

Fishermen Warn that Ports will be Blocked if Parliament Passes the IMF Bill

Under pressure from the World Trade Organization (WTO), the central government recently drafted the Indian Marine Fisheries Bill (IMF), 2021, to be introduced in the monsoon sessions of Parliament. People from fishing villages in the coastal states have been protesting in various agitation forms by black flags, beach protests, strikes, and dissent petitions since the news broke. Fishermen are also warning that the ports will be blocked if the current bill is passed by parliament. If the bill becomes Act, the lives of one crore 50 lakh traditional poor fishermen will be in complete danger. The Indian rulers are preparing to tie up the Indian market, which is the 2nd largest aqua sector and the 3rd largest fishery product in the world, to National and foreign multinationals.

This bill makes it difficult for illiterate fishermen to obtain a license. Charges and annual fees will increase significantly. Again fishermen will need to renew their fitness certificates. Beyond all this the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) is given enormous powers, such as Seizure of boats, revoking or suspending licenses for breach of license terms and imposing fines for catching fishes of particular species above a permitted quantity with thier nets. Fishermen face up to a year in prison for questioning the Indian Coast Guard. They are already being treated as criminals when they go hunting and are threatened with kneeling on their feet, raising their hands above their heads or shooting them. All of these are fatal to poor fishermen.

Also under the State List of the 7th Schedule of the Constitution of India there are certain clauses that violate the rights granted to the States. Although fishing in the territorial sea (TS) is on the state list, management is vested in the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) under the Central Government. Fish monitoring responsibility for control and surveillance goes into the hands of the center and reduces the grip of the states. From the power to determine the license fee to the procedure for appealing to the Appellate Authority, the state government has very little to say under the proposed bill.

A similar bill proposed by the then Congress government in 2009 was stopped amid opposition from fishermen. But in 2019, 2020 With the impetus of the World Trade Organization (WTO) conference on fisheries subsidies the BJP-led central government has made some changes to the old bill and proposed it twice in draft form. The Modi government, under pressure from the decisions of the WTO virtual session on July 15, 2021, seeks to impose severe sanctions on poor fishermen and hand over trade rights to corporates with the support of international fishing agencies to monopolize fishing and marine resources. As part of this, the Government of India has introduced this

controversial bill in Parliament to the detriment of the lives of fisher -men and the rights of the states. Fishermen and intellectuals must fight against this anti-public draft.