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LANDELIJKE INDIA-WERKGROEP

The Netherlands

Utrecht, June 17th 1981.

PRESS REPORT

Indian and Dutch protests lead to suspension of Dutch trawlers-supplies to India.

Just recently the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation has decided to suspend the financing of 8 shrimp-trawlers, who were part of the Dutch aid programme for India. At short notice there will be an investigation into the expected effects of the introduction of these trawlers on the catches of the traditional fishermen of India. A final decision about this, will be taken within a few months. Nine trawlers, build by 2 Dutch shipyards, will still be delivered starting september 1981. The contract for these ships between the Dutch shipyards and the Indian buyers, have already been signed. According to a letter of the involved Dutch ministry to the India Committee of the Netherlands, these contracts could not be cancelled because of 'repercussions of breach of contract' and the 'aspect of employment' in the Netherlands. A decision about possibly financing even more than 17 trawlers, will have to await an elaborate study on the possible harmful effects of the export of trawlers on the traditional fishermen of India. All the above decisions are the outcome of the aid-spending negotiations between the Indian and the Dutch governments, which were held in New Delhi on the 19th and 20th of May.

Indian as well as Dutch protests played a big role in the suspension of part of the supply of trawlers.

The 'National Forum for Catamaran and Countryboat Fishermen's Rights and Marine Wealth' a representative body of 13 traditional fishermen's unions in India, wrote a letter to the Dutch minister of Development Cooperation, Mr. J. de Koning. In this letter the 'National Forum' voiced their 'total opposition' to this contract between the Indian and the Dutch government,

because 'to supply 17 prawn-catching trawlers will ultimately intensify the oppression let loose on our artisanal fishermen fishing in shallow waters'.

Also the India Committee of the Netherlands wrote letters to the minister and other high officials.

The India Committee of the Netherlands is a combination of 4 India committees in Netherlands, who have as their purpose to spread critical information on political, economical and cultural events in India and outside, in which the relationship between India and The Netherlands is a central topic. In this way we try to support progressive movements in India and evoke more solidarity between the Dutch public and these movements.

In a press-report, based on our recently published booklet: 'Blue Revolution in India - Millions of fishermen threatened by advance trawlers', the arguments to stop the financing of trawlers for India were given. From different Indian sources it is clear that in particular the shrimp resources along India's coast are being overfished and catches of traditional fishermen, including shrimps, have been declining drastically because of mechanised boats and trawlers fishing in the shallow waters along the coast. Because shrimps are concentrated in the coastal waters and fishing in the deep-sea is uneconomical, also the shrimp-trawlers from the Netherlands will threaten the employment, incomes and even the mere survival of the traditional fishing community comprising of 6,5 million people.

On top of that more fish will be exported employing these trawlers, so the price of fish for the Indian consumer is likely to increase even more. In 1980 the Netherlands imported 1374 ton of Indian prawns for about 45 million rupees, against 128 ton in 1977.

All this is in sharp contradiction to the main purpose of official Dutch policy on development cooperation, which is; improving the living conditions of the poorest groups in the developing countries.

Instead in the case of the trawler-supplies only 2 Dutch shipyards and a handful of Indian trawler-owners stand to gain from this deal.

On the basis of the above-mentioned arguments the India Committee of the Netherlands demanded of the Dutch government;

- to stop the supply and financing of shrimp-trawlers to India from development-aid money,
- to give development-aid to the small-scale fishery sector, in close collaboration with organizations of fishermen. The 'National Forum' has already put forward some concrete ideas on appropriate forms of fishing-technology who are labour-intensive, not harmful to the ecology of the sea, raising productivity and income-distributive.

Quite a bit of attention was given on the subject of the traditional fishermen of India and the trawlers by a number of Dutch newspapers and magazines. (As an example the most recent article of the 15th of June you will find included). In all these articles quite a bit of attention was devoted to the letter of the 'National Forum' to the Dutch minister. No doubt all this publicity helped in reversing the decisions of the ministry, in favour of the interests of the traditional fishermen.

A few more facts on the trawlers shall be given now.

The Dutch government has already been negotiating with India on the supply of trawlers since 1976. Talk has always been of 'deep-sea trawlers for multi-purpose fishing', according to the ministry in a recent letter to us. Different numbers of trawlers-to-be-exported from the Netherlands to India have been mentioned during these years, even up to 41 in early 1980. Due to different causes, among which the problems between the Indian ministries of Agriculture and Transport on the lending-agency and the interim-guaranties on loans, the programme was not being implemented untill recently. So the money for the 41 trawlers was reallocated. In december 1980 and january 1981 again was allocated for 17 shrimp-trawlers (not 'deep-sea trawlers for multi-purpose fishing'), costing around 33 millions guilders (about 130 million rupees). Compared to a price of 1,1 million guilders for one trawler 2 years ago, this means a price of 1,9 million guilders at this moment. Part of this price-increase is due to the fact, that an export-subsidy which was on the trawlers two years ago, has now been cancelled due to an improved order-position of the Dutch shipyards.

The shrimp-trawlers are 23,5 meter long and are only usable for shrimp-fishing because of there limited motor-capacity.

The financial arrangement of this deal has two sides. On the one hand, The Dutch government gives a soft loan to the Indian government for buying the ships. This is a 30 year loan with an interest-free period of 8 years and a rent of 2,5 %. On the other hand the Indian government, through the Shipping Development Fund Committee, gives soft loans on different conditions to the businessmen and companies that buy the trawlers.

If your paper/magazine decides to publish anything from this press-report, please send a copy to the; India Committee of the Netherlands, Voor Clarenburg 10, 3511 JE UTRECHT.

If your paper/magazine is interested in more details on the trawler-supplies or on the 2 survey-vessels, supplied by The Dutch government 2 years ago, please write to the same address.