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title: Need for a separate Ministry for fisheries and fishermen welfare and look into the development of fishermen.

DR. K. GOPAL (NAGAPATTINAM): Hon. Chairperson, Sir, thank you.

Fishing in India is a major industry in its coastal States employing 30 million people. India has 7,517 kilometres of marine coastlines, 3,827 fishing villages, and 1,914 traditional fish landing centres. Even after 68 years of Independence, fishermen community has not developed in education and socio-economic status. There are many long-pending demands from these 30 millions fishermen community in the country.

There is a need for a separate Ministry for Fishers and Fishermen Welfare.

An exclusive bank in the name of National Bank for Fisheries and Fishermen Development shall be established for their benefits.

Letter of Permit shall be provided to the traditional fishermen.

Traditional fishermen community should be accorded with the Scheduled Tribe status.

Also fishing has to be recognized on par with agriculture. The fishermen should be provided with benefits and concessions as agriculturists.

The fishermen shall be provided with fuel at cost price without any Central taxes and cess.

The fishermen community has to be provided with waiver of loans by the Government since they are the first ones to suffer from floods and cyclones.

I wish to record in this august House the steps taken by the hon. Chief Minister, Puratchi Thalaivi Amma, since 1991 for retrieving Katchatheevu back. Amma had filed a petition in the Supreme Court seeking the declaration of the 1974 and 1976 agreements between India and Sri Lanka on ceding of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka as unconstitutional.

I urge upon the hon. Prime Minister to take appropriate steps for the immediate release of 64 fishermen, to secure 77 fishing boats from the Lankan custody and to also retrieve Katchatheevu back. Thank you.