area. Often, they aren't only from women. Sridhar says that everybody from the more affluent trawler owners to professors from local colleges begin to ask her about marriage. “The overwhelming feeling throughout my research has been of being a very different sort of woman, Sridhar says, “A woman armed with the privilege of caste and class, but also the privilege of being able to practice feminism. When Sridhar first began to work, her research was in Uttara Kannada, Karnataka. She would travel on her own, and it took her a few months to stop noticing that she was doing things alone.

“I was very aware that I was seen as an outsider, and that there were eyes looking at me all the time, she says. In Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu, where Sridhar was researching Palaivar fish workers and their history as part of her PhD (on the history of fishery science in India), she would meet fishermen on the beach late at night, when they had their meetings. She soon found herself receiving blank calls and phone calls from priests who wished her goodnight at 1 am. She never found out how they got her number. In 2013, Sridhar visited villages in coastal Orissa. Here, she was looking at the impact of sea turtle conservation on women fishers, but found herself spending a long time waiting around, relying on the generosity of local men to drive her from place to place. She didn't know how to drive a geared motorbike.

“I was confronted by the limits of my urban sensibilities, she says, over the kacha roads packed with mangrove mud. She was thrown off the bike more than once on the 10-km ride through the mangroves. Other times, Sridhar would slip out of her accommodation (which was in itself terribly hard to get because it was never available for single women) at night to be able to buy sanitary pads in the village. And while male researchers could simply put out a sleeping bag anywhere at night, Sridhar says that it isn't fair to suggest to unwilling women that this is the way they should be working. There is more on the flip side. Martina Anandam, a primate ecologist who spent four years in Chamba village, Himachal Pradesh, researching langur distribution there, says there is often an apathy to women's needs by fellow male researchers.

“They expect you to forget you're a woman, she says. The sense is that since she is strong enough to go out on fieldwork as a woman, something like being on her period couldn't be a reason to be slower on the field for a day. And as Janaki Lenin wrote in her piece on women in wildlife research for Sanctuary Asia, women also have to deal with male colleagues who stop them from carrying out research. “We have to work twice the amount to get one-quarter the recognition that men get. They routinely look down upon us like we are small; we don't count, Gopa Pandey, one of the first Indian Forest Service women officers, had said to Lenin. Over the years, Jaini, Manuel, and Sridhar say that they have all come to find ways to answer curious questions about themselves.

If they did choose to get married and have children, perhaps they would be like Kaberi Kar Gupta, who studied primates, and took her baby daughter with her while she did her research in

the Kalakkad-Mundanthurai forests. Maybe it is also a lot like negotiating to be allowed on a boat, or wondering if you should join the fish workers for a drink, apart from meeting them at a local chai shop. They now make space for themselves where they are usually not allowed.

India and Sri Lanka: Plea to set up research station in Kachchativu to underscore Sri Lankan sovereignty

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2017/feb/01/plea-to-set-up-research-station-in-kachchativu-to-underscore-sri-lankan-sovereignty-1565882--1.html>

"The Sri Lankan think tank Pathfinder Foundation (PFF) has called for the immediate setting up of a Marine Science Research Station on Kachchativu island in the Palk Strait to strengthen Sri Lanka's case for sovereignty over the island which is disputed by Tamil Nadu politicians and fishermen. "From time to time, there have been demands by interest groups in Tamil Nadu for retrieving the island, which was allegedly ceded to Sri Lanka following the agreement between the two countries in June 1974. Such demands have become a common feature, particularly when Tamil Nadu fishermen poaching in Sri Lankan waters are apprehended by the Sri Lankan authorities, the PFF said. "Reports on flag hoisting may represent a mischievous attempt intended to disturb the prevailing friendly relations between the two countries, as questions of sovereignty over Kachchativu were discussed and amicably resolved some 40 years ago, after Sri Lanka conclusively established that its sovereignty over the island went back to the colonial period, it said.

Suggesting a way to meet these threats and also to safeguard the marine environment in the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar areas, the PFF has asked the Sri Lankan government to get the National Aquatic Resources Agency (NARA) and the Department of Fisheries to come up with a plan to set up a Marine Science Research Center on Kachchativu. "Living quarters, communication facilities and research equipment will be needed to make the research station functional. Regular exchange of personnel should be organized as well as transport and emergency services, it suggested. "If resources are difficult in the short term, support of the private sector may be sought to commence the project, it added. Indian fishermen have no case Reiterating Sri Lanka's case vis-à-vis Kachchativu PFF said that Sri Lanka's sovereignty over Kachchativu was formally and legally recognized at the highest political level in both countries after the Agreement was signed by Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in June 1974 and ratified by the respective Parliaments.

"So clearly and permanently were the rights of the two countries established and regulated by the Agreement, that when questions were recently raised regarding ownership of the island, the then Attorney-General of India Mukul Rohatgi, representing the Indian Central government reportedly expressed the opinion to a Supreme Court bench led by Chief Justice of India R.M. Lodha on 26 August 2014 that: If India wants Katchatheevu back, it will have to go to war to get

it back, PFF recalled. However, from time to time, some commentators have mischievously claimed that the Agreement grants to Indian fishermen the right to fish in and around Kachchativu, and that there has been interference with the exercise of that right, PFF noted.

Some Indian commentators point out that Article 5 of the 1974 Agreement grants Indian fishermen and pilgrims access to visit Kachchativu as hitherto, and will not be required by Sri Lanka to obtain travel documents or visa for these purposes. But the phrase “as hitherto refers to visits for drying fishing nets or for religious observances. It does not refer to fishing or other activities, which are, by Article 4 of the agreement, fully subject to Sri Lanka's sovereignty and exclusive jurisdiction. “Paragraph 1 of the Exchange of Letters between the two countries in 1976 clearly prohibits fishing in the Indian waters by Sri Lankans and Sri Lankan waters by Indians by stating that fishing vessels and fishermen of India shall not engage in fishing in the historic waters, the territorial sea and the EEZ of Sri Lanka nor shall the fishing vessels and fishermen of Sri Lanka engage in fishing in the historic waters, the territorial sea and the EEZ of India, without the express permission of Sri Lanka of India, as the case may be, the PFF pointed out.

There is no scope for access even for drying nets and resting because with the introduction of the steel hulled mechanized trawlers by Tamil Nadu fishing syndicates, man-made fiberfishing nets and the gradual disappearance of artisan fishing methods, the need for drying fishing nets on the island has become a long forgotten practice. One way to underscore Sri Lanka's sovereignty and prevent the degrading of the marine environment by the poaching Tamil Nadu trawlers is to establish a marine science research station in Kachchativu, which is said to be home to unusual varieties of marine flora and fauna, as the area surrounding the island has taken the brunt of poaching, the PFF said.

Tamil Nadu: TN sticks to its stand on deep sea fishing guidelines

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/TN-sticks-to-its-stand-on-deep-sea-fishing-guidelines/article17039758.ece>

"The Tamil Nadu government has reiterated, among other issues, its stand to rescind the guidelines on Deep Sea fishing issued in 2014 over allowing foreign fishing vessels under Letter of Permit in the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In a meeting held in Delhi on Friday, where all coastal States put forth their comments on the Draft National Policy on Marine Fisheries 2016, Fisheries Minister D. Jayakumar said the stand on the deep sea fishing guidelines was in order to fully protect the interests of fishermen from Tamil Nadu. Since marine fisheries sector is still a livelihood and an income generating sector for the coastal community, “any conservation and management measures to be implemented should be decided in consultation with the State governments and Union Territories concerned, Mr. Jayakumar said. He also

added that caution needs to be exercised while adopting the principles followed by western countries.

He reiterated that fishing vessels even below 24m Over All Length must be given open access in the EEZ and surveillance should contain policy for providing seamless communication facilities to the fisher folk. "Necessary provisions should be made for streamlining and simplifying licensing for fishermen to use VHF and HF for seamless communication network facilities. This procedure is extremely tedious at present in our country, Mr. Jayakumar contended. He pointed to the State government's stand of the traditional fishing rights in the Palk Bay. He also pointed out that Tamil Nadu was yet to receive Rs. 133 crore for fishing harbour projects already sanctioned by the Centre. Tamil Nadu called for a policy decision for including fishermen community of Tamil Nadu in the list of Scheduled Tribes and for a policy framework for the maintenance dredging of the river bar mouths to keep them open. The Fisheries Minister also reiterated that 20 fishermen and 118 fishing boats from Tamil Nadu be released from Sri Lankan custody.

Tamil Nadu: Indian, Sri Lankan fishermen repatriated

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Indian-Sri-Lankan-fishermen-repatriated/article17018006.ece>

"Fifty-one Indian and three Sri Lankan fishermen were on Tuesday repatriated to their respective countries in line with the decision taken at recent ministerial-level talks held in Colombo, a Fisheries official said. The Sri Lankan Navy handed over the 51 fishermen from Tamil Nadu, arrested over the past few months, to the Indian Coast Guard at the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) in the Palk Bay. Similarly, the three Sri Lankan fishermen, released from the Puzhal Prison in Chennai on January 8, were handed over to the Sri Lankan Navy at the IMBL, Ramanathapuram District Fisheries Deputy Director Kasinatha Pandian said. The trio had drifted into the Indian waters off Dhanushkodi recently after their boat ran out of fuel and were arrested. The Tamil Nadu fishermen would arrive at Karaikal coast from where they would be taken to their respective destinations, officials said.

The 51 fishermen from Tuticorin, Pudukottai and Ramanthapuram districts were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy while fishing in their territorial waters between November and December, 2016 and lodged in prisons in the island nation. They were released on January 6. Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh headed the Indian delegation at the January 2 talks, during which Sri Lanka also agreed to consider returning a large number of fishing boats while India decided to set free the three Lankan fishermen. Meanwhile, around 2,000 fishermen from this island town returned without catch this morning after they were allegedly chased away by the Sri Lankan naval men while fishing off Katchatheevu on Monday night, Rameswaram Fishermen's Association representative Sagayam said.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen welcome reconstruction of fishing harbour at Mookaiyur

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/Fishermen-welcome-reconstruction-of-fishing-harbour-at-Mookaiyur/article16971831.ece>

"Fishermen leaders have welcomed the reconstruction of fishing harbour at Mookaiyur, near Sayalkudi in the district and thanked former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa for her efforts to build the harbour to decongest the Palk Straits and support the livelihood of local fishermen. The harbour, a long pending demand of the fishing community in the district, would go a long way in decongesting the Rameswaram fishing jetty and help to resolve the vexatious problem faced by the Indian fishermen when they entered into the Sri Lankan waters beyond Katchatheevu to fish in their traditional waters, they said, reacting to Centre giving its nod for the project. After its Project Sanctioning Committee (PSC) gave its approval to the project, the Centre gave the administrative approval for Rs. 113.90 crore with 50 per cent assistance. The State would allocate 50 per cent of the cost as its share and the tenders are likely to be floated soon. The government proposed to reconstruct the existing fish landing centre along with breakwater and wharf that would enable access to fishermen throughout the year.

The new harbour would have facilities such as fish auction hall, protection wall, drying platform and net mending centre. "We express our gratitude to former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa who was very keen on the project and had repeatedly taken up the project with the Centre, P. Sesu Raja, Rameswaram fishermen leader said. A large number of 'Paravar' community fishermen, who had migrated to Rameswaram island would return back after the harbour comes up, he said. Welcoming the project, U. Arulanandham, President of the Alliance for the Release of Innocent Fishermen (ARIF) said the demand for the harbour came up in the year 1985, when the fishermen faced the worst onslaught of the Sri Lankan navy.

After the then Chief Minister M. G. Ramachandran took up the issue, then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi deputed a central team the same year but the project failed to take off immediately, he said. After the harbour comes up, fishermen would be able to take to deep sea fishing, down south and avoid their conflicts with the Lankan navy in the Palk Bay, he also said. Lasting solution "This will definitely pave way for a lasting solution to the fishermen issue as more and more fishermen would be inclined to take to deep sea fishing, he opined. "It was the pet project of Jayalalithaa and the harbour will largely benefit the fisher folk, M. Ilango, Chairman of the National Fisherfolk Forum said.

Bottom trawling that scrapes the seabed: Finding solutions to the fishery conflict.

<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2016/11/27/bottom-trawling-scrapes-sea-bed-finding-solutions-fishery-conflict>

"Fishermen from the coastal districts of India and Sri Lanka have used the sea around the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar, for traditional fishing, until the signing of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) agreement in 1974 and 1976, which is clearly demarcated, mutually agreed upon and legally binding, separating the territorial waters of the two countries. The Tamil Nadu fishermen changed their fishing methods in the late 1970s and upgraded to steel hulled fishing vessels and engaged in bottom-trawling, to boost production. Continuous bottom trawling in the Indian side of the IMBL resulted in depleting fish stocks, and gradually, the trawlers began to cross over to the Sri Lankan side of the IMBL. The newly introduced Indian trawlers are bigger and more powerful than the traditional craft. The Lankan fishermen found it difficult to venture into sea during the days when Indian trawlers were poaching, as they feared damage to their boats and fishing gear, as well as, safety for their lives.

During the time of conflict, Sri Lankan government was compelled to restrict fishing by local fishermen in the north and east, due to security concerns. However, the Indian trawlers continued to bottom trawl at times, venturing 2-3 nautical miles off the Lankan coast. With the end of the conflict in Sri Lanka, local fishermen wished to recommence their livelihood activities, and encountered a large, hostile Tamil Nadu trawler fleet plundering their resources. With the fishery conflict gaining significance both governments continue discussions at various levels to find an amicable, long lasting solution. However, to-date, there has been no solution or even a common agreement. The United Nations Development Summit in September 2015, adopted the UN Resolution 70/1, "Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The basis for this was the understanding that global resources in the oceans should be carefully managed for a sustainable future, as the oceans are key in making the earth habitable for humankind.

The main objective of Goal 14 of this agenda, 'Life Below Water' is to "conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (UN, 2015). The spirit of this resolution is clearly applicable to the Indo-Sri Lanka fishery conflict. The UN has set a target year, 2020, to end Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. The UN resolution also talks about conservation and sustainable use of oceans as per international law as reflected in UNCLOS, and encouraging sustainable artisan fishing. India and Sri Lanka being member states of the UN should abide by this resolution. Kachchativu Island The two governments concluded that the two IMBL agreements were with a view to maintaining cordial relations. They could be termed as landmark agreements, which came into force even before the UNCLOS. Tamil Nadu maintains that the island of Kachchativu was 'ceded' to Sri Lanka by the 1974 agreement without the consent of the state, for which it has sought legal remedy.

However, the central government maintains that these two agreements are binding. Hence, sovereignty and exclusive jurisdiction of Kachchativu clearly falls under Sri Lanka. Tamil Nadu politicians also accuse that Sri Lankan Navy and Coast Guard harass the Tamil Nadu fishermen,

who accidentally drift across the IMBL closer to Kachchativu. However, the Indian Coast Guard, filing an affidavit in Chennai High Court stated: the Indian fishermen cross the IMBL into Lankan waters for a better catch, as resources are depleted in the Indian side of the IMBL; they use banned methods of fishing; and Sri Lanka Navy does not cross the IMBL to the Indian side (Indian Coast Guard, 2015). No further argument is necessary, as this statement has come from the most authoritative source in India.. This affidavit also nullifies the claim made by Indian fishermen that the Sri Lanka Navy is harassing them. The Tamil Nadu fishermen are experts in navigation and know their position. Besides, most of these trawlers are fitted with Global Positioning Systems (GPS), and they fish not only around Kachchativu island, but advance 2-3 nautical miles from Pesali in Mannar island, which is 17.5 nautical miles from the IMBL and south west of the Delft island, i.e. about 11.5 nautical miles from the IMBL (Admiralty Chart, 1987). These two locations are deep inside Lankan territorial waters.

Therefore, the issue of Kachchativu is only a cover to justify destructive fishing carried out by Indian trawlers to sustain the multimillion-dollar prawn export industry. Livelihood issue Often Tamil Nadu argues that their 'poor fishermen' suffer due to enforcement measures by the Sri Lankan government. However, it is noteworthy that almost all who are engaged in bottom trawling, are contracted employees. It is alleged, the trawlers are owned by large-scale businessmen, often close to the political elite of the state, as highlighted by Suryanarayan. Prawns have become a multimillion-dollar industry; mainly for exporting to the USA, Japan and Western Europe. However, when the Sri Lankan authorities arrest a minute percentage of these trawlers for poaching in its territorial waters, and subject offenders to judicial processes, there are huge protests in Tamil Nadu and letters written to the central government demanding intervention. To maintain goodwill between the two neighbours, the government of Sri Lanka releases offenders and hands over their boats to Indian Coast Guard at the IMBL, at regular intervals.

This is not an effective deterrent, as they return to poaching no sooner they are released. Enforcement measures such as burning or blowing up captured fishing vessels engaging in IUU fishing, as practised by Australia and Indonesia, are not implemented in Sri Lanka. Due to the severity of poaching Sri Lanka has refused the demand made at the November negotiations in New Delhi for the release of hundreds of boats it has seized, which is a step in the right direction. Security implications The northern Sri Lankan fishermen engage in most sustainable methods of fishing, employing traditional artisan methods. They do not operate multi-day fishing vessels, unlike their southern counterparts. They use small boats and venture into the ocean for short periods, usually, not more than 24 hours.

However, large, steel hulled Indian trawlers practise bottom trawling, considered as one of the most destructive methods of fishing. Bottom trawlers are called 'hoovers of the ocean' and 'bulldozers mowing down fish and other benthic species' (Suryanarayan, 2016). If this

bulldozing of the Sri Lanka Ocean is continued, soon there will be hardly any fish to catch. Bottom trawling scrapes the sea bed, disturbs the marine environment, damages age old corals, affects the growth of plankton, and finally, affects the reef fish, prawns and other types on benthic marine species, which could result in 'habitat degradation'. The majority of the northern coastal population of Sri Lanka depends on fishing or fishery related industry. It is the only livelihood activity they have ever known. If that source of livelihood is destroyed, there will be huge economic, social and political consequences affecting human security.

The Indian side has made it a practice to demand that representatives of fishermen from the two countries should meet and discuss all issues relating to the dispute. However, this time around, representatives of Lankan fishermen had been firm against the systematic exploitation of fisheries resources by their Indian counterparts. During the recent encounter in New Delhi on November 2, after a gap of nearly one and a half years, Sri Lankan fishermen refused to agree to the demand made by their Tamil Nadu counterparts to fish in Sri Lankan waters for 83 days in a year, for three consecutive years, as a grace period, before they switch into deep sea fishing, as an alternative solution to the issue (Sunday Times, November 13, 2016). The Sri Lankan fishermen had been adamant that they would not agree to the continuation of illegal poaching and bottom trawling in their waters.

They also demanded compensation for losses incurred due to poaching and bottom trawling, prior to any further talks (The Hindu, 2016). They pointed out that Tamil Nadu fishermen were engaged in IUU fishing, and threatened to take the matter up in international forums. The stand taken by Sri Lankan fishermen, victims of IUU fishing, is genuine as it is their livelihood that is at stake. It is the responsibility of the Indian government to adopt measures to address the livelihood issue of its citizens and, allocate adequate resources to help them in their transition from bottom trawling to deep-sea fishing. In the aftermath of the inconclusive fishermen's talks, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister and Aquatic Resources Development Minister met with Indian External Affairs Minister and Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, to discuss possible measures to find solutions to the fishery conflict (Lanka Business Online, 2016). This is the first time the two foreign ministers actively participated in fishery talks, a clear indication of the commitment of both governments to find a lasting solution.

While the details of the discussions have not been published yet, it is reported that they agreed to set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries to meet every three months, and a meeting between the Ministers of Fisheries every six months. The first Ministerial Meeting would be held on January 2, 2017 in Colombo. While the Sri Lanka side maintains that poaching and bottom trawling by Indian trawlers should not be permitted, the Indian side demands licensing, limiting the number of trawlers and days, and not harming their fishermen in Sri Lankan waters. The law enforcement authorities on both sides of the IMBL are forced to restrain themselves due to political pressure wielded by Tamil Nadu business interests. The solution to the problem is not to

permit Tamil Nadu business interests to profit from their illegal activities. Unless a firm position is taken by Sri Lanka with regard to violation of its territorial waters, poaching in the Palk Bay area and the Gulf of Mannar would continue for some time, while the marine environment is systematically destroyed to a point of no return.

However, the ongoing dispute should not result in physical harm to Tamil Nadu fishermen, due to the failure of the authorities to address the dispute.. Positive measures As Suriyanarayanan points out, there are some positive measures being undertaken by Tamil Nadu, i.e. a planned buy-back arrangement of trawlers, provide alternative livelihood for fishermen engaged in trawling and to construct tuna long liners. Through incentives and persuasion, affected fishermen could be encouraged to switch over to deep sea fishing or engage in other vocations. However, sincerity, effectiveness and timely implementation of these measures are yet to be ascertained (Suryanarayan, 2016). Sri Lanka's concern is whether the fragile marine ecosystem in the Palk Bay would survive until these measures are implemented.

There is a need for scientific research on the subject, to ascertain the real damage caused by bottom trawling and the impact on the fisheries in the Palk Bay, gather data from primary and secondary sources, make an assessment of the cost of annual losses due to poaching, and be ready to present an incontrovertible case to India. A research station in the island of Kachchativu manned by National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA) personnel could be entrusted with this task. A joint mechanism for investigation of alleged offences and joint patrolling by both countries merits consideration. If all efforts fail in finding an amicable solution, the government of Sri Lanka should be ready to refer the dispute to the appropriate international authorities on the strength of UN Resolution 70/1, Goal 14: 'to conserve and sustainably use oceans and marine resources for sustainable development'.

Sri Lank: Bottom trawling that scrapes the sea bed: Finding solutions to the fishery conflict

<http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2016/11/27/bottom-trawling-scrapes-sea-bed-finding-solutions-fishery-conflict>

"Fishermen from the coastal districts of India and Sri Lanka have used the sea around the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar, for traditional fishing, until the signing of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) agreement in 1974 and 1976, which is clearly demarcated, mutually agreed upon and legally binding, separating the territorial waters of the two countries. The Tamil Nadu fishermen changed their fishing methods in the late 1970s and upgraded to steel hulled fishing vessels and engaged in bottom-trawling, to boost production. Continuous bottom trawling in the Indian side of the IMBL resulted in depleting fish stocks, and gradually, the trawlers began to cross over to the Sri Lankan side of the IMBL.

The newly introduced Indian trawlers are bigger and more powerful than the traditional craft. The Lankan fishermen found it difficult to venture into sea during the days when Indian trawlers were poaching, as they feared damage to their boats and fishing gear, as well as, safety for their lives. During the time of conflict, Sri Lankan government was compelled to restrict fishing by local fishermen in the north and east, due to security concerns. However, the Indian trawlers continued to bottom trawl at times, venturing 2-3 nautical miles off the Lankan coast. With the end of the conflict in Sri Lanka, local fishermen wished to recommence their livelihood activities, and encountered a large, hostile Tamil Nadu trawler fleet plundering their resources. With the fishery conflict gaining significance both governments continue discussions at various levels to find an amicable, long lasting solution. However, to-date, there has been no solution or even a common agreement. The United Nations Development Summit in September 2015, adopted the UN Resolution 70/1, “Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The basis for this was the understanding that global resources in the oceans should be carefully managed for a sustainable future, as the oceans are key in making the earth habitable for humankind. The main objective of Goal 14 of this agenda, ‘Life Below Water’ is to “conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (UN, 2015). The spirit of this resolution is clearly applicable to the Indo-Sri Lanka fishery conflict. The UN has set a target year, 2020, to end Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

The UN resolution also talks about conservation and sustainable use of oceans as per international law as reflected in UNCLOS, and encouraging sustainable artisan fishing. India and Sri Lanka being member states of the UN should abide by this resolution. Kachchativu Island The two governments concluded that the two IMBL agreements were with a view to maintaining cordial relations. They could be termed as landmark agreements, which came into force even before the UNCLOS. Tamil Nadu maintains that the island of Kachchativu was ‘ceded’ to Sri Lanka by the 1974 agreement without the consent of the state, for which it has sought legal remedy. However, the central government maintains that these two agreements are binding. Hence, sovereignty and exclusive jurisdiction of Kachchativu clearly falls under Sri Lanka. Tamil Nadu politicians also accuse that Sri Lankan Navy and Coast Guard harass the Tamil Nadu fishermen, who accidentally drift across the IMBL closer to Kachchativu.

However, the Indian Coast Guard, filing an affidavit in Chennai High Court stated: the Indian fishermen cross the IMBL into Lankan waters for a better catch, as resources are depleted in the Indian side of the IMBL; they use banned methods of fishing; and Sri Lanka Navy does not cross the IMBL to the Indian side (Indian Coast Guard, 2015). No further argument is necessary, as this statement has come from the most authoritative source in India.. This affidavit also nullifies the claim made by Indian fishermen that the Sri Lanka Navy is harassing them. The Tamil Nadu fishermen are experts in navigation and know their position. Besides, most of these trawlers are fitted with Global Positioning Systems (GPS), and they fish not only around Kachchativu island,

but advance 2-3 nautical miles from Pesali in Mannar island, which is 17.5 nautical miles from the IMBL and south west of the Delft island, i.e. about 11.5 nautical miles from the IMBL (Admiralty Chart, 1987).

These two locations are deep inside Lankan territorial waters. Therefore, the issue of Kachchativu is only a cover to justify destructive fishing carried out by Indian trawlers to sustain the multimillion-dollar prawn export industry. Livelihood issue Often Tamil Nadu argues that their 'poor fishermen' suffer due to enforcement measures by the Sri Lankan government. However, it is noteworthy that almost all who are engaged in bottom trawling, are contracted employees. It is alleged, the trawlers are owned by large-scale businessmen, often close to the political elite of the state, as highlighted by Suryanarayan. Prawns have become a multimillion-dollar industry; mainly for exporting to the USA, Japan and Western Europe.

However, when the Sri Lankan authorities arrest a minute percentage of these trawlers for poaching in its territorial waters, and subject offenders to judicial processes, there are huge protests in Tamil Nadu and letters written to the central government demanding intervention. To maintain goodwill between the two neighbours, the government of Sri Lanka releases offenders and hands over their boats to Indian Coast Guard at the IMBL, at regular intervals. This is not an effective deterrent, as they return to poaching no sooner they are released. Enforcement measures such as burning or blowing up captured fishing vessels engaging in IUU fishing, as practised by Australia and Indonesia, are not implemented in Sri Lanka.

Due to the severity of poaching Sri Lanka has refused the demand made at the November negotiations in New Delhi for the release of hundreds of boats it has seized, which is a step in the right direction. Security implications The northern Sri Lankan fishermen engage in most sustainable methods of fishing, employing traditional artisan methods. They do not operate multi-day fishing vessels, unlike their southern counterparts. They use small boats and venture into the ocean for short periods, usually, not more than 24 hours. However, large, steel hulled Indian trawlers practise bottom trawling, considered as one of the most destructive methods of fishing. Bottom trawlers are called 'hoovers of the ocean' and 'bulldozers mowing down fish and other benthic species' (Suryanarayan, 2016).

If this bulldozing of the Sri Lanka Ocean is continued, soon there will be hardly any fish to catch. Bottom trawling scrapes the sea bed, disturbs the marine environment, damages age old corals, affects the growth of plankton, and finally, affects the reef fish, prawns and other types on benthic marine species, which could result in 'habitat degradation'. The majority of the northern coastal population of Sri Lanka depends on fishing or fishery related industry. It is the only livelihood activity they have ever known. If that source of livelihood is destroyed, there will be huge economic, social and political consequences affecting human security. The Indian side has

made it a practice to demand that representatives of fishermen from the two countries should meet and discuss all issues relating to the dispute.

However, this time around, representatives of Lankan fishermen had been firm against the systematic exploitation of fisheries resources by their Indian counterparts. During the recent encounter in New Delhi on November 2, after a gap of nearly one and a half years, Sri Lankan fishermen refused to agree to the demand made by their Tamil Nadu counterparts to fish in Sri Lankan waters for 83 days in a year, for three consecutive years, as a grace period, before they switch into deep sea fishing, as an alternative solution to the issue (Sunday Times, November 13, 2016). The Sri Lankan fishermen had been adamant that they would not agree to the continuation of illegal poaching and bottom trawling in their waters. They also demanded compensation for losses incurred due to poaching and bottom trawling, prior to any further talks (The Hindu, 2016). They pointed out that Tamil Nadu fishermen were engaged in IUU fishing, and threatened to take the matter up in international forums.

The stand taken by Sri Lankan fishermen, victims of IUU fishing, is genuine as it is their livelihood that is at stake. It is the responsibility of the Indian government to adopt measures to address the livelihood issue of its citizens and, allocate adequate resources to help them in their transition from bottom trawling to deep-sea fishing. In the aftermath of the inconclusive fishermen's talks, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister and Aquatic Resources Development Minister met with Indian External Affairs Minister and Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, to discuss possible measures to find solutions to the fishery conflict (Lanka Business Online, 2016). This is the first time the two foreign ministers actively participated in fishery talks, a clear indication of the commitment of both governments to find a lasting solution.

While the details of the discussions have not been published yet, it is reported that they agreed to set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries to meet every three months, and a meeting between the Ministers of Fisheries every six months. The first Ministerial Meeting would be held on January 2, 2017 in Colombo. While the Sri Lanka side maintains that poaching and bottom trawling by Indian trawlers should not be permitted, the Indian side demands licensing, limiting the number of trawlers and days, and not harming their fishermen in Sri Lankan waters. The law enforcement authorities on both sides of the IMBL are forced to restrain themselves due to political pressure wielded by Tamil Nadu business interests. The solution to the problem is not to permit Tamil Nadu business interests to profit from their illegal activities.

Unless a firm position is taken by Sri Lanka with regard to violation of its territorial waters, poaching in the Palk Bay area and the Gulf of Mannar would continue for some time, while the marine environment is systematically destroyed to a point of no return. However, the ongoing dispute should not result in physical harm to Tamil Nadu fishermen, due to the failure of the authorities to address the dispute.. Positive measures As Suriyanarayanan points out, there are

some positive measures being undertaken by Tamil Nadu, i.e. a planned buy-back arrangement of trawlers, provide alternative livelihood for fishermen engaged in trawling and to construct tuna long liners. Through incentives and persuasion, affected fishermen could be encouraged to switch over to deep sea fishing or engage in other vocations. However, sincerity, effectiveness and timely implementation of these measures are yet to be ascertained (Suryanarayan, 2016). Sri Lanka's concern is whether the fragile marine ecosystem in the Palk Bay would survive until these measures are implemented.

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Tamil Nadu: Country boat fishermen want Palk Bay to be declared as a protected marine zone

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/Country-boat-fishermen-want-Palk-Bay-to-be-declared-as-a-protected-marine-zone/articleshow/55539168.cms>

"Around 60 representatives of country boat fishermen from Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam districts will meet Tamil Nadu fisheries minister on Tuesday with their five-charter demands. The fishermen leaders levelled charges against both mechanised trawlers and their own fishermen who indulge in "destructive fishing practices" like pair trawling and using purse seine nets and explosives. Unlike the turn system of fishing followed between Rameswaram and Point Calimere where country boat fishermen carry out fishing four days in a week and trawlers for three days, there is no specific system on the Nagapattinam coast. Powerful engines are used in trawl boats and multi-day fishing is carried out by fishermen in Nagapattinam and Karaikal areas, they said.

The country boat fishermen is demanding that the Palk Bay - being one of sensitive fish breeding area - be declared as a protected marine zone and ban all destructive fishing methods in the sea area. "Using all destructive fishing gear and practices, the trawl boat fishermen are destroying the marine wealth and traditional country boat fishermen have nothing to sustain their livelihood. We appeal to the government to take a stern action before the issue explodes into violent struggles between two sections of fishermen," said G Arul, president of country boat fishermen

at Pamban. They want the central and state governments to include them in talks between Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen since they also face the brunt of the Sri Lankan naval agencies.

‘Important first step taken to resolve India-Sri Lanka fisheries conflict’

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/step-taken-to-resolve-fisheries-conflict-samaraweera/article9335059.ece>

"Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera on Friday said India realised the dangers of bottom-trawling, but the two countries should work out a win-win situation for poor fishermen on both sides of the Palk Bay. The Joint Working Group that the neighbours have set up, following the high-level talks in New Delhi last week, will meet in Colombo early January to take discussions forward. "I am sure that we should be able to come to a suitable agreement in the shortest possible time, said the Minister, who in September called for a ban on bottom-trawling, citing its adverse impact on marine ecosystems. Terming the New Delhi meeting "a great success, he told The Hindu in an interview that both sides demonstrated political will to find a solution and that a "very important first step has been taken.

On the outcome of the U.S. elections, he said there were certain concerns about some of the policies Donald Trump expounded during the campaign. But "what you say at election time is not always what you do when you are elected. The American system, he said, would steer the new administration along the same path as far as international relations are concerned. Asked about the recent controversial remarks of the Chinese envoy in Colombo criticising at a press conference Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake's view on "expensive Chinese loans Mr. Samaraweera said he advised the envoy that any such issue should be sorted through the Foreign Ministry rather than through the media.

China is a "good friend and an important partner in Sri Lanka's economic development, he said. Mr. Samaraweera, a top leader in Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party, which leads Sri Lanka's unity government along with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, has been at the helm of initiatives aimed at reconciliation. Asked about concerns voiced by the civil society on the draft of Sri Lanka's new counter-terrorism law, he said his own Ministry had conveyed to an oversight committee its reservation over some of the recommendations in the draft. The final version, he said, would be in line with global norms. "But still the commitment of the government to repeal the earlier Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and introduce a new Prevention of Terrorism Act in keeping with international best practice is as strong as ever. On whether the reported actions of the country's Terrorism Investigation Divisions and ongoing arrests under the PTA meant that the country's security apparatus that drew strong criticism during President Mahinda Rajapaksa's time remained as was earlier, Mr. Samaraweera said after 10 years of a "very authoritarian government it was not easy to change the mindset created by

that era. Even if governments change, the officials and bureaucracy remain. “It's not possible to change them all overnight. It is a gradual process. But that process is taking place.

Sri Lanka and India: Looking for a humane solution

<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/indiasri-lanka-fishing-dispute-looking-for-a-humane-solution/article9312303.ece>

"The agreement between India and Sri Lanka on establishing a Joint Working Group on fisheries is a small step forward in resolving the dispute between fishermen of both countries. In fact, such a mechanism had been in place until a few years ago to address problems that arose whenever fishermen from Tamil Nadu were arrested by Sri Lanka. The points agreed on are important: a hotline between the Coast Guards of both countries, a meeting of the JWG once in three months, and a meeting of the fisheries ministers every six months. Welcome too is the commitment that there would be no violence or loss of life of fishermen. These measures are useful in getting Indian fishermen or their boats released from custody, but they are unlikely to have any immediate impact on the livelihood crisis facing the fishermen of northern Sri Lanka. Such a crisis may grip Tamil Nadu fishermen too one day, after the fishery resources in the Palk Bay are exhausted.

The real issue is how long trawlers from Tamil Nadu will continue to fish in Sri Lankan territorial waters, and how soon bottom trawling is ended. The official statement after the talks between the foreign ministers refers to “expediting the transition towards ending the practice of bottom trawling at the earliest. An agreement on this is crucial, but in the absence of a time frame there remains a question mark over a solution emerging. Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen are firm on an immediate end to all incursions and are against seized Indian boats being released without legal process, even though they agree that the arrested fishermen should be released. In talks between representatives of fishermen held a few days earlier, Tamil Nadu fishermen had asked for a three-year phase-out period for their trawlers, and a deal under which they would fish for 85 days a year until then.

This was rejected outright by the Sri Lankan side, which holds that the Indian vessels cause serious economic and ecological damage. One way of preventing boundary transgression is to find a livelihood alternative for Tamil Nadu fishermen. Equipping them for deep sea fishing is an option. For now, Tamil Nadu should show greater understanding of the plight of the Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen, who are economically weaker and yet to fully recover from a devastating war, and agree to a more reasonable phase-out period. Sri Lanka, then, can look at a licensing system under which fishermen from both sides can fish on specified days using sustainable methods and permissible equipment. It is important that all sides recognise that there is a humanitarian dimension to the issue.

India and Sri Lanka: Fishermen of India, Sri Lanka to hold talks in Delhi

<http://www.sify.com/news/fishermen-of-india-sri-lanka-to-hold-talks-in-delhi-news-national-qlcjcKhehjjeb.html>

"A delegation-level meeting of fishermen associations of India and Sri Lanka is scheduled to be held in the national capital today. An 11-member delegation of Sri Lankan fishermen yesterday reached the national capital to have talks with its Indian counterpart from Tamil Nadu on resolving of fishing issues. The meeting, fourth in the series, has been called to work out a sustainable solution for trouble-free fishing in the Palk Bay, separating the two countries. It comes few days before foreign ministers of the two countries are to chair meeting of all stakeholder in New Delhi on Saturday to sort out the issue. The fishing issue was mentioned by Sri Lankan Prime Minister during his meeting with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi last month and both sides had agreed for a high-level meeting. It is reported that Tamil Nadu fisheries Minister Jayakumar will be attending the talks, along with fishermen representatives from Nagapattinam and Ramanathapuram.

Fishermen from Tamil Nadu are urging the government to secure the release of 115 fishing boats detained by Sri Lanka and fellow fishermen languishing in Lankan jail. The local fishermen want a lasting solution to the problem of Sri Lankan Navy apprehending them whenever they are fishing near international maritime boundary line. They want to secure the rights to fish in traditional fishing zones near Kachatheevu and Palk straits. The fishermen talks will give stress to avoid bottom trawling with Irattamadai nets which will destroy fish resources.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands: CMFRI provides inputs on seaweed farming to fisheries department

http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/cmfri-provides-inputs-on-seaweed-farming-to-fisheries-dept-116102801061_1.html

"The emerging seaweed farming industry in the country is all set to get a major boost, with a premier fisheries research institute transferring its technology of seaweed cultivation to Andaman Nicobar Islands. Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) today said it has provided scientific inputs on methods of seaweed farming suitable to the Andaman Nicobar Islands, as a part of the institute's initiative for intensifying its consultancy services. The seaweed cultivation is generally perceived as one of the most environmentally benign types of

mariculture activity. A feasibility study conducted in the seawater inundated areas in South Andamans by a team of CMFRI scientists has revealed that these regions are highly prospective for the seaweed farming, it said. Aimed at avoiding environmental disruptions, CMFRI selected the coastal areas devoid of coral reefs. As part of transferring the technology, the CMFRI provided practical training on methods of the farming practices to the officials of the Department of Fisheries in Andaman.

Training on fabrication of floating rafts with bamboo, tying of seed material (seaweed fragments) in the ropes, tying of seeded ropes in the bamboo rafts and positioning them in the sea were given to the participants. The CMFRI provided technical inputs on monoline culture method of the seaweed to the officials of the Fisheries Department in Andaman. The expert group from the CMFRI also educated the officials on seaweed distribution and diversity in the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar regions and seaweed products, besides giving training on wild collection of seaweed and identification of commercially important seaweed species. A K Abdul Nazar, Scientist-in-Charge of Mandapam Regional Centre of CMFRI and Johnson B, Scientist at the Centre coordinated the training programme. The seaweed farming venture, to be launched off the Andaman coast, will definitely help meet the growing demand in the industry, said Nazar. "Seaweeds are renewable source of food, energy, chemicals and medicines and valuable source of raw material for industries like health, food, medicines, pharmaceuticals, textiles, fertilizers, animal feed, etc. Seaweeds are also used for the production of Agar, Alginates and Carrageenan."

"Chemicals from brown seaweeds such as alginic acid, mannitol, laminarin, fucoidin and iodine have been extracted successfully on a commercial basis," he said. CMFRI had developed an anti-diabetic nutraceutical, Cadalmin™ Antidiabetic extract (ADe) from seaweeds. The product is effective to combat type-2 diabetes. It also developed another medicinal product, Green Algal extract (Cadalmin™ GAe), from seaweeds to combat inflammatory pain and arthritis.

India and Sri Lanka: India-Sri Lanka Fishing issue drags as talks loom

<http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2016/10/10/indo-lanka-fishing-issue-drags-as-talks-loom/>

"Fishermen in once war-torn Jaffna Peninsula claim that they were treated as a marginalised group by successive governments, firstly due to the terrorists activities in the area. Thavashselvam Thanushan, President of the Jaffna District Fishermen's Society federation, says the United National Party led government came to power with a pledge, stressing the 'good governance' policy would treat every citizen equally. "Now, we don't have powers to go to the harbour area but Indian goods are transported or shipped without any restrictions. We understand diplomatic relations of the two countries. Having said that we are citizens of the land ...sadly sidelined by authorities, this is one of our major concerns of the people voted to elect the present

regime, he stressed. He says they represent 128 unions but nobody from the government had consulted them. Stressing that they were aware of President Maithripala Sirisena calling for an early solution to address the Palk Bay conflict involving fishermen of India and Sri Lanka, Thanushan says while admiring the move he said they should have consulted the fishermen to know more about the hardships they go through due to the poaching by Indian fishermen.

“ The President did mention about us and concerns about the long-term damage caused to the environment and the sea resources, when he met Indian Minister of State for External Affairs M.J. Akbar in New York. Indian fishermen, originating from Tamil Nadu, use thousands of bottom-trawlers to fish in the Palk Bay. They reportedly cross the maritime boundary between the countries, often prompting arrest by the Sri Lankan Navy. “But what's the point ...the problem continues and goes on, he said. The Sunday Leader learns that President Sirisena told Mr. Akbar that both governments viewed the fisheries conflict from a humanitarian perspective, and swiftly released fishermen arrested on charges of trespassing. When contacted, Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Minister Mahinda Amaraweera told The Sunday Leader that more than 50 percent of the problems of the fishermen had been solved after he took over. He said that India has been pressurising for some time.

“Tamil Nadu has been trying very hard to pressurise us to release these boats. However, since I took over the ministry, I have not allowed to release a single Indian boat that was arrested. I will continue to instruct the relevant divisions to arrest all Indian fishermen entering our waters no matter how much they pressurise us. At present, we have over 100 boats in our custody and the arrests are continuing, he added. He says Indian encroachment has been an issue that has been festering for a long time now. “This has been happening for the past 30 years and they have been coming into our territory even during the war. Now the Indians think that this is their right to fish in our waters. However, we are not allowing them to come here. But the problem is that when there are thousands of Indian boats entering our waters, even the Navy finds it hard to stop them all.

However we will not just allow this to continue and we are looking at various possibilities and solutions in order to resolve this issue, he added. Fielding questions, Amaraweera said that some of the concerns were not brought under his notice. However, he would look into the matter. Responding to Thavashselvam Thanushan's concern on the dilapidated state of the Jaffna Fisheries Co-operatives building, he said they are willing to spend the needed Rs. One million or more of the betterment of the fisher folk in the area. The Fisheries sector in Sri Lanka accounts for 1.8 percent of GDP –Gross Domestic Product at the current market prices and 1.3 percent at constant (2002) prices in 2014. Total fish production in 2014 amounted to 535,050 metric tons and its value addition was Rs. 176,239 million or USD 1,350 million.

Growth rate of fisheries sector in 2014 was recorded as 4.5 percent at constant prices and it was 12.7 percent at current market prices against 2013. Around 272,140 active fishermen have engaged in both marine and inland fisheries and 1,023,780 members of their household depend on the income gained through fishing and related activities. The Fisheries sector has generated Rs. 34,797 million (US\$ 266.5 Mn.) of export earnings in the year 2014 and it was accounted for 2.4 percent of total export earnings. A positive trade balance of Rs. 15,937 million (USD 122 Mn.) was indicated for external trading of fish and fishery products. In order to achieve this growth, about 32,025 of motorised boats and 21,963 of non-motorised boats have been operated in marine fishing. Out of motorised boats around 4,447 boats have been operated in offshore fishing. Meanwhile, another union leader said that most of families have grievances that need to be addressed.

“Because some of these people have come from the Vanni, we cannot expect them to have any fishing equipment for their daily fishing operations. When fishing families in other parts of the country suffered from the tsunami disaster of 2004 , non-government organisations (NGOs) rushed to their assistance, but only two or three NGOs are helping the resettled Jaffna fishermen. He says these families do not have the basic facilities even to start their fishing. The fishermen's families also lack proper housing. Resettling organisations have put up tiny makeshift homes, better described as sheds, made of stone and a dozen or so sheets of tin for a roof, he said.

Fishermen whose homes were in the vicinity of the Mayiliddy fishing pier have not been allowed to return as the area remains a part of the High Security Zone, he said. There has been talk that no families will be resettled within a kilometer of the eastern end of Maathakal. It is understood that land in this area has been earmarked for sale in a deal with a foreign company. The Fishing Federation of Jaffna and other fishing groups have discussed the problems facing the fishermen in the North with senior government officials and foreign officials.

Tamil Nadu: No fish in the water, fishermen at sea

<http://www.indiawaterportal.org/articles/no-fish-water-fishermen-sea>

"What makes a good fisherman? His tools like boats and intricate nets, the ability to make deep dives or the tenacity to stand the elements? For most of the fishers, it's about having a deep understanding of the ecosystem and the wisdom to make it work for them. The fishing community at Palk Bay is a good example for this. A shallow water region between India and Sri Lanka, the bay is home to several biological resources and the people who thrive on this wealth. This is, however, changing fast with the commercial fish trawlers damaging the sea floor and netting the catch in bulk, limiting the sea's capacity to regenerate its marine wealth for future use. By bringing the narratives of both the small scale and the mechanised sectors of the fisheries together, the film Fishers of Palk Bay made by Evanescence Studios and Dakshin Foundation tries to bring forth the contradictions and conundrums that we face in fisheries today.

With numerous families depending on trawler-based fisheries for their livelihood, how can we arrive at a solution that hurts no one? The last knowledge bearers The half an hour narrative, backed by good research and some splendid underwater shots, tracks the way a fisher picks a chank from the sea floor. Image by Umeed Mistry A fisher picks a chank from the sea floor. Image by Umeed Mistry working styles of the fishing communities in Palk Bay who seem to be the last bearers of traditional knowledge of this type of fishing. So, we have the divers who can hold their breaths for over one minute while collecting chanks from the sea floor. These divers take care not to pick the small-sized chanks. Lack of oxygen support during the dives self regulates this practice as divers are able to pick only around 20 pieces every day which are enough to make a living and also let the sea floor recuperate.

Southern Palk Bay is known for its traditional fish traps. Acacia tree branches are first cleared of thorns, sun dried and then woven into single-faced, double-faced or three-faced traps depending on the requirement. The traps, which are anchored in crevices of the underwater rocks, have gaps narrow enough to trap a medium-sized fish and wide enough to let small fish pass through. Compare this to one-size-fits-all approach of trawler nets which even catch fingerlings (60-day-old fish). Moreover, these small fish don't have great market value, but in the sea, they grow and reproduce, preparing the next pool of fish to be cherished. The traditional traps fetch five-10 kg of fish which are enough for one family to eat and sell, but those who weave these are the last of the craftsmen left. Mural net makers are the other traditional craftsmen who are on the decline. A gill net with a difference, these have floats made of calotropis plants, which match the dynamic movements of mural or half beak fish schools. The same nets can be used to catch other fish varieties by adding stones in them. "This shows how extensive is the knowledge of these fishermen about buoyancy and movements of various fish varieties.

Depending on the season, the time of the day and the water type and its depth, they can modify their tools to fetch a particular fish, says Umeed Mistry who shot the underwater footage for the film. Prawn catchers also have specific three-layered net which drag like trawler nets but only skim the sea bed, catching only the food-value species. A trawler net, on the other hand, grabs a lot of things which are valuable under water but a waste out of the sea. What can work? Though the trawler nets have contributed to the decline of these traditional knowledge hubs, even the fishermen who use them are worried about the shrinking produce due to over exploitation and their own future.

With the reduction in catch, fishermen are now more frequently risking conflicts with Sri Lankan fishermen and navy by venturing into their territory which still has a sizeable amount of fish and other resources. But is there a way out? Aarthi Sridhar of Dakshin Foundation, who is the lead researcher for the film, feels this story has no simple solutions, but complexity can also be a good starting point for conservation. "There won't be a future in fisheries if a wide range of people don't appreciate the effort and conservation ethics behind small-scale fisheries. This

means that if they want to eat fish, they better be willing to pay the price for the fish caught through sustainable means. People's demands for consumption is also what fuels large-scale fisheries right? she says. Government can chip in with subsidies for small-scale fishers and buy back schemes for trawl fishers after a consistent dialogue process. This film can be a good starting point to understand what's at stake. A preliminary version of the film was screened at the Moving Waters Film Festival in Bengaluru, September 17-18, 2016

Sri Lanka: Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera calls for ban on bottom trawling

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lankan-foreign-minister-calls-for-bottom-trawling-ban/article9119133.ece>

"Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera has called for a ban on bottom trawling, a destructive fishing practice that harms marine ecosystems. Mr. Samaraweera made the appeal at the recent 'Our Ocean 2016 conference' in Washington DC, ahead of high-level talks between India and Sri Lanka on the Palk Bay conflict. Sri Lankan Tamil fisher-folk have for long expressed concern over bottom-trawling by Tamil Nadu fishermen in Sri Lankan waters. The Indian fishermen are reluctant to give up trawling which, they argue, employs hundreds of people. Illegal fishing Mr. Samaraweera said Sri Lanka was committed to combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Sri Lanka paid a heavy price for it, when the European Union imposed a 15-month ban on seafood imports from the island. While the ban was lifted in April this year, after Sri Lanka adopted new fisheries policies, activists in Sri Lanka point to "IUU fishing by Indian fishermen in the Palk Bay. Last year, Tamil lawmaker M.A. Sumanthiran moved a bill in Sri Lankan Parliament to ban mechanised bottom trawling. Indian fishermen, however, still cross the maritime boundary and fish using trawlers. In 2016 so far, the Sri Lankan Navy has arrested at least 150 Indian fishermen on charges of illegal fishing. The Palk Bay issue has proved a challenge to India-Sri Lanka relations, with talks between fishermen of both sides ending in a deadlock. The two countries are now working on dates for the Ministerial level talks, according to diplomatic sources in New Delhi. The neighbours are also trying to resume talks between fishermen from both sides, officials said.

Karnataka: And the river flows on

<http://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/moving-waters-that-features-international-and-national-films/article9115274.ece>

"Rivers and oceans sustain our lives, but as urban dwellers we know little about them. To bring to the fore stories of the people, places and ecosystems that contribute to rivers and oceans, a group of individuals have organised Moving Waters Festival, to be held at Goethe-Institut/Max

Mueller Bhavan, supported by Nature in Focus, Suchitra Film Society, Jungle Lodges and Resorts and Candor International School. Adarsh Raju, a documentary film-maker and program co-ordinator, speaks about the idea behind the festival. "My friend Abhi and I had attended film festivals in the US. We wanted to host a similar film festival in Bengaluru. Besides, there are no platforms for documentary films in the city. The organisers are from different backgrounds each with an interest in the environment.

"There are techies, a marine and wildlife biologist, says Adarsh. The festival features five world premieres, which includes Kiribati and Bali to Bengaluru's Vrishabhavathy and Arkavathy rivers. There are films by Claudia and Hendrik Schmidt, Peter McBride, Ben Knight, Will Stauffer-Norris, Andreas Roth, Marco Biemann, Volker Barth and national films. "There will be animation, short films and documentaries, informs Adarsh. The Indian films include: The Fishers of Palk Bay, which features the last remaining traditional fishing practices of the Palk Bay, by Saravanakumar Salem, The Mangroves by Pooja Gupta, Unearthed, which shows how sand mining is affecting the Cauvery, by Munmun Dhalaria, Kali by Amoghavarsha, which shows the river through the eyes of a 100-year old woman, Janaki, Crabs of Karwar, by Adarsh and Radha Rangarajan and Shifting Undercurrents: Women Seaweed Collectors of Gulf of Mannar by Rita Banerji, which is about 5000 women who collect seaweed in the Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park, off Tamil Nadu. The festival also includes eight key speakers. It will be held on September 17 and 18, from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., free entry and is open to public.

Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera calls for ban on bottom trawling

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Mr. Samaraweera said Sri Lanka was committed to combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. Sri Lanka paid a heavy price for it, when the European Union imposed a 15-month ban on seafood imports from the island. While the ban was lifted in April this year, after Sri Lanka adopted new fisheries policies, activists in Sri Lanka point to "IUU fishing by Indian fishermen in the Palk Bay. Last year, Tamil lawmaker M.A. Sumanthiran moved a bill in Sri Lankan Parliament to ban mechanised bottom trawling. Indian fishermen, however, still cross the maritime boundary and fish using trawlers. In 2016 so far, the Sri Lankan

Navy has arrested at least 150 Indian fishermen on charges of illegal fishing. The Palk Bay issue has proved a challenge to India-Sri Lanka relations, with talks between fishermen of both sides ending in a deadlock. The two countries are now working on dates for the Ministerial level talks, according to diplomatic sources in New Delhi. The neighbours are also trying to resume talks between fishermen from both sides, officials said.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen stage demo

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/fishermen-stage-demo/article9066563.ece>

"A day after launching indefinite strike, more than 300 fishermen, including leaders of various fishermen associations staged a protest demonstration after entering to the sea, demanding peaceful solution to their vexatious issue and release of fishermen, arrested by the Sri Lankan navy and boats confiscated by it. Aggrieved that there was stalemate after they participated in the 'internal stakeholders' meeting chaired by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in Delhi on July 29, the fishermen staged the demonstration, holding black flags entering into the sea near the fishing jetty here on Friday. The agitation was to draw the attention of the Centre and State governments to the plight of fishermen, who faced threat to their livelihood, P. Sesu Raja, leader of a fishermen association, said. The Lankan navy continued to harass and arrest them and confiscated their boats whenever they ventured into the sea for fishing in the Palk Bay, he said.

"The governments should secure our traditional fishing rights in the Palk Bay or retrieve Katchatheevu islet and ensure peaceful livelihood, he said. It was unfortunate that both the State and Central governments continued to ignore the demand for compensation to the owners of 18 boats, which were impounded by the Lankan authorities last year and could not be salvaged after they suffered extensive damage due to months of neglect and disuse, he said. No attempt was also being taken to secure the release of 104 mechanised and country boats presently in the custody of Sri Lanka, he said. As there were no signs of the Centre arranging talks with their counterparts in Sri Lanka, they would launch an indefinite fast from September 12 in front of the Rameswaram bus stand, he added.

Tamil Nadu: Mechanised boat fishermen begins indefinite strike

<http://news.webindia123.com/news/Articles/India/20160901/2928550.html>

"Fishing activities came to a grinding halt in the Island town of Rameswaram, as about 5,000 fishermen today began an indefinite strike, demanding immediate release of four Indian fishermen and 103 fishing trawlers detained by Sri Lanka.. Fisheries department officials said the fishermen anchored about 850 trawlers at Rameswaram fishing jetty and did not venture into the sea. N.J.Bose, President of Rameswaram Port Mechanized Boat Fishermen Association told newsmen here that leaders of 11 mechanised boat fishermen associations have decided to launch

the indefinite strike. He said the fishermen and their families would stage a "Jal Demonstration" by standing in the "Agni Theertham" (Sea) tomorrow to draw the Centre's attention towards the plight of fishing community. The continuous detention of Indian fishing trawlers by Sri Lankan government has severely crippled the livelihood of boat owners and fishermen. Despite our several requests, the Centre is not taking any concrete steps for the retrieval of boats from Lanka, he said. The fishermen were also demanding the Centre to restore the traditional fishing rights of Tamil Nadu fishermen in the Palk Bay.

Tamil Nadu: Will Jayalalithaa's proposal end fishermen troubles?

<http://newstodaynet.com/chennai/will-jaya-proposal-end-fishermen-troubles>

"Sri Lanka welcomed TamilNadu Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa's proposal to phase out bottom trawling by Indian fishermen and encourage tuna deep sea fishing. "Jayalalithaa had urged the Central government to facilitate the system of long liners for tuna deep sea fishing," the Fisheries Ministry said yesterday. An official release said Lankan Fisheries Minister, Mahinda Amaraweera, is planning to send a letter to Jayalalithaa to thank her and support her stand. He said Jayalalithaa's decision was in accordance with accepted international norms on fishing. He said, "Lanka has been arresting Indian fishermen for allegedly poaching and carrying out destructive bottom trawling." Around 129 Indian trawlers have been arrested and their vessels confiscated since 2015. On 14 June, Jayalalithaa had said diversification of bottom trawlers into deep sea tuna long liners would reduce the pressure of bottom-trawling boats in the Palk Bay.

In a memorandum to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking Central assistance, she had said it would cost Rs 975 crore over three years. "This issue was discussed at a meeting convened by the Principal Secretary to Prime Minister in 2015 with the Chief Secretary of Tamil Nadu and the Secretary, Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries," she had said. Based on the discussions, she had sent a proposal to the Centre for reduction of trawling pressure in the Palk Bay, on 12 May 2015. "As the main proposal is yet to be approved, my government has initiated a scheme at a cost of Rs 51.3 crore for the construction of new tuna long liners and the construction of 171 tuna long liners has commenced," she had said.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka lauds Jayalalithaa's proposal to phase out bottom trawling

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/sri-lanka-lauds-jayalalithaas-proposal-to-phase-out-bottom-trawling-2950130/>

"Sri Lanka Tuesday welcomed Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa's proposal to phase out bottom trawling by Indian fishermen and encourage tuna deep sea fishing. Jayalalithaa had urged the Central government to facilitate the system of long liners for tuna deep sea fishing, the Sri Lankan Fisheries Ministry said. An official release said Lankan Fisheries Minister Mahinda Amaraweera is planning to send a letter to Jayalalithaa to thank her and support her stand. Amaraweera said that Jayalalithaa's decision was in accordance with the accepted international norms on fishing. He said Lanka has been arresting Indian fishermen for allegedly poaching and carrying out destructive bottom trawling. Around 129 Indian trawlers have been arrested and confiscated since 2015.

On June 14, Jayalalithaa had said diversification of bottom trawlers into deep sea tuna long liners would reduce the pressure of bottom-trawling boats in the Palk Bay. In a memorandum to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking Central assistance, she had said that it would cost Rs 975 crores over three years. "This issue was discussed in a meeting convened by the Principal Secretary to Prime Minister in 2015 with the Chief Secretary of Tamil Nadu and the Secretary, Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, she had said. Based on the discussions, she had sent a proposal to Centre for reduction of trawling pressure in the Palk Bay on May 12, 2015. "As the main proposal is yet to be approved, my government has initiated a scheme at a cost of Rs 51.3 crores for the construction of new Tuna Long Liners and the construction of 171 Tuna Long Liners has commenced, she had said.

Tamil Nadu: Tamil Nadu fishermen ready to compromise

<http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2016/07/10/tamil-nadu-fishermen-ready-to-compromise/>

"Tamil Nadu fishermen have expressed the desire to hold urgent talks with Sri Lanka and reach a compromise in order to resolve the long standing fishing issue. Tamil Nadu Fishermen's Association President S. Emiret told The Sunday Leader they are even willing to consider giving up bottom trawling if an alternative solution is provided to them. Bottom trawling by Indian fishermen is a serious concern for Sri Lanka and the matter has been raised in Parliament as well. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe told Parliament last Thursday that bottom trawling by Indian fishermen is having an impact on the livelihood of fishermen in the North and East. However Emiret noted that even some Sri Lankan fishermen engage in bottom trawling so it is unfair to only blame Indians.

"Also don't forget even Sri Lankan fishermen poach in Indian waters. So this is not just something to point fingers at us. We must discuss and resolve this issue, he said. He said Tamil Nadu fishermen are prepared to sit down with their Sri Lankan counterparts to map out a time based solution to end the crisis. "We have had talks before with Sri Lankan fishermen but most often it is the businessmen who attend the talks and not the fishermen themselves. Some of these businessmen have their own agendas so the talks never go forward, Emiret said. Emiret said that

recently his association met Indian External Affairs minister Sushma Swaraj and urged her to take efforts to resolve the issue.

However he said Tamil Nadu fishermen feel only direct talks with their counterparts will result in a solution acceptable to both sides. “We need to have three meals a day. The fishing industry feeds us as this is our job. We will look at alternative means if we really must give up bottom trawling to resolve this issue, he said. Emiret also asserted that Tamil Nadu fishermen have no qualms with fishermen in the North and East and want to prevent the issue from hurting the relationship between both countries. Meanwhile, the government on Thursday said it will not release boats seized from Indian fishermen who were arrested for poaching in Sri Lankan waters. Tamil Nadu chief minister J. Jayalalithaa has been demanding that the boats and the fishermen be set free.

However Prime Minister Wickremesinghe said boats will not be returned but the fishermen will likely be released. He made this announcement in Parliament when the opposition questioned him about reports that Sri Lanka may allow Indian fishermen to fish in Sri Lankan waters. “We will not allow Indian fishermen to catch fish in Sri Lankan waters as they wish, he asserted. The Prime Minister said that talks on seeking a solution to the Indo-Lanka fishing issue has been held between the governments of Sri Lanka and India. He said several options are now being looked at to resolve the issue and he hopes a final solution to the issue will be reached by the end of this year. “This issue cannot continue to drag, the Prime Minister added. Just last week the Sri Lankan navy arrested several Indian fishermen who were poaching in Sri Lankan waters. Navy spokesman Akram Alavi told The Sunday Leader the navy assisted the coast guard to arrest 16 Indian fishermen at two separate locations on Wednesday night. He said that the fishermen were arrested south of Delft Islands and off Mannar.

The navy spokesman said that three boats used by the Indians were also seized. The fishermen and boats were handed over to the Jaffna Fisheries Inspectorate and the Mannar Assistant Directorate of Fisheries once being brought ashore. Akram Alavi said the arrest on Wednesday follows the arrest of 17 Indian fishermen two days earlier. The arrests prompted Jayalalithaa to write another letter to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to direct the External Affairs minister to secure the immediate release of 57 Fishermen and 98 fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody, including the 23 fishermen and their three fishing boats apprehended on July 4 and 5. “I am constrained to write to you yet again to bring to your notice two more incidents of apprehension of innocent Indian fishermen belonging to the state by the Sri Lankan Navy.

It is reported that six fishermen in their traditional fishing boat who set sail from Pamban fishing base in Ramanathapuram District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on Monday and taken to Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka. In yet another incident, two boats from Nagapattinam District with 17 fishermen were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on Tuesday and have been taken to

Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka, she said in a letter to Modi, according to the Deccan Chronicle. Pointing to the ceding away of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka by the Indian government in 1976 and the case filed by her challenging it, she said that the state government has taken a stand that the International Maritime Boundary line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka cannot be treated as settled as the matter is sub judice. "I reiterate that only the retrieval of Katchatheevu will ensure the restoration of the peaceful pursuit of their traditional livelihood by our fishermen in the Palk Bay, she noted. The Sri Lankan government has however asserted on several occasions that Katchatheevu is not open for discussion as it now belongs to Sri Lanka.

Requesting the Centre to impress upon the Sri Lankan government to immediately release the 95 fishing boats of the state fishermen already in their custody, Jayalalithaa said, "I once again seek your urgent directions to the Ministry of External Affairs to initiate earnest efforts to find a permanent and pragmatic solution to this livelihood issue of our fishermen. When asked about the comments being made by politicians in Sri Lanka and India on the issue, Emiret said politicians look to take advantage of the issue and more often than not prevent the issue from reaching an end. He said both governments need to understand that the issue affects the lives of ordinary people and so no one should play politics with the fishing dispute.

Sri Lanka: Licensed Fishing in Sri Lankan Waters: Problems and Prospects

<http://www.sguardian.org/2016/07/licensed-fishing-in-sri-lankan-waters-problems-and-prospects/>

"The Government of India and the Government of Sri Lanka are very keen to find a peaceful solution to the travails of fishermen living on both sides of the Palk Bay. What is at stake is the livelihood of thousands of Indian Tamil and Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen. A clue to current Sri Lankan thinking on the subject was provided in a news item in the Hindu couple of days ago. Dated Colombo the news report quotes the Defense Secretary Karunasena Hettiarachchi who mentioned that several options are being considered including "licensed fishing to break the deadlock. There are precedents to licensed fishing in the region. According to the 1976 Maritime Boundary Agreement which delimited the boundaries in the Gulf of Mannar and the Bay of Bengal, as a gesture of goodwill to Sri Lanka, India permitted Sri Lankan fishermen to continue fishing in the Wadge bank near Kanyakumari.. To quote from the 1976 Agreement: "Sri Lankan fishing vessels, duly licensed by the Government of India, may engage in fishing in the Wadge Bank, for a period of three years from the date of establishment of India of its Exclusive Economic Zone.

It should also be pointed out that the Sri Lankan Government, in order to promote bilateral relations, agreed to consider proposals for licensed fishing in 2003. The press release issued at the end of Foreign Secretary level consultations on 25 July 2003 mentioned in paragraph 11: "The Indian side broached the possibility of licensed fishing for Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan

waters, with a view to preventing illegal activities. Sri Lanka called for detailed proposals in this respect for its considered examination. Unfortunately the window of opportunity was not grasped by Chennai and New Delhi. It was for the first time that Colombo officially committed itself to consider proposals for licensed fishing. According to informed sources in New Delhi, the Government of Tamil Nadu did not seriously pursue the matter nor could New Delhi submit any credible proposals due to reservations expressed by the Ministry of Agriculture. Marine fisheries fall within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture. Since 1993, the Author had been suggesting licensed fishing as a possible solution to the travails of Indian fishermen in the Palk Bay.

The Sri Lankan fishermen do not fish in waters very near to the maritime boundary. Therefore, I suggested that the Government of Tamil Nadu should persuade New Delhi to make the suggestion to Sri Lanka that licensed Indian fishermen may be permitted to fish up to five nautical miles from the international maritime boundary line. If the principle was accepted, detailed procedures could be worked out between the two governments to not only regulate fishing, but also to ensure that the facilities were not misused. As a quid pro quo Sri Lankan fishermen could be permitted to fish in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone, which is rich in tuna. The problem today has become more complex because Indian fishermen resort to bottom trawling which not only adversely affects the livelihood of Sri Lankan fishermen but also play havoc with marine ecology. The ball is in the Indian court today. The Government of India and the Government of Tamil Nadu should immediately take steps to de-commission the bottom trawlers from the Palk Bay.

What is more, deep sea fishing should be started in a big way in Tamil Nadu and fishermen from the Palk Bay region should be encouraged to switch over to deep sea fishing. Fishermen are attached to the sea, but they have no special attachment to the coastal villages in which they live. They are migratory. In fact majority of Rameshwaram fishermen have migrated from southern part of Tamil Nadu. The success of diplomacy consists in converting a crisis into an opportunity. The present strains in the Palk Bay could be overcome by looking at Palk Bay not as a contested territory, but as common heritage. Historically the Palk Bay was never a barrier; it was a bridge which linked the peoples of both countries. New Delhi should suggest to Colombo that a Palk Bay Authority should be constituted, consisting of representatives of both countries, which can determine the ideal sustainable catch, what type of fishing equipments can be used, how many days can Sri Lankan and Indian fishermen fish and how to jointly enrich the sea. What is more, instead of imposing a solution from above, a solution from below should be worked out. Fishermen of both countries should be closely associated in every stage of the dialogue. This will open a new era in India-Sri Lanka relations; it will also give a fillip to bilateral and regional co-operation.

Tamil Nadu: Film on Ban on sea cucumber fishing: socio-economic impact

"This video is made as a representation to the Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests, and also the Ministry of Fisheries, pleading on behalf of the fisher people in the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay seeking a revocation of the blanket ban on sea-cucumber harvesting and adoption of more scientific methods of conservation. The video link is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITC5ud_jMII&feature=share

Sri Lanka: Shedding IUU fishing for better times

<http://www.dailynews.lk/?q=2016/06/27/features/85751>

"With Sri Lanka finally having overcome the EU ban on fishing, the fisheries experts point out that, the time is opportune for the government to effect a complete halt to the destructive practice of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in Sri Lankan waters. The country is estimated to lose Rs. 6 billion per annum due to IUU fishing and the resolving of this issue will greatly boost our fish exports and foreign exchange earnings. In 2010, a statement issued by the European Union and USA recognised, "Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing to be one of the most serious threats to sustainable fishing and to marine biodiversity in the world's oceans. Fisheries expert Dr. Steve Creech in the meantime who addressed the forum - "India-Sri Lanka relations in the 21st century - organised by the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS), recently chose to highlight the case of Tamil Nadu fishermen in Lankan waters as the best example of IUU fishing.

"There are complex political and legal drivers that perpetuate IUU fishing by Tamil Nadu trawlers in Sri Lankan and Indian waters, he said. Gaining political mileage over fisheries issue The fishermen issue between the two neighbours across the Palk Straits was not a new one and Dr. Creech noted that caste, Sri Lankan Tamil politics in the Northern Province and Tamil Nationalism especially with regard to the role of Tamil Nadu in support of federalism and Eelam, as reasons for not finding a solution to the problem. "The Karaiyar which refers to the fishermen caste are poorly represented in Northern Sri Lankan Tamil Politics. Northern politics is still dominated by the upper Vellala caste who are land owners and educated middle class, he explained. In India, Tamil Nadu was very much depended on using the fishermen issue for political mileage and the Union Government of India in turn was depended on the Tamil Nadu State government for support in the Lok Sabha.

"In Tamil Nadu they have always garnered popular support by stating that they favoured Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism along with their appeal for Kachchativu, Dr. Creech said. In the 1970s, both the countries agreed on the setting up of a maritime boundary. Things, however, began to change when the ban on fishing in the Northern Seas was lifted by the Sri Lankan

authorities with the end of war. Since then, fishermen from both sides have continuously been arrested for trespassing in the others' territorial waters, jailed and later released following intervention from their respective governments. IUU and the EU ban The EU regulation to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing (2010) stated, "Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing depletes fish stocks, destroys marine habitats, distorts competition, put honest fishers at an unfair disadvantage and weakens coastal communities, particularly in developing countries. In Sri Lanka, the economic impact of IUU fishing has been severe. "Tamil Nadu Sea Food companies export US\$ 41 million worth seafood per annum harvested by Tamil Nadu fishing vessels that are allegedly owned by Tamil Nadu politicians. There are 34 EU registered exporters, they are sold and exported from Tamil Nadu as 'Product of India' seafood, Dr. Creech said.

The Presidential initiative on combating IUU fishing and seafood fraud – 2015 (The United States of America) stated "IUU fishing and fraudulent seafood products distort legal markets and unfairly compete with the products of law abiding fishing and seafood industries globally. Dr. Creech explained that the ban was invoked by the EU in October 2014 due to illegal fishing operations by Sri Lankan fishing vessels and the Sri Lankan government's failure to report on and regulate Sri Lanka's High Seas fishery in the Indian Ocean. "The EU has lifted its ban; Sri Lanka is free to carry out its export of seafood to the European nations without a barrier. It is the right opportunity for the government to put an end to this fisheries issue and bring equal benefits to both Northern and Southern Sri Lankan fishermen, he emphasised. He also opined that it was time Sri Lankan foreign policy considered the Rs 6 billion in revenue that the country lost every year due to illegal fishing and daily degradation of Sri Lanka's marine resources.

Matter of definition When it comes to finding a lasting solution to the problem, Dr. Creech emphasised that it was only by correctly defining the terms of the discourse that Sri Lanka could seek to stop IUU fishing by Tamil Nadu fishing vessels. "It is not Indian fishermen or Indian trawlers that engage in illegal fishing; it is the Tamil Nadu fishermen and Tamil Nadu trawlers who are engaged in this. Therefore, defining them precisely is vital when dealing with the problem. Improper defining might make the matters worse, he explained. He said that since 2009, nearly 282,842 IUU fishing trips have been made by Tamil Nadu Trawlers. This takes the number to 40,409 trips every year. There are over 5,000 mechanised trawlers in Tamil Nadu and nearly 2,500 of them enter Sri Lankan waters on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. These vessels are also known to engage to some extent in the smuggling of Kerala ganja, gold, sea cucumber and saris, thus posing a security threat to Sri Lanka.

The right application of the law When it comes to the legal aspect of the problem, Dr. Creech alleged that the fishermen were often remanded for violating maritime boundaries under the Immigrants and Emigrants Act of 1948 rather than for illegal fishing. This meant that very little action was taken to enact laws relating to IUU fishing. "The Immigrants and Emigrants Act is

applied by the Attorney General's Department disregarding the Foreign Fishing Vessels Act of 1979, which is the most suitable to prosecute the skipper and the boat owners, he said. No Tamil Nadu fishermen are prosecuted for illegal fishing, claimed Dr. Creech. Arrests do not matter, solution bilateral Dr. Creech explained that there was no point in arresting fishermen when they are inevitably released and repatriated immediately. "By avoiding the arrest of fishermen, the Sri Lankan government can avoid the problem of having lots of Tamil Nadu fishermen in Sri Lankan custody.

Tamil Nadu politicians also take this opportunity to speak about Tamil Nationalism and that in turn becomes a bilateral issue, he said. The solution proposed by Dr. Creech was to release the fishermen and keep the boats. They could then ask the Indian boat owners to come to Sri Lanka to pay a fine to release their boats rather than having humanitarian concerns of keeping Tamil Nadu fishermen in Sri Lankan custody. "This is what the Indian state government does when Sri Lankan fishermen get arrested. They charge them under the Maritime Zones Act. The Sri Lankan boat owners have to go to India, pay the fine and get their boats released. In Sri Lanka, the Attorney General's office charges the fishermen under Emigrant Immigrant Act and that causes bilateral issues, he said. The Maritime Boundary Act International Law Expert, Dr. Nirmala Chandrahasan in the meantime said that illegal fishing had considerable influence on political, economic, societal and environmental security; the most alarming impacts being on political and environmental security.

"The MoU signed in 1974 clearly states that fishing vessels and fishermen of either country shall not engage in the gulf waters, territorial sea or EEZ of the other without permission, she said. The illegal fishing issue thus demonstrated the encroachment on the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) by fishermen from Sri Lanka and India for fishing even though a Maritime boundary crossing for fishing purposes was prohibited once the Maritime Boundary agreement was enacted. These violations, however, continue to persist in the Palk Straights, Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar by the Tamil Nadu fishermen, she said. According to Dr. Chandrahasan, one of the primary purposes in establishing the EEZ was to clarify the rights of individual nations to control the fish harvests off their shores. "The only alternative to Sri Lanka is to have stringent action taken to ban illegal fishing in Sri Lankan waters, Dr. Chandrahasan said. Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Y. K. Sinha, however, insisted that the fishing dispute between Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen be viewed from a humanitarian standpoint. The Fisheries Ministry Several high level discussions have taken place between authorities from both Sri Lanka and India over the dispute.

Both sides have insisted that they had many areas which they agreed on. Fisheries experts, however, stress that though Indo-Lanka diplomatic relations were good in the broader sense, illegal fishing has been an issue that both states have struggled with to arrive at a holistic decision. Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Ministry Secretary, Mangalika Adikari said the Indian

government was not showing adequate concern over the issue. Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Minister Mahinda Amaraweera in the meantime stressed that policy level discussions were being planned to take place between Sri Lanka and Indian governments. Adikari, however, said they would have to check with the Foreign Affairs Ministry for further clarifications before the said discussions are to take place. "The trawlers captured by the Sri Lankan Navy will not be released and measures are being taken to conduct more effective inspections with the aim of bringing an end to the issue, Minister Amaraweera said.

Adikari assured that the ministry was seriously concerned about the well-being of the fishing community and the betterment of the country. "We are looking forward to have holistic discussions with India to reach a solution to the illegal fishing issue, she added. Sri Lanka Navy Media Spokesperson Captain Akram Alavi revealed that at present there were 24 Indian fishermen in custody and 120 fishing trawlers and boats confiscated. This year alone, 32 boats and 177 fishermen were apprehended. "We have been arresting fishing boats and the fishermen, but the fishermen were repatriated regularly at regular intervals and in the meantime the trawlers were sent back to the respective fishing authorities in India. Since 2015, the trawlers are not sent back to India, as a result there are 120 boats under our custody, he said. "Bottom trawling is prohibited in India as well in Sri Lanka. But, Tamil Nadu fishermen use this method when they fish in our territory. They scoop the whole of the sea bottom, destroying coral reefs, sea reeds and regeneration of fish, Captain Alavi said.

The Navy and Coastguard apprehend fishermen along with their boats, fishing nets and equipment and hand them over to the respective fisheries inspector. It is then up to the Fisheries Department to take legal action against them. "We have a shore based radar as well as ships and craft installed radars. A fishing trawler illegally crossing the maritime boundary can be easily apprehended. Most of the time we try to send them off from our territory, they are arrested when they venture deep into Sri Lankan territory, Captain Alavi said. He said the Navy began to apprehend the fishing trawlers after 2010 with the end of war. Numbers peaked somewhere in 2012-2013 and the number of trawlers venturing into Sri Lankan waters was on the decline. Ultimately, the removal of the EU ban would have little impact on fish trade if we let IUU fishing destroy the very product we export to these countries.

India: Problem of fishermen in India-Sri Lanka relations

http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/problem-of-fishermen-in-india-sri-lanka-relations_gsen_200516

"During his latest visit to India in early May, President Maithripala Sirisena is reported to have discussed with Prime Minister Narendra Modi the problem of frequent arrests of fishermen of both countries and seizures of their fishing vessels by the Sri Lankan and Indian authorities in the common sea area between the two countries. The issue is not new. The problem has been

festering with political ramifications, particularly in Tamilnadu for a number of years. The situation with regard to fishing has gradually turned out to be adverse for Tamil fishermen from Sri Lanka's northern province after the end of the Fourth Eelam War in 2009. During the Eelam War, active patrolling by the Sri Lankan Navy and by the Indian Navy and Coast Guard to interdict the movement of LTTE cadres also prevented Indian fishermen from Tamilnadu, and also to an extent from Andhra Pradesh and Puducherry, from undertaking fishing across the median line international boundary in the Palk Bay which had been firmed up by mutual agreement between India and Sri Lanka in 1974.

But the fact of the matter is that post that conflict, Indian fishermen have extended their fishing activities to Sri Lankan territorial waters. This is owing to the gradual depletion of fishing resources in the Indian continental shelf, the relatively greater availability of fish on the Sri Lankan side, and the Sri Lankan fishermen from the northern province not being in a position to exploit the marine resources. Moreover, Sri Lankan fishermen did not have the means, for example, advanced fishing implements like gill nets, modern trawlers, etc. Indian fishermen have also been resorting to bottom trawling (banned as per international fishing regime), which is destructive of the layout of the sea-floor, and the natural habitat for fish breeding. In other words, opportunities induced Indian fishermen to venture into the sea domain of their Sri Lankan counterparts.

The moot point so far as Indian fishermen are concerned is whether the Centre and the state government in particular will initiate comprehensive and effective measures towards providing alternative means of livelihood for them. Unless their dependence on fishing in the Palk Bay decreases, it will be difficult to curb the natural tendency of Indian fishermen to intrude into Sri Lankan territorial waters. The Department of Ocean Development and Ministry of Agriculture, which are responsible for providing technical support to States on development of fisheries and blue economy matters, are required to develop holistic plans to ensure that Indian fishermen do not become over-dependent on fishing in the Palk Bay on an individual basis. Fishing in the area may be undertaken under institutional arrangements of, say, government recognized and registered fishermen's cooperatives or through outsourced/contractual arrangements of the Tamilnadu Government's fisheries department, in order to ensure that fishing is carried out in an organized manner and within an institutional framework. This will obviate individual fishermen straying across the sea boundary line towards the Sri Lankan coast.

Therefore, a multi-pronged approach is necessary to ensure that the rights of Indian fishermen are not curtailed within Indian territorial waters, they have opportunities to earn their livelihood through direct fishing in a viable manner, and they engage in concomitant fishery product processing as part of downstream activities. Such an approach can only become feasible if the Government of India takes the initiative and does not leave the issue, with all its complexities and sensitivities, to the Tamilnadu Government. The latter may not be able to deal with the broad

gamut of related issues owing to resource constraints and political compulsions. A resolution of the fishermen's problems, their periodic arrests, impounding of their vessels –on both the Indian and Sri Lankan sides – may not be possible only through coercive measures and maritime deployments of the Indian Coast Guard and Navy and Sri Lankan Navy. The underlying causes of fishermen trespassing the sea boundary have to be attended to.

Only after action on the lines suggested above is initiated should the security dimension may be attended to as a concomitant measure through joint sea patrols. The governments in New Delhi and Colombo should also agree to a protocol to be observed by their patrolling naval forces, to the effect that, immediately after fishermen trespassers are apprehended, they are handed over to the governmental authorities of the country the fishermen concerned belong to or originate from. Such a step will generate confidence in the fishermen that their own government will ultimately protect them from incarceration in a hostile, unfriendly or uncertain environment in a foreign country, even if such a perception may not necessarily be based on reality.

The phenomenon of long detentions of arrested fishermen in jails in a foreign country with negative repercussions on their families and neighbours, apart from the political fallout on the governments in Chennai and New Delhi, will consequently become avoidable. The Government of India may also exercise caution in dealing with the fishermen issue owing to the interest shown by China, of late, towards assisting Sri Lanka in strengthening its fisheries and aquatic infrastructure. China has already decided to support a Fisheries & Aquatic Research and Development Centre in Sri Lanka's southern province at Matara – Mirissa. While on the face of it, this developmental cooperation is welcome, the fallout should not lead to Sri Lankan over-dependence on China in the fisheries domain, particularly in areas of the Palk Bay and the sea periphery of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has plans to resuscitate 36 lagoons in the northern province and a few selected ones outside this area, and also develop the Point Pedro fisheries harbour on its northern shore. The country is also keen to remove illegal prawn cages in its territorial seabed, develop the milieu for migrant fishing and enhance its overall aquaculture capacity.

Sri Lanka has also to contend with the problem of nearly 50,000 of its fisher folk families being affected because of the constraints in fishing in the northern and eastern sea periphery and adjoining areas. In this backdrop and keeping in view its capacity in the aquaculture domain, India should play a measured but proactive role in assisting Sri Lanka in its endeavour to develop its fisheries sector, and in regard to creating conditions in the Palk Bay for the fishermen of both countries to exploit the respective fishing potential amicably, without detriment to the livelihood needs of the northern Sri Lankan fisher folk and due cognizance of the mutually accepted sea boundary. While there is a pressing need to diversify the capacities and opportunities of Indian fishermen and wean them away to an extent towards means of livelihood away from fishing on an individual basis, enhancing the abilities of their Sri Lankan counterparts in inland aquaculture and processing of fishery generated products may also be flagged as a matter for Indian attention.

Continuing turmoil and agony at the civic level in both countries arising from the woes of fishermen will be an irritant in bilateral relations and unnecessarily generate negative fallouts in the domestic environment of both India and Sri Lanka.

Tamil Nadu: Fishermen plan stir against church on Katchatheevu

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/fishermen-plan-stir-against-church-on-katchatheevu/article8612923.ece>

"Fishermen associations in the State have planned a series of protests if the Central government does not stop Sri Lanka's move to construct a new church on Katchatheevu islet in the Palk Bay. Though the islet was handed over to Sri Lanka after an agreement, people from both India and Sri Lanka visit the annual festival of St. Antony Shrine. Fishermen from India are also allowed to dry fish and nets. M. Ilango, chairperson, National Fishworkers' Forum, said that fishermen who had been to the church had seen construction work there and had alerted him. "When we sought a clarification from Sri Lanka, we were told that the plan was to construct a new church there and this was being done with the blessings of the Jaffna Diocese. This cannot be allowed. If a church is coming up there, it should only be with contribution from the Indian fishermen, he said.

Tamil Nadu: Why Katchatheevu is non-issue for fishermen, good for politics

<http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/tracking-indian-communities/why-katchatheevu-is-non-issue-for-fishermen-good-for-politics/>

"In the run-up to the state elections, both the AIADMK and the DMK have been bringing up the issue of ceding of Katchatheevu in 1974 and blaming each other for the woes of fishermen in Palk Bay. While the AIADMK accuses the DMK of remaining silent and not acting against the handover, DMK refutes this and asks why the present government did not act when in power. A case is pending in the Supreme Court on this issue. The Centre seems to hold the view that it cannot be seen as going back on a bilateral agreement which has demarcated the waters according to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. There is a need to examine the issue dispassionately to see how the issue, even after four decades, has not led to any change in the lives of the fishermen. When Katchatheevu was ceded in 1974, Karunanidhi, who was in power then, claims that he protested but there was no recourse to any legal measure. The ownership of the island itself was in question as both Indian and Sri Lankan academics claimed rights over the island.

The 1974 agreement allowed Indian fishermen to dry their nets in Katchatheevu. This provision was lopsided as unless someone fished in the waters around the island, why would they dry their nets? In 1976, it was made clear that Indian fishermen are not allowed to fish on the Sri Lankan side. It is being made out that the reclamation of Katchatheevu will put an end to the misery of

the fishermen. The ground reality is very different. Firstly , it must be understood that the Indians are in the wrong and only sustainable fishing practices will change the situation. The government, instead of prolonging the issue of rights, must invest in technology to begin efficient and eco-friendly fishing practices. Most fishermen do not stop at Katchatheevu but venture almost up to the Sri Lankan coast.

Also historical rights that the agreement guarantees pertain to using traditional boats and not mechanised trawlers which have denuded the marine ecosystem. Ironically , many of the Indian fishermen are wage-earners on trawlers owned by rich politicians and are compelled to venture into Sri Lankan waters risking arrest. Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen have objected to Indian trawlers eating into their livelihood. The Lankan Navy also is doing their job and is equally harsh on Pakistani and Bangladeshi fishermen. There have been many efforts to bring the Indian and Lankan fishermen to the negotiating table but these have met with little success due to lack of agreement on the modalities for fishing.

Solutions have been proposed in the past, including obtaining a fishing area on lease in perpetuity , and identifying zones favourable for tuna fishing by Sri Lankan fishing vessels in exchange for an area around Katchatheevu for Indian fishermen. But the most important suggestion which has the potential to make a difference is investing in deep-sea fishing and training fishermen for multi-day shipping. With an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of around 2.1 million square kilometers, this would facilitate optimum harnessing of resources. The idea was to promote a concept that catered to multi-day fishing in the EEZ along with cold storage on land and hinterland connectivity for the product to reach consumers. The TN vision document 2023 does contain some good proposals on this, but little has moved in this regard. Integrating technology , human resources, markets and best practices to promote livelihood issues can help bring dignity to the fisher men.

With the commencement of the annual ban on fish KA-ing, this is the best time to talk about the deep sea fishing initiative, and engage with the fishermen to train and equip them for multi-day fishing. In conclusion, with or without Katchatheevu, there is a lot that can be done to improve the lot of Indian fishermen by weaning them away from mechanised fishing in the coastal waters and in Palk Straits in the context of dwindling catch and unwanted confrontations that have strained bilateral relations.

Sri Lanka: From obscurity to limelight

<http://www.dailynews.lk/?q=2016/04/18/features/79066>

"It was September 26, 1959. Though devastated by 1958 riot yet it was a tranquil and beautiful island. In this scenario, the Prime Minister, SWRD Bandaranaike was assassinated on the fateful day of September 26, 1959. Upon the tragic death of Bandaranaike, W. Dhanayake

became the Prime Minister of Ceylon for a short period, till March 1960. C. P. de Silva was unable to form a government. Parliament was dissolved and the election was held on March 19, 1960. UNP was led by Dudley Senanayake while SLFP was led by C.P. de Silva. Both parties failed to obtain comfortable majority of parliamentary seats to form a stable government. In the premise, both parties approached the Federal Party which secured 15 Seats in order to secure its support to run a government without any political hindrance. SLFP led by C. P. de Silva was successful in obtaining the support of FP on an oral promise made to revive the BC Pact. Chelvanayakam, Leader of the Federal Party was repeatedly asked C.P. de Silva and the then strong man Felix Dias Bandaranaike for assurance that they would honor the oral promise. C. P. de Silva said ""I drive a hard bargain and when I had made it, I keep it"".

Chelvanayakam replied ""On this basis of this assurance I would give the Governor General my word that my party would support the government headed by C. P. de Silva"". Accordingly Chelvanayakam told the then Governor General, Sir Oliver Goonatilleke. Sir Oliver asked Chelvanayakam ""Will you support the government for a minimum period of two years?"". Chelvanayakam said ""My Party had come to an understanding with the SLFP. We will support the government not merely for two years but till the end of the term of this Parliament"". Notwithstanding a clear word of support, Sir Oliver did not accept the word of Chelvanayakam but dissolved Parliament and held the election in July 1960. Professor A. J. Wilson says that Sir Oliver had reported to Dr. N.M. Perera that he did not make C. P. de Silva the Prime Minister on the ground of his social status. Oral promises were once again made to the Leader of the Federal Party by prominent leaders of SLFP that they would revive BC Pact and the FP had wholeheartedly supported the SLFP at the July election.

World's First Woman Prime Minister In the July General Election Sirima Bandaranaike came out of political obscurity to the limelight of politics. SLFP was this time led by Sirima Bandaranaike. Many mean objections were raised by her opponents for her to be a Member of Parliament but Providence moved swiftly and silently. Sirima Bandaranaike became victorious at the election. SLFP swept the polls and got 75 Seats while UNP got 30 Seats only and the FP secured 16 Seats. As the SLFP got an overwhelming majority it had ignored the FP absolutely. Sirima Bandaranaike was sworn in as Prime Minister on July 21, 1960. The West had always claimed that they were the civilized nations but had failed to make a Woman Prime Minister. Ceylon, being a third world country, had the rare privilege of making the World's First Woman Prime Minister.

It is on record that Sirima Bandaranaike had always made a thorough study of all Cabinet papers before they were presented to the Cabinet to take a decision. She kept all Cabinet Ministers, especially Dr. N.M. Perera and Dr. Colvin R. de Silva under control. A tap on the table would make the erudite doctors both NM and Colvin to stop their long winding speeches. Dedication to duty The height of dedication, astuteness, political maturity and able governance of Sirima

Bandaranaike were demonstrated successfully during her second term of office as Prime Minister. She simply extolled herself as a genius when she mastered the Law of the Sea and signed the Agreement between India and Sri Lanka on Maritime Boundaries in Historic Waters on June 26/28, 1974.

UNCLOS Sri Lanka was an active participant in the First United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea - UNCLOS - I, held in 1958 at Geneva. Four important issues were determined at this Conference. They were, 1. The Convention on the High Seas. 2. The Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone. 3. The Convention on the Continental Shelf and 4. The Convention on Fishing and Conservation of the Living Resources of the High Seas. The Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea - UNCLOS - III commenced in or about 1967. Shirley Amerasinghe, an expert exponent on the Law of the Sea was since 1967 the Sri Lankan Permanent Representative to the UN and in 1969 headed the Seabed and Ocean Floor Conference. He was later elevated to the Office of President of UNCLOS -III. He was in that position till he reached his untimely death in 1980. During this period the Ministry of Defence and Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka had an able team of dedicated legal advisers headed by C.W. Pinto. He and his team of officers had very cordial and affable relationship with Shirley Amerasinghe.

It is notable that Sirima Bandaranaike's second term of office as Prime Minister was faced with many problems. Internally, she faced the insurgency of JVP, the promulgation of the First Republican Constitution, the Land Reform Law and the like, and externally, the hoisting of Non-aligned Countries Conference in Colombo and the signing of the Agreement between India and Sri Lanka relating to Maritime Boundary between the two countries, popularly known as Kachchativu Agreement. The Kachchativu Agreement was an epoch making achievement of Sirima Bandaranaike. During her first term of office as Prime Minister she found a durable solution to the knotty problem of stateless persons. Kachchativu Kachchativu is an islet in the Palk Bay, about a mile long and less than half a mile broad. It is closer to Delft but uninhabited and the surrounding area is rich in many species of the living resources of the sea and minerals: suspected of geological petroleum and natural gas deposits around its surroundings. Sirima Bandaranaike had spent many hours to study on her own and she had sought advice as to why Kachchativu islet became so important to Sri Lanka.

She found the seas surrounding this islet were full of fertile flora and fauna of marine environment, minerals, living, non-living resources of the sea-bed and sub-soil together with living organisms belonging to sedimentary species of many kinds of fish, crabs, turtles, conshelves, Chunks, petroleum products. She became personally possessed of facts that Ceylon had exercised sovereignty over the Chank Fisheries, Pearl Banks and Pearl Fisheries. Sirima - a skilled negotiator When Sirima Bandaranaike became satisfied of the richness of Kachchativu islet and it belonged to Sri Lanka, she sent a letter dated September 28, 1971 and addressed to

Indira Gandhi, asserting that ""May I say at the outset having now had the opportunity to examine the relevant records and documents that they leave no doubt in my mind that Kachchativu is part of the territory of Ceylon and that the island continues to be under my Government's jurisdiction and control"".

Since 1968 Dudley Senanayake as Prime Minister had intensive discussions and correspondences with the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi with regard to Kachchativu issue. When Sirima Bandaranaike inquired Dudley Senanayake through her officials, he disclosed many vital documents and information he had with the Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. She procured all such information from Dudley Senanayake in writing and informed Indira Gandhi their earlier agreement concluded with Dudley Senanayake to have a median line been drawn with respect of historic waters between India and Sri Lanka. Sirima Bandaranaike summoned Shirley Amerasinghe twice to Colombo and studied all mechanisms and intricacies of the median line. She was well explained by Shirley Amerasinghe by maps, drawings and sketches that on the basis of median line Kachchativu would naturally come within the territorial jurisdiction of Sri Lanka. Shirley Amerasinghe explained her well that a new regime of median line would be incorporated in the UNCLOS- III giving legal effect to the concept.

The Agreement clearly states inter alia that ""The fishing vessels and fishermen of India shall not engage in fishing in the historic waters, the territorial sea and the exclusive economic zone of Sri Lanka"". There is Wadge Bank which comes exclusively within the exclusive economic zone of India. India shall have the sovereign rights over that area and its resources. Sirima Bandaranaike successfully negotiated for the Sri Lankan fishermen to fishing rights under certain conditions for a period of three years from the date of establishment by India of its exclusive economic zone.

A reading of some of the conditions that Sirima Bandaranaike secured in the Wadge Bank for the benefit of Sri Lanka would prove the negotiating skill and ability of this great lady politician we have ever had. 1. The facility allowed to the Sri Lanka fishing vessels and persons on board those vessels is restricted to the fishing vessels owned by the Government of Sri Lanka or by Sri Lanka Company or its nationals. This facility shall not be transferable to any other State or its vessels or nationals. 2. At the request of the Government of Sri Lanka, the Government of India agrees to provide annually to Sri Lanka two thousand tons of fish of the quality and species and at the price to be mutually agreed upon between the two Governments, for a period of five years with effect from the date of cessation of fishing activity by Sri Lanka Vessels in the Wadge Bank. 3.

The Government of India agree to make available to the Government of Sri Lanka, upon terms and conditions to be agreed upon between the two Governments, technical assistance for the development of Sri Lanka fisheries. Indira Gandhi was not properly advised by her officials with

regard to the importance of the living and non-living resources of Kachchativu. She openly declared that Kachchativu islet was a sand hill. The Opposition Parties and the Tamil Nadu Government had all agreed to the signing of this Agreement by Indira Gandhi. No person had ever made a request for Indian fishermen to have fishing rights in the historic waters as the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka had ably negotiated for fishing rights in the Wadge Bank. Sinhala Only Act enacted by SWRD Bandaranaike and its stringent implementation by Sirima Bandaranaike did not pave way for a united Sri Lanka. SWRD Bandaranaike concluded his Speech on the Sinhala Only Bill in Parliament, saying that ""We will finally emerge a stronger, more united and truly progressive people than we have been hitherto"". Both failed to realize that Sri Lanka is a country with multi-racial, multi-religious and bi-lingual communities and not with one single race or community.

Because of their short-sighted political vision the country did not get united but stood divided and was bleeding for the last thirty years. It is unfortunate that they allowed an indelible blot to creep in to mar their illustrious political march. Still it is lurking in the political horizon whether the New Proposed Constitution would accommodate all communities and march towards prosperity.

Sri Lanka: Indian Fishermen Destroying Our Marine Resources Permanently

<http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2016/04/03/indian-fishermen-destroying-our-marine-resources-permanently/>

"Marine experts in Sri Lanka have stated that poaching and bottom trawling by Indian fishermen and illegal fishing methods used by the local fishermen have been permanently destroying the marine resources around the country and they predict that the region may soon be barren if these activities continue. Sri Lanka is known for its breath-taking golden beaches, bays, and many lagoons and estuaries, which are usually saline and shallow water bodies. Underneath the water, in lagoons, estuaries and in shallow coastal waters, many types of marine vegetation such as sea grasses, and the shallow coastal waters support coral reefs, areas of such rich diversity and productivity that they are dubbed 'the rain forests of the sea'. These coastal ecosystems have been home to an abundance of marine species. Some 29 marine mammals are found in our seas including the Blue whale, Sperm whale, Spinner dolphin, and the Dugong.

Apart from that, Sri Lanka's sea area is also home to five of the seven species of marine turtles found worldwide: Green turtles, Leather backs, Hawks bills, Olive Ridelys and Loggerheads. Sri Lanka's coral reefs also supports some 900 species of reef fish, about 200 species of hard corals and a multitude of weirdly wonderful invertebrates. There are 15 species of sea grasses recorded in Sri Lanka, while thousands of other species – micro-organisms, algae, invertebrates and vertebrates, have also been found. However, today Sri Lanka's sea areas are under threat from global warming, oceanic changes, poaching and use of illegal fishing methods. Around 5000

Indian trawlers enter Sri Lankan territorial waters and their use of bottom trawling gear destroys all the marine life and the entire marine eco system.

To make matters worse the local fishermen too engage in the use of illegal fishing methods further destroying the marine resources of the country. Bottom trawls are designed to plough in to the top layer of the sea-bed and dredge up everything therein. In this method two heavy metal panels are fixed at both sides of the mouth of the Bottom Trawling net to make sure that it remains at the bottom of the sea floor. In addition to altering seafloor habitats, bottom trawling also results in huge amounts of smaller fish and other sea plant life which is not required by the fishermen which are then just discarded. This is a terrible shame as the nets also dredge up the corals and other rocks at the sea bed disturbing the reproductive cycle of the marine life.

The fish lay their eggs among the rocks and corals and this is one of the main reasons that the shoals of fish gather in these spots. When the bottom trawls rake the sea bed everything in its path gets dragged into the nets. This too has had a devastating effect on the marine eco system, as when the breeding sites are destroyed along with the eggs, there is no way the fish stocks can breed and multiply. Reef fish are also exploited for the marine aquarium trade. Other species – such as Sacred Chanks for use as religious talismans, sea cucumbers for traditional medicine and food, corals and seashells as ornaments – are also at risk from over-exploitation. Sea Cucumbers and Pearl Oysters are also the targets of bottom trawling.

The Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar record one of the richest Biological Diversities in the Indian Ocean which includes 20% of Indian Ocean creatures. The Palk Bay, located between the Bay of Bengal and the Gulf of Mannar is home to 580 fish species, 733 molluscs, 651 crustaceans and 128 species of stony corals. Further the seas around Mannar and Palk Bay were once famous for Pearl Oysters, but these destructive fishing methods have destroyed the habitat of these pearl oysters and today these pearl oysters can hardly be found around Mannar and the Palk Bay. Zoologists claim that the Gulf of Mannar is home to over 3,600 marine species. The five endangered marine turtles also inhabit this area.

The local fishermen engage in a method called purse seine where a large wall of netting is deployed around an entire area or school of fish. The seine has floats along the top line with a lead line threaded through rings along the bottom. Once a school of fish is located, a skiff encircles the school with the net. The lead line is then pulled in, “pursing the net closed on the bottom, preventing fish from escaping by swimming downward. This method too catches not just the targeted fish but also unwanted catch which is then discarded, adding to the marine destruction. Sea turtles can be captured by a purse seine as it is set and then become entangled in the net mesh as it is hauled in. Entangled turtles may sustain injuries to their flippers and shells due to the force of the net as it is hauled. In a large catch, turtles risk being crushed under the

sheer weight of the tow. Once the netting has been set, encircled marine mammals cannot escape and can become entangled, injured, or stressed.

Even with quick retrieval, marine mammals' sensitive bodies and internal organs cannot usually withstand the weight of the catch or the impact of being placed on the vessel. Local fishermen also use explosives in order to stun the fish, but this method too destroys even the fish eggs and the fish lings. Last year the Sri Lanka Navy had confiscated 165 kg of high explosives gel and 152 Kg of TNT from fishermen who were engaged in this destructive fishing method. In addition 34 safety fuses, 364 detonators, 5kg C4 high explosives were also confiscated by the Navy last year. According to fisheries sources, none of these are available in the open market and are believed to have been obtained illegally. According to a report by NARA on the destruction caused to marine life due to illegal fishing methods, there are around 7 illegal methods that are still being used by the local fishermen.

The report suggests that with the use of explosives, the fishermen are able to gather a large haul of fish within a short period, and this maybe the reason that this method is being used. The harvesting of coral conch shells and sea cucumbers too has become a huge problem that has led to the destruction of the marine eco system. India has banned the harvesting of sea cucumber or conch shells and the Indian fishermen mainly target Sri Lanka's waters, as it is a highly lucrative trade. A valuable conch shell can sell for millions of rupees while even the sea cucumber is sold at around Rs. 20,000 per kilo. However while the Indian are protecting their waters by strictly imposing laws, they are exploiting Sri Lankan waters and destroying the local seas. Further according to an official of the fisheries ministry, due to the sand mining for the 269 hectare port city project, 65 million cubic metres of sand is being taken from the sea. The danger here is that when such a huge volume of sand is dug, the waves and currents then wash the sand from other areas toward the area where it has been dug.

The shifting sand also covers the corals and marine eco system that leaves no place for the fish to lay eggs. Environmentalists warn that this could spell further disaster for Sri Lanka. However in a bid to assist in the preservation of the marine resources, the fisheries ministry has decided to cut the annual licences of divers in a bid to encourage them to seek alternative employment. According to the NARA study currently there are over 500 young fisher folk engaged as divers without proper training. The ministry has also allocated Rs. 2500 million this year for the development of 10 identified lagoons in the country in a bid to stop the destruction that is happening. In 2014 Sri Lanka imported around 77,000 metric tons of fish to the country despite the fishing done locally, and in 2015 we have imported 112,000 metric tons. This figure is expected to increase to around 120,000 metric tons this year. Sri Lanka also imported 6200 metric tons of canned fish in 2014, in 2015 it exceeded 11,000 metric tons and this year the fisheries ministry anticipates that it might exceed this figure.

Last year the local fish production was around 533,000 metric tons, with the EU ban in place. Earlier SL only exported type 1 fish, but with the hope the EU ban will be lifted soon, there is a possibility that SL could also export type 2 fish. But the issue is do we have enough fish stocks in order to meet the demand. The only solution would be to fish in international waters, but SL has a quota of only 1645 large trawlers. Of this around 1400 trawlers already have licences, but there is provision for only another 245 licences to be obtained. Under the current situation where Sri Lanka's seas are facing the threat of destruction, the fisheries ministry needs to take all precautions to stop the Indian trawlers from entering local waters and destroying our marine resources. However currently there is nothing Sri Lanka can do, other than confiscate their boats and fishing nets. But will this stop the Indian trawlers from encroaching on our waters is one question, while the other is the destructive fishing practices of the local fishermen. Unless all these issues are resolved quickly, Sri Lanka's marine resources and marine eco systems are facing certain doom.

India's Rameswaram fishermen told to take up sea cage farming

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/rameswaram-fishermen-told-to-take-up-sea-cage-farming/article8273858.ece>

"India's Rameswaram fishermen, who often get arrested by Sri Lankan navy on charges of poaching and faced threat to their livelihood, could take up the profitable sea cage farming of Cobia and Pompano, the high value marine fishes, A. Gopalakrishnan, Director of Central Marine Fisheries Research Centre (CMFRI), Kochi said. Addressing the gathering before distributing hatchery-produced Cobia fingerlings to select fishers at Mandapam Regional Centre of CMFRI here on Tuesday, he said sea cage farming of the two high value species could be an ideal alternative to the risky trawling and exhorted the marine fishermen to switch over to cage farming. He said the Mandapam Regional Centre, which has perfected breeding, seed production and farming technologies for the two species, produced about two lakh fingerlings of Pompano and 50,000 fingerlings of Cobia in a year for the benefit of local fishermen and entrepreneurs.

Despite being a research Institute, CMFRI continued in the seed production for the benefit of fishermen, he said adding at present 16 fishermen Self Help Groups were engaged in sea cage farming, setting up 50 cages in the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay. "It is quite profitable and this can be the best alternative for marine fishers, he said. Seaweed rafts The fishermen could take up sea cage farming, he said adding they could benefit more if they took up Integrated Multi Tropic Aquaculture (IMTA) and cultivated 'kappaphycus,' using seaweed rafts attached to the cages. They could harvest about 300 kg of 'kappaphycus' per raft in 45 days, even while growing the marine fishes.

Hatchery proposed As the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Department proposed to set up a hatchery for producing seeds of the two species, jointly with CMFRI, the demand for seeds could be easily met in the coming years, he said. A. K. Abdul Nazar, Scientist in-charge, CMFRI, Mandapam region said the introduction of sea cage farming has helped fishermen improve their economic standards. K. Kasinathapandian, Deputy Director of Fisheries, said the Cobia fingerlings were distributed to fishermen under the Fisheries Management for Sustainable Livelihood (FIMSUL) with 90 per cent subsidy for setting up two cages per group. Bobby Ignatius, Principal scientist, Mariculture division, CMFRI, Kochi, R Jayakumar, Senior scientist and B Johnson, Scientist, Mandapam region were present.

A festering fisheries crisis amid cosy Indo-Lanka ties

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/a-festering-fisheries-crisis-amid-cosy-indo-lanka-ties/story-P8G0oADevPG17VSswHxMJ.html>

"India-Sri Lanka relations have not looked this strong in decades, but renewed ties hold little hope for Sri Lanka's northern fishermen, whose livelihoods are in serious question because of their Indian counterparts. The new dynamic between the countries followed the dramatic regime change in Sri Lanka in January 2015. It was hard to miss South Block's relief over the defeat of former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, who was seen as leaning dangerously towards China. New Delhi promptly reached out to the new government in Colombo led by President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, known to be pro-West and a friend of India. President Sirisena, in turn, made New Delhi his first port of call after assuming charge.

In no time, the neighbours cemented diplomatic ties in a series of high-level visits, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic visit to Sri Lanka in March 2015, the first bilateral visit to the island by an Indian Prime Minister in almost three decades. Soon after, following victory in Sri Lanka's August parliamentary elections Mr. Wickremesinghe made his customary visit to New Delhi. And now, Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj is scheduled to visit Sri Lanka early February. Eager to cash in on the new goodwill, India has been pushing for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which New Delhi and Colombo have been discussing since 2000. India sees the pact as a breakthrough, for it would open up the Sri Lankan market for Indian goods, services and investment.

The two countries already have a Free Trade Agreement but for New Delhi CEPA, or a similar new trade agreement, will be that deal-clincher that consolidates Indo-Lanka relations on the foundation of economic integration. There has been no final word from Colombo, but there are positive signals from the Sri Lankan Government with further negotiations and a likely deal in 2016. Clearly, the political economy of Indo-Lanka relations is going through a transformation, with both governments not only aggressively pursuing neoliberal policies in their own

economies, but also seeking to further liberalise ties between the two countries. Significantly, these economic and security ties are also determined by the geopolitics of proximity to the West while distancing China. Misery for northern fishermen All is apparently well in terms of diplomatic and trade ties.

However, none of this has even remotely helped the nearly 2 lakh people in Sri Lanka's Northern Province who continue to lead miserable lives, mainly due to Indian trawlers that poach relentlessly in Sri Lankan waters. Tied to the sea and dependent on the fisheries sector for survival the fisher folk in Jaffna, Killinochchi, Mannar, Mullaitivu and the smaller islands off Jaffna peninsula are struggling to rebuild their lives after three decades of a brutal civil war. The bottom-trawlers from Tamil Nadu not only cross the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) demarcating territorial waters in the narrow Palk Bay separating the neighbours, but also systematically destroy the Indian ocean's marine ecology. They virtually scoop out fish and other marine organisms from the ocean bed.

Hundreds of trawlers charge ahead every other day, tearing apart Sri Lankan fishermen's fishing nets and boats, their primary assets. Indeed, there is a major asymmetry of power in the Sri Lankan waters of the Palk Bay; some 6,000 motorised 18-foot boats and over 5,000 kattumarams of 9 to 15 feet length on the Sri Lankan side face as many as 2,000 Indian trawlers 30 to 60-foot-long with very powerful engines. In perpetual fear of losing what remains of their modest fishing equipment, the northern Tamil fishermen do not venture out to the sea during the three days of the week when they expect the Indian trawlers. Their catch has fallen due to the repeated assault of trawlers and consequently, they are trapped in debt. A problem that began during the war, when the Sri Lankan navy and the LTTE barred northern fishermen from going to the sea, has only become worse since it ended in 2009.

The Sri Lankan Navy arrested nearly 400 Indian fishermen in 2015 on charges of poaching. The number of fishermen arrested are usually only a fraction of those actually poaching. The Sri Lankan Navy, too, has oscillated between being very stringent or lenient depending on Indo-Lanka relations at a given point. Several rounds of talks between fisher leaders of both countries have proved futile. The arrested fishermen of Tamil Nadu, often daily wage labourers, are pawned in the diplomatic tussle between the two countries manipulated to an extent by Tamil Nadu. They are released around major bilateral meetings, just as President Sirisena released 104 Indian fishermen on Pongal Day, about a fortnight before he meets Ms. Swaraj. Tamil Nadu's hypocrisy As New Delhi consolidates its ties with Colombo and pursues its economic vision in Sri Lanka, it has the responsibility of addressing the fisheries issue convincingly and with a sense of urgency.

Anticipating the shrill and unreasonable demands from Tamil Nadu, aimed at electoral gains, New Delhi will have to come up with a sound strategy to address this problem. More so this year

as Tamil Nadu goes to polls. Considering that the fisher folk along its coast constitute a significant electoral segment, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalaithaa, eyeing another term in power, is likely to politicise the issue further, pressuring New Delhi to get the arrested Tamil fishermen released, as she usually does. Tamil Nadu stands increasingly exposed with the Palk Bay crisis. After proclaiming political solidarity for decades to Sri Lanka's northern Tamils it has now emerged the chief culprit in this fisheries conflict. How can Tamil Nadu claim to have any sympathy towards the Tamils in Sri Lanka when it strongly backs its fishermen who so ruthlessly exploit livelihoods of the war-torn Tamil fisher-folk? The revival of the fisheries sector in Sri Lanka's north is a crucial component of post-war reconstruction.

A marked shift within Sri Lanka As long as Rajapaksa was in power, his Government leveraged the fishing conflict to neutralise New Delhi on other fronts, amid mounting pressure on human rights and militarisation in the North. The arrested fishermen and seized trawlers were released accordingly. Virtually no one spoke for the Sri Lankan fishermen. However, the northern fishermen have recently found the unlikely support of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), Sri Lanka's the largest Tamil party. Its leaders, for the longest time, refrained from raising the issue, fearing they would antagonise political supporters in Tamil Nadu. With the situation of northern fisher-folk becoming worse, the TNA broke its silence last year, for the first time raising the fisheries conflict with the visiting External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in February 2015. More recently in October, Sri Lanka's Opposition Leader and TNA veteran R. Sampanthan made a powerful speech in parliament on the plight of northern fishermen. He spoke at length on the hopeless condition of fishermen who were growing indebted by the day and of the serious damage being caused to Sri Lanka's marine resources.

Upon his request, President Sirisena met with the fisher leaders and the various arms of the state to heighten efforts to address the fishing conflict. He urged the foreign ministry to have discussions with both New Delhi and Tamil Nadu to find a solution. He also proposed that the Indian Navy or the Indian Coast Guard collaborate with the Sri Lankan Navy in a joint patrolling exercise. There is now a national consensus in Sri Lanka calling for strict measures to end poaching by Indian trawlers. There is growing pressure for larger fines and the permanent seizure of trawlers. Lack of political will If New Delhi has been trying to convince Tamil Nadu, clearly it has had little success, despite a few promising signs in discussions on alternatives. The Indian Government has been contemplating a “buy back scheme where the central government – which along with international agencies in the 1970s incentivised trawlers under problematic fisheries policies – would now purchase the trawlers from the fishermen. It would instead, support fishermen to take up deep sea fishing methods.

However, there can be no drastic change without political will in Tamil Nadu. Furthermore, leaders in both countries have to consider the livelihoods of the Northern fishing community as well as the ecological sustainability of the ocean resources, which has to necessarily begin by

ending bottom trawling. It might be tempting for those taking forward the new vision of Indo-Lanka relations, or the shining high growth policies in New Delhi and Colombo, or the fast industrialising policies in Tamil Nadu, to turn a blind eye to the problems of downtrodden fisher-folk. Here, it is the daily struggles of the fisher-folk that will be a powerful reminder of the social and economic realities of many citizens in both countries, whose lives get blurred in the pursuit of narrow political gains, or grand economic and foreign policies.

Sri Lanka-India: Fishermen talks on track, but core issues remain – Analysis

<http://www.eurasiareview.com/06042015-sri-lanka-india-fishermen-talks-on-track-but-core-issues-remain-analysis/>

"Independent of the success or failure of the third round of bilateral fishermen association talks between India and Sri Lanka held in Chennai on March 24, 2015, it would be remembered for a few things. The joint statement issued by the fishers' representatives at the end claims that the long hours of talks were held under "Puratchi Thalaivi Amma's guidance, a reference to former Tamil Nadu chief minister and ruling AIADMK supremo J. Jayalithaa. More importantly, the short but nuanced joint statement is pregnant with ideas that the talks were not as smooth or as conclusive, as a section of the Tamil Nadu media sought to make it out to be during the days after the conclusion of the talks. It may also be an indication that the fishermen on the two sides are acquiring diplomatic skills, in saying what they want to say, and not having to have the rest of the world hear what they did not want them hear. It does not mean that the talks were a failure. It was the first round of talks between the two sides after new governments have taken over in the two countries.

It's more so in the case of Sri Lanka, where the change of government did eliminate an overbearing air of suspicion and suspense at the talks. It's a good beginning for future talks. If however, this round itself did not produce any tangible results, it owes to the complexities of the issues involved, the solution available – and also the missed opportunities. It was thus possibly that the Sri Lankan Tamil fishers' representatives did not protest loudly to the one-sided references to Jayalithaa, who does not hold any constitutional position in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, or to subsequent references to the state government and the Centre, without similar mention of either the elected provincial administrations in the North and the East of the nation, nor that of the central government in Colombo. It being a fishermen level talks, and not between the governments, such laxity did not come too much under the scanner, for words to be split and meanings to be read, when none might have existed in the first place.

Tamil Nadu government commitment The four-paragraph joint statement is accompanied by a six-point set of demands put forth by the Indian fishers (from Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry, whose Karaikkal enclave lies closer to the Sri Lankan waters). The joint statement said that the Sri Lankan fishermen would take it up with their brethren back home, in

Sri Lanka's North and the East, and communicate their position before end-May. The taste of the pudding is in the eating, and in this case, for the first time, the Indian fishers (including Puducherry fishers) have acknowledged the Tamil Nadu government's initiatives, taken at every turn at the instance of 'Manpu-mihu Puratchchi Thalaivi Amma' ('hon'ble revolutionary leader'), to end their use of vessels and nets banned in Sri Lanka and which also harm fish population and fishermen's livelihood on the other side of the Palk Strait. The demands' note thus points out how the Indian fishers are committed to follow the state government's directives in the matter, and recalls how it had extended a 50 percent grant not beyond IRs.3 million, for converting banned trawlers on to deep-sea vessels, capable of tuna fishing.

In this context, it also refers to Jayalalithaa's request for the Centre to grant Rs.975 crore for such conversion, when she met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, when she was still the chief minister. It is another matter that the Centre is yet to come out with its decision in the matter. If anything, some state leaders of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the centre began speaking about it to the local media and elsewhere, but to no avail. That the Indian fishers' were serious about the entire process became equally clear when their proposals brought down to three years, their original demand of five, for conversion of their (destructive) bottom trawlers to deep-sea vessels and reiterated their earlier commitment not to fish within five nautical miles from the Sri Lankan coast, lest the boats and gears of fishers from that country should continue to suffer damage and destruction. In part thereof, the Indian fishermen also committed to reducing the number of fishing days in a year from 120 to 83, during three years.

Problems still galore Left to themselves, the fishers on the two sides might not have a great problem accepting or adapting a version of the Indian side's demands, with mutually agreement amendments and changes, if any. The problem might arise as and when officials from the two sides, as the ultimate enforcers of any fishers' agreement, sit down to give finishing touches to any agreement of the kind. The current joint statement having said that the Tamil Nadu government would 'examine' all future decisions at the fishers' level before implementation with the approval of the two national governments, it becomes inevitable that the governments got involved at the appropriate time and levels. One of the possible implications flow from the Tamil Nadu government's repeated assertions about 'historic waters' and 'traditional fishing rights' would make it that much more difficult for any government in Sri Lanka and equally so for an elected administration, such as the present one, in the island nation's Tamil-majority Northern Province, to attest any fishermen association level agreement.

While neighbourhood nations across the world have agreed to sharing of the sea wealth, particularly fish and other living marine produce for similar reasons, such agreements in the past have been without any specific and formal reference to 'historic waters' and 'traditional rights', etc. Significantly, there is no reference to such terminology in the fishers' joint statement this time. In the past, the state government's official releases notifying impending talks would assert

such rights. Mandated by their respective governments to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the respective nation, their navies and coast guards would be hard pressed to look the other way if they had suspicion or 'intelligence' that not all vessels crossing over to the other side were indulging in innocent fishing, with or without use of 'right to innocent passage'. If the fishermen's agreement implies that the Sri Lankan government would direct its navy not to stop or otherwise harass genuine Indian fishers, a similar situation would arise in the case of Sri Lanka's mainly Sinhala fishers on tuna hunt in Indian waters, at times not very far away from strategic assets in the Andaman Sea and along the coast line of states like Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and (northern) Tamil Nadu.

The navy/coast guard duties are thus linked also to the international maritime border line (IMBL), over which Jayalithaa in her political and personal capacity had moved the Supreme Court of India, challenging the ownership of Katchchativu islet, conferred on Sri Lanka by the twin bilateral agreements of 1974 and 1976. Domestic legal issues over the need for Indian parliamentary ratification apart, the agreements having been notified under UNCLOS (UN Convention on the Laws of the Seas) little purpose would be served by challenging the same in international fora other than vitiating the Palk Strait atmosphere more than already. The present Tamil Nadu government is also a party to the Supreme Court case and has supported petitioner Jayalithaa's position in the Supreme Court. The deployment of Sri Lankan Navy thus could become problematic if the Katchchativu-linked IMBL issue is not resolved to mutual satisfaction. What was essentially considered as a part of the livelihood issue of Indian fishers has thus become a contentious and complicated 'territorial problem', with 'national sentiments' getting added on with greater effect.

It may thus become necessary for the Indian stake-holders to view/review their known positions on the issue if the fishermen were to reach a meaningful and actionable agreement in good time. While terms like 'historic waters' and 'traditional fishing rights' may – or, may not, if one were to hear the Sri Lankan side – apply to Palk Bay fishing, it cannot necessarily be extended to Indian fishers from Nagapattinam and surrounding localities, to miles on either side. Both Palk Bay and other fishermen from India are also reportedly caught far away from what might have been acknowledged as shared seas and fishing grounds. The fishers' representatives might have to address these issues, too, as and when those relating to the present demands from the Indian side are satisfactorily addressed. The role of the respective navies under the circumstances would also need to be considered by the governments concerned. For all the problems that it has left unsaid, what the fishers' talks achieved this time is very substantial, in content than in form. It needs to be built upon, faster and quicker.

The joint statement wholly reflects the seriousness with which the Tamil Nadu government in particular has approached the issue, and the kind of cooperation that the state and its fishermen expect from the other side, in the interim for most parts. That the talks did not suffer from

prejudices or attempts at further procrastination, particularly after Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe had made – and repeated – his controversial statements on the fishing dispute only weeks before the talks were being scheduled, should, for now, show that the stakeholders, particularly those on the Indian side, are genuine and serious about it all, from this time round on.

India-Sri Lanka fisheries talks postponed indefinitely as Lanka is busy

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/Fisheries-Talks-Postponed-Indefinitely-as-Lanka-is-Busy/2015/02/23/article2683251.ece>

"Talks between India and Sri Lanka on fishing in the Palk Bay and Palk Strait, which were to be held in Chennai on March 5, have been postponed indefinitely because the Lankan government is busy with other more pressing issues, the Director General of Fisheries, Nimal Hettiarachchi, told Express here on Monday. "Fisheries Minister Dilip Wedaarachchi had to seek postponement because the government is busy implementing its post-Presidential election 100-day program and with getting the European Union's ban on buying fish from Lanka lifted, Hettiarachchi explained. " A fresh date for the talks will be fixed, taking into consideration mutual convenience, the official said. Asked what line the Lankan government would take at the talks, Hettiarachchi said that the North Lankan fishermen want the government to tell India firmly that Lanka will not allow Indian fishing vessels to cross the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL). They want a guarantee from India that Indian fishermen will abjure the use of trawlers and other destructive methods of fishing. "But the Indians want time to switch over to other fishing grounds or take to other methods of fishing. The Lankan government feels this could be discussed, Hettiarachchi added.

The first and second rounds of fisheries talks were held at Chennai and Colombo on January 27 and May 12, 2014 respectively, following initiatives taken by former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa. Earlier in February, Tamil Nadu's Fisheries Secretary S Vijayakumar had written to Suchitra Durai, Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, requesting her to obtain clearance from the Centre at the earliest for conducting talks in Chennai. March 5 was fixed for the talks. EU Ban Hurts Meanwhile, the EU ban on buying Lankan fish had begun to engage Colombo's attention because the EU accounts for 40 percent of Lanka's fish exports and 32 percent of its overall exports. The ban was imposed to punish Lanka for indulging illegal and unregulated fishing in international waters. In 2014, the Rajapaksa government allowed eight high capacity Chinese-built and owned Purse Seiner vessels to fish on Lanka's behalf. But these destroyed marine life needlessly. Lankan fishermen were breaking other norms. The Sirisena government is anxious to get the EU ban lifted and has introduced legislation to regulate fishing.

Sri Lanka President underscores need for a permanent solution to India-Sri Lanka fisheries conflict

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/south-asia/sri-lankan-president-mahinda-rajabaksa-underscores-need-for-a-permanent-solution-to-fisheries-conflict/article6318571.ece>

"Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa has underscored the need for a permanent solution to the fisheries conflict affecting fishermen of India and Sri Lanka. In a meeting with Indian High Commissioner Y.K. Sinha, who called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa on Thursday, Mr. Rajapaksa expressed concern over the impact the Palk Bay conflict had on fishermen and the environment, according to a statement from the President's office. Mr. Sinha, the statement said, expressed his appreciation for the President's gesture to release Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan custody on the occasion of the Indian Independence Day. On Wednesday, Mr. Rajapaksa ordered the release of 94 Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan custody on charges of engaging in illegal fishing activity. The Indian High Commissioner also briefed the President on the Indian CEOs Forum that is set to take place this week, it said. The High Commissioner presented Mr. Rajapaksa 'India & Sri Lanka: A Partnership That Transcends Time', a compilation of Indian projects in Sri Lanka published by the Indian High Commission, which Minister of Economic Development Basil Rajapaksa launched on Wednesday.

Indian fishermen to phase out bottom trawlers

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/fishermen-to-phase-out-bottom-trawlers/article6303837.ece?homepage=true>

"A delegation of fishermen leaders on Sunday met Union Minister Pon. Radhakrishnan here to stress for a long-term solution to the Palk Bay fishing crisis. During the meeting, the delegation conveyed its willingness to give up use of bottom trawlers in phased manner. However, it sought the Central and State governments support to switch to an alternative. Emerging out of the meeting at the BJP's State headquarters, M. Ilango, chairperson of the National Fishworkers' Forum, told The Hindu that the Minister gave a patient hearing to the delegation. Mr. Radhakrishnan had told them that the officials of the External Affairs Ministry were involved in talks with their counterparts from Sri Lanka to arrive at a permanent solution to the fishermen crisis.

The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, had also been briefed about the progress on this front. Mr. Ilango said the last bilateral meeting between the fishermen of Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu held in May ended in a deadlock as those from the island nation insisted on immediate halt to bottom trawling. "We had told them that an immediate halt was not possible as majority of fishermen in Tamil Nadu use the bottom trawlers. But we are open to a change in a phased manner, for which

government support is necessary. We conveyed this to the Minister as well during the meeting, Mr. Ilango said. The delegation also stressed that steps should be taken to secure the release of 93 Tamil Nadu fishermen and over 60 boats still in Sri Lankan custody.

Sri Lanka Navy arrests 29 Indian fishermen poaching in Sri Lankan waters

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14A/Jun01_1401628058CH.php

"Sri Lankan Navy on Sunday arrested 29 Indian fishermen for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary line and fishing in the country's waters, the Navy said. A naval craft attached to the North Central Naval Command on routine patrol arrested the 29 Indian fishermen in the seas northwest of Thalaimannar along with their six trawlers on 01st June. The arrested fishermen and trawlers have been handed over to the officials of the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources in Mannar for legal action. The arrest comes days after the Indian fishermen resumed their fishing activities last Friday after a 45-day ban on fishing in Palk Bay. Sri Lankan President last week ordered the release of all Indian fishermen in the country's jails on the occasion of India's new Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in on Last Monday. At their meeting in New Delhi the two leaders agreed that a long-term solution is needed for the fishermen's issue as it is a livelihood issue and the talks should continue in this regard.

Sri Lankan fishermen campaign for fishing rights, an end to poaching by Indian fishermen

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14A/May31_1401477844CH.php

"Sri Lankan fishermen today launched a petition signing campaign to demand an end to the poaching by the Indian fishermen and urge the government to allow them fishing rights to practice their livelihoods. The National Movement for Cooperation among Fishermen and the National Fisheries Action Committee organized the petition signing campaign in front of the Fort Railway Station in Colombo to collect signatures from the public. The campaigners demanded the government to resettle people displaced by the war and allow them to resume their fishing activities and release their lands occupied by the Navy and other security forces. The fishermen also called on the government to provide more subsidies on fuel.

Among other issues, the fishermen also demanded an end to the poaching by the Indian fishermen in Sri Lankan waters as the Indian fishermen resumed their fishing activities today after a 45-day ban on fishing in Palk Bay. The second round of talks held on May 12 between the Sri Lankan and Indian fishermen failed without reaching an agreement as the Sri Lankan side vehemently refused a request by the Indian side to fish in Sri Lankan waters. Sri Lankan fishermen totally opposed to allow the Indian practice of bottom trawling in Sri Lankan seas. Indian fishermen said it will take three years for them to discontinue bottom trawling, a practice that depletes the fishing resources and damages the seabed. Sri Lankan President Mahinda

Rajapaksa and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to address the nagging issue, when they met Tuesday in New Delhi. The two leaders agreed that a long-term solution is needed as it is a livelihood issue and the talks should continue in this regard.

India-Sri Lanka fishermen's talk deadlocked

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/south-asia/indiasri-lanka-fishermens-talks-deadlocked/article6002310.ece>

"The talks between fishermen of India and Sri Lanka, aimed at evolving a sustainable solution to the Palk Bay conflict, reached a deadlock here on Monday. Northern Sri Lankan fishermen urged their Indian counterparts to immediately stop using bottom trawlers, but the Indian fishermen said they needed at least three years to completely phase out trawling. The Sri Lankan side was not convinced by the Indian fishermen's offer to bring down the number of days they engage in trawling from 120 to 90, either. The much-anticipated second round of talks the first was held in Chennai on January 27 left fishermen of both sides rather disappointed. The Indian side was represented by 18 fishermen from across Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, with eight government officials monitoring the proceedings, while the Sri Lankan side had 20 fishermen and 10 officials at the meeting that went on from 9 a.m. till 8.30 p.m. "How can we permit any trawling when it causes so much damage to us? asked Thangavelu Sathasivam, who heads Sri Lanka's National Fisheries Federation.

On the other hand, P. Sesu Raja, president of the Ramanathapuram-based mechanised boat fishermen's association, said: "How can we stop trawling all of a sudden, when so many of our fishermen's livelihoods depend on that? We are only asking for some more time, he said. During the meeting, Indian fishermen assured their Sri Lankan counterparts that they would stop using the banned pair-trawling (rettai madippu valai) and purse seine (surukku madi valai) nets. However, the northern Sri Lankan fishermen were uncompromising in their demand that the Indians immediately stop using trawlers, which in addition to damaging nets used by fishermen in Sri Lanka's Tamil-speaking Northern Province, poses a major threat to marine resources. Unable to find common ground, fisher leaders from both sides held a quick meeting with their respective officials, but the outcome did not change either of their positions. U. Arulanandam of the Tamil-Nadu Alliance for Release of Innocent Fishermen alleged that Sri Lankan officials introduced the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) as a point of discussion at the last minute, complicating the talks.

"It was not on the agenda, we were here to purely discuss alternatives in terms of fishing methods. We feel very let down, he told The Hindu. The northern fishermen, however, said trespassing was very relevant to their discussion and hence had to be brought up. The Sri Lankan fishermen said they were disillusioned with the outcome. "The Tamil Nadu fishermen virtually walked out without taking our plea into consideration. We will wait for their response to

decide on the third round of talks, he said. Asked what they planned to do next, the Sri Lankan fishermen said they would urge their government to take stern action against fishermen who trespass their waters. Meanwhile, Sri Lankan Fisheries Minister Rajitha Senaratne urged the visiting Joint Secretary of India's Foreign Ministry, Suchitra Durai, to hold government-level talks on the fisheries issue at the earliest.

Sri Lanka, India fishermen-level talks on May 12

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_14A/May03_1399090969CH.php

"The postponed second round of talks fishermen level talks between the Sri Lankan and Indian fishermen are to be held in Colombo on May 12 a senior government official has said. Sri Lanka's Director General of Fisheries, Nimal Hettiarachchi has told the media on Friday that the long stalled talks between the representatives of the fishermen of India and Sri Lanka on the controversial issue of fishing in the Palk Strait and Palk Bay, will be held in Colombo on May 12. According to the official, 26 Indian fishermen and 20 Sri Lankan fishermen will participate in the one-day talks. Officials from the two countries will be present as observers. Official-level talks on technical, scientific and legal aspects of fishing in the disputed region will be held later and the dates will be fixed for the discussions after the fishermen level talks, according to Hettiarachchi. After the successful talks at the first round on January 27 in Chennai, the Tamil Nadu State government fixed March 25th date for the second round of talks, which were originally scheduled to be held on March 13th in Colombo. However, the talks got postponed since Sri Lanka did not release all the Indian fishermen and their boats detained in Sri Lanka before the talks as the Tamil Nadu government demanded.

Heavy fishing boat a major risk to Dugong in India's Kutch

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/Heavy-fishing-boat-a-major-risk-to-Dugong-in-Kutch/articleshow/27466857.cms>

"The study 'Dugong distribution, habitat and risks due to fisheries and other anthropogenic activities in India', by the Wildlife Institute of India, pointed out that in the Gulf of Kutch, more than 50% of boats used were in heavy fishing boat category. This was a major threat as heavy boats cause excessive damage to seagrass beds. Also, some fishermen said excessive hunting in the past was responsible for the decline of the dugong in the Gulf of Kutch. Gill nets are most dangerous and if a dugongs die when accidentally caught in them. Catches in gill nets are one of the major causes of dugong mortality. Gill nets alone form 63% of the total gear used, followed by purse seines (35%), beach seines (1%) and long lines (1%). Usage of gill nets was highest in Kutch and the Mannar-Palk Bay area.

In the Gulf of Kutch over 65% of fishermen use gill nets. According to the study, a high proportion of respondents left gill nets untended for over 2-3 hours, effectively reducing the possibility of an entangled dugong being spotted and released in time. Although hunting has been totally banned in India, dugong meat is highly prized and considered a delicacy. Its consumption has been reported in the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay and Andaman and Nicobar islands. In the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay, gill nets, shore seines, trawl nets, drift nets, ray nets and explosives were used to hunt dugongs. Capture numbers were 25 dugongs per year in 1960-1980 and 200 dugongs per year in 1983-1984.

This dropped to 9 dugongs per year in 1986-1988. Also, 19% of respondents said that they would eat or sell dugong meat if caught in their net. Unintentional dugong mortality is caused by boat strikes and propeller injuries when motorized boats traverse shallow feeding grounds. Fast-moving boats give dugongs less time to evade a collision. With 3.5% of daytime spent resting at the surface of the water, dugongs are vulnerable to boat strikes. Compared to solitary individuals, mother-calf pairs spend more time near the surface, and are hence more prone to accidents. Another threat to dugong habitat is trawl, which degrades seagrass meadows by uprooting rhizomes and removing healthy leaves.

Dugong under threat in Gulf of Mannar

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/dugong-under-threat-in-gulf-of-mannar/article5213444.ece?homepage=true>

"Dugong, the sea-grass eating marine mammal found in the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Bay off India, is under threat from increased human activity. The Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park proposes to undertake a study to assess the population of these sea creatures, according to Deepak S. Bilgi, Wild Life Warden. The study, to be conducted by Tuticorin based Suganthi Devadason Marine Research Institute, would be completed during this financial year, after which an action plan and measures for Dugong conservation would be launched, he told The Hindu. As Dugongs feed on sea grass, the sea grass beds in the Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar region will also be assessed. The study will be conducted through the Tamil Nadu Bio-Diversity conservation and Greening Project (TBGP), and is aimed at determining the distribution, population and migratory pattern of Dugong. "We will launch the study shortly and complete it by the end of this financial year, Mr Bilgi said, adding a study conducted in 2007 had revealed that the region had over 150 Dugong.

"The Dugong population is the highest in the Gulf of Mannar region compared to other parts of the country, he said. He added that their distribution was high in sea-grass bed areas. Following the study, the Forest department plans to promote awareness among fisherfolk of the need to conserve the species and its habitat. A similar exercise would be conducted in the case of sea turtles. Mr Bilgi said the TREE foundation had identified nesting areas and enlisted local

fishermen to help conserve the sea turtle population. The study launched in April indicated that the eggs laid by sea turtles were either eaten by stray dogs or collected by fishermen for consumption, he said. A questionnaire-based survey will be conducted in the coastal villages of Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar to understand the present status of the Dugong population. Interviews will be conducted with a minimum of 10-15 active fishermen in each village, according to sources.

The respondents would be drawn from among experienced and knowledgeable people connected with fisheries. The questionnaire in Tamil will focus mainly on the historical and present occurrence of the Dugong, the threats, use, and local attitudes toward its conservation. For sea-grass assessment, a preliminary visual survey will be carried out to identify the location and extent of sea-grass meadows in the Gulf of Mannar between Pamban and Tuticorin, covering 140 km. In the Palk Bay, the assessment will be carried out along a 130-km stretch between Pamban and Athirapattinam. The Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar area will be demarcated, using GPS coordinates, into several separate sites. The focus areas will be the sea-grass species density, shoot density and sea grass biomass. Land-based as well as fishery-related threats to the Dugong habitat will be assessed. Since sea-grass beds in both the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Bay are important in terms of livelihood to traditional fisherfolk, the social-ecological system prevailing in this biodiversity-rich and productive coastal region will be documented and considered one of the key components in the preparation of the Dugong conservation action plan.

Sri Lankan statement on fishermen signifies rising tension on maritime boundary

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Lankan-statement-on-fishermen-signifies-rising-tension-on-maritime-boundary/articleshow/21928832.cms>

"In the two years up to the end of the Sri Lankan civil war in 2009, less than 400 Indian fishermen were arrested for breaching the maritime boundary line with India's island neighbour. In the four years since, more than 1200 fishermen have ended up in Lankan jails. That in a nutshell explains how sensitive the maritime boundary line between India and Sri Lanka has become. The announcement by Sri Lankan minister for external affairs G L Peiris that Colombo will detain and prosecute Indian fishermen, who poach in Sri Lankan waters marks a qualitative change in the Rajapaksa government's handling of the issue. Since the fall of the LTTE and end of the ethnic war in 2009, the international maritime boundary in the Palk Bay has become more volatile with the island nation stepping up action against illegal fishing in its territorial waters. As on date, 120 Indian fishermen languish in Lankan prisons.

Until recently, when TN fishermen were arrested by the Lankan navy, chief ministers wrote to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and New Delhi took up the matter with Colombo through the

Indian high commission. The fishermen were subsequently released and handed over to the Indian Coast Guard on the maritime boundary. But of late, they are being held in Lankan jails for longer periods in a bid to stop cross-border fishing, which has deprived Lanka of much of its marine wealth. Fishing is a major vocation in the northern Sri Lankan province. Prior to 1983, about 38% of the catch in Sri Lanka came from the coast along the northern province.

The ethnic conflict which began in 1983 marked a turning point for the fishing industry in both countries. Until then the Palk Bay was never a barrier; there was free movement of people between the two countries, partly due to the fact that Lanka did not have a strong navy then. The ground reality changed when the conflict started. V Suryanarayan, a retired professor of Madras University and an authority on Lankan affairs, said, ""During the ethnic conflict starting from 1983, fishing in the Tamil dominated areas came to a standstill as it was banned by the Sri Lankan government. Many fishermen came to Tamil Nadu as refugees and they worked for Indian trawler owners. In fact, they used to direct Indian fishermen to areas on the Sri Lankan side of the Palk Bay where fish is in abundance"".

But as the Sri Lankan navy expanded, they stepped up action against Indian fishermen, sometimes suspecting them to be Tamil guerrillas. With the end of the ethnic conflict, Sri Lankan fishermen have resumed fishing. But they find poaching by Indian fishermen a major hindrance to their livelihood. ""What is more, trawling is banned in Sri Lanka and the Indian trawlers, which go deep into Lankan waters, play havoc with the marine ecology,"" said Suryanarayan. Lankan fishermen complain that if trawling continues, there would be no fish left on the Sri Lankan side as well after a few years. General secretary of Mechanised Boat Fishermen Welfare Association N J Bose said, ""Pursuit of banned fishing practices and use of high power fishing trawlers by Indian fishermen are the reasons for the detention"". U Arulanandam of Alliance for Release of Innocent Fishermen (ARIF) estimates that about 2,000 fishermen would have been detained and released by the Lankan authorities since 1996.

Colombo will try Indian fishermen

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/colombo-will-try-indian-fishermen/article5035516.ece>

"Sri Lanka has ruled out early repatriation of over 100 Tamil Nadu fishermen arrested by it recently for allegedly crossing into Sri Lankan territorial waters. Some of them have been in custody for over two months, and Colombo says they would have to undergo the judicial process though the intention is not to deprive them of their liberty for long. "But there has to be some deterrence, otherwise why won't they come over and over again?" asked Sri Lankan Minister for External Affairs G.L Peiris who maintained that India's transfer of Kachchatheevu island to Sri Lanka was a settled matter and cannot be reopened. The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister said that till some time back, Indian fishermen who entered Sri Lankan waters were released quickly. But

as this step was not dissuasive enough, Sri Lanka planned to prosecute the current lot of arrested fishermen so that they would not venture into its waters again. “We are anxious to resolve this problem. Our problem is they come in large numbers – about 1,500 in 400 to 500 boats. The proportion of the problem is very disquieting and is not restricted to Palk Bay. They come as close as 700 metres from Sri Lanka's eastern sea-board. This is a very volatile issue on our side too and the duty of the Sri Lankan government is to do something about it and not allow resources to be taken away day after day.

Sri Lanka defended its human rights record and did not think the international community's reservations on its handling of the military conflict with Tamil militants would come in the way of participation of member-countries in the Colombo Commonwealth Summit in November. Here to formally invite Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to the Commonwealth Summit, which Tamil parties and human rights organisations are calling on India to boycott, Mr. Peiris admitted the people of northern areas, where some of the most vicious fighting took place, were “bitter, angry and disillusioned. But the Sri Lankan government had achieved more rehabilitation and reintegration in its Tamil-majority areas than other post-conflict societies in Cambodia and the former Yugoslavia, he said. As was the case with Minister for Economic Development Basil Rajapaksa, Mr. Peiris also ruled out an early fix to the demand for greater political powers to the Northern Province, which will go to polls later next month. He also indicated that the Parliamentary Select Committee that is looking into giving greater political powers to provinces will go ahead with its deliberation next week without representatives of Tamil parties attending.

125 Indian fishermen arrested by Sri Lanka this year, none killed

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_13A/Apr23_1366699599CH.php

"Sri Lanka so far this year has arrested 125 Indian fishermen for violating Sri Lanka's International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) and entering into Sri Lankan territorial waters but no fishermen have been killed as claimed by the Tamil Nadu fishermen and anti-Sri Lankan activists. Indian Defense Minister AK Antony provided these figures in a written reply to Lok Sabha Monday. According to the Indian Defense Minister no fishermen have been killed in 2012 either while Sri Lanka detained 202 Indian fishermen during the year. In 2011, two fishermen have been killed during the skirmishes with the Sri Lankan Navy while 203 Indian nationals were arrested. Among the detained, 10 Indian nationals including 05 fishermen arrested in November 2011, are in custody on charges of smuggling narcotics and contraband.

The Indian government has been consistently taking up the fishermen issues with the Sri Lankan government to ensure that the Sri Lankan Navy acts with restraint and the fishermen found near IMBL are treated in a humane manner, Antony noted. The two governments have reached an understanding in October 2008 to avoid the recurrence of incidents involving Indian fishermen with Sri Lankan Navy. The agreement put in place practical arrangements to deal with bonafide

Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen crossing the IMBL. As part of these arrangements, it has been agreed that there would be no firing on Indian fishing vessels and that Indian fishing vessels would not enter the sensitive areas designated by the Government of Sri Lanka along its coastline. Sri Lanka's Ministry of External Affairs says the continuous allegations against the Sri Lankan Navy on the alleged killing and harassment of Indian fishermen were wrong and had no factual basis.

The Ministry says the Navy had been asked to treat all Tamil Nadu fishermen, who regularly crossed the Sri Lanka waters, in a humane manner. The Indian Defense Minister pointed out that the Indian Coast Guard provides assistance to Indian fishermen at sea while they are in distress through regular patrolling and conducts Community Interactions Programs to educate fishermen among other issues, on the perils of cross border fishing. Under operation Tasha, Indian Navy and Coast Guard ships are deployed continuously (24X7) in Palk Bay area to prevent any illegal activities and also to protect the fishermen from any attacks, while they are fishing in Indian waters, the Defense Minister added.

India says no records of Indian fishermen killed in Sri Lankan territorial waters last year

http://www.colombopage.com/archive_13A/Mar12_1363060010CH.php

"Contradicting the claims by Tamil Nadu fishermen that Sri Lankan security forces killed hundreds of Indian fishermen, The Indian Defense Minister AK Antony said that during the last one year, there is no official record of Indian fishermen killed in Sri Lankan territorial waters. In a written statement to the Indian Parliament yesterday, the Indian Defense Minister said Sri Lankan Navy during the last one year had apprehended 23 boats and 131 Indian fishermen. The apprehended fishermen have been repatriated, following the action taken by the Indian government through diplomatic channels with the Sri Lankan authorities. Indian fishermen, mainly from Tamil Nadu, illegally poaching in large scale with trawlers in Sri Lanka's waters, have become a serious threat to the livelihoods of Sri Lankan fishermen, who have urged the authorities to prevent the stealing of their livelihood by Indian fishermen.

Antony explained that Indian government has been consistently taking up the issue of alleged attacks on Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy with the Sri Lankan government to ensure that the Sri Lankan Navy acts with restraint and the Indian fishermen found near International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) are treated in a humane manner. According to the Indian Minister, in order to avoid recurring incidents, the two governments have reached an understanding in October, 2008 to put in place practical arrangements to deal with bona fide Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen crossing the IMBL. As part of these arrangements, it has been agreed that there would be no firing on Indian fishing vessels and that Indian fishing vessels

would not enter the sensitive areas designated by the Sri Lankan government along its coastline. The Indian Defense Minister told Lok Sabha in his statement that the Indian Coast Guard conducts Community Interaction Programmes to educate fishermen on the perils of cross border fishing and Indian Navy and Coast Guard ships are deployed continuously (24x7) in Palk Bay area to prevent any illegal activities and also to protect the Indian fishermen from any attacks, while they are fishing in Indian waters.

During the 8th India-Sri Lanka Joint Commission meeting held on 22nd January, 2013 in New Delhi, both sides reiterated the highest priority accorded by respective governments to the wellbeing, safety and security of fishermen from the two countries, he noted. Sri Lanka Navy says its vessels and craft are in deployment for interception of unlawful intrusions into the Sri Lanka's territorial waters and it apprehends the poachers in order to prevent exploitation of the country's fishing resources and harms inflicted on its marine life.

Sri Lanka universities address concerns of post-war Northern fishing communities and the Palk Bay Indian trawler problem

"The Universities of Jaffna and Ruhuna co-organised an international workshop on the challenges facing the long suffering fishing communities in Northern Sri Lanka. The workshop discussed the findings of a two-year-long research project on the Palk Bay fishing problem with the partnership of the University of Jaffna, University of Ruhuna, the Madras Institute of Development Studies and the University of Amsterdam. The workshop on this issue of national importance was inaugurated by Prof. Vasanthi Arasaratnam, Vice Chancellor, University of Jaffna and Prof. Susirith Mendis, Vice Chancellor, University of Ruhuna, and drew the participation of administrators, academics, researchers and representatives of the fishing community.

The primary focus of the workshop was to address the economic devastation facing the Northern Sri Lankan fishing community. This community, which was unable to go to the seas during the war, continues to suffer from the impact of Indian trawlers on Northern waters. Great financial losses due to the destruction of fishing nets and inability to go to sea when trawlers are present, as well as serious damage to ecological resources were all issues discussed at the workshop. Fisher leaders of Northern Sri Lanka have voiced appreciation of this inter-university effort to address the Indian trawler problem, with which they have been grappling since the end of the war. The workshop underlines the importance of multi-disciplinary research and multi-tiered dialogue for generating appropriate solutions. This initiative appeals to the Governments of Sri Lanka and India, academics, opinion makers and all relevant actors to address the issue with urgency.

Navies of India, Sri Lanka to get to bottom of fishermen issue

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/states/other-states/article3606874.ece>

"The recent arrest of Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy and related incidents will figure at the bilateral International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) meeting of the navies of India and Sri Lanka to be held shortly, according to Inspector General Satya Prakash Sharma, Commander, Coast Guard Region, East. He was reviewing maritime security with KBL Bhatnagar, Deputy Inspector General of Coast Guard, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, and Commandant S. Mankoti, Commanding Officer, Coast Guard Station, Puducherry. Mr. Sharma told The Hindu here on Thursday that some fishermen of Rameswaram were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy for allegedly entering Sri Lankan waters. The process of convening the meeting, of which Indian Coast Guard was a part, had been activated and it would be held shortly.

To a question about the repeated incidents of arrest of Indian fishermen in the Palk Bay and the Gulf of Mannar and the alleged harassment by the Sri Lankan Navy, Mr. Sharma said that talks were on between the two governments at different levels to find a solution. A few forums and fishermen associations were also working out plans. He hoped that a peaceful solution would be arrived at. Asked about an immediate solution to the issue, he said: "The Indian fishermen should carry out their activities peacefully in Indian waters. We [Coast Guard] are here to take care of their safety and security. Asked about the outcome of the enquiry being conducted by the Coast Guard into the alleged involvement of its vessel in an accident near Mandapam recently, in which a fisherman was killed, the Inspector General said that the preliminary probe by two Deputy Inspectors General of the Coast Guard was at the final stages. The Tamil Nadu police were conducting separate enquiry into the accident. The Coast Guard had provided all information sought by them and would continue to coordinate with them to find out the real reason for the accident. Earlier, Mr. Sharma met Lt. Governor of Puducherry Iqbal Singh and Chief Secretary M. Sathiavathy.

Sri Lanka, India to amicably solve fishing issues

<http://www.dailynews.lk/2012/05/12/news04.asp>

"Fisheries authorities in Sri Lanka and India have agreed to solve the issues of fishermen in the Palk Bay region without taking the fishermen through court processes. Sri Lanka is releasing Indian fishermen who have been in Sri Lankan custody for illegal cross-border fishing, while India is releasing Sri Lankan fishermen in Sri Lankan custody for similar doing after a top level decision taken by Sri Lanka and India to release the fishermen, Fisheries Ministry Maritime Surveillance Unit yesterday told the Daily News. Fisheries Minister Dr Rajitha Senarathna said they have decided to solve matters amicably by way of friendly discussions with the Indian

authorities. There are thousands of trawlers from Tamil Nadu that enter Sri Lankan waters on a daily basis. This has led to a situation of dwindling fish in Lankan waters. Sri Lanka recently released a batch of Indian fishermen who were in Sri Lankan custody for violating International Maritime Boundary Line law and illegally fishing in Lankan waters in a friendly gesture to India.

Meanwhile, India released 20 Sri Lankan fishermen four days ago. They had been arrested for fishing in the Indian waters, said Fisheries Ministry officials. They said, moves are under way to install a Vessel Monitoring System(VMS) to monitor Sri Lankan vessels and to prevent them from straying into the territorial waters of other countries by way of satellite based signals. Asked if the system could monitor foreign vessels from entering into Sri Lankan seas, he said, "it will not be possible. However, the Sri Lanka Navy and local Coast Guard patrol the sea to prevent such occurrences. Asked about the situation of trawling by Indian vessels in Sri Lankan waters, Navy spokesman commodore Kosala Warnakulasuriya said , " that situation has been brought under control to a greater degree.

Asked if they arrest poaching Indian vessels, he said , " Sri Lankan Navy would arrest any vessel that enters the Sri Lankan waters illegally. " However, we used to issue warnings to Indian vessels before they cross over into our waters. We have not arrested anyone recently, he added. "We have brought several local fishermen and their boats to Sri Lankan shores after they were handed over to us by the Indian Coast Guard. We too have handed over Indian fishermen, who were arrested by us on charges of illegal entry into Lankan waters upon their release by the government, he explained.

Sri Lanka detains 22 Indian fishermen

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/Sri-Lanka-detains-22-fishermen/articleshow/12050008.cms>

"Even as fishermen in Rameswaram in the south Indian State of Tamil Nadu are gearing up the St Antony's festival in Katchatheevu islet, the Sri Lankan Navy has shocked the fishing community by detaining 22 of them, off the controversial islet in Palk Bay late on Saturday night. The fishermen are kept in a transit camp at Talaimannar, said a state fisheries officer. The Sri Lankan Navy had also seized five mechanised boats of the fishermen. ""We will get the official report on the detention by Monday morning. We hope that the fishermen would be released the same day itself,"" said a state fisheries department official. Fishermen from various fishing hamlets in Ramanathapuram set out for the sea on Saturday morning in 620 mechanised boats.

The fishers, hailing from Thangachimadam and Rameswaram areas had cast their nets near the Katchatheevu islet and were fishing there around midnight. It was then that a flotilla of Sri

Lankan vessels arrived at the spot. While fishermen in most of the boats who spotted the flotilla scattered from the area, the Sri Lankan Navy rounded up five boats including that of one Jaisingh from Thangachimadam. They then detained 22 persons in the five boats and took them away to Talaimannar. Fellow fishermen rushed to the coast in the early hours of Sunday to inform about the detention to the fisheries officials and police.

Sri Lanka, India agree to enhance bilateral cooperation on fishermen's issues

<http://www.iewy.com/39981-sl-india-agree-to-enhance-bilateral-cooperation-on-fishermens-issues.html>

"Reiterating that the well-being, safety and security of fishermen from the two countries are of highest priority, Sri Lanka and India have agreed to be more flexible and enhance bilateral corporation on the fisheries issues. Noting that developments made at a joint meeting held in March 2011 in New Delhi had a salutary effect, the two countries, at the just concluded 4th meeting of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group on Fisheries held in Colombo, agreed that the use of force could not be justified under any circumstances and reiterated the need to extend humane treatment to fishermen from both sides.

During the two-day meeting held on 13-14 January 2012, Sri Lanka stressed the need to respect the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) but showed flexibility in expediting the release of fishermen captured when they cross the IMBL. The two countries, noting that the Joint Statement on Fishing Arrangements of 26th October 2008 had since led to a decrease in violent incidents, have agreed to allow both countries to pursue their fishing activity in a safe, secure and sustainable manner, including discouraging fishermen from using destructive fishing methods, a joint statement issued by the two countries said.

The Sri Lankan delegation was led by Ms. Kshenuka Senewiratne, Additional Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs of Sri Lanka and the Indian delegation by Mr. Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs of India. The 11-member Indian delegation had representatives from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and a host of agencies, including the Indian Coast Guard. The two sides have also discussed measures for the expeditious release of bonafide fishermen from both countries. "Both sides noted the importance of an ongoing engagement between fishermen and fishermen's associations in India and Sri Lanka. They agreed to encourage a continued dialogue process between the fishermen's communities of the two countries through regular meetings. In this context, it was agreed that a

delegation of fishermen's representatives from Sri Lanka would visit India at the earliest in 2012, the stamen said.

The delegations, exchanging views on measures to manage the fishery resources in their respective waters, have emphasized the need to conserve marine resources and protection of marine ecology and agreed to the joint development of fisheries and marine resources in the Palk Bay area and the Gulf of Mannar. The two sides also agreed to develop programmes for bilateral exchanges in aquaculture and fishing related activities, including training in fisheries management, genetic improvement of cultured species, fishing technology, exchange of scientists, etc. A Memorandum of Understanding on development and cooperation in the field of fisheries and an agreement to set an early date for the work were also suggested during the meeting. The Indian delegation appreciated Sri Lanka's assistance in rescuing Indian fishermen stranded due to cyclonic weather conditions in the Palk Straits area in recent weeks, enabling their speedy repatriation and facilitating the visit of a team from India to salvage the grounded boats. Both sides agreed to hold the meetings of the Joint Working Group on a regular basis, at least once in six months. The next meeting is to be held in New Delhi at mutually convenient dates.