

PRESS RELEASE

Text of the D.O. Letter dated 22.3.2015 addressed by Thiru O. Panneerselvam, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India is reproduced below:

As you are aware, my revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma, in view of the sentiments and desire of the fishermen community of Tamil Nadu to hold talks with the fishermen of Sri Lanka to sort out the day to day issues faced by them while fishing in the Palk Bay and in the interest of keeping a channel of communication open between the fishermen communities of both countries, had facilitated holding fishermen level talks between fishermen associations of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. The next round of talks is scheduled to be held in Chennai on 24.3.2015. The Sri Lankan fishermen delegation is programmed to arrive in Chennai in the morning of 23.3.2015 (Monday).

At a time when all the groundwork for the talks has been completed and there was eager anticipation amongst the fishermen community that these talks could lead to a significant breakthrough in a long-pending and vexatious issue, it is most disconcerting and shocking to learn that the Sri Lankan Navy has apprehended and arrested 54 innocent fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu and their 10 boats in two separate incidents which took place in the early hours of 22.3.2015 when the fishermen were engaged in their peaceful avocation in their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay. 33 fishermen in 5 boats belonging to Rameswaram fishing base in Ramanathapuram District and 21 fishermen in 5 boats belonging to Jagathapattinam in Pudukottai District who set sail on 21.3.2015, were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy and have been remanded up to 27.3.2015 and 2.4.2015 respectively.

These latest incidents, coming as they do on the eve of the fishermen level talks, constitute an extremely unfortunate development. The unprovoked and belligerent action has caused tremendous anxiety and agitation amongst the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu. The assiduous and decisive steps being taken by the Government of Tamil Nadu under the guidance of my revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma to defuse the tense situation prevailing in the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu and to create a conducive and accommodative atmosphere for the smooth conduct of bilateral fishermen level talks, could be undermined by this action of the Sri Lankan authorities.

This latest incident definitely requires your personal intervention and we exhort you to take concrete and decisive action to ensure the immediate release of the 54 apprehended fishermen and their 10 boats. I request you to instruct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan Government forthwith and impress upon the Sri Lankan authorities to arrange for the immediate release of our fishermen and their boats.

I wish to state that, only when all the apprehended fishermen in Sri Lankan custody and their boats are released would the talks be meaningful and conducted in a conducive atmosphere.

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