

PRESS RELEASE

Text of the D.O. Letter dated 24.11.2014 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:

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"I write to bring to your notice, one more incident, in which 14 fishermen in three fishing boats bearing registration Nos. IND-TN-06-MM-595, IND-TN-06-MM-625 and IND-TN-10-MM-384, who set sail from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District and Jagathapattinam fishing base of Pudukkottai District on 23.11.2014 have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy. The boats and fishermen have been taken to Kangesanthurai in Sri Lanka and are under detention.

It is unfortunate that this incident has taken place after the recent positive development in which 5 fishermen who were sentenced to death in a foisted case of transporting narcotic substances were released on 20.11.2014. You are aware that the Government of Tamil Nadu on the directions of my Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had been relentlessly raising the issue of the release of these 5 fishermen with the Government of India ever since their arrest in 2011. On the instructions of my Leader the State Government had also funded the entire legal costs of the defence of these five fishermen and also supported their families throughout this period with financial grants. As soon as information on the award of death penalty to these 5 fishermen was received on 30.10.2014, the Government of Tamil Nadu requested you to immediately take up the matter with the highest authorities in Sri Lanka to ensure that the lives of the 5 innocent Indian fishermen are saved and they are released to return home at the earliest. The Government of India was also requested to direct the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka to set in motion the legal procedure for appeal and secure the best legal counsel and support for the effective defence of the 5 fishermen. The Government of Tamil Nadu also sanctioned Rs. 20 lakh towards the legal costs for the defence of the 5 fishermen.

Based on the request of the Government of Tamil Nadu you had personally intervened in the matter and the 5 fishermen were released on 20.11.2014. I thank you for your timely intervention.

However, the latest incident which occurred on 23.11.2014 shows that the Sri Lankan authorities have resorted to their familiar tactics of harassing and intimidating Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu while they fish in their traditional fishing waters in the Palk Bay. May I remind you that 24 fishermen belonging to Tamil Nadu who were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy nearly 2 months ago are still in custody, apart from the 14 fishermen apprehended, yesterday (23.11.2014).

Further the devious and sinister strategy of the Sri Lankan authorities, which our Beloved Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had already brought to your notice, of not releasing the fishing boats which were apprehended in successive incidents wherein Indian fishermen were harassed and arrested while pursuing their peaceful avocation of fishing, has now very seriously impacted the livelihood of Indian fishermen and their families in Tamil Nadu. 75 fishing boats from Tamil Nadu continue to be in Sri Lankan custody apart from the 3 boats which were apprehended on 23.11.2014.

The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats of our fishermen is causing great frustration amongst the fishermen of Tamil Nadu. Without their livelihood base, these fishermen are in a state of despondency. I urge you to take this up with the highest authorities of the Sri Lankan Government and ensure the immediate release of the precariously berthed boats which continue to suffer great damage in the North-East Monsoon.

Nearly 10 lakh fisherfolk in Tamil Nadu depend on marine fishing as their only source of livelihood. As our beloved Leader, Puratchi Thalaivi Amma had indicated earlier, the Government of Tamil Nadu under her leadership had taken a number of steps towards diversification of their avocation to minimize the pressure on the marine ecosystem. A two pronged approach is necessary at this juncture to solve this chronic problem. One is sanction of the financial package of Rs.1520 crores and a recurring grant of Rs.10 crores per annum for maintenance dredging, that our Leader had requested from the Central Government, which would go a long way in improving the socio economic status of the fishermen. The second is the abrogation of the 1974 and 1976 agreements and retrieval of Katchatheevu as well as restoration of the traditional and historical fishing grounds of the Palk Bay to the Tamil Nadu fishermen. The ceding of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka has been challenged on extremely valid and legal grounds by our Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma in her personal capacity and also by the Government of Tamil Nadu in the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India. Denying our fishermen, the right to peaceful fishing in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay to which they have a historical claim is causing

considerable angst amongst the fisherfolk of Tamil Nadu. I request your personal intervention to immediately resolve this long pending issue by retrieving Katchatheevu and restoring the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen as has been demanded by our beloved Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma.

May I request you to instruct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter immediately and ensure the prompt release of the 38 fishermen, including the 14 detained yesterday, who are languishing in Sri Lankan jails and the release of 78 boats currently in Sri Lankan custody?"

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