

Italy, India Dispute on Marines Arrests Unresolved

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Italy's and India's foreign ministers failed Tuesday to resolve a dispute over the arrests of two Italian marines accused of killing two Indian fishermen 10 days ago.

In their first meeting over the shootings off India's southwest coast, India's Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna said both countries had strong opinions but were cooperating.

Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Terzi, who traveled to New Delhi for Tuesday's high-level talks, said the two countries still disagreed on which country should try the case.

"I have explained frankly the position of our government on the legal aspect," Terzi said. "There is a difference of opinion which has not been resolved concerning jurisdiction."

The marines were providing security on a cargo ship and mistook the fishermen for pirates.

New Delhi has said the Italians should be tried in India because the killings happened on an Indian boat. Rome has argued the shooting took place in international waters and the case should be handled in Italy.

The two Italians are in custody in a guest house in the southern city of Kochi. Terzi will travel there to meet the marines before returning to Rome.

India has allowed Italian observers on the case, and experts from both countries conducted ballistic tests last week.

The case will be heard by a court in the southern Indian state of Kerala.

The Italian minister referred to the scourge of piracy that had necessitated the presence of armed military personnel aboard the cargo ship.

Piracy has emerged as a major threat to merchant ships in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, with Somalia-based pirates hijacking ships and crew for ransom.

Several countries, including India, allow ship owners to deploy armed security guards on ships.