

Fishermen protest Sri Lankan Navy's 'atrocities'

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As many as 3,000 country boats and 1,000 mechanised fishing trawlers did not go out to sea in protest.

The immediate provocation for the protest by the fishermen was the arrest of more than 900 fishermen from Rameshwaram, along with 300 fishing boats, by the Sri Lankan navy July 2 in the Palk Straits. The trawlers were later released after thorough investigation.

'The strike by the Indian fishing community would continue indefinitely,' N.J. Bose, general secretary of the Tamil Nadu-Puducherry Fishermen's Federation told reporters.

'Allied industry will also join the strike if the government does not take steps to extract meaningful assurance of providing safety to Indian fishermen from the Lankan authorities in the waters between the two countries,' the federation official added.

Sri Lankan Navy spokesman Commander D.K.P. Dassanayake said the 300 trawlers were sailing towards Tamil Tigers-held Vidattativu area in northwestern Mannar district when they were surrounded by Sri Lankan navy vessels.

Sri Lanka has denied that its navy attacked and harassed Indian fishermen.

Sri Lanka said, it had intelligence reports that the Indian boats were to be used as camouflage by the LTTE, planning terrorist attacks.

The Indian fishermen are, however, adamant on assurances and the federation has decided to hold another protest in Rameswaram July 10.

They have threatened to block rail and road traffic at Pamban, 600 km south of Chennai, where the Indian land mass is closest to Sri Lanka, across the Strait.

The federation had a similar protest in January this year after firing on Indian boats by the Sri Lankan navy.

- Indo Asian News Service