

India offers to complete Italian marines trial within 4 months

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Hamburg (Germany): India has told an international tribunal that it is ready to complete within four months the trial of two Italian marines accused of killing two Indian fishermen off Kerala's coast if Italy cooperates.

The offer was made before the International Tribunal on Law of the Sea (ITLOS) here after Italy dragged India to it accusing delay in the trial of February 15, 2012, incident in which marines Massimiliano Latorre and Salvatore Girone, who were on board ship 'Enrica Lexie', allegedly killed two Indian fishermen.

"I have been instructed to state that India is prepared to guarantee that the decision of the Special Court could be handed down within four months from the date on which the hearings open, if Italy were to cooperate and withdraw its objections to the procedure before the Indian Supreme Court," Indian representative Alain Pellet told the tribunal.

The tribunal reserved its order after hearing both sides for two days on Monday and Tuesday and will give its ruling on August 24.

India also rebutted Italy's claim before the tribunal that New Delhi shut the door for a diplomatic solution to the marines issue and also that there was any back channel discussions between the senior Prime Ministerial advisers and Italian representative.

Earlier, Italy told the tribunal that there was no scope for the Indian government to engage in further discussions about a "political settlement" after External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said in May that Italy should join in the judicial process as the matter is sub judice.

"Some days after this statement, Italy was informed on the private channel of engagement between the senior Prime Ministerial advisers that the statement by Minister Swaraj reflected the position of the Government," Italy told the tribunal.

Rebutting this, Indian representative Rodman Bundy said: "There is absolutely no evidence to show that it was only in May 2015 that it became clear that a diplomatic solution could not be reached, or that, as Sir Daniel (Italian representative) asserted: At this point -- that is May 2015 -- the Indian Government indicated to Italy that it had no latitude to pursue a negotiated settlement given the engagement of the Indian Supreme Court.

"Where is the evidence of that statement? It is not on the file. Pure assertion. My colleague has not pointed to any document that supports this claim that somehow it was only in May of this year that settlement became impossible. Sir Daniel's arguments in this respect are pure assertion," Bundy said.

- PTI