

Sri Lankan Navy denies role, promises thorough probe into Indian fisherman's killing

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The Sri Lankan Navy today promised a thorough probe into the killing of an Indian fisherman but categorically denied that it was responsible for his death even as India raised the issue with Sri Lanka's Prime Minister.

The Sri Lankan Navy has promised a full and thorough investigation into the killing of an Indian fisherman in the Palk Straits, the Indian government said today.

“Government of India is deeply concerned at the killing of an Indian fisherman. Our High Commissioner to Sri Lanka has taken up the matter with the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Navy has promised a full and thorough investigation,” a statement by the Ministry of External Affairs said.

Earlier today, Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Taranjit Singh Sandhu raised the matter with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Sri Lankan Navy denies role in Indian fisherman's killing

Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan Navy has categorically rejected the Indian media reports that it shot dead an Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu near the Katchatheevu islet.

Sri Lankan Navy spokesperson Lt Commander Chaminda Walakuluge said the navy personnel had been ordered not to fire at Indian fishermen but to only arrest them if they entered Sri Lankan waters.

Sri Lanka and India are divided by a narrow strip of sea. The Sri Lankan Navy has been accused of killing scores of fishermen from Tamil Nadu found fishing in the island nation's territorial waters.

A Tamil Nadu official said fisherman Bridgo, 22, was fishing in a mechanised boat at a short distance off Katchatheevu islet along with others on Sunday night when the naval personnel opened fire without any warning.

Bridgo was killed while another Indian fisherman was injured. Police said during the autopsy, an AK-47 bullet was found lodged in the neck of the deceased.

The Sri Lankan ministry of fisheries said Minister Mahinda Amaraweera has written to the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence to carry out an investigation on the alleged shooting.

In his letter, Amaraweera has said the navy has denied firing at the fishermen but in order to maintain good relations with India it was important to launch a probe on the Indian accusations of shooting, the ministry said.

Fisherman's killing sparks protest in Tamil Nadu

The killing has triggered protests in Tamil Nadu, where Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami condemned the incident and announced a compensation of Rs five lakh for the victim's family.

Palaniswami said the state government has been repeatedly taking up with Centre the various instances of arrest and "intimidation" of fishermen by the Lankan Navy, besides seizure of their boats and pressed for a lasting solution.

Hundreds of fishermen also staged a demonstration in Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu.

The protesting fishermen at Thangachimadam in Rameswaram and the bereaved family have refused to accept the body of the fisherman unless a Central Minister visits the island and gives them an assurance that such incidents would not happen again, Rameswaram Fishermen Association President S Emiret said.

Tamil Nadu CM Palaniswami writes to PM Modi over fisherman's killing

In a letter to the Centre, Palaniswami said the Sri Lankan High Commissioner to India should be summoned forthwith and "the strong feelings of the Government of India and government of Tamil Nadu about the unprovoked firing on fishermen and non-adherence to earlier agreements on this issue should be conveyed in no uncertain terms."

Lanka resorting to "such inhuman and barbaric tactics" completely belies all the diplomatic efforts that have been undertaken including the understanding reached in several meetings between the two countries, including the recent one at Colombo, Palaniswami said in the letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He said at the ministerial level meeting in Colombo in January, "it was clearly agreed not to use force against bona fide fishermen at sea."

While the fishermen were fishing in their traditional waters of Palk Bay, at about 9.30 pm (yesterday), "a fleet of four Sri Lankan Naval vessels surrounded the fishing boat and opened unprovoked and indiscriminate fire on the unarmed fishermen," he said.

"Two fishermen received bullet injuries and while Bridgo died while being brought to the shore, Saran has been admitted in hospital," he added.

"Even as action is taken on longer term issues like retrieval of Katchatheevu (islet) and on diversification to deep sea fishing, under no circumstances can the present escalation of actions by the Sri Lankan side be ignored or tolerated," the Chief Minister said.

He urged Modi to intervene "personally in this sensitive livelihood issue of our fishermen and use all means at the command of the government of India to curb the unacceptable aggressive actions of the Sri Lankan Navy in the Palk Bay, and to protect the life, limb and liberty of our innocent fishermen".

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