

PRESS RELEASE

Text of the D.O. Letter dated 13.10.2015 addressed by Selvi J Jayalithaa, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India is reproduced below:

"I wish to draw your immediate and personal attention to the sixth instance of arrest and remand of innocent Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy, within a span of a few weeks. In the last 20 days there have been 6 separate incidents in which fishermen from Tamil Nadu have been arrested and continue to be in detention and their boats have been seized by the Sri Lankan Navy. **In the latest incident which occurred on the night of 12.10.2015, 24 fishermen who set sail in 4 boats from Rameswaram fishing base in Ramanathapuram District were arrested and taken to Thalaimannar in Sri Lanka. As on date, 78 fishermen from Tamil Nadu and 38 boats of fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu are in Sri Lankan custody.**

I had hoped that after the change of regime in Sri Lanka there would be a positive change in the hostile environment created for fishermen from the coastal Districts of Tamil Nadu while fishing in their traditional fishing waters, and the aggressive actions of the Sri Lankan Navy would cease. Unfortunately, such incidents of apprehension of Tamil Nadu fishermen show no signs of abating and continue with painful regularity. Such incidents inflict huge misery and hardship on the fishermen community.

Despite my taking up the issue repeatedly with you there has been no concrete action and our fishermen are suffering prolonged incarceration in Sri Lankan jails. You will agree that this is an unacceptable situation which has to be remedied through a set of comprehensive measures including securing the urgent release of the fishermen in custody.

My stance on the issue of Katchatheevu is well known and has to form the basis of any long term solution to this issue. 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 once again 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 have 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 has also subsequently impleaded itself. The main prayer before the Supreme Court is to declare the 1974 and 1976 agreements as null and void in the absence of the required mandatory Constitutional amendment, and to retrieve Katchatheevu for India.

The other major component of the long term solution is the Comprehensive Special Package for deep sea fishing and infrastructure at a cost of Rs.1520 crores with a recurring grant of Rs.10 crores per annum for maintenance dredging which I had requested as part of the Memorandum presented to you on 3.6.2014. I underscore the need to expedite approval of this package without further delay.

The issue of harassment and frequent arrests of Tamil Nadu fishermen is an abrogation of their traditional fishing rights in their traditional fishing areas. This is a livelihood issue of thousands of our fisher folk and is taking on a huge social and political dimension. India cannot continue to be seen as a mute spectator as the rights of Indian fishermen are repeatedly infringed upon. The issue thus requires urgent intervention not merely at a diplomatic level but also at the highest political level. In the present circumstances I have no doubt that you would agree that the fishermen issue needs to be placed at the top of the agenda in any interaction with Sri Lanka.

I do hope that through concerted action you would be able to secure the immediate release of our 78 fishermen and 38 fishing boats from Tamil Nadu currently in Sri Lankan custody including the 24 fishermen and 4 boats apprehended on 12.10.2015. We expect that concrete action on the long term solution to this issue will also be initiated forthwith."

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