

PRESS RELEASE

Text of the D.O. Letter dated 28.1.2015 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:

"I write to you on an issue of serious concern regarding the future of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees currently living in Tamil Nadu. The Ministry of External Affairs has written to the Government of Tamil Nadu inviting a senior officer of the State Government to attend an inter-ministerial meeting on 30.1.2015 on the issue of voluntary repatriation of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees to Sri Lanka. As you are aware, even now, refugees who want to leave for Sri Lanka on their own volition, do so. Therefore this meeting could be perceived to be an exercise to encourage Sri Lankan Tamil refugees to leave for Sri Lanka. Further, I would like to place on record that the conditions in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka are still not conducive for the refugees to return to their native land.

A total of 3,04,269 refugees came to Tamil Nadu in four phases from 24.7.1983 till date. No refugees have come into India since 2013. So far, about 2,12,000 refugees have gone back by their own arrangements, with Government assistance and with UNHCR assistance. At present there are a total of 1,02,055 refugees belonging to 34,524 families still in Tamil Nadu of whom 64,924 belonging to 19,625 families are in 107 refugee camps.

Tamil Nadu has been very accommodative of the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. It has been the endeavour of this Government under the leadership of my revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma to ensure that the Sri Lankan Tamils living in refugee camps in the State are enabled to live a life of dignity, safety and security. Hence, a momentous decision was taken by my revered leader Puratchi Thalaivi Amma which was announced in the Governor's Address on 3rd June, 2011, to extend the benefits of all welfare schemes implemented in Tamil Nadu to the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees. Accordingly, the monthly cash assistance to refugees residing in camps has been enhanced substantially from Rs 400 per month to Rs 1000 per month for the head of the family; from Rs 288 per month to Rs 750 per month for adult members of the family; and from Rs 180 and Rs 90 per month to Rs 400 per month for children below 12 years. In addition, 20 kg of rice is being made available every month free of cost to each family. Each family is also entitled to purchase sugar, wheat, dhal and oil under the Public Distribution System at subsidized rates. Sri Lankan Tamil refugee children are eligible for free education up to Class XII and also receive text books, note books, school uniforms, cycles, noon meals, bus passes, laptop computers and accessories such as geometry boxes, colour pencil boxes etc., free of cost as in the case of other students in Tamil Nadu.

These students have also been made eligible for admission to Professional Colleges and Arts and Science colleges. They are also eligible to avail of scholarships and admission to Government run hostels.

The refugee families have also been made eligible for various social welfare schemes including the monthly pension of Rs 1000 under Social Security Scheme; family distress relief scheme payment of Rs 25,000 in the case of death due to accident; the benefits under the Moovalur Ramamritham Ammaiyar marriage assistance scheme and the Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy maternity benefit scheme; the Girl Child Protection scheme and the Mahalir Thittam (formation of women's Self Help Groups). In addition, the Government has also sanctioned Rs 25 crores for upgrading the basic amenities in the refugee camps including drinking water supply. Rs 19.86 crore has also been sanctioned for construction of 1,655 durable houses at a cost of Rs 1.20 lakh per house in selected camps. All these measures have ensured that the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees have been able to live a life of dignity in Tamil Nadu.

My revered leader Purtaichi Thalaivi Amma has repeatedly called for justice to be rendered to the Sri Lankan Tamils. The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly has also passed various Resolutions to ensure this.

In this context, recent political developments are a cause for hope and have raised expectations of reconciliation. However, there are still apprehensions about the presence of the Sri Lankan Army in Tamil areas. The atmosphere of fear, intimidation and of possible human rights violations has not entirely dissipated. There is a concern that Tamils could be reduced to a minority even in their own traditional habitation areas. There are internally displaced Tamils in Sri Lanka who are still living in camps. The positive intention of the new Government in Sri Lanka to ensure rehabilitation and reconciliation are yet to be translated into action which would give confidence to the Sri Lankan Tamils living outside Sri Lanka to return. Credible and specific reconciliation measures must be undertaken which alone can create adequate confidence amongst the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees to return to their native land. Our interactions with the refugees in Tamil Nadu and through NGOs working with refugees also reinforce this conclusion. The Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu are particularly concerned about the pace and manner in which the internally displaced persons within Sri Lanka are being rehabilitated. The autonomy and democratic rights of the minority Tamil population in the country must be fully protected and they should not be subjected to further persecution and humiliation nor their second class citizenship status perpetuated. Only after such measures are taken and confidence restored, will the refugees be able to even countenance any possible voluntary repatriation.

The process of voluntary repatriation could be considered only after concrete and credible measures are taken by the Sri Lankan Government and the Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu are given adequate verifiable assurances and gain the requisite confidence to return to their native land. In this context, we believe that having a meeting to discuss voluntary repatriation of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees is premature and should be deferred for the present.”

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