

Sri Lanka frees 12 more Indian fishermen

Sri Lanka Tuesday freed 12 Indian fishermen who were arrested by its navy while poaching in the island's territorial waters in early March, diplomatic sources here said.

The navy arrested 59 Indian fishermen and seized six fishing trawlers March 8 off Chilaw. The authorities released 47 of them in two trawlers after two days. The others have been in custody since then.

According to officials and diplomatic sources, the district court at Puttalam, north of Colombo, last week ordered the release of these 12 fishermen from Tamil Nadu along with their four trawlers.

'We are taking these 12 men and their trawlers to be handed over to the Sri Lankan Navy who in turn will hand them over to the Indian Coast Guard,' Theivendran Williams, the assistant controller of immigration, told IANS over telephone Tuesday.

An Indian diplomatic official confirmed the release of the fishermen. The Sri Lankan Navy spokesman was not available for comment.

Instances of Indian fishermen intruding into Sri Lankan waters have become almost a daily event, causing problem for both governments.

The Sri Lanka Navy in February lodged a complaint with the Indian authorities over what it said was a 'serious threat' posed by the Indian fishermen after a naval craft was damaged in a night shooting off Thalaimannar.

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