

PRESS RELEASE

"Text of the D.O. letter dated 25.1.2018 of Thiru Edappadi K. Palaniswami, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu addressed to Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, New Delhi."

I am writing with deep concern about the unabated apprehensions of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu and the implications of the new Bill introduced in the Sri Lankan Parliament on 24th January, 2018 with provisions to impose huge penalties on Indian fishermen, who engage in legitimate fishing in their traditional fishing grounds of Palk Bay.

It has been reported that 8 fishermen, along with their 2 mechanised fishing boats set out for fishing from Jegathapattinam fishing base of Pudukkottai District, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 25.1.2018 and have been taken to Sri Lanka.

New amendments made in the Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Act, 1960 of Sri Lanka during the year 2017, has banned and declared bottom trawling as a punishable offence. In addition, a new Bill named the Foreign Fishing Vessels Bill, has also been approved by the Sri Lankan Cabinet which provides for stringent penalties against fishing in the sovereign territory of Sri Lanka. It is widely reported in the media, that the Bill has been introduced in the Sri Lankan Parliament on 24.1.2018 and its provisions were aimed at Indian Fishing Trawlers from Tamil Nadu, the Tamil Nadu fishermen, as well as their fishing gear, while they are peacefully fishing in their traditional fishing waters of Palk Bay. This new Bill has provisions to incarcerate our fishermen for longer periods of time and impose huge penalties, which run upto few crores of Indian rupees. The life and livelihood of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu who fish in the traditional waters of Palk Bay, will then be left at the mercy of the Sri Lankan Government. This move has created widespread resentment and panic amongst the fishermen of Tamil Nadu, especially amongst the fishermen fishing in the Palk Bay.

It is an extremely unfortunate development, at the time when the Ministers of India and Sri Lanka met twice and the Joint Working Group on Fisheries met thrice, to work out a permanent solution to resolve this long pending sensitive livelihood issue. In addition, the Government of Tamil Nadu with the support of Government of India has initiated various proactive measures to decongest the Palk Bay and diversify the

trawling fishing effort from Palk Bay into deep sea fishing. This unilateral move by the Government of Sri Lanka has far reaching implications on the livelihood propositions of fishermen from Tamil Nadu and will definitely hamper proactive efforts taken by the Government of Tamil Nadu and the diplomatic efforts taken by the Government of India.

Palk Bay is the historic and traditional fishing area of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu. Their historical rights were simply signed away, as part of the ill-advised Indo-Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976, which also unilaterally ceded Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka, without having any foresight or concern for the plight of our innocent fishermen.

The stand of our Revered Leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma and the Government of Tamil Nadu to abrogate the 1974 Indo Sri Lankan agreement that created an imaginary International Maritime Boundary Line and ceded the Katchatheevu islet along with the potential traditional fishing grounds of our fishermen to Sri Lanka, is sub-judice before the Supreme Court of India. Thus, it would be fitting for the Government of India to register its strong disapproval of such a move, affecting the livelihood of our fishermen in the Palk Bay, at the highest diplomatic level.

You are also aware that 163 fishing boats and gear, which are essential for fishermen to earn their humble livelihood, have not yet been released by Sri Lanka. Long periods of disuse and the monsoons have condemned the boats and equipment to ruin and the poor fishermen are being subjected to a huge permanent loss. I request that the only means of livelihood of our fishermen is returned in a refurbished condition by the Government of India at the earliest.

I request you to immediately take action through the highest diplomatic channels to secure the release of 108 fishermen and 165 fishing boats, including the 8 fishermen and 2 mechanised fishing boats who were apprehended on 25.1.2016. I once again earnestly urge you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian Mission in Sri Lanka to immediately and effectively respond to this latest move by the Sri Lankan side, by registering our strong protest against the new legislation of the Sri Lankan Government and ensure that the Act is not implemented.
