

‘ASEAN FTA: FEDERAL NATURE OF CONSTITUTION HAS BEEN UNDERMINED’

Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF) Media Release
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Terming the hurried signing of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in goods yesterday at the ASEAN Bangkok meeting as ‘an attack on the federal structure of the Indian Constitution’ the Kerala Independent Fishworkers Federation (KSMTF) called for a mass mobilisation of progressive groups to stop the FTA from being implemented.

KSMTF President T Peter said that ‘It is ironic that this affront to federalism comes a day before the country celebrates its 62nd Independence Day tomorrow. It exposes the anti -democratic mindset of the UPA Government’. Kerala had voiced its opposition to the FTA quite clearly. Last month UPA Cabinet Ministers from Kerala AK Anthony and Vayalar Ravi had cautioned Prime Minister Manmohan Singh but their concerns were ignored with the carrot of the so called ‘sensitive list’ which apparently excluded some products of concern to Kerala.

Kerala Chief Minister VS Achuthanandan then met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi on 3 August 2009 in an attempt to stop the deal from going ahead. Despite an assurance that a thorough scrutiny of the FTA would be done and copies of the text would be made public, the Kerala Government is still in the dark on the actual contents of the deal signed in Bangkok on 13 August 2009 by Commerce Minister Anand Sharma.

An official press release from the Commerce Ministry after the Bangkok signing states that India has excluded 489 items from the list of tariff concessions to address domestic sensitivity. These supposedly include agriculture, textiles, auto, chemicals, crude and refined palm oil, coffee, tea and pepper.

‘The trade in goods agreement will enable the dumping of upto 177 species of fish in the Indian market,’ said T. Peter. The ‘sensitive list’ is just a smokescreen and we will soon expose the hollow rhetoric of the UPA Government once we get a hand on the text, he added. Malaysia has aggressive interests in palm oil, Indonesia in rice and rubber and Thailand in fish. If the Government of India puts all of these in a negative list, it is unlikely that these ASEAN members will play ball on the FTA. (Ends)

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