

PRESS RELEASE

Text of the D.O. Letter dated 29.11.2015 addressed by **Selvi J Jayalalithaa**, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to **Shri Narendra Modi**, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India.

"I write to bring to your notice that the string of unfortunate instances of apprehension and arrest of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu, while peacefully pursuing their traditional livelihood of fishing in the Palk Bay, continues unabated. In the latest incident, 8 fishermen who set out for fishing in two mechanised fishing boats from Rameswaram fishing base in Ramanathapuram District and Jegathapattinam fishing in Pudukkottai District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the early hours of 29.11.2015 and taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

The Government of Tamil Nadu is committed to ensuring that the historic rights of fishermen from Tamil Nadu to fish in their traditional fishing waters of the Palk Bay are protected and preserved. The repeated attempts by the Sri Lankan Navy to prevent the exercise of these traditional rights by apprehensions, arrests and assaults need to be brought to an end through concerted efforts by the Government of India.

You are well aware that the position of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) itself is a matter which is sub judice in the Supreme Court of India as I have challenged the constitutional validity of the Indo- Sri Lankan agreements of 1974 and 1976 in my personal capacity, and subsequently, the Government of Tamil Nadu has also impleaded itself in this case.

Understanding the plight of our fishermen, my Government is implementing various innovative schemes for deep sea fishing and infrastructure. One of the efforts of my Government is the launch of a prestigious scheme for the first time in the country of providing subsidy up to Rs.30 Lakhs for procuring new Deep Sea Fishing Boats, aimed at equipping our fishermen to expand their deep sea fishing capabilities. 171 Deep Sea Fishing Boats are currently being built, which will directly benefit 581 fishermen families.

I have also sought assistance of Rs.1520 crores as a comprehensive financial package with a recurring grant of

Rs.10 crores per annum for maintenance dredging from the Government of India for deep sea fishing and infrastructure. I reiterate my request for early sanction of the Government of Tamil Nadu's proposal.

I have also repeatedly pointed out that the Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the apprehended boats and fishing gear even after releasing the fishermen has severely impaired the means of livelihood of several fishermen families causing great frustration and despondency amongst the fisherfolk of Tamil Nadu. This is also an issue which has to be resolved without further delay, given the huge risk of deterioration of the fishing boats and gear which lie unattended and exposed to the very copious and destructive North-East Monsoon this year.

May I also request you to proactively initiate an appropriate set of actions that will bring about a permanent solution to this sensitive issue that plagues the livelihood of thousands of Tamil Nadu fishermen who fish in their traditional fishing grounds in the Palk Bay and are facing the daily threat of abduction at the hands of the Sri Lankan Navy? In the meantime, I request you to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with the Sri Lankan authorities in a concrete and decisive manner so as to secure the immediate release of 37 fishermen and 55 fishing boats including the 8 fishermen and 2 fishing boats apprehended on 29.11.2015. I also request you to expedite the return of four Indian fishermen and their motorised craft which drifted to the Sri Lankan shores on 8.11.2015 due to mechanical failure and remain still stranded there."

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