

PRESS RELEASE

Text of the D.O. letter dated 5.1.2016 of **Selvi J Jayalalithaa**, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu addressed to **Shri Narendra Modi**, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India.

“It is unfortunate that the apprehension and arrest of Indian fishermen while pursuing their avocation of fishing in their traditional waters by the Sri Lankan Navy continues unabated. I write to bring to your notice four incidents that have occurred in rapid succession in the last 24 hours in which 20 fishermen in four mechanized fishing boats have been arrested and detained. This includes one boat with 8 fishermen from Akkaraipettai, Nagapattinam District, who were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on 4.1.2016 and taken to Mullaitheevu. On 5.1.2016, two boats with 8 fishermen from Ramanathapuram district were arrested and taken to Thalaimannar; and 4 fishermen in one boat from Pudukkottai district were arrested and taken to Kankesanthurai. With this, the total number of fishermen from Tamil Nadu in Sri Lankan custody has reached 104. It is very regrettable that many of these fishermen have continued to be kept in custody for several weeks now and were unable to spend the festive season with their families.

In addition, there are now 66 fishing vessels with gear in Sri Lankan custody. This includes boats of fishermen who were released many months ago, which have not been returned. These boats have been lying on the sea shore, totally exposed to the elements. The boats and the fishing gear would have become completely unusable by now. This has been a big blow to the livelihood of these fisherfolk families.

The continued incarceration of the fishermen and their boats for extended periods and the apparent lack of any serious effort on behalf of the Government of India to obtain their early release has contributed in no small measure to the sense of despondency amongst the coastal fishermen community.

My Government stays committed to restoring and upholding the historic rights of fishermen from Tamil Nadu to fish in their traditional fishing waters of Palk Bay. The repeated attempts by the Sri Lankan Navy to infringe on these traditional rights of our fishermen by persistent resort to coercive tactics, including arrest and detention in custody, needs to be brought to an end through concerted efforts by the Government of India. People in Tamil Nadu are also increasingly

unhappy with the lack of any concrete measures on behalf of the Government of India on the vexed fishermen issue.

You are well aware that the issue of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) itself is sub judice in the Supreme Court of India, as I have challenged the constitutional validity of the Indo- Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 in my personal capacity. The Government of Tamil Nadu has also subsequently impleaded itself in this case.

For the first time in the country, my Government launched a prestigious scheme of providing subsidy up to Rs.30 lakhs per vessel to procure new Deep Sea Fishing Vessels, aimed at equipping our fishermen to expand their deep sea fishing capabilities. I have already sought assistance of Rs.1520 crores as a comprehensive financial package from the Government of India, for promoting deep sea fishing and developing infrastructure with a recurring grant of Rs.10 crores per annum for maintenance dredging for deep sea fishing and infrastructure. There has been no forward movement even on this proposal of the Government of Tamil Nadu in the last 18 months. I reiterate my request for early sanction of the proposal.

Since the prolonged detention and disuse of the boats and gear in custody coupled with exposure to the severe monsoon has caused considerable damage to the boats and ruined the equipment, I strongly urge the Government of India to not only secure the early release of the boats and equipment, but also to restore the only means of livelihood of our fishermen in a refurbished condition by the Government of India at the earliest.

It is imperative to proactively initiate an appropriate set of actions that will bring about a permanent solution to this sensitive issue that plagues the livelihood of thousands of Tamil Nadu fishermen. In the meantime, I urge your personal intervention in this matter and request you to ensure that the matter is effectively taken up at the highest level with the Sri Lankan Government to secure the immediate release of the 104 fishermen and 66 fishing boats currently in Sri Lankan custody.

May I request you to take immediate action in this regard?"

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