

Sixteenth Loksabha

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Title: Need to create a separate Ministry for Fishermen and also take measures for welfare of fishermen Community

DR. K. GOPAL (NAGAPATTINAM): The fishermen community in Tamil Nadu are most affected due to Natural calamities as well as indiscreet attacks from Sri Lankan Navy.

The Union Government has promised to form a separate Ministry to develop and conserve the fisheries resources and to ameliorate the socio-economic status of the fishermen community. I urge the Government to create a separate Ministry for Fisheries and Development of Fishermen Community in the country. The entire 1,076-km coastline of Tamil Nadu is affected severely because of either natural calamities like cyclones or by the atrocities committed by the Sri Lankan Navy. The State government perceives coastal security as a subset of national security. The creation of a Central Marine Police Force (CMPF) would relieve the police forces of an additional responsibility for coastal security. I would like the Government to create the Central Marine Police Force by recruiting former Navy personnel and members of the fishing community of each state.

The coastal corridor in Tamil Nadu consists of 13 districts with 15 major ports and harbours, sandy beaches, lakes and river estuaries. Tamil Nadu has a fishermen population of 2 million and the coast consists of 3 major fishing harbours, 3 medium fishing harbours and 363 fish landing centres. Unfortunately, there have been several incidents of Sri Lankan Navy personnel firing on Indian fishermen fishing in the Palk Strait, where India and Sri Lanka are only separated by 12 nautical miles. The Government of Tamil Nadu has protested against Sri Lankan navy for its alleged involvement in attacks on Indian fishermen. Katchatheevu was ceded to Sri Lanka in violation under the 1974 and 1976 agreements without the approval of the two houses of Parliament and hence the ceding is unlawful and not valid.

The remote controlled boats fitted with high definition thermal cameras, operated through satellite based technology are most effective for coastal security especially during pitch dark nights over the seas. The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) has developed a database of all the fish-landing centres to ensure the security of fishermen during cyclones. I urge the Government to provide adequate funds for the purchase of state of art equipment to strengthen the coastal security.

Fishing has to be recognized on par with Agriculture. The fisher communities suffer very much due to natural calamities. They need waiver of their loans by Government. Fishermen should be provided with loans to buy boats, nets, other gears and equipments. An exclusive bank called National Bank for Fisheries should be established. Fishermen should be provided with fuel at cost price, without any Central and State taxes and cess. Letter of Permit (LOP) should be provided to the traditional fishermen and 60% subsidy facility from Banks.

Fishermen Community should be accorded Schedule Tribe status.

A Comprehensive Special Package for Diversification of Fisheries at a cost of Rs.1520 crores is the need of the hour. The Mid Sea Fish Processing Park project requires Rs. 80 crores. The present level of assistance of Rs. 3 crores per year for motorization of nearly 1,000 traditional crafts is very meagre since there are over 40,000 non motorized traditional crafts in Tamil Nadu. I urge the Government to sanction Rs.12 crores per year to ensure all traditional craft is motorized within five years.

The Government has sanctioned construction of Fishing Harbour at Poompuhar in Nagapattinam District. There is a need to provide funds for the construction of fishing bays at Nagore, Senthur, Vellapallam, Vizhunthavadi, Siruthalaikkadu, Vedaranyam, Muthupettai, Akkarappettai, kodiyaikkarai, Thondiyankadu, Pushpavanam and Nambiyar Nagar under Centrally Sponsored Schemes, in my Nagappatinam Parliamentary Constituency. The Tamil Nadu Fisheries University at Nagappatinam needs generous financial and logistic support from the Government of India.

I once again urge the Union Government to create a separate Ministry for the welfare of Fishermen and take all necessary steps to make fishing a flourishing occupation in the country.