

PRESS RELEASE

Text of the D.O.Letter dated 1.6.2014 addressed by **Selvi J Jayalalithaa**, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to **Shri Narendra Modi**, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India is reproduced below:-

"I write this letter with a deep sense of anguish that, right at the beginning of the fishing season on June 1st, after a 45 day fishing ban, 33 innocent Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu, along with their 7 fishing boats, have been apprehended and detained by the Sri Lankan Navy. There were 76 incidents of apprehension and 67 incidents of attacks on and harassment of Indian fishermen of Tamil Nadu in the past three years by the Sri Lankan Navy. I had written to the former Prime Minister on numerous occasions over the past three years seeking strong diplomatic action to ensure that such incidents do not occur, but to no avail.

It has been reported that seven Mechanized Fishing Boats bearing Registration Nos. IND-TN-10-MM-123, IND-TN-10-MM-263, IND-TN-10-MM-344, IND-TN-10-MM-368, IND-TN-10-MM-372, IND-TN-10-MM-446 & IND-TN-10-MM-571, which went for fishing on 31.5.2014, from the Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District with 33 fishermen on board, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 1st June, 2014, and they have been taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka. This resumption of abductions and detentions has sent shock waves throughout the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu. There was an expectation that, with the change of Government at the Centre, there would be a reset in the relations with Sri Lanka and such attacks and apprehensions would cease.

The right of livelihood of our fishermen to fish in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay, to which they have a historic claim, is being infringed repeatedly and effectively abrogated by Sri Lanka. This is caused in no small measure because of the action of the Government of India having entered into an ill-advised agreement, which ceded to Sri Lanka the islet of Katchatheevu, which was historically part of India's territory and undisputedly an integral part of India.

Despite the non-conducive atmosphere created by the actions of the Sri Lankan Government, including the recurrent instances of violent attacks upon and abductions of our fishermen on the high seas in the Palk Bay, the seizure and destruction of boats and fishing equipment by the Sri Lankan Navy and the prolonged detention of scores of poor fishermen from Tamil Nadu in Sri Lankan jails, our fishermen in an accommodative frame of mind, were eager to sort out the day to day issues faced by them by engaging in talks with fishermen from Sri Lanka. The Government of Tamil Nadu facilitated two rounds of bilateral fishermen level talks in Chennai on January 27th, 2014, and in Colombo on May 12th, 2014. The Sri Lankan stand

in these talks has been obdurate and it is unfortunate that despite the Government of Tamil Nadu taking a positive approach and helping to facilitate fishermen level talks, the instances of attack on and abduction of innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu continue unabated.

The meek and weak response of the erstwhile UPA Government to the repeated instances of abduction of and attacks on our fishermen in their traditional waters has emboldened the Sri Lankan Navy to act brutally against our innocent fishermen. I hope that there will now be a decisive shift in the stance of the Government of India towards handling this issue under your leadership, and that the Government of India will now take the necessary steps to find a lasting and permanent solution to this vexatious question, which has a highly emotive impact amongst the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu and grave security implications for our State.

In order to put an end to the systematic violence unleashed by the Sri Lankan Navy and to decisively impress upon the Government of Sri Lanka that the Government of India would not tolerate such acts of brutality by the Sri Lankan Navy against our innocent fishermen, I request you to put in place a strong and robust diplomatic response and ensure that India registers the strongest disapproval of the belligerent actions of the Sri Lankan Navy.

May I also request you to proactively initiate an appropriate and calibrated set of actions that will bring about a permanent end to the perennial problem that plagues the livelihoods of lakhs of Tamil Nadu fishermen who fish in their traditional fishing grounds in the Palk Bay, facing the daily threat of attack and abduction at the hands of the Sri Lankan Navy? This would be in sharp contrast to the passive and immobile policy paralysis that characterized the approach of the UPA Government for several years. There is high expectation in Tamil Nadu that the new NDA led Government at the Centre would act decisively on this very sensitive issue, which involves the livelihood of lakhs of poor fishermen households in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu. I urge your personal intervention in the matter and request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities in a concrete and decisive manner so as to secure the immediate release of 33 fishermen who were apprehended on 1st June, 2014, and their 7 fishing boats from Sri Lankan custody at the earliest. We hope that the firmness of India's response would ensure that such instances do not recur hereafter.

May I look forward to early action?

Issued by: Director, Information and Public Relations, Chennai – 600009.
Date: 1.6.2014