

PRESS RELEASE

Text of the D.O.Letter dated 8.6.2014 addressed by **Selvi J Jayalalithaa**, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to **Shri Narendra Modi**, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India is reproduced below:-

"At the outset let me thank you for the very prompt and effective action taken on my letter dated 1st June, 2014, in which I had brought to your attention the apprehension of 33 fishermen from Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy. Owing to your immediate intervention, all the fishermen were promptly released without being subjected to prolonged detention.

As I had pointed out in the Memorandum, which I presented to you on 3rd June, 2014, the protection of the traditional fishing rights of Indian fishermen in the Palk Bay and ensuring their safety and security remains a serious issue because of the aggressive posture taken by the Sri Lankan side. In the last three years, there have been 77 incidents of apprehension and 67 incidents of harassment of and attacks on our fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy, causing tremendous agitation amongst the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu.

It seems to me that the tide has not yet really turned so far as this long standing issue involving our fishermen is concerned. I write to you again with a deep sense of anguish that in the late hours of 7th June, 2014, 82 innocent Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu, along with their 18 fishing boats have been apprehended and detained by the Sri Lankan Navy in two separate incidents.

We are informed that 10 mechanized fishing boats with 50 fishermen which went for fishing on 7th June, 2014, from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanathapuram District have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 7th June, 2014.

In yet another incident on 7th June, 2014, 8 mechanized fishing boats, seven from Jegathapattinam fishing base of Pudukkottai District with 26 fishermen on board and 1 fishing boat from Rameswaram fishing base of Ramanthapuram District with 6 fishermen, have been apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the late hours of 7th June, 2014, and they have been taken to Kankesanthurai, Sri Lanka.

The repetition of such aggressive acts by the Sri Lankan side, immediately after the change in Government at the Centre and the consequent reset in our relations with Sri Lanka does not seem to augur well for the peaceful pursuit of fishing in the Palk Bay by fishermen from Tamil Nadu. It is important that the repeated infringements and effective abrogation of the very basic human right to livelihood of our fishermen to fish in their traditional waters of the Palk Bay, to which they have a historic claim, are strongly and decisively dealt with by the Government of India at the highest diplomatic level with the Government of Sri Lanka.

A permanent solution to this problem must be found by a decisive initiative under your leadership. In my Memorandum dated

03.06.2014, I had outlined the contours of some of the elements of such a permanent solution, including the retrieval of the islet of Katchatheevu, which was historically part of India's territory until it was unilaterally ceded to Sri Lanka by the Government of India. Talks between the fishermen of the two sides could also help to resolve day to day issues provided they are held in a conducive atmosphere and in an accommodative spirit of mutual understanding and reciprocity. Even on this limited issue, the Sri Lankan side had adopted obdurate and obstructive attitudes which led to the failure of the last round of talks held in Colombo in May 2014.

In order to put an end to the unabated, brutal, unprovoked attacks on and abduction of our fishermen by the marauding Sri Lankan Navy, the time has now come to lay down a time bound action plan to achieve a long-term, permanent solution to the problem and also to put in place a strong and robust diplomatic response. I am confident that with the Government of India and the Government of Tamil Nadu acting in concert, it would be possible to achieve a permanent solution to this vexatious issue.

As an immediate measure, I request you to kindly ensure that India registers the strongest disapproval of the belligerent actions of the Sri Lankan Navy. Given the question of livelihood for the families and dependents of the poor fishermen who have been arrested, I urge you to have this issue taken up at the highest level on the Sri Lankan side to secure the immediate release of the 82 Indian fishermen who were apprehended on 7th June, 2014, with their 18 fishing boats. I would also like to point out that the 6 boats belonging to the fishermen who were apprehended on 01st June, 2014, and have since returned to Tamil Nadu, are still under Sri Lankan custody and it is my request that the return of these 6 boats may also be taken up with the Sri Lankan authorities."

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