

Press Release

The Chief Secretary of Tamil Nadu has written a D.O.letter dated 10.11.2016 to the Foreign Secretary, Government of India requesting for the release of 105 fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody and also the relief assistance to be extended to the owners of the 18 fishing boats that were damaged in Sri Lankan custody. The copy of the letter is given below.

This is to bring to your kind notice the pathetic plight of Indian fishermen whose 18 fishing boats which are their sole means of livelihood, were allowed to suffer extensive damage in Sri Lanka. This irretrievable damage to the boats was caused due to the impounding of the fishing boats by the Sri Lankan authorities and their precarious berthing for long period, destroying their seaworthiness.

During 2014, the Sri Lankan Government apprehended and impounded a total of 158 boats of Tamil Nadu fishermen. The Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu had repeatedly urged the Hon'ble Prime Minister to take necessary steps for the early release of the boats of Tamil Nadu fishermen. The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly also unanimously passed a resolution in this regard on 5-12-2014. Subsequently, the Government of Tamil Nadu had filed motions in the respective Sri Lankan courts for advancing the date of hearing of the cases and requested for the release of the boats. The Assistant Director of Fisheries, Rameswaram, along with an Inspector of Fisheries with a power of attorney from the boat owners, was deputed to follow up with the Sri Lankan courts the necessary process to enable the early release of the fishing boats. The release of the fishing boats was finally ordered on 12.2.2015, 13.2.2015 and 16.2.2015.

Following this, two salvage teams were formed with the fishermen to salvage 80 boats. The salvage operation was carried out in two phases by 355 fishermen with 54 salvage boats. The Government of Tamil Nadu bore the entire legal expenses and the expenditure for the salvage operation. In these salvage operations, 64 boats of Indian fishermen were salvaged with minor and major repairs and brought to India in March and April, 2015.

It is disheartening to note that due to prolonged berthing without any proper upkeep, 16 boats were damaged beyond retrieval and had sunk in Sri Lanka. Another two boats sank while engaged in fishing in the traditional waters and could not be salvaged as well. The Indian (Tamil Nadu) fishermen incurred huge losses for the repair of their salvaged boats and resumption of fishing. The Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu has written to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India reiterating that the boats which were impounded and released by Sri Lanka after sustaining damages need to be returned to our fishermen in a refurbished condition by Government of India. Despite the repeated appeals by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, the Government of India is yet to agree to bear the losses suffered by the Indian fishermen.

Now the boat owners of the 18 fishing boats, which were lost in Sri Lankan harbour, are in a state of penury and abject poverty without any means of livelihood. The fishermen associations of Palk Bay districts of Tamil Nadu have registered their claim for compensation for the 18 boats. They have also requested the immediate release of the remaining 105 boats which are still in Sri Lankan custody.

I request the Government of India to suitably compensate the fishermen for their losses and provide necessary assistance to rebuild their lost means of livelihood. The cost of each fishing boat is around Rs.25 lakhs.

I also request you to impress upon the Government of Sri Lanka to secure the early release of 105 fishing boats which are sustaining serious damages in Sri Lankan custody and return the boats in a refurbished condition.

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