

D.O.Letter No.16804/FS 6/2006      Dated: 22. 09.2006

Dear Prime Minister,

In recent past, a number of incidents of attacks by the Sri Lankan Navy on Fishermen of Tamil Nadu have caused great distress and hardship to the coastal fishermen of Tamil Nadu, and is a matter of great concern to the Government of Tamil Nadu. On 8.9.06, reports have been received regarding the inhuman act of the Sri Lankan Navy when they intercepted four Tamilian fishermen of Sirvathur (near Velankanni), took their catches, manhandled the fishermen and pushed them out of the boat into the sea ordering them to swim to safety. Two of these fishermen are feared to have drowned as they could not be rescued. What is pertinent to note is that all the four fishermen were fishing within the Indian territorial waters, south east of Vedaranyam (at 5 lengths depth). This incident has caused deep anguish and distress and has led to spontaneous protests by the fishermen especially in Nagapattinam district.

Prior to this incident, on 5th September 2006, the Chief Secretary of Tamil Nadu had sent a D.O. letter to the Foreign Secretary requesting him to take up the issue of expediting the restoration of traditional fishing rights of Indian Fishermen in and around Katchathivu in the Palk Bay Region. Unfortunately, now the Sri Lankan Navy has started preventing the fishermen of Tamil Nadu from fishing in our own territorial waters. The total number of such incidents for the last few months is growing causing great anxiety to us.

As you are aware the fishermen of Tamil Nadu depend essentially on fishing in the waters near the Katchathivu for their livelihood. Attention of the Government of India has been drawn repeatedly by the Government of Tamil Nadu to the incidents of violence which Indian fishermen face in this region. Government of India has also been repeatedly urged to restore the traditional rights and privileges to carry on the normal occupation of fishing in these waters. As it is the question of the livelihood of our fishermen this issue is of great concern for this Government and it is due to this concern that in the Governor's address to the Legislative Assembly on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2006 incorporated the following **"Necessary measures will be undertaken to safeguard the traditional fishing rights of fishermen of Tamil Nadu to undertake fishing activities near Katchathivu and to remove the difficulties faced by them"**.

I am sure you are also aware of the fact that the Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu had passed a resolution in 1991 on this issue wherein the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly called upon the Government of India to take all urgent action and efforts necessary to get back Katchathivu and restore it to the Indian territory apart from moving the Sri Lankan Government to pay compensation for families of fishermen killed by the Sri Lankan Navy as well as those who have lost their belongings in the attacks by them. Government of India was also requested to move the Sri Lankan Government **to create "Congenial conditions for Tamil Nadu fishermen to lead a peaceful life"**.

During the second meeting of the Indo-Sri Lankan Joint Working Group on Fisheries held in Colombo on 31.1.2006 with the Co-Chairman and the Joint Secretary (BSM), Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, Tamil Nadu Government had suggested that Government of India should at least persuade the Sri Lankan Government to permit authorised fishing for fishermen in Sri Lankan waters at a distance of 5 nautical miles.

In the light of this, it is suggested that Government of India could work out a perpetual lease of Katchathivu for fishing, drying of nets and pilgrimage within the purview of the existing agreement .

I would be grateful if you could kindly look into this and use your good offices to resolve this long pending issue and restore the traditional fishing rights of Indian fishermen in the waters in and around Katchathivu and impress upon the Sri Lankan Government to instruct their Navy to desist from harming innocent Indian, more specifically fishermen of Tamil Nadu who solely depend on fishing in these waters for their livelihood.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

**(M. KARUNANIDHI)**

To

**Dr. Manmohan Singh,**  
Hon'ble Prime Minister of India,  
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New Delhi - 110001.