

PRESS RELEASE

Text of the D.O. Letter dated 2.6.2015 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 with a deep sense of anguish that, right at the beginning of the fishing season on 1st June, after a 45 day fishing ban, 14 Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu, along with their 3 fishing boats, have been apprehended and detained by the Sri Lankan Navy. It has been reported that three Mechanized Fishing Boats which set sail for fishing on 1.6.2015, from the Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District with 14 fishermen on board, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 1st June, 2015, and have been taken to Thalaimannar, Sri Lanka.

Further, as you are aware, as on date, 18 boats belonging to our fishermen still continue to be in Sri Lankan custody. I would like to specifically point out that of the 80 boats impounded since June, 2014, 16 boats were completely ruined beyond recovery and could not be salvaged. Boats and fishing gear which are essential for the poor fishermen to earn their livelihood are deliberately not released by the Sri Lankan authorities while releasing fishermen. Long periods of disuse condemn the boats and equipment to ruin and the poor fishermen are subjected to a huge permanent loss.

In this context, this latest apprehension of innocent and unarmed Tamil Nadu fishermen with a motive to intimidating and preventing them from venturing into their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay and in the vicinity of Katchatheevu, which has always been a part of the traditional fishing area of our fishermen, adds to the immense frustration that has built up among the fishermen community of Tamil Nadu.

My Government strongly believes that the unconstitutional Indo-Sri Lankan Agreements of 1974 and 1976 should be nullified and the traditional rights of our fishermen restored at the earliest. I would like to reiterate that the Government of India should not treat the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) with Sri Lanka as a settled question as the constitutionality of the 1974 and 1976

agreements has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. I had personally filed W.P. (Civil) No.561/2008, in which the Government of Tamil Nadu had also subsequently impleaded itself. The main prayer before the Supreme Court is to declare the 1974 and 1976 agreements along with the Executive Order of 1976 as null and void in the absence of the required mandatory Constitutional amendment, and to retrieve Katchatheevu for India. Our stand is that Katchatheevu has always been a part of India, geographically, culturally and historically and needs to be retrieved, keeping in view the livelihood interests and security of lakhs of Indian fishermen.

My Government has taken many steps towards diversification of fishing activities amongst the Palk Bay fishing communities, including the provision of subsidy assistance for purchasing deep sea tuna long liners and promoting use of gill nets. We have also proposed the development of fishing harbours with fish landing facilities at Mookkaiyur and Rameswaram in Ramanathapuram District. The above steps would reduce the pressure on the Palk Bay. These proposals were included in the Memorandum I presented to you on 3.6.2014 requesting sanction of a financial package of Rs.1520 crores and a recurring grant of Rs.10 crores per annum for maintenance dredging. The detailed project reports for many of the components of this package have been submitted by the Government of Tamil Nadu to the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, and are awaiting clearance. I would also like to point out that the decision of the Government of India on the Meenakumari Report which was placed in the Lok Sabha has not been given effect to, by rescinding the Notification dated 12th November, 2014, issued by the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India.

We have also encouraged fishermen level talks so that a sustainable and permanent solution to the issue through bilateral talks is worked out. It is unfortunate that despite the Government of Tamil Nadu taking a positive approach and helping to facilitate bi-lateral level talks, the abduction of innocent fishermen from Tamil Nadu continues unabated.

A permanent solution to this problem must be found by a decisive initiative by the Government of India. A time bound action plan alongside a strong and robust diplomatic thrust must be put in place to achieve a long-term, permanent solution to this vexatious

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problem which is affecting the livelihood of lakhs of our fishermen from Tamil Nadu.

I urge your immediate personal intervention in this issue and request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities to secure the immediate release of the 14 fishermen who were apprehended on 1.6.2015 and their 3 fishing boats along with the 18 fishing boats which are already in Sri Lankan custody."

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