

Regarding problems of fishermen from Chennai to Kanyakumari

**SHRI DURAI VAIKO (TIRUCHIRAPPALLI):** Respected Chairperson, I would like to speak on a very emotional issue concerning our Tamil Nadu fishermen, who have been attacked, killed, and looted of their belongings by the Sri Lankan Navy for the past 40 years.

Our Chief Minister, Mr. Stalin, in his recent letter to the External Affairs Minister mentioned that more than 250 fishermen have been attacked, arrested during the last seven months. Our Chief Minister has pointed out a valid fact that in this year of 2024 alone, it has seen the highest number of such attacks by the Sri Lankan Navy. We have more than eight lakh fishermen engaged in fishing activities in 14 coastal districts, starting from Chennai to Kanyakumari.

Sir, I would like to bring to the attention of this House that more than 6,000 fishermen have been arrested, attacked, and looted of their belongings by the Sri Lankan Navy during the past 20 years. More than 500 of these fishermen have lost their lives and some of their bodies were not even traceable. I would like to bring to the attention of this House that these fishermen and their families have undergone tremendous mental agony and stress. These families have lost their sole breadwinner. I have personally visited some of these families and shared their griefs. I have witnessed tragedies where the children have lost their father, women have lost their husband, and parents have lost their only son. Most of these fishermen belong to the backward districts of Ramanathapuram and Pudukkottai, where there is little rainfall and less resources. Fishing is their only livelihood. These fishermen have to go to the seas to ensure that their families do not go hungry. They live a hand-to-mouth existence.

Sir, our current Chief Minister, previous Chief Ministers, and various leaders from Tamil Nadu have appealed to the Union Government during the past 30 years to find a lasting solution. But the situation has become horrible and worse. We, the people of Tamil Nadu, and the Tamil Nadu fishermen have lost hope on the Central Government. The fishermen from other States have the necessary backing of the Coast Guard, Navy, and the Union Government whenever they get into trouble. I do

know that we had given the Katchatheevu Island to Sri Lanka in 1974. I do know the fact that the Indo-Sri Lankan Katchatheevu Agreement signed in 1974 and 1976 has been diluted, taking away the rights of our fishermen.

I also know that there are certain geo-political issues that are linked to this issue. But I do not know if this Government is genuinely interested in solving this grave issue of our fishermen. ? (*Interruptions*) I do not know if our Tamil Nadu fishermen are considered as citizens of this country. ? (*Interruptions*) I also do not know whether this Government considers Tamil Nadu as a part of the Indian federal setup because they do not give us our funds and they do not care for the safety of our fishermen.

I humbly appeal to this Government -- our Prime Minister and the External Affairs Minister -- to find a lasting solution to the Tamil Nadu fishermen is problem. Thank you, Sir.