

India and Pakistan must ensure that fishermen are not victims of a deterioration in ties

An Indian fisherman was killed in firing by the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) off the Gujarat coast on November 7. This is the first such killing by the PMSA in the last six years though conflicts over fishing rights are not infrequent along the International Maritime Boundary Line between the two countries. Six other fishermen have reportedly been detained, while one injured person managed to return to Indian shores. India has termed Pakistan's action deplorable and "in contravention to all established international practices and bilateral understandings". On Monday, the Ministry of External Affairs summoned a Pakistani diplomat who was asked to investigate the incident and instruct its forces to refrain from unprovoked firing. According to the Gujarat government, a total of 345 fishermen from the State were lodged in Pakistan jails as on December 2020. In April 2020, Pakistani forces opened fire on two boats off the Gujarat coast injuring one person, and in 2019 they sunk an Indian boat in which six of seven fishermen onboard were rescued. One person went missing. Fishermen often get caught in the fluctuating fate of the bilateral relations between the two countries, which is currently at a low.

According to the National Fishworkers Forum, there are 558 Indian fishermen in Pakistani jails, and 74 from Pakistan in Indian prisons. The Forum calculates that 1,200 Indian fishing vessels are in Pakistan's custody. The families of these imprisoned people are in penury. Consular access to those in prison is difficult. Only 295 of the 558 prisoners in Pakistan could have their nationality verified. In 2007, both countries formed a joint judicial committee comprising eight retired judges — four each from India and Pakistan — to facilitate the exchange of civilian prisoners. The mechanism has been defunct since 2013, and attempts to revive it in 2018 did not bear fruit. Civilians along international borders often get caught in disputes between countries, and India has several such hotspots, on land and in sea. Even fishermen venturing near the India-Sri Lanka maritime border often fall victim though both countries maintain cordial bilateral ties. Many Indian villages along the

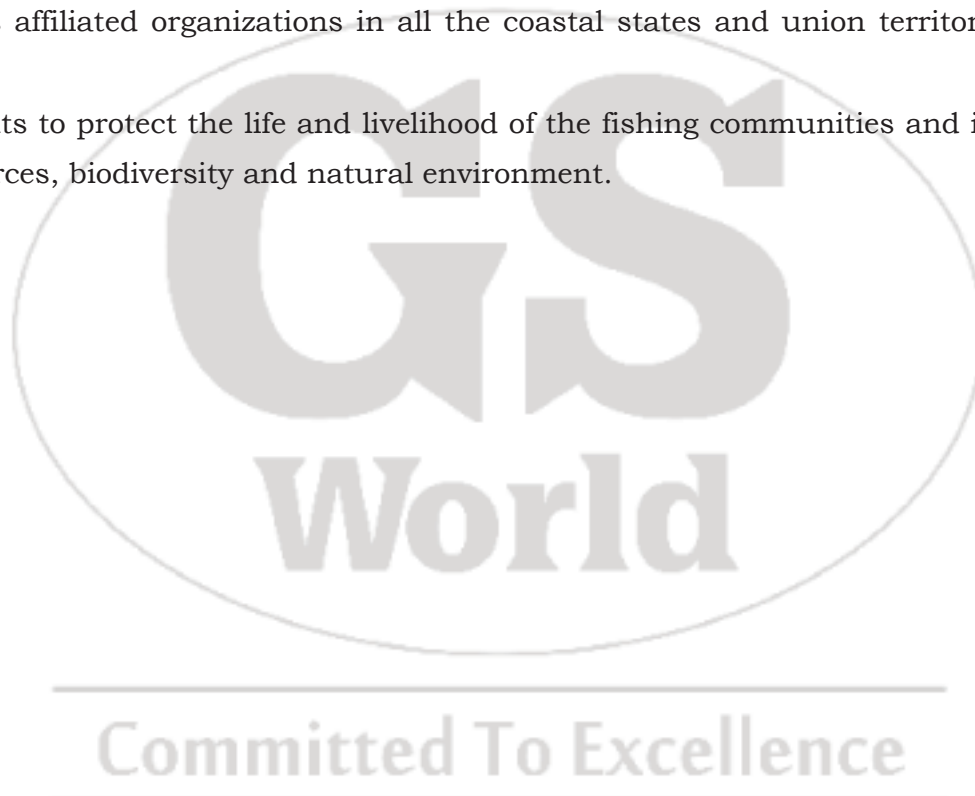
borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh also become theatres of conflict, as communities often find it difficult to reconcile with international borders that divide their traditional spheres of economic and social activities. Pakistan has aggressively sponsored violence in India, and terrorists trained by its agencies sailed in a hijacked Indian fishing boat in 2008 to Mumbai. It is a tragedy that ordinary people could end up in a foreign prison while trying to earn their livelihood. India and Pakistan must consider this as a humanitarian crisis and work towards resolving it. And, both countries must avoid any escalation in tensions on account of the latest incident.

What is National Fisherworkers' Forum?

National Fisherworkers' Forum, registered under the Trade Union Act of India, is the only national federation of state level small and traditional fish workers' unions of India.

NFF has affiliated organizations in all the coastal states and union territories of the Indian mainland.

NFF fights to protect the life and livelihood of the fishing communities and its basic source – fisheries resources, biodiversity and natural environment.



Expected Question (Prelims Exams)

Q. With reference to the National Fishworkers Forum, consider the following statements-

1. It is Registered under the Trade Union Act of India.
2. It is associated with the World Forum of Fishers People as a major partnership.

Which of the above statement is/are true?

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 Nor 2

Expected Question (Mains Exams)

Q. How can the disputes that exist between India and Pakistan regarding maritime security and economic activities of fishermen be resolved? Discuss. (250 Words)

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Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.