

May kindly see the representation from Shri K.Kalaiselvam, General Secretary, Katchal Settlers Welfare Association to Hon'ble Home Minister of India endorsing copy to various of authorities as well as a representation from Tribal Council, Katchal to Hon'ble Prime Minister of India.

2. Katchal Settlers Welfare Association has requested for allotment of agriculture land with resettlement in non tribal areas since they are getting a meager wages from Andaman and Nicobar Islands Forest Plantation Development Corporation (ANIFPDC). They have in the alternative, requested for granting them tribal status in Katchal.

3. On the other hand Tribal Council, Katchal has stated that in the tsunami of 2004 they have not only lost many tribal members but also large land area under cultivation for coconut and arecnut with the Tribal community. 100 hectares of cultivable land is claimed to be permanently inundated by the sea and lost forever. In this situation they have requested that Sri Lankan settler in Katchal Rubber Plantation may be shifted to some other islands so that land and house so available can be utilized for the tribal community to make up for the loss of land in the tsunami.

4. It is stated that under the Shastri SriMao Bhandernayaka Pact of 1964, 48 families of Indian origin from Sri Lanka on repatriation were settled in rubber plantations at Katchal in Nancowry group of islands during the period 1970 to 1976 with employment in Rubber Plantation Board, Kottayam. They were also provided with half an acre of agricultural land per family as well as residential accommodation equivalent to type one quarter. Whole Katchal islands was declared as protected forest in 1967 and as such no right in respect of land and house was conferred on these settlers.

5. As the functioning of the Rubber Plantation Board is entrusted to ANIFPDC now the erstwhile settlers employed with Rubber Plantation are now with ANIFPDC. The number of 48 families with 236 persons may now be around 450 persons. It is apparent that due to decline in Rubber Plantation as well as increase in number of family members, the settlers are looking for better avenues to support the families. Besides the demand from the Tribal Community for their shifting is also pressurising them to seek their settlement in some non tribal islands.

6. This demand from two communities need to be given a thought since not much interaction and fellowship seems to have developed between the two communities even after more than 30 years of settlement. Besides the Sri Lankan settlers have been known for their aggressive posturing and agitational methods in the past. Giving the Sri Lankan settlers a tribal status may have to be legally examined by Tribal Welfare department and is to be viewed in the light of similar demands being voiced by other settlers. As such it could not be considered in isolation in respect of Sri Lankan Settlers. Continued stay of the settlers in the Katchal could also lead to some confrontation between the settlers and tribals at a later stage. In such situation the physical shifting of Sri Lankan Settlers to some non tribal area may have to be explored. In the Nicobar Group of Islands whole area is tribal except for seven revenue villages in Campbell Bay. Land available is merely adequate to meet demands from various departments and for projects relating to tsunami reconstruction. The